FROM THE CHAIR

It is hard to believe that we are halfway through the year already, June always seems to come around so quickly these days!

Over the last few months, I have been visiting the directors of each of the Catholic Education Offices in Victoria and various other stakeholders. I have also met with Stephen Elder in his dual capacity as Executive Director of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) and as Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV). It is very gratifying to know that parent leadership in our education system is valued by all these stakeholders and that while I cannot talk in detail about curriculum issues, I can address the issues that matter to parents. I am always treated as an equal with a genuine desire to ‘hear’ what I have to say. Parents, teachers and the Catholic Education Offices need to work together, because when we do, we really can make a difference to the education of our children. From my meetings over the past few months, I have been pleased to see that at a systemic level there is a real recognition of the important role that parents play not only in our children’s lives, but also in their education.

In April, we held the first of our parent forums in Ballarat. We were welcomed by the school community of St Columba’s Primary School, Ballarat. The forum was a successful night, greatly assisted by the delicious food provided by the St Columba’s Parents and Friends Association. It was great at a parent forum to be able to support other parents in their fundraising efforts. The meeting was well attended by School Board members, employees from the Catholic Education Office and principals from both the primary and secondary sector. Audrey Brown, Director of the Catholic Education Office Ballarat also attended the meeting, leading us in prayer and giving us an update on status of school funding negotiations with the federal government. The purpose of this meeting was to tell parents who we are and what we do, and to listen and find out what issues were important to parents in the diocese of Ballarat (which is also the diocese that I live in).

It was reassuring to know that we are on the right track and that the issues we are currently addressing are very relevant for parents. More forums are planned for Melbourne, Sandhurst and Sale with the timing and details to be confirmed. One of the topics for discussion was the issue of bus safety and the need to have seat belts on school buses. This is a matter that we will continue to keep on the government agenda, but it is a work in progress.

I met with James Merlino MLA (the Deputy Leader of the Victorian Labor Party and Shadow Minister for Education) in April this year and during this meeting he invited me to attend a forum on Catholic education at the CEOM with him, Daniel Andrews MLA, Leader of the Victorian Labor Party and Colin Brooks MLA.

The forum was held on 5 June 2013 and I attended on behalf of VCSPB. This was a very positive forum and a wonderful opportunity for me to hear about all the amazing things being carried out by the Catholic Education Offices for the benefit of our children. It was an honour to be part of this forum and to sit with senior CEOM staff and put the parent perspective on issues important to parents. I believe this is recognition of the growing strength of our voice and of government’s need to listen to what we have to say.

Given the changing and challenging education landscape, the VCSPB Council continues its commitment and endeavours to establish a national Catholic parent body to ensure that the distinctive views of parents in Catholic schools have an appropriate channel through which to pursue discussions with all relevant Church, government and other bodies.

TRACIEY O’NEILL
Funding Update
On Wednesday 5 June 2013, the Australian Government moved closer to making its proposed school funding and regulatory reforms for Australian schools a reality, by passing legislation in the House of Representatives.

The Australian Education Bill 2013 confirms the Gonski Review-based commitment that students with disability and other additional learning needs, will attract the same funding to meet their needs, regardless of the school they attend.

The legislation also includes details about the proposed funding model, which suggests that over the next few years, funding outcomes for Victorian Catholic schools will not differ greatly from the status quo.

Potential gains are some time away.

While Catholic education continues to negotiate with the Government, more information about the funding model has been made available, as a result of the letters many Catholic school parents have written to their local representatives, seeking details about the changes for their schools.

The Senate will debate the Australian Education Bill 2013 in the last scheduled sitting week of Parliament before the federal election on 14 September 2013. Schools have been asked to encourage parents to write to the 12 Victorian Senators.

Government funding for Catholic schools must keep pace with the changing costs of education, and we need to ensure that your school leaders can continue to make decisions in the interest of your school community.

