



CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

**SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION COUNCIL
Review of the Melbourne Declaration**

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CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION AS PART OF THE REVIEW OF THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION

Preamble to response

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Review of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (December 2008).

CSPA is authorised as the national body representing and advocating for the parents/carers of over 764,000 children and young people who attend the 1750 Catholic schools across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with state/territory Catholic parent bodies, national Catholic principal bodies and the National Catholic Education Commission and is authorised as the national Catholic parent body by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education.

While the Melbourne Declaration (2008) still has relevance, this review is timely given the increasing complexities in education over the past decade. These complexities have been impacted by changes to family and society and expectations of government related to equitable funding levels, student achievement and evidence-based decision making.

Catholic education centres around education of the whole person such that *the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.*¹ Also, *in willingly welcoming parents' cooperation, Catholic schools consider essential to their mission the service of permanent formation offered to families, to support them in their educating task and to develop an increasingly closer bond between the values proposed by the school and those proposed by the family.*² CSPA believes major emphasis must be placed on the unique role played by parents in the education of their children, especially as children transition into pre-school, then primary school and then secondary school, and any national education declaration must acknowledge and promote this vital role played by parents.

A national education statement also needs to promote learning in schools that are supportive and engaging contexts for all students, teachers, and caregivers. All learners including those with disability, and/or who exhibit high-level gifts and talents, and/or have a refugee background, and/or have English as an additional language or dialect, and/or are in out-of-home-care and/or are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background are entitled to an education which develops them physically, spiritually, culturally, intellectually, psychologically and emotionally within an environment which promotes their personal health and wellbeing.

The following discussion is organised under the ten questions listed in the Education Council's *Review of the Melbourne Declaration Discussion Paper*.

1. What are your expectations of a national aspirational declaration on Australian education?

CSPA believes the current declaration goes some way to articulating broad, national educational goals and is a useful guide for government, policy developers, educators, parents and employers. All should be regularly reminded of key elements of the declaration which should be used as benchmarks for unifying and constructive comment by those in positions of educational leadership.

In saying this, the declaration needs a goal to *achieve* rather than simply *promote* equity and excellence. Also, at their respective stages of development, that all students *are* (rather than *become*) successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. These goals need to be at the heart of a national mission and vision for education.

2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?

Any education declaration needs to inspire and guide all involved in learning as part of the national enterprise of education. The preamble to the current declaration outlines key components of national education intent with strong focus on the schooling for all young Australians.

A national declaration should inspire and guide educators to deliver on the education of the whole person physically, spiritually, culturally, intellectually, psychologically and emotionally within schooling contexts which promote personal health and wellbeing of all. If education of the whole person is central, active and informed citizens should be an intended consequence.

3. How has the Melbourne Declaration impacted or influenced you?

It has been highly influential as both a guide for assisting in the generation of mission and vision as part of the philosophy and aims for school education and also as a benchmark for educational accountability.

4. What do you consider are the three most important economic, social and technological changes that will shape the future of education in Australia?

A key is the sensitive balance between challenge and support for teachers, students, parents and post-school providers working in partnership with each other for student development.

Some shapers for future education in Australia include:

- Schools positively partnering with parents for teacher-student learning and wellbeing.
- Raising the national status of teachers/principals/education profession.
- Efficient determination of equitable school funding agreements.
- Technologically enhanced efficiencies around learning/teaching/communication.
- Investment in novel approaches to authentic education.
- Education of the whole person including spirituality.
- Career education as a learning theme from mid-primary school years.³

- More prominence of 'soft skills'^{7,14,15} - general capabilities and employability skills.

5. How can a national declaration best reflect that Australians need to continue to participate in learning throughout their lifetime?

CSPA supports any proposals to further promote lifelong learning in any education declaration. Also, a key life stage that could receive more emphasis is from birth through to transition to school as *the habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference.*⁴

An education declaration needs to include comment on educating the whole child from birth and inculcating attributes to that of being a lifelong learner - key for which will be to identify elements of lifelong learning as part of a national education statement. The key roles played by parents in their children's learning in the years before school (e.g. 1000 hours of reading), recurrent government funding for early childhood education, schools and parents constructively engaging in effective strategies for student learning and wellbeing, and a focus on 'soft skills'^{7,14,15} throughout formal schooling, all assist in setting foundations for lifelong learning.

