

Friday 23 January 2015

Mr Byrne  
Executive Director  
Queensland Catholic Education Commission

Via email: [director@qcec.catholic.edu.au](mailto:director@qcec.catholic.edu.au)

Dear Mr Byrne

Thank you for your correspondence regarding issues of concern for the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) and Catholic Parents and Friends Federation's in the context of the 2015 State Election.

Queensland is a great place to live and work and does have a bright future, but with more uncertainty facing the rest of Australia and the world, we need to make sure Queensland stays on track to secure that bright future.

Through strong economic management, we are seeing real progress in health and education, more jobs in a stronger economy, better roads and less crime. And now that we've set the right financial foundations, we're able to truly afford the better schools and hospitals, improved roads and more police our growing State needs.

A re-elected Newman LNP Government will keep working hard to deliver our long term economic plan. We'll keep growing a four pillar economy focusing on agriculture, construction, resources and tourism to deliver more jobs and better services.

The LNP is committed to ensuring that Queensland is the safest place to live, work, visit and raise a family.

#### **1. Annual per student funding**

The Newman LNP Government is committed to ensuring all Queensland children receive a first class education, regardless of which sector provides that education. We recognise and appreciate the valuable contribution and important role that Catholic schools play in the education of children in Queensland, and we support parents' right to choose the school they believe will be best for their child and consistent with their personal values or faith.

With respect to the level of recurrent funding that we provide the Catholic schooling sector, we have sought to ensure that it not only keeps pace with the rising costs of delivering a quality education, but reflects the expectations of parents and families. At the same time, we have been forced to undertake the massive fiscal repair task as a result of the former Labor government's legacy of debt and deficit.

This repair task required the exercise of significant spending restraint across all portfolios of government, including education.

**A** 66-68 Bowen Street, Spring Hill QLD 4000 | **P** PO Box 940, Spring Hill QLD 4004

**P** 07 3844 0666 **F** 07 3844 0388 **E** [info@lnp.org.au](mailto:info@lnp.org.au) **W** [www.lnp.org.au](http://www.lnp.org.au)

Despite this, under the Newman LNP Government, per student funding for students in the 296 Catholic schools in Queensland is the third highest in Australia: in 2014/15, general recurrent funding to the non-state schooling sector increased by 6.9 per cent to \$589.658 million. Further, the Newman LNP Government is committed to continuing its close engagement with QCEC to ensure that Catholic schools in Queensland have the certainty they will be able to continue to provide Queensland families with an affordable and high quality choice when it comes to education.

This commitment is bolstered by the Newman LNP Government's strong record of extending to the non-state sector the benefits of our strong plan to build a first class state school system in Queensland. For example, under *Great Teachers = Great Results*, our \$537 million action plan to improve and reward teacher quality, Catholic schools have shared in nearly \$100 million allocated to the non-state schooling sectors to invest in encouraging professional excellence in teaching and boosting school autonomy.

## **2. Increased capital funding to deliver the additional student places required to meet the needs of Queensland's growing population**

The Newman LNP Government supports the right of parents to send their children to a Catholic school and recognises the responsibility of government to provide an appropriate share of capital funding for those schools. We have a strong record of working closely with the non-state schooling sectors to ensure that they have sufficient funding to provide families right around the state with the modern schools that our kids deserve.

Despite the legacy of debt and deficit that we were confronted with on coming to government in 2012, the Newman LNP Government has continued to provide the Catholic school sector with a significant level of capital assistance funding to enable it to meet its school infrastructure requirements. As promised during the 2012 Queensland election, the Newman LNP Government established the four year, \$115 million *Building our Future Schools Fund*. QCEC has already received \$34.185 million since 2012 under this fund. This is in addition to other capital funding of nearly \$200 million provided by the Newman LNP Government to the Catholic schooling sector since 2012, including nearly \$83.5 million through the *State Capital Assistance Grant*, more than \$9 million for external infrastructure, and \$105 million to support the transition of Catholic students from Year 7 into Secondary under the *Flying Start* initiative.

The Newman LNP Government also established the Queensland Schools Planning Commission, so that for the first time we have in place a coordinated, cross-sector process to better plan where new schools and additional classrooms would be. As members of this body, QCEC and the Catholic Parents and Friends Federation were able to engage with the independent and state school sectors to undertake long-term cross-sectoral strategic planning, and deliver a 20 year demand map for the entire state. This body advises on the locations and timing of potential new and expanded school infrastructure that Queensland families expect. As you identified, the Commission projected that there would be significant growth in the number of school-aged children between now and 2031, with a requirement for up to 119 new schools over the next two decades.

The Newman LNP Government now has a fully-funded plan to implement the recommendations of the *Schools Planning Commission* and ensure that Queensland communities that need them are provided with the schools of tomorrow. Through our strong economic management, and our *Strong Choices* asset leasing plan, the Newman LNP Government will ensure that Queensland children have the schools they deserve by setting aside \$1 billion for a *Future Schools Fund* to deliver new schools and classrooms, as well as to upgrade facilities at existing schools, right across the state. The *Future Schools Fund* will be broken into two priority programs:

- \$700 million to provide up to 22 new schools across the state, ensuring that we plan properly for a bright future for Queensland kids; and
- \$300 million to upgrade existing school infrastructure around Queensland, delivering modern learning facilities for our kids.