Stay connected
Place a link to the VCSPB website on your school website.
Wellbeing is at the core of learning and school improvement

Why is SEL important?
Research on health and wellbeing shows that schools are important environments for the promotion of wellbeing in children and young people. The connection between the promotion of wellbeing and positive learning outcomes is clear. Further, positive learning outcomes occur when delivered through a framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches. Together they provide a sound basis for developing future healthy relationships and, ultimately, achieving success in life.

SEL is the process through which we learn to recognise and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviours.

In the school learning context, SEL is the process for integrating thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve important social/life tasks, meet personal and social needs and develop the skills necessary to become a productive, contributing member of society.

Educators, researchers and policy makers are increasingly aware of the importance of SEL as an integral part of education. This strategic inclusion will ensure that the school’s main purpose and mission – development of the whole person (spiritually, intellectually, morally, physically, socially and emotionally) is fulfilled.

What is SEL?
SEL addresses the competencies of:

• self-awareness – recognising one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and limitations
• self-management – managing emotions and behaviours to achieve one’s goals
• social awareness – showing understanding and empathy for others
• relationship skills – making friends, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict and bullying
• responsible decision making – making good choices about personal and social behaviour.

Research shows that students who experience social and emotional learning (SEL) have a better attitude to school and motivation to learn, demonstrate more pro-social behaviour, have improved maths and literacy skills and higher level problem solving and planning abilities.

Benefits of SEL
SEL has been demonstrated to:

• increase academic competence
• increase motivation to learn
• reduce anxiety
• improve attention
• improve study skills
• increase commitment to school and the time devoted to school work
• improve school attendance
• reduce suspensions and expulsions.

Research indicates gains for schools which include:

• an improved classroom climate
• more effective learning
• clear improvements in behaviour, which may lead to improved school attendance
• increased motivation
• improved morale of teachers and students
• improved learning outcomes for students.

SEL in the curriculum and part of school improvement
The Australian Curriculum and Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS) provide a guide to schools in the key areas of academic learning and have placed a particular emphasis on the physical, personal and social learning needs of students. In particular in each subject there is a stated need to develop personal and social capabilities (competencies) to understand the self and others to manage relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively.
Research clearly shows that in schools where SEL is integrated as a part of the curriculum, there is an increase in the students’ preparedness for and receptivity to learning. Student attachment to school is also fostered. These two factors are strongly linked to academic success.

Wellbeing is at the core of learning and school improvement. Children and young people who are happy, confident, and able to establish meaningful relationships are better placed to achieve positive learning outcomes.

Support for students will be manifested within school philosophies, beliefs, attitudes and school organisation, links with parents, the community and outside agencies, classroom practice, teacher-student relationships and curricula.

Improved integration can be achieved by reviewing school vision and mission statements, policies, resources and strategies, master plan and action plans, aligning them with SEL competencies, and embedding SEL in the curriculum and life and language of the school community.

Resources


The Catholic Education Office Melbourne Wellbeing & Community Partnership Unit has initiated many opportunities to develop a system-wide approach to SEL as a way of developing a safe, effective and successful learning community including:

- Professional learning
- SEL Guidelines for Catholic School Communities (2009)*
- Partnership resources for Engaging Parents (2011)*
- a set of SEL competencies posters for use in the classroom (2013)*.

* available to schools on the CEVN website <http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au> under Curriculum & Student Support / Student Wellbeing.
Update from the Diocese of Sandhurst

Liz Grogan, VCSPB Council member

The Sandhurst School Education Board (SSEB) has made a firm commitment in 2013 to the parents and families of children enrolled in Catholic schools within the diocese in recognition and respect for them as the prime educators of their children. The SSEB believes that a deeper commitment to parent leadership and family engagement will unearth the capacity within communities to be hope-filled, and emphasise the importance of parents as the prime educators and the family being the first school.

