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Committee Secretary
PO Box 6021
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Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into the Schools Assistance Act Amendment Bill 2011

Submission from the National Catholic Education Commission

1. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is the peak national body representing all Australian Catholic schools in matters of national schooling policy.
2. NCEC supports the proposed amendment, the effect of which will be to remove the current 31 January 2012 implementation date for the Australian Curriculum from the Schools Assistance Act (2008) and to enable the implementation of the curriculum to be managed by regulation.
3. NCEC notes that Catholic school authorities have been closely involved in the ongoing development of content, achievement standards, and in trialing sections of the new curriculum.
4. NCEC believes that the steadier rollout pace has been both helpful for schools and conducive to ensuring that the new curriculum not only is of a high standard but that it also allows for best practice implementation at school level, and for the more careful consideration of how the curriculum meets the needs of different student groups.
5. NCEC is pleased to see that the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is working on an overarching curriculum philosophy statement. In retrospect it is clear that the decision not to include such a framework statement at the beginning of the Australian Curriculum project was unhelpful.
6. Catholic school authorities also appreciate the steadier rollout of the new curriculum as this helps to reduce unnecessary pressure on teachers and on professional development resources in schools.

7. NCEC is active in its formal consultation with ACARA regarding the development and rollout of the new curriculum. NCEC notes that ACARA's position as an agency of MCEECDYA has both helped and hindered the effective rollout of the new curriculum. On the one hand, the MCEECDYA processes have allowed for perceived difficulties with the new curriculum to be addressed within a political context and this advanced. On the other, the decisions by MCEECDYA to add significantly to ACCARA's work portfolio may have unhelpfully contributed to some of the difficulties that ACARA has faced regarding prioritising and completing tasks.

8. NCEC notes that a significant number - one in three - students in Australia attend nongovernment schools, and that neither national nongovernment school peak body has any representation on MCEECDYA, the body that governs the work of ACARA and thus the work on the Australian Curriculum. NCEC therefore calls on Australia's Ministers of Education assembled at MCEECDYA to be always mindful of their responsibilities as Ministers of Education for all students in their jurisdiction, rather than act simply as heads of major state department school systems, when making decisions about the Australian Curriculum.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Therese Temby
Chair