6. How could the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the Melbourne Declaration be updated to ensure they are still contemporary over the next decade?

The efficient, effective delivery of equitable funding based on school and student needs are fundamental to maximising outcomes for students. For example, the currently onerous administrative requirements on teachers to collect and record data for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability is detracting from their teaching and more efficient methods need to be identified. This laborious process is also detrimental to the mental health/wellbeing of teachers.

This comment might impact on a national education declaration in that equitable outcomes cannot be reliant upon processes that negatively impact classroom teaching. In this instance, it is the lower socioeconomic schools that are often more negatively impacted through the proportion of students with disability, less access to resources and less engagement of families in learning and wellbeing.

7. Are the eight areas for action in the Melbourne Declaration still contemporary and how well do they address the goals?

The eight areas for action are still relevant and do promote consistency. However, the implementation of these actions can vary by state and jurisdiction. An area for further consideration will be to include more specificity for learners with disability, and/or who exhibit high level gifts/talents, and/or have a refugee background, and/or have English as an additional language/dialect, and/or are in out-of-home-care and/or are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background. These students, together with contexts which are remote and/or of lower SES, need to be specifically included in a commitment to action.

8. Are new priority areas for action needed? And are there areas that should no longer be a priority?

While the eight areas listed still seem relevant, CSPA recommends six themes be considered for inclusion or further emphasis. These are discussed below.

a) Parent engagement in student learning and wellbeing.

While partnership with parents is included as part of the discussion under *Developing stronger partnerships* as part of a commitment to action in the Melbourne Declaration, CSPA suggests that strategic action must be undertaken to enhance the unique relationship between parents, their children and the school(s) they attend. Over fifty years of research indicates that children will learn more successfully when parents, alongside educators, are connected and supported in guiding their children.

While this was part of the government's *Students First* agenda, parent engagement in student learning and wellbeing has languished in the too hard basket for the vast majority of school staff and parents. The student benefits are too hard to ignore, these include: more regular school attendance; better social skills; improved behaviour; better adaptation to school; increased social capital; a greater sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning; greater engagement in school work; and a stronger belief in the importance of education.⁵ This requires understanding of what the expectations of the school, parents and students are, and how parents can partner with teachers and support learning at home.

This also requires a focus on professional learning about parent engagement for student learning and wellbeing for school staff and parent leaders, so that capacity building to engage with parents is maximised.

CSPA endorses key elements of parent engagement as noted by ARACY (2017), including:

- Required systemic change around parent engagement at all levels;
- The need for schools to be obligated to embed parent engagement practices;
- Building the capacity of school staff to better engage with families - through parent engagement skilling in pre-service teacher education courses and on-going professional learning of educators; and
- Embedding a national parent engagement survey tool to assist in measuring parent engagement within school communities towards implementing more effective practices (ARACY, personal communication).

There is also increasing evidence of the positive impact of parent engagement on student learning within lower socioeconomic contexts, and this would provide a welcome variance to the usual trend of lower SES correlating with lower student learning outcomes.

An approach to engaging parents in children's learning needs appropriate authorisation in any national declaration on education.

b) General capabilities and STEM⁶.

CSPA believes that any future national statement on education should provide specific emphasis on student skills which fall broadly within the general capabilities, 21st century skills, employability skills, future skills⁷ and STEM skills agendas. The seven general capabilities within the Australian Curriculum encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area and the cross-curriculum priorities, will assist students to live and work successfully. The descriptor '21st century skills' seems to be somewhat dated whereas general capability skills (employability skills referred to by industry) seems more suitable and aligns with the Australian curriculum.

Below is a list of the top ten *Future Skills* required for work in 2020 as suggested in a World Economic Forum report (the bracketed number indicates the skill's 2015 list position).

