

Submission

No 81

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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**CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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14 May 2008

The Committee Manager
Committee on Children and Young People
NSW Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years in NSW

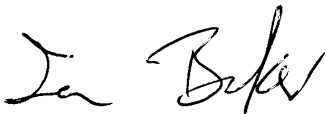
Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the *NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Young People 9 to 14 Years* and comment in relation to the Terms of Reference.

Please find attached a brief submission from the Catholic Education Commission, NSW for consideration. This submission is supported by the Catholic Social Services Committee (NSW/ACT).

The Catholic Education Commission, NSW would welcome the opportunity to provide further comment at the planned public hearings in June and July 2008.

Should you wish to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact Annette Crothers at Annette.crothers@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au or 9287 1510.

Sincerely



Ian Baker
Director, Education Policy and Programs

CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION NSW
SUBMISSION TO
THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY
INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

The Catholic Education Commission, NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the *NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Young People 9 to 14 Years* and comment in relation to the Terms of Reference. This submission is supported by the Catholic Social Services Committee (NSW/ACT).

Both agencies, Catholic Education Commission (CEC) and Catholic Social Services Australia (NSW/ACT) are directly involved with young people in the target age group. It is recognised that many of the needs of these young people are addressed by whole-of-government initiatives. However the impact across such initiatives is significantly enhanced (efficiency and effectiveness) when the non-government sector is involved in planning, implementation and delivery of these services. It is the opportunity for young people to obtain support regardless of their age, gender or level of disadvantage that empowers them to achieve.

In this context it should be noted that across the relevant years of schooling Catholic schools enrol:

Year 4	17,718
Year 5	17,678
Year 6	17,511
Year 7	20,869
Year 8	20,761
<u>Year 9</u>	<u>20,275</u>
TOTAL	114,812 students

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT:

It is widely recognised that the family and home environment of children and young people is critical to their development, health and wellbeing. Children and young people living in a family/home environment where there is drug and alcohol use, domestic violence, mental health and dual diagnosis issues are at significant risk.

Where the parent/s is no longer a responsible carer the 'primary carer role' is often taken up by other family members. Many children and young people are cared for by their grandparent/s, adding an unexpected financial burden to the grandparents' retirement provision/pension, placing the children and young people in care which has the potential to be withdrawn unexpectedly. In other families the older children will often take on the 'primary carer responsibilities' for parents and their younger siblings. This can include being the main source of family income, despite being under age.

Increasingly the financial pressure placed on families is influencing the welfare of children and young people. This is particularly evident where the work practices and employment arrangements of the adults prohibit them from providing adequate supervision and nurturing, as well as financial support for their children.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

The increasing use of technology in a young person's life can place added financial burdens on them and also requires a re-evaluation by society of 'appropriate communication' issues. The increasing 'consumerism' facilitated through technology and the media provide a plethora of options for young people, for example in their personal communication, sexual behaviours, and their purchasing powers. Taken together these matters raise important questions regarding behavioural expectations. Many of the available options are actually adverse to the young person's best interest and require community oversight.

Young people are increasingly involved in decisions around these issues at an earlier age, making support and guidance critical. Schools are increasingly becoming involved in providing guidance to young people through the development of policies addressing issues such as cyber bullying and sexualised behaviours. Often such guidance is provided through programs in pastoral care, values education and financial literacy.

For Catholic schools the development of the spiritual dimension of each child is seen as a critical way to build resilience and self worth. These factors themselves promote better lifestyle decisions and outcomes.

IDENTIFIED GROUPS:

Within the target age group of 9 to 14 years there are identified groups of young people at risk who require specific intervention.

Specific issues are identified for young people of refugee or immigrant status, particularly those who are highly traumatised, have suffered physical, sexual and/or emotional violation/s and/or are from countries in social chaos. These young people require specialised mental health intervention and support to enable them to integrate into their school and the wider community.

The identified issues of Aboriginal young people are well documented and require ongoing community involvement, in particular the opportunity to connect with their spirituality and culture while preparing their potential for life. Whilst this is addressed to varying degrees in our schools, it requires widespread community involvement and support so that appropriate opportunities can be provided to these young people.

Homeless youth, particularly young girls in the target age group require additional support as their immaturity and vulnerability present a challenge to established welfare and education services.

As with the identified groups above, the planning and support for young people with special needs to achieve their potential requires ongoing investment. They all require ongoing support to build resilience and help identify and attain their aspirations for life. The potential for these children and young people to be left behind or further damaged continues to be a community wide issue.

RURAL AND REMOTE:

Agencies, both government and non-government struggle to provide equity of service provision in rural and remote areas. Children and young people and their families are disadvantaged due to location, evidenced by the lower educational outcomes in rural and remote areas. The lack of opportunities and the additional costs in these communities reduces the capacity for young people to reach their potential.

While it is recognised that there are some services available to young people in rural and remote communities, the infrequency and lack of consistency of services are problematic. The availability of services, where the services are infrequent, is often not well promoted in the communities, or the waiting period is so extensive it is counterproductive for the user of the service.

EDUCATION TRANSITION:

In the education setting, transition periods are clearly identified times children and young people are at an increased risk and require additional support.

These transition periods occur when a child enters preschool (3-4 years), school (5 years), secondary school (11-12 years) and on leaving school (15-18 years). These are time when the children and young people are establishing their roles with their peers and their new environment.

While education transition periods are difficult times for most students the groups of young people previously identified tend to experience greater difficulty and therefore require support.

CARERS NEEDS:

Children at risk who require foster and other out of home care services face a shortage of service provision. Non-Government agencies which are providers of foster and other out of home care services require further community and Government support including financial assistance.

CONCLUSION:

The children and young people identified above tend to be in situations where there is parental long-term unemployment and/or disempowerment, where there is the potential for a breakdown of family structure, values and responsibility. These children and young people have the potential to be marginalised by the wider community. The responsibility for these issues is community wide and must not be just seen as a matter for schools. There is a need for easily accessible, user friendly intervention services to provide support that enables both resilience to be built and the individual potential of these children and young people to be developed. Also any action needs to empower their families, in part by deepening their appreciation of community values and responsibilities.

NEXT STEPS:

CEC,NSW and CSSA(NSW/ACT) understand that they will have an opportunity to expand on the above cited issues at a public hearing and are happy so to do.