

**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT
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Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT

NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales

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Preamble

This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP) representing the parents of more than 275,000 students in almost 600 Catholic schools in NSW/ACT.

CCSP thanks the NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee on Foundational and disability supports available for children and young people for the invitation to make this submission. This submission is made on behalf of approximately 150,000 families who choose to enrol one or more of their children in NSW/ACT Catholic schools.

CCSP is the officially recognised body representing the interests of parents of children and young people in NSW and ACT Catholic schools. The work of the Council is guided by the principles of parental choice, equity, and social justice. CCSP provides leadership, advocacy and support to the parents of children and young people in all Diocesan and Congregational Catholic schools in NSW and the ACT.

'Parents', as the term is used in this submission, is intended to cover both biological and adoptive parents and other carers who are the primary carers of children and young people, including grandparents and recognised kinship carers.

Parents are the first educators of their children.¹ This is not only true for parents in Catholic families or the parents of children in Catholic schools but all parents.

CCSP helps parents who have children and young people with diverse learning needs in a variety of ways including:

- [CCSP website](#), [Parent Talk eNewsletter](#) and [Facebook](#).
- Delivery of the CCSP *Supporting Diverse Learning in Catholic Schools – A Guide by Parents for Parents*. This guide is available on the CCSP website.
- Delivery of a range of parent education webinars supporting parents in their role as primary carers and offering avenues of support if issues are identified.
- Maintaining a Diverse Learning Working Party to identify opportunities to provide support for families.

This submission is in response to the Committee's published Terms of Reference adopted by the Committee on 27 November 2024.

The Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT Council members have provided feedback to *some* parts of the Terms of Reference - Parts (a) through (i).

In considering our submission, we acknowledge that disability is a broad term and covers partial or total loss of bodily or mental functions, partial or total loss of a body part, presence of organisms that cause or can cause disease or illness, disorders of learning and disorders of behaviour, emotions, judgement, or thought processes.²

Terms of Reference

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2023.

² *Getting Started: Disability and Education*; Australian Government, Department of Education

Select Committee Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales targets feedback with reference to the following:

(a) the role of such services and supports on a child's overall development, health and wellbeing

Parents, as the primary care givers for children and young people, have the responsibility of identifying the needs of their children as they develop. It is indisputable that the role of a parent is complex and often challenging and parents regularly seek the advice and support of experts in a variety of fields when assessing their child's development. Parents may seek the advice of the general practitioner, childcare service, teachers, baby and child health clinics among other services and often, family and friends who have raised children themselves. Identifying appropriate developmental milestones and potentially areas where additional support might be required, can be challenging for parents. Services that provide informing, support and guidance for families are critical, particularly in the early years, when access to appropriate interventional support is most beneficial for positive long-term outcomes. Services that provide information and guidance are critically important particularly for parents in communities where individuals may experience disconnect. It is through their guidance, parents can gain insight into interventions or adjustments that can positively impact developmental milestones.

(b) the types of services and supports available and measures to improve effectiveness, availability and access of such services and supports in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote New South Wales, including medical, community-nursing, allied health services, NDIS services and other service delivery models

(c) the role of diagnostic services, existing gaps and barriers, and measures to improve effectiveness, availability and access of such services

(d) gaps and barriers to accessing early childhood intervention and their impact on a child's overall development, health and wellbeing, as well as on their family or carers and other government services and systems

Parents of children in Catholic schools in rural and remote regionals have reported challenges accessing early intervention support for their child. Parents may suspect a disability and discuss this with their ECEC provider or teacher in a school setting. Parents have reported challenges accessing appropriate services and support to ensure the correct diagnosis is made, if necessary.

Accessing specialist paediatricians, allied health professionals and services offered by other health professionals results in additional issues. Often, appointments are scheduled for months or years post the initial identification of the need to investigate.

Parents also report the significant cost to travel to appointments, the time children and young people are required to be absent from schools to travel and attend appointments as well as the impact this has on the family with parents required to take longer periods of time off work, other child-minding and caring responsibilities and obligations.

On occasions, parents are dealing with their own disabilities, limiting their ability to manage their needs as well as their child's.

CCSP is aware of the NSW Government's commitment to improving outcomes for all students. It is indisputable that early intervention is a primary determinant of improved outcomes for children and young people. If services are difficult to access because of, for example, significant delays to schedule an appointment, large amounts of time to travel to appointments as well as transport costs incurred and cost barriers for parents paying for consultations, this has a negative impact on the length of time taken for health professionals to form a diagnosis. A delay in a diagnosis results in a delay accessing services and support, which in turn, impacts outcomes for students.

The affect on mental health and wellbeing of parents can be significant with parents reporting increased

stress levels as they attempt to navigate a pathway to access support for their child.

(d) opportunities to increase engagement across sectors and improved collaboration across both government and non-government services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, early learning services, educational settings and health services

Since July 2024 CCSP has been advocating on behalf of students with vision impairment in Catholic schools in NSW. All students with disability experience challenges that are reduced through the collaborative efforts of parents and teachers. For students with vision impairment, accessing Braille printed resources is particularly difficult. We are aware public schools in NSW have access to a library of Braille resources that can be borrowed for student use via the Braille and Large Print Service (BLPS), a service managed by the Department of Education.

Unfortunately, students enrolled in Catholic schools are unable to access the full suite of resources. They *have* been granted access to existing electronic files, which enables them to have a copy of the text printed in Braille at an additional expense. This adds to the time that the student is without the text. In the case of rural and remote students, this adds even more time where they are without the Braille version of the required text.

Of concern is what will happen if a new syllabus prescription renders some of the existing electronic files redundant. We assume this will reduce the number so that files would be available for students.

(i) any other related matter

CCSP is grateful the NSW Government Legislative Councils Select Committee has sought feedback into disability supports from our members. Access to appropriate resources is fundamental to improved outcomes for students.

It would perhaps be worth exploring the provision of mobile health services similar to those services provided by NSW Health and Breastscreen or the Red Cross Blood Bank, where purpose-built vehicles, staffed with allied health and other paediatric support, are provided in the most vulnerable communities to allow screening such as auditory screening and cognitive assessments etc. for children.

These services can also be an opportunity to assist communities to build their capacity to identify vulnerable children as well as improve understanding of strategies that can support child development.

Conclusion

CCSP commends the NSW Legislative Council's Select Committee for conducting this Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales

We acknowledge the challenge faced by the Australian governments, both federal and state, in achieving improved outcomes for all children and young people. It is only through legislators working closely with parents that we can ensure best outcomes for our children and young people.

CCSP thanks the NSW Legislative Council for the opportunity to provide this submission and will happily contribute further information if requested.