- i. *Complex problem solving* (1).
- ii. *Critical thinking* (4).
- iii. *Creativity* (10).
- iv. People management (3).
- v. Coordinating with others (2).
- vi. Emotional intelligence.
- vii. *Judgement and decision making* (8).
- viii. Service orientation (7).
- ix. *Negotiation* (5).
- x. *Cognitive flexibility*. (Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum, 2016).⁷

Conceding that there would be enthusiastic discourse around which of the listed skills are learned through various content specific studies, it is proposed that STEM would majorly contribute towards the learning of the italicised skills. This is reinforced by Adams (2017)⁸ who, with reference to others, suggests that the seven most important STEM skills involve: Statistics, Problem-Solving, Creativity, Argumentation, Intellectual Curiosity, Data-Driven Decision-Making, and Flexibility. A report⁹ (2017) promoted by the University of Sydney shows that 75% of the world's fastest growing occupations require STEM (analytical, scientific, mathematics and technical) skills.

In a recently released strategic plan of Innovation and Science Australia (ISA) the first listed imperative for action is education and *better preparing students for post-school STEM occupations*. However, ISA notes that many early- and mid-career scientists, for example, *are taking their publicly-funded PhDs and moving overseas* – Dayton (2018)¹⁰ describes this as a *postdococalypse*. Unfortunately, this 'brain drain' has existed in Australia for the past fifty years and somehow this draining of confidence as well as talent needs to be addressed by governments in partnership with schools, universities and industry – otherwise it will be the same discussion and hand wringing fifty years from now. Addressing this impasse could provide insight into a paradigm shift in an

education-industry culture which is complemented by expectations outlined within a revised national declaration on educational goals for young Australians.³

The whole STEM narrative will require discerned national reflection as there has been much discussion over the past forty years around a lack of student take-up of Maths/Sciences at secondary and tertiary levels. CSPA believes this change in culture will be a complex challenge and will require cooperation and participation from all education stakeholders – including parents.

A 2018 OECD report¹¹ *“asserts educational success is no longer about reproducing content knowledge, but about extrapolating from what we know and applying that knowledge to novel situations. Education today is much more about ways of thinking which involve creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. It is also about ways of working, including communication and collaboration, as well as the tools they require, such as the capacity to recognise and exploit the potential of new technologies, or indeed, to avert their risks”*.

There has been much talk, it is now time to develop an effective national strategy and implement it. A goal of our education system should be to produce students who are mentally agile, creative, reflective and armed with an array of critical and structured thinking skills that prepare them for life-long-learning.

c) Greater inclusivity of children with need.

A recent OECD report shows that in Australia student disadvantage is a particular detractor from future success, more evident here than in comparable countries in terms of education measures. This is unacceptable and urgent efforts should be enacted to address this disadvantage, such that all Australian students are given the tailored opportunities to a world class education. All students can't be excellent, but they can be successful, and all should have the opportunity to take their place in society after an education that facilitates their eventual employment – part of Fullan's¹² (2011) moral imperative. Schleicher¹¹ (2018) states that, *‘Perhaps the most impressive outcome of world-class school systems is that they deliver high quality across the entire school system so that every student benefits from excellent teaching’*. Further, he states, *‘achieving greater equity in education is not only a social justice imperative, it is also a way to use resources more effectively, and to increase the supply of skills that fuel economic growth and social cohesion’*. It is an imperative that equitable resourcing by government must be achieved more effectively both within and between all Australian sectors of schooling.

In any revised declaration on education, greater specific reference needs to be made to children with special learning needs.

d) Achieving excellence through world class teaching.¹³

A foundational shift required for greater educational success is the improved status for education and the teaching profession. Countries which enjoy comparatively greater educational success often place greater value on education resulting in teaching being highly esteemed as a first choice profession of the academically able with entrance pre-requisites to match. These high-performing countries often welcome pedagogical innovation fuelled by cutting edge professional development as opposed to bureaucratically dominated conservatism. Such a shift in the education psyche needs to be led by governments, education jurisdictions and the teaching profession to make teaching more intellectually attractive and held in higher regard by the wider community.