This commitment arises from the understanding of the evidence that education influences only 20 per cent of a child’s educational success and life changes whilst social and personal factors are responsible for the remaining 80 per cent. Therefore in order to support the empowerment of all families and teachers within our school communities to build every child’s achievement, life chances and spirit of service, the SSEB supported its parent leaders to develop a Parent Leadership and Family Engagement Strategy which was launched in March this year. The inception and planning of the strategy was done primarily by the parent leaders in conjunction with the support and wisdom from within and external to Catholic Education Office Sandhurst (CEOS) under the unfailing guidance and support of the Director, Phil Billington. Our main external consultant was George Otero and his enthusiasm and support for the strategy is ongoing as we see it being applied in individual school settings.

The parent leaders on the SSEB, Michael Devlin, Vaughan O’Sullivan, Annette Jacob and Elizabeth Grogan (Sandhurst Representative on the VCSPB) are thrilled with the response that the strategy has received so far from board members, parents, families and educators. Following the launch at the Diocesan Leadership Gathering at the beginning of March and more recently, the Board Chair Gathering at the end of May, the feedback around the strategy and its goals, key actions and accompanying strategies has been positive.

The Strategy has not been designed as a document which prescribes actions and strategies to individual schools but rather provides guidelines and suggestions which aim to be applicable across any school environment. Through this parent-driven strategy we wish to formally support the empowerment of the entire school community in order to recognise the divine possibilities inherent in all of our students.

The development, introduction and implementation of such a strategy, although driven by the parent leaders requires a great deal of support from its leadership and its staff. Sally Livermore has recently commenced employment with the CEOS as the Parent Engagement Officer and has already been instrumental in taking the strategy to its next phase, in particular with the development of the Parent Leadership and Engagement Tool to support the use of the strategy.

SSEB and CEOS have recognised the value in a vision where parent leadership is central to driving the change from traditional models as parents/family involvement moves to engagement in partnerships within the school throughout a student’s learning journey. Our hope for this strategy is that it may be used by any of these individuals or groups to develop opportunities where everyone can make a valid contribution and to build a ‘culture of community conversation and a culture of sharing’.

2013 VCSPB Council Meetings
(7.00 pm – 9.00 pm)

24 June Diocese of Sale
24 July Archdiocese of Melbourne
26 August Diocese of Sandhurst
25 November Archdiocese of Melbourne (includes AGM)

Visit our website and subscribe to this newsletter online

www.vcspb.vic.catholic.edu.au
Responsible Gambling Awareness Week

Lisa Hughes, VCSPB Deputy Chair

On Monday 20 May, Tracey O’Neill and I attended the launch in Melbourne of Responsible Gambling Awareness Week (RGAW) sponsored by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. First launched in 2007, RGAW is held across Victoria in May to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to gambling.

Responsible gambling means gambling in a way that:

- is controlled
- is within your financial means
- doesn’t interfere with your life or the lives of those around you.

Responsible Gambling Awareness Week aims to:

- Increase the Victorian community’s awareness of responsible gambling practices and strategies to ‘stay in control’.
- Reinforce the message for those who choose to gamble that knowledge, balance and control are important to stay within their limits.
- Increase organisational awareness about responsible gambling practices and available support services.

RGAW is created and managed by a unique partnership between the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Local Governments, industry and community groups.

The Hon. Edward O’Donohue MLC, Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation, opened the event followed by Australian and international academics presenting findings of their doctoral studies into the areas of interactive gambling. In Australia, the risks of youth gambling via digital and social media, and parental concerns pertaining to youth gambling. Studies show that 75 per cent of Victorians gamble at least once per year with 2 to 3 per cent experiencing problem gambling. Eighty-five per cent of adolescents recently surveyed said they had participated in some form of gambling in the previous year. The focus of this year’s RGAW was highlighting the increase in sports betting and how the marketing of such is targeting youth. The forum was also used to launch the Responsible Gambling Guide.

