SUBMISSION

IN RESPONSE TO THE

REPORT OF THE REVIEW OF TEACHER EDUCATION

NEW SOUTH WALES

June 2001
Council of Catholic School Parents [CCSP]

The Council was officially incorporated under NSW law on 7th May, 1997. It is the official body recognised by the NSW Catholic Bishops to represent the 200,000 Catholic school parents in New South Wales.

The Council nominates two parents to the Catholic Education Commission, NSW and through those parents is aware of, makes input to, and supports the major thrusts of the Commission’s submission to the Review.

The Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute directly to the Review and thrusts that its submission will add value to the material obtained from other sources.

Preliminary Comments

1. The diversity of school provision in Australia is public recognition of the pluralist nature of our society and evidence of the strength of our democracy. In a pluralist society no-one is compelled to any particular system of values, including secularism, but is free to choose and exercise his/her value system. In schooling, the NSW Education Act 1990 properly recognises that this choice belongs to parents. ‘the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child’s parent’ [Part 2, Article 4,(b)]. For Catholic school parents there is a necessary connection between parenting and schooling. The teacher’s role is an extension of the parent’s responsibility. For this reason parents expect to be able to access teachers who exercise their professional responsibility in a manner consistent with parents’ values and beliefs.

‘In partnership with parents, teachers have an important role in shaping the values and attitudes of young people’ [Quality Matters, page 4]

2. Catholic school parents are concerned that there appears to be increasing signs that the balance between the expected work-life of teachers and their ‘other-life’ is not properly understood. Ramsey identifies some of the new ‘challenges’ confronting teachers. Catholic school parents believe an adequate response to these challenges is not simply a matter of giving teachers proper recognition or better programs of pre-service and post-service education, important as these are. Teachers themselves understand the nature of the imbalance which results in a low morale within their profession as evidenced by the loss of teachers and the lack of teacher’s interest in promotion. For this reason the Council hopes that any proposed ‘Institute of Teachers’ would have a Governing Board comprised mainly of practicing class-room teachers and that the Institute would itself be given the necessary support to enable it to commission major study about the profession. Practicing teachers, through their proposed Institute, need to be in a position to properly inform Government and the society generally on what should be done to enhance their profession and restore a proper balance in their work-life.

‘Teachers know that they are involved in an often complex and demanding calling; they want to be well prepared and supported to be effective in their teaching. They want account to be taken of their views and opinions on professional matters.’ [Quality Matters, page 4]

‘The Challenges.........will be best addressed by creating the circumstances in which teachers can focus strongly on the quality of their professional lives and can exercise the responsibilities of truly professional people’ [Quality Matters, page 4]
3. Catholic school parents want to be confident that; teachers are well trained, the curriculum is well taught and class-room and school behaviour is well managed. This is not a new expectation. However, the Council is disappointed that the Ramsey Review does not extend its general acknowledgement about the importance of the parent/teacher partnership with consideration about general implications arising from that partnership for the training of teachers, the teaching of the curriculum and the management of student behaviour.

‘Other professions and occupations in our society have adapted their structures and practices to better serve the public. Teaching needs to do the same’ [Quality Matters page 25]

Parents with children at school are a special part of the ‘public’. The Council believes that they can be, and ought to be a key element in helping to engender and maintain the joy and satisfaction which needs to be associated with the profession of teaching if the best talent is to be attracted into that profession. The Council believes, and the evidence supports the belief, that constructive parent/teacher partnership is a significant factor in the successful implementation of curriculum ie, in quality teaching. The Council believes that school parents have a special responsibility, both individually and collectively, to contribute in a positive way to the management of class-room and school behaviour. To take advantage of this contribution requires in our teachers a high level of ‘person skills’ and the opportunity to develop those skills in both pre-service and in-service training. The Council can and ought to have an opportunity to contribute constructively to facilitating the development of those skills.

The Review rightly identifies a place for universities, employers and for major businesses and industries as important partners in developing and maintaining a quality system of education in New South Wales [Quality Matters, page 16]. The Review is silent on the inclusion of major parent organisations in this partnership.