Words must be crafted to promote a government-led cultural shift on how teachers and the teaching profession are viewed. From a culture which is often characterized by criticism and blame to one of respect and valuing. Schools more effectively partnering with parents will contribute significantly to this pursuit and the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers and the Professional Standard for Principals provide a professional platform to assist in delivering this.

Effective education is reliant on a dynamic and empowered teaching profession and this should be made explicit as part of a national declaration on education.

e) Mental health and wellbeing.

Satisfactory student and staff mental health and wellbeing need to be a focus for all in a school community. This has to be a vital component of any revised national education declaration.

f) Digital literacy.

Much is written on the skills that students will need to thrive in the future. For example, a typical 2017 study¹⁴ found that *in Australia, 90% of future jobs will involve digital literacy, yet 35% of 15-year-olds are not digitally literate or proficient in technology.*

Any future national education declaration must address this reality of need.

9. Are there better ways to measure and share progress toward achieving the declaration's goals?

There is much hard data by way of school/national/international school tests to determine trends in the academic growth of students. An aim of a revised statement in relation to educational goals could be to also incorporate a commitment to knowing trends around such elements as: general capabilities, various social and emotional measures, health and wellbeing, parent engagement and school satisfaction. These attributes pertain to all in the school community.

10. How can we ensure the education sector works together to achieve the goals of the Declaration?

A key way of promoting education sectors and contributors working together is to give all a voice and for decision-makers to be inclusive, active-listeners and activist-professionals. It does take a whole village to raise a child and all in every village need to be invited to be heard.

Concluding comment

A revised national declaration on educational goals for young Australians should clearly address:

- Attractive study pathways to raise uptake and achievement in STEM;
- The teaching and measuring of capabilities including *critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, curiosity, interpersonal and communication skills, self-regulation, grit, entrepreneurial skills, teamwork and craftsmanship*;¹⁵
- Clarity around inclusivity for children with need;
- Greater promotion of parent engagement in children’s learning and wellbeing;
- Digital literacy and proficiency in technology;
- Holistic education including spirituality;
- Career education from primary years;³ and
- Mental health and wellbeing of school staff and students.

References

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*.

² Congregation for Catholic Education (2007) *Educating Together in Catholic Schools - A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and The Lay Faithful*.

³ Department of Education and Training (2019) *A student focused national career education strategy*. Available at: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/future_ready_a_student_focused_national_career_education_strategy.pdf

⁴ Aristotle quote.

⁵ Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., and Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*. A report by the ARACY for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.

⁶ Catholic School Parents Australia (Feb, 2018). *Optimising STEM Industry-School Partnerships: Inspiring Australia’s Next Generation*. Response to Issues Paper (December 2017).

⁷ World Economic Forum (January 2016). *The Future of Jobs Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Global Challenge Insight Report.

⁸ *The 7 Most Important STEM Skills We Should Be Teaching Our Kids*, Caralee Adams, February, 2017 and available at <https://www.weareteachers.com/important-stem-skills-teaching-kids/>

⁹ University of Sydney (2017). *STEM skills: The Key to Future Growth* is available at: <https://www.itt.com.au/blog/news/stem-skills-key-future-growth/>.

¹⁰ Dayton, L. (Feb., 2018). *Australia faces a 'postdocalypse' as young scientists take their brains and talent overseas*. The Science Show, ABC Science.

¹¹ Schleicher, A. (2018). *How to Build a 21st-Century School System*. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/world-class/making-education-reform-happen_9789264300002-5-en

¹² Fullan, M. (2011). *The Moral Imperative Realized*. A joint publication with Ontario Principals' Council.

¹³ Catholic School Parents Australia (November 2017). Submission to the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*.

¹⁴ The Educator (August 2018). *What skills do students need to thrive in the future?* Available at <https://www.theeducatoronline.com/k12/technology/e-learning/what-skills-do-students-need-to-thrive-in-the-future/253055>

¹⁵ The Mitchell Institute (2017). *Preparing young people for the future of work*. Available at: <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/preparing-young-people-for-the-future-of-work/>