The arrangements for the *Future Schools Fund* under a re-elected Newman LNP Government will be informed by the current policy framework for capital funding and other capital contributions to government, Catholic and independent schools on the basis of the recommendations provided to the Government by the *Queensland Schools Planning Commission*. Proposals for capital funding from any of the three sectors that are consistent with the objectives of this policy framework, which will remain centred on a cross-sectoral approach to delivering school infrastructure in high growth areas, will be considered when the detailed arrangements for the fund are established.

Importantly, the capital funding to be made available under the *Future Schools Fund* will be an additional investment by a re-elected Newman LNP Government in Queensland's schools system over and above the increased recurrent and capital funding that the Government remains committed to providing over coming years.

Should the LNP Government be re-elected on 31 January 2015, we look forward to continuing to work constructively with the QCEC on the delivery of a high quality school education to all children attending Catholic schools in Queensland.

### 3. Students with a disability

The Newman LNP Government is committed to ensuring that all Queenslanders are provided with the appropriate support to enable them to achieve positive educational outcomes.

With respect to funding for the non-state sector to support students with a disability, a set percentage of the general recurrent grant is allocated towards a targeted program for students with disabilities in the non-state sector. This percentage is currently set at 6.65 per cent, which amounts to approximately \$38.175 million in 2014-15.

Additionally, we have again extended state school programs to include the non-state sector, including:

- \$10.9 million over four years for speech language pathologists in Queensland state and non-state schools. These specialists have been deployed throughout Queensland, allowing more than 5,500 additional students to receive a speech language therapy service;

- \$3.5 million over four years for our *eLearning for Special Needs Students*' initiative for state and non-state schools. Under this initiative, non-state schools providing a special education program have been provided with 10 e-tablets to assist students with communicating, learning and engaging in the classroom.

Our close and productive engagement when it comes to providing appropriate support for students with a disability in the non-state sector is further evident in the Newman LNP Government's decision to continue funding for experienced specialist staff, or *Advisory Visiting Teachers* (AVTs) in the non-state sector in 2015 at no cost to Catholic or independent schools. AVTs assist teachers seeking support for students verified in the categories of hearing impairment, vision impairment and physical impairment in a manner that is consistent with the state school sector. Moreover, we are committed to further consultation with QCEC and the independent sector to ensure that students with a disability continue to have access to high quality specialist staff, and are open to providing access, support and advice on a fee for service basis.

With respect to QCEC's recommendation that the Catholic sector be included in tele-health trials to deliver health screening services to regional and remote students, we will ensure that consultation occurs between the Government's Health and Education portfolios to determine how this could occur. Similarly, in relation to the establishment of a cross-sectoral body to be established ahead of the implementation of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS), the Newman LNP Government has been working across a range of portfolios to prepare for its implementation in Queensland in 2016. We welcome the opportunity to work with QCEC and other key stakeholders in the education sector should we be re-elected.

#### **4. Vocational Education and Training (VET) for secondary school students**

Since coming to power, the Newman LNP Government has reinvigorated the vocational education and training sector in Queensland, with the key goal of ensuring that Queenslanders are training for quality jobs – not training for training's sake.

Throughout this reform process, we have worked hard to ensure that students living in regional and rural areas can continue to access high quality training services. As a key education stakeholder, the Newman LNP Government has closely consulted with QCEC over *VET in Schools* (VETiS) reforms, which have included the introduction of full contestability to VETiS funded from the Government's VET investment budget on 1 July 2014. This has seen an increase in consumer choice and access to training so that schools accessing government training funds for VETiS are now able to choose from more than 300 pre-approved departmental training providers (as at October 2014), whereas previously they were restricted to delivery by a TAFE institute.

With respect to accessibility for those living in regional and rural areas, Registered Training Organisations (RTO) will often offer training delivery in a variety of modes and formats and online delivery is accessible for many qualification. In many instances, this mode of delivery is offered by RTOs in collaboration with schools. Many schools have applied for and received RTO status under the auspices of the *Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority* (QCAA), with 77 per cent of VETiS training activity resourced and delivered by school RTOs.

In relation to the options available for female students under the *Employment Stream*, while the qualifications on this list are concentrated across industries associated with traditional trades, the *Employment Stream* provides multiple entry points to those industries. It is squarely focussed on ensuring that young people are undertaking qualifications that will lead them to employment or into further training. However, our VET Investment Plan, which sets out the Newman LNP Government's funding priority areas, is reviewed every year and these concerns will be given due consideration ahead of the release of the 2015/16 VET Investment Plan.

