

Submission  
No 82

**INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (PARENTAL RIGHTS) BILL 2020**

**Organisation:** Roman Catholic Diocese of Parramatta

**Date Received:** 5 May 2021

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**Diocese of Parramatta submission into the  
*Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020*  
5 May 2021**

1. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Parramatta (Diocese of Parramatta) makes this submission to the Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No.3 - Education about the *Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020* (Bill).
2. This submission supersedes the submission dated 26 February 2021 (Submission No 32) from Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta.
3. This submission by Diocese of Parramatta proposes improvements to that Bill.
4. Diocese of Parramatta, through its education agency, Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta, runs a system of 80 faith-based schools in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Diocese of Parramatta educates over 43,000 students and employs almost 5,000 staff.
5. Diocese of Parramatta covers 16 State Electorates including: Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Castle Hill, Granville, Hawkesbury, Londonderry, Mount Druitt, Mulgoa, Parramatta, Penrith, Prospect, Riverstone, Seven Hills, and Wollondilly.
6. Diocese of Parramatta is committed to responding to the needs of all students. Diocese of Parramatta collaborates with parents, students, and staff to realise the mission of bringing the person of Jesus Christ into the lives of the young people in its care and their families.
7. Catholic educators are called to accompany students from diverse backgrounds in dialogue with different perspectives.<sup>i</sup> All students - including those who identify as gender diverse should have the opportunity to reach their God-given potential, to learn with their peers and feel a sense of belonging in their learning environment.
8. Diocese of Parramatta proposes amendments to clarify and improve parts of the Bill. As an education provider schooling one in five students in Western Sydney, Diocese of Parramatta is trusted by local families to make appropriate discernments regarding sensitive matters in student learning.

9. Diocese of Parramatta strongly affirms the Catholic teaching that parents are the primary educators of their children in matters of faith and education.<sup>ii</sup>
10. Diocese of Parramatta recognises parents as each child's most influential, primary, and essential educator and actively partners with parents and caregivers, encouraging open communications and supportive learning environments. Diocese of Parramatta works in partnership with parents and carers to provide holistic Catholic education programs for our students.
11. Diocese of Parramatta affirms the prohibition of teaching gender ideology (gender fluidity) in an educational setting. As I explain in my attached Pastoral Letter (attached Appendix 1) I have serious concerns, echoing Pope Francis, about this ideology.
12. Our Catholic position is well outlined in *Male and Female He Created Them: Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*<sup>iii</sup> and *Amoris Laetitia*.<sup>iv</sup> In his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis says that "the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created".
13. Our major overriding concern is also to affirm that each and every child is loved, supported, comforted, extended emotional and pastoral assistance, and given appropriate accompaniment. That is our essential mission as Catholics called to live the Gospel and reach out compassionately to those experiencing harassment and marginalisation.
14. Diocese of Parramatta also affirms that parents are the primary educators of their children, provided it occurs within a framework of open collaboration with the school. These two elements should work together harmoniously and with transparency.
15. Parents' role in education is vital, necessary and sought after at all times because parents are their children's first teachers (Canon 793 §1).<sup>v</sup> In addition, "the family's right to be recognised as the primary pedagogical environment for the educational formation of children" must be paramount.<sup>vi</sup>
16. This Bill, in our view, however, should not in any way be used as a means to diminish or reduce the professional capacity and expectations of a teacher and the school community.
17. Certainly, steps must be taken to ensure such legislation respects the rights of children which Australian governments have ratified in international agreements.



18. Diocese of Parramatta therefore encourages respectful and intelligent dialogue with students, with our deeply committed teaching staff, and within a caring Catholic environment about sensitive or challenging topics such as consent, sexuality, and gender. It is important that the school community is able to challenge unhealthy, ill-informed and discriminatory attitudes. Our primary concern is to affirm, like Pope Francis, the absolute dignity and uniqueness of each child of God. This is best fostered where there is an inclusive and healthy atmosphere among all students and staff.<sup>vii</sup>
19. We are of the view that the Bill should not be used to prohibit a school from supporting children who are already at risk of marginalisation because of gender identity issues.
20. Diocese of Parramatta supports the individual and loving the individual, regardless of their sexual orientation. Catholic teaching requires us to uphold the dignity of each human person and invites us to accompany all people and provide all people with pastoral care. We strongly endorse the leadership of Pope Francis and his pastoral approach which places great emphasis on inclusivity, dialogue and the acceptance of each unique child of God.
21. I am thankful on behalf of the Diocese of Parramatta for this opportunity to present a submission into this important topic that will impact the lives of children for generations.