The Responsible Gambling Guide is a comprehensive guide to Responsible Gambling aimed at parents and teachers, covering the areas of sports betting, poker machines and online betting. It offers information on why people gamble, the changing nature of gambling, corrects myths with evidence and up-to-date statistics and offers tips and strategies for adults to work with adolescents and youth in creating safe boundaries to remain in control and identifying problem behaviour. It also supplies helpful links to support agencies.

The Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB) is one of the community organisations that support Responsible Gambling Awareness Week, as it is in partnering with such organisations and supporting the promotion of these events that we can further our education and disseminate good quality information to you, our parents, and thereby be a proactive part of the solution to these social challenges.

My own personal learnings from the event were in the area of electronic media. Studies reveal the average time young people are spending on electronic media is five hours per day, with two and half of those hours being on the internet. Many of the studies the academics shared with the audience involved the correlation between video gaming and simulated gambling and the percentage of simulated gamblers contemplating gambling in the future. One study shows at risk adolescents were six times more likely to report a history of simulated gambling via smartphone apps. It highlighted for me the vulnerability of our children and our need to set boundaries for them particularly with the electronic media. It was stressed the changing face of gambling meant it was available 24/7 online and the reality of the odds of winning was not conveyed realistically through simulated games so the young brain is not conditioned to the ‘OUCH’ of losing.

The ever increasing presence of sports betting was enthusiastically discussed in the panel forum and some personal insights of what it is like to have your life turned upside down from problem gambling was delivered by RGAW ambassador and former AFL footballer Daniel Ward.

A thought provoking afternoon which I felt was well worth attending.
Victorian Government vision for gifted education

Victorian Education Minister, Martin Dixon, has released the Government’s directions paper for the education of gifted and talented students. *New Opportunities for the Gifted and Talented* commits to a renewed focus on the needs of gifted and talented children and young people. It builds on the findings of 2011 parliamentary inquiry, to which the VCSPB made a submission.

The directions paper describes the needs of gifted and talented students, outlines issues with current provisions and describes progress already made in addressing the recommendations of the inquiry. These include the establishment of an expert group to guide policy and resource development (on which Catholic education is represented). A new five-year strategy is also to be developed and will be released later this year.

Resources for parents

The VCSPB website provides a range of resources for parents in the areas of:

- Bullying
- Catholic identity
- Catholic school funding
- Curriculum
- Parent Engagement
- Parenting.

**Bully Stoppers – new online learning modules for parents**

*Bully Stoppers* aims to provide practical advice, information and strategies to support everyone to ‘make a stand, lend a hand’ and stop bullying. New online learning modules developed in partnership with experts are linked to fact sheets and are now available for parents and schools. Details are as follows:

- Module to help parents understand, recognise and manage bullying and cyberbullying behaviours [Andrew Fuller, clinical psychologist and student wellbeing specialist].
- Module which focuses on [cybersafety, cyberbullying, and includes information on sexting, gaming addiction and online grooming that aims to help parents address standards of behaviour in the context of cybersafety and social media. [Susan McLean, cyber safety expert].
- A *Bully Stoppers* cybersafety parent evening presentation package which consists of a set of PowerPoint slides with comprehensive speakers notes for schools to run a parent cybersafety night [Robyn Treyvaud an educational leader and online safety educator].

Australian Curriculum multimedia resource – ABC Splash!

ABC Splash is a free, public online education portal providing a range of educational media resources mapped and aligned to the Australian Curriculum. There are resources for students, teachers and parents. ABC Splash brings Australian content from ABC TV and Radio, as well as video from around the world.

The resources include video clips, audio, images, interactive games and info graphics. New material is being added as it is produced across ABC media platforms. Currently the resources cover English, mathematics, history and science (which is particularly well catered for). Resources for geography and the arts will become available in the coming year. As further functionality is added, users will be able to create their own collections of resources from the website. Another component of the site is ABC SplashLive, an online learning program which uses videoconferencing to connect students with experts from the ABC and other educational and cultural institutions.