In addition to the subsidising of *Employment Stream* VETiS qualifications through the *Queensland Training Subsidies List*, the Newman LNP Government provides additional funding to the three school sectors to assist with the implementation and management of VETiS. These VETiS grant funding allocations are for the purpose of facilitating the development and delivery of activity that increases opportunities for secondary school students to participate in vocational education and training. QCEC currently receives \$866,200 annually; however, we note QCEC's concerns about the need for indexation of this sum, and are committed to actively reviewing this allocation beyond 2015.

The Newman LNP Government shares QCEC's disappointment over the cessation of Commonwealth Government career development programs and initiatives. However, we have not only remained closely engaged with the Australian Government to discuss service provision for disadvantaged groups, including young people, but have also put in place a number of strategies to connect young people to training opportunities that lead to employment, including:

- The *Community Learning Program*, a \$47 million initiative which provides community-based training designed to help disadvantaged Queenslanders obtain nationally recognised qualifications. As part of our \$91 million *Jobs of Tomorrow* election commitment, we've also committed to invest \$15 million in our *Pathway to a Quality Job* initiative, an extension of the *Community Learning Program* focussed on providing additional support to young disadvantaged learners;
- *Skilling Up for Quality Jobs*, a \$30 million initiative that is part of our \$91 million *Jobs of Tomorrow* election commitment – this will enable young Queenslanders aged 15-24 obtain up to two Certificate 3 qualifications free of charge, removing any barriers to them gaining further qualifications that will lead to a job;
- School-based apprenticeships and traineeships which allow young people to develop workplace skills, knowledge and confidence and a competitive edge when applying for a job. The *School to Trade Pathway* incentive provides up to \$5,000 for both private and public sector employers who convert a school-based apprentice to full-time arrangements after they complete their schooling; and
- The *Queensland Skills Gateway*, which allows Queenslanders to search and browse vocational education and training information including qualifications available, training providers, government funding and career pathways. Individuals are able to enter their desired occupation and the *Queensland Skills Gateway* will provide them with information on the skills required, tasks undertaken, related occupations, and the training pathway available to them. The *Queensland Skills Gateway* can be accessed via [www.skillsgateway.training.qld.gov.au](http://www.skillsgateway.training.qld.gov.au).

## 5. Parent engagement strategies

The Newman LNP Government welcomes QCEC's desire to work collaboratively to support strategies to enhance parent engagement. We have a proud record of parent and community engagement through school representative bodies and strongly believe that school communities, including school leaders, teachers and P&Cs, are best placed to make decisions about the needs and priorities of those communities. Widespread and sustained participation is critical to a school's effective parent and community engagement strategy, because it enables changes to become the long term practice of the school community. In our promotion of a school autonomy agenda focussed on local decision-making, the importance placed on the role of P&Cs and the value of parental engagement has never been higher.

Indeed, the draft *Queensland Education Accord* has identified engaging parents and communities as one of Queenslanders' top priorities for education. This includes empowering families and providing opportunities for them to be engaged in their child's learning, and enabling regular and valued two-way communication with parents and communities about children and their school. We note that QCEC and the Catholic Parents and Friends Federation have played a key role in the development of this document, and look forward to further consultation as we work to finalise the *Queensland Education Accord* and our shared vision for the future of education in our state.

We have given real meaning to the importance of the role of P&Cs, with the Catholic Parents and Friends Association enjoying prominent representation on a number of key processes in the education sector since we came to government, including the *Queensland Schools Planning Commission* and the *Queensland Education Accord* Summit.

With respect to your request for \$250,000 in funding to enable the Catholic sector to roll out its new framework for parent engagement, we will be making new policy announcements to enhance the LNP's strong plan for Queensland over the remaining days of the election campaign. I encourage you to continue to monitor the work that we are doing to deliver dividends for Queenslanders that can only come from better economic management and responsible government.

The *Child Protection Commission of Inquiry* was clear that parents and families have a primary duty to protect and care for, and ensure the wellbeing and safety of, their children. The Newman LNP Government has invested in landmark reforms which will strengthen the capacity in vulnerable families. These reforms will provide the right support and services to at risk families, so wherever possible we prevent the need for more intrusive intervention and ensure more children are kept safe at home.

The newly established *Family and Child Commission* will also encourage communities and professionals through public education to help support at risk families by:

- referring them to services available locally;
- encouraging them to accept help; and
- encouraging the community to offer help.

While a lot has been achieved, the job is not yet done.

If Queensland goes off track now, the real progress we are starting to see will be at risk.

We cannot afford the political chaos that would occur if Labor flopped over the line with the help of wasted votes on minor parties and independents. That will only make Queensland weaker.

Vote LNP to keep on course for a brighter future and a stronger Queensland.

Thank you for taking the time to write and I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Henderson", is positioned above the printed name.

Brad Henderson  
State Director

A 66-68 Bowen Street, Spring Hill QLD 4000 | PO Box 940, Spring Hill QLD 4004

P 07 3844 0666 F 07 3844 0388 E [info@lnp.org.au](mailto:info@lnp.org.au) W [www.lnp.org.au](http://www.lnp.org.au)