**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv  
Bishop of Parramatta**

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<sup>i</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (for Institutes of Study). (2013). *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools. Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*. Vatican City. 28 October, cls. 61-63 Retrieved on 22 February 2021 from [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20131\\_028\\_dialogo-interculturale\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20131_028_dialogo-interculturale_en.html)

<sup>ii</sup> The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1982). *Lay Catholics In Schools: Witnesses To Faith*. Vatican City. 15 October, cl.12. Retrieved on 22 February 2021 from [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_19821015\\_lay-catholics\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19821015_lay-catholics_en.html)

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19\\_0997\\_INGLESE.pdf](http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib3-cann-793-821\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann-793-821_en.html)

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19\\_0997\\_INGLESE.pdf](http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> See attached Appendix 1 Pastoral letter to the pastors, parents and the faithful of the Diocese of Parramatta on the proposed Parental Rights Bill, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 <https://parracatholic.org/pastoral-letter-to-the-people-of-parramatta-on-the-parental-rights-bill/>



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## **Pastoral letter to the pastors, parents and the faithful of the Diocese of Parramatta on the proposed Parental Rights Bill**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta recently made a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's inquiry into the *Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020* (introduced by the Hon. Mark Latham, NSW State Leader of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party). I felt it was important to write to reassure you that the decision to oppose the Bill was guided both by our strong Catholic faith and teachings, and concern for the wellbeing of our students and their families.

Our Catholic schools remain resolutely committed to our Catholic values which are at the heart of teaching children and young people. This means approaching these matters with sensitivity, compassion and truth, acknowledging at all times the dignity of each person. Dedicated staff respond to the needs of each student in an age-appropriate way.

As the Bishop of Parramatta, with oversight of Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta, I take seriously the trust you have placed in us to educate your children and will uphold that trust with an education based on Catholic Scripture, Tradition and Values. Parents' role in education is vital, necessary and sought after at all times because parents are their children's first teachers (Canon 793 §1). This is made very clear in Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta's submission to the parliamentary inquiry.

At issue is whether or not certain sensitive or challenging topics such as consent, sexuality, gender et cetera can be discussed in the classroom. Some have quickly made a judgment that our Catholic education system panders to dangerous ideology. I can assure you that we take all the vital questions of our culture seriously and reflect on them through the prism of Jesus' solidarity with the marginalised.

As a Catholic community, we believe that all students - including those who identify as gender diverse - should have the opportunity to reach their potential, to learn with their peers and feel a sense of belonging in their school. The Bill prohibits the schools from affirming and supporting these children who are already at risk of marginalisation. We have to remember that at times the teachers are the only people these children might trust in helping them in these sensitive matters. By banning their discussion, the school community is unable to address unhealthy and discriminatory attitudes that may exist in their learning environment.

**I emphatically reject the notion of gender ideology. What I advocate for is a compassionate, respectful, inclusive, Gospel-centred learning environment and a deep commitment to the wellbeing of all students, particularly those at risk. Their lives must not be made more intolerable by unjust laws such as elements of the “Latham” Bill that I have articulated above.**

We have nothing to fear from a respectful and intelligent dialogue with our sons and daughters, with our deeply committed teaching staff, and in a caring Catholic environment. Life can be complex; but the Church is not a cult that refuses to engage and challenge our contemporary culture. I believe when faced with a choice, we need to acknowledge and stand with those who are ostracised rather than consigning them to the margins of society.

Catholics believe all people are made in the image and likeness of God. As our Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us, the Catechism of the Catholic Church invites us to accompany all people. As the parable of the Gospel’s Good Samaritan tells us, we are called to walk with and care for everyone in our community.

As always, I welcome respectful discussion and acknowledge the good intentions of many of those with an interest in this important issue. Yet I ask that the dignity of each person be maintained at all times, regardless of the view being expressed. Thank you for working with us in partnership for the best outcomes for children and young people.

Yours in Christ,

**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv  
Bishop of Parramatta**

*Given at Parramatta on 27 April 2021  
Tuesday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week of Easter*