The ABC is seeking ideas for inclusion on the site via Splash Labs, with the aim of generating and evolving ideas for innovative interactive learning that meet the requirements of ABC Splash.

ABC Splash is an education initiative funded by the Department of Broadband, Communication and Digital Economy and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and produced in partnership with Education Services Australia. The project is funded until December 2014.

‘Being true to yourself and God’s love for us all’

In the past month my children’s school principal died after a long battle with a brain tumour. It is a devastating loss for his family and our school community. As I sat at the funeral listening to the eulogies, I was struck by the huge impact that this man had on the world around him. He was an amazing man who had touched the lives of everyone that he came into contact with. It made me think about my own actions, thoughts and words.

I think we can often underestimate the way in which our words and deeds impact on others. I believe that in a Catholic community whether it is a parish or a school that we all should be striving to be better people and to live our Catholic values. As a parent, I try to instil in my children the courage to do this. There will be times when all of us have a negative impact on people around us, but I really believe that it is never too late to say sorry or to make amends. I was always brought up to believe that it takes courage to say sorry. We shouldn’t let fear of failure or criticism prevents us from continuing to live a good life.

You do not need to be gifted at sport or academics to be a positive influence on the lives of others; you just need to be true to yourself and God’s love for us all. There can never be too much love in the world, so let’s spread a little around our own communities. It can be as simple as being there for your friends and family, being prepared to welcome newcomers into your community, being prepared to listen to others and enjoying your life to the full. It is an achievable objective for us all.

Tracey O’Neill
PARENT SEMINAR SERIES 2013

RAISING MIGHTY BOYS
Presenter: Michael Grose
Tuesday 10 September St Joseph’s, Yarra Junction
Thursday 12 September St Cecilia’s, Glen Iris

THE SECRETS OF HAPPY, CREATIVE, CONFIDENT AND COMPETENT KIDS
Presenter: Andrew Fuller
Monday 5 August St Francis of Assisi, Tarneit
Monday 14 October St Mary’s, East St Kilda

A FOR ATTITUDE TO POSITIVE PARENTING
Presenter: Julie Davey
Tuesday 17 September St Lawrence, Derrimut

HOW TO STAY IN TOUCH ON THE ADOLESCENT ROLLER COASTER
Presenter: Bill Jennings
Tuesday 20 August Kilbreda College, Mentone
Tuesday 3 September Thomas Carr College, Tarneit

DAUGHTERS AND DADS
Presenter: Bill Jennings
Thursday 5 September Ava Maria College, Aberfeldie

Evenings from 7.00 pm to 9.00 pm
Cost $10 per person

For further information or to register please contact your school or:
CEOM, Parent Seminar Series Coordinator
Doug Sandiford
Phone: 9267 0228
Email: dsandiford@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au

A key objective of the VCSPB Council for 2013 is to seek support from each school by requesting a registered contact person. The role of the School Contact is to:

• ensure the dedicated VCSPB contact email address (vcspbcontact@schooldomain.catholic.edu.au) is activated
• take any communication from the VCSPB to the school board (or where no board exists, to the parent support group acknowledged as such by the principal)
• communicate with the VCSPB on behalf of the school board (or the acknowledged parent support group).

If you have not yet indicated your school contact person, or if your school contact person has changed, you are invited to submit the information below.

VCSPB SCHOOL CONTACTS

SCHOOL CONTACT PERSON:

NAME ..............................................................................................................................................................................
EMAIL ADDRESS ................................................................................................................. SCHOOL E NO. ..............................................
SCHOOL NAME ...................................................................................................... SCHOOL LOCATION ..............................................

TICK ONE:
☐ School board member
☐ Member of parent support group
NAME OF GROUP ..................................................................................................

EMAIL: secretary@vcspb.catholic.edu.au or FAX: 9415 9325 to the VCSPB.