



CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

NEW SOUTH WALES

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Committee Secretariat
Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

RE: Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW: Additional information

Dear Mr Keenan,

On Tuesday 17th March, officers of the Catholic Education Commission Secretariat gave evidence to the inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW. Please find following, responses to additional questions from the Committee. I forward these on behalf of Mr Ian Baker who is currently on leave.

1. How available are tutoring and homework support programs for middle year's students? What is required?

Many schools provide opportunities for tutoring and homework support but there are differences across schools, depending on location, local contexts and student needs.

Teachers provide additional subject-specific tutorial support to students, as required, and this typically occurs at lunchtime or after school. Long-term, school-initiated and formalised tuition programs for this age group are rare.

Some schools plan to manage the impact on junior secondary students of different teachers simultaneously presenting long and short term tasks by coordinating homework requirements across subjects. In addition, some schools conduct homework support programs which are typically quite structured (i.e. available to groups of students at a particular afternoon after school, or lunchtime, for a specified amount of time).

2. Are there issues particular to Aboriginal students when they transition to high school and how could they be addressed?

Many Aboriginal students and their families find the transition to secondary school difficult. Often these students have come from smaller, more community-like schools where they have a sense of belonging that flows from pastoral care approaches where Aboriginal students are everyone's concern. Specific issues for Aboriginal students entering high school are:

- A significant number enter secondary school performing poorly in literacy and numeracy and it can take some time to identify these students which leads to a widening of the gap.
- A lack of student engagement and ability and increasing disruptive behaviour.
- The time taken and the anxiety caused by attempting to master the large alien physical and organisational environment of secondary schools.
- The need to interpret timetables and move from class to class can be extremely stressful.
- The need to identify specific staff for specific needs.
- Lack of knowledge about who to speak to when things are not going well either academically or socially leads to social isolation.
- Racism from other students damages the cultural identity of Aboriginal students.

These issues could be addressed by use of appropriate diagnostic tools which assess literacy and numeracy proficiency in Year 7, schools raising their expectations of Aboriginal students' achievements, case management plans for those students who require them, cultural awareness training for all school personnel, thorough student induction programs and buddy/mentor programs.

3. Do Catholic schools allow external organisations to make use of school grounds and resources? What issues are associated with this, such as insurance matters?

Catholic schools generally allow external organisations to make use of their facilities, most commonly, school halls and sporting fields. A hire agreement would be in place and hirers required to provide evidence of having a current public liability insurance policy and that all requirements of the Children and Young People's legislation are met. They are also required to indemnify the school against any claims.

4. How beneficial would reducing class sizes for years 7 and 8 be in relation to the transition to high school?

We are not aware of any empirical research to support a link between smaller Years 7 and 8 class sizes and more effective learning. Similarly, we are not aware of any empirical evidence to suggest that class sizes impact on the transition to high school. More significant factors are high quality teaching and the relationships between teachers and students, including pastoral support and a focus on student wellbeing.

5. In what ways could the curriculum for middle years students be improved?

In general, a focus on quality teaching and learning including relevant curriculum, raised expectations and a quality learning environment will assist. Identifying rich/big/significant questions and forming genuine links to community assists in making learning purposeful for middle years students. A focus on development of authentic tasks that develop collaborative skills by using online collaborative learning portals may also result in improvements.

6. To what extent does the curriculum for middle years students in NSW include a focus on strategies for building resilience? Could programs aimed at building resilience be further integrated into the curriculum?

Our first comment is that the curriculum can only be part of the answer, and especially with regard to building resilience in students. Other significant influences are relationships between teachers and students, and their families, and schools' approaches to student pastoral care and wellbeing.

With regard to curriculum, students receive explicit education in building resilience through the K-6 and 7-10 PDHPE curriculum and in school developed Pastoral Care programs. These programs are monitored and evaluated through school and system review processes. Whilst the term resilience is not mentioned in the NSW K-6 PDHPE syllabus the skills of decision making, problem solving, relationships, communicating, self awareness and self management are developed.

Strategies for building resilience should be integrated into all curriculum areas. All learning and extra-curricular experiences should build the confidence of all students. There is scope for a positive focus on mental health and wellbeing to be integrated into schools' programs. MindMatters (secondary schools) and KidsMatters (for primary schools) are examples of initiatives which support schools in providing these educational experiences. These programs are most effective when they are integrated across the curriculum.

7. Your submission identified that the family and home environment of children and young people is critical to their health and wellbeing. What kind of support is needed for parents of children in the middle years?

The following support would benefit parents and, therefore, their families:

- Information and support programs on current and emerging issues, e.g. cyber bullying.
- Workshops and programs to assist parents in supporting their children as they engage with the curriculum. This should happen in a variety of ways which recognise the time commitments of parents – short adult education courses, online learning options, use of technologies to link to other organisations, outside work hours.
- Promotion of positive strategies/positive parenting focusing on adolescence.
- Taking a multidisciplinary approach to support families by working collaboratively within the system and its associated agencies and with external agencies through established links.

Please contact me (rosalie.nott@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au or 9287 1560) if you would like to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely



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