Recommendations of the Review

Institute of Teachers

- The CCSP supports the Review’s proposal for the establishment of a NSW ‘Institute of Teachers’ with a primary role to raise the quality and status of teachers and teaching.

- The CCSP supports an Institute established under Parliamentary Statute with a Governing Board comprised of a majority of practicing teachers. The number of practicing teachers together with teacher nominees from the recognised professional teaching organisations [eg, principal associations, special teachers association] should comprise at least 80% of the Board’s membership.

‘Many [teachers] expressed the view……that the schools in which they work, particularly if part of a larger system, are so disconnected from their employers and the universities that as teachers they are precluded from exercising fully their professional responsibility’ [Quality Matters, page 4].

- The CCSP agrees with a central thrust of the Review that compulsory registration of teachers is unlikely to achieve the aims of the Institute. It supports voluntary membership with a reasonable fee set by the Institute for ‘Institute Accreditation’. The CCSP believes a key measure of the success of the Institute will be the high regard afforded this ‘Institute Accreditation’ over time by both teachers, parents, employers and the general community.

‘Good teaching does not come about through imposed requirements but through the individual teacher’s commitment to high professional standards’ [Quality Matters, page 7]
The CCSP supports the Review’s recommendations regarding the specification and promulgation by the Institute of standards of professional competence in teaching. The CCSP believes decisions on levels of accreditation should be a matter for consideration by the Institute in consultation with teacher employers, school authorities, recognised parent organisations and government, using the three levels identified in the Review as a starting point for the consideration. The CCSP considers the development and identification of standards of teacher competence will necessarily be an evolutionary process and subject to re-definition from time to time. The CCSP considers the specification of these competence standards to be the major challenge for the Institute. The experience of Catholic school parents suggests there is no simple answer to what it means to be an effective teacher. The CCSP contends that the specification and promulgation of the standards will only be useful if they provide teachers with a frame of reference for their professionalism and the community with a high level of confidence in the profession. This is unlikely to happen if the standards fluctuate simply in response to supply/demand pressures.

The CCSP believes the Institute’s Board of Governors should make known its decisions on standards, not only to members of the profession, but to school parents and to the general public. Funds need to be provided by the NSW Government not just for the development of the standards but also to enable effective communication about the standards.

The CCSP contends that all the responsibilities of the Board of Governors of the Institute should be adequately funded by the NSW Government. Included in this funding support should be provision for the Board’s ‘Working Parties’ and ‘Advisory Groups’ and for the commissioning of major research projects. As well, the development and provision of suitable ‘practicum’ arrangements for initial training will need to be properly funded.

Consultation and Collaboration with NSW recognised School Parent Organisations

The success of the Institute of Teachers will be helped by working constructively and collaboratively with the recognised NSW representative parent organisations. The CCSP expects that the Governing Board of the Institute will provide a stronger mechanism, than currently available, where school parents and school teachers can pursue collaboratively the many issues which come under the heading of ‘parent/teacher’ partnership.

Some collaboration already occurs in response to research findings on the value of the partnership for ensuring the curriculum is well-taught. This collaboration is almost exclusively at the Primary school level and not generally seen as evidence of a teacher’s understanding of the importance of the partnership and hence as evidence of the teacher’s competence per se. There is considerable scope for developing the level of teacher competence in this area especially with respect to Secondary school teachers.

This submission has already referred to the importance to teachers of ‘person skills’. While the practicum may help teachers develop these skills with respect to dealing with young persons, the CCSP believes that parent organisations can play a constructive and practical role in the development of these skills in dealing with adult persons, particularly school parents. Teacher competence in communicating with parents is not just important for a child’s learning and behaviour but is critical in how the profession is viewed by the community.

Class-room and school behaviour management is another area where collaboration has significant potential to assist teachers develop their competence. Anecdotal evidence available to the CCSP suggests that this area does not figure largely in the pre-service training programs for teachers. More direct evidence in the day-to-day contacts of parents and teachers indicates a considerable potential both for teacher training and for parent understanding from collaboration on the issue.

Representing Catholic School Parents in the Dioceses of NSW & ACT.