



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

20 February 2017

Dear Catholic school communities

On Thursday, 16 February, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released the full report of its survey results on claims made against Catholic organisations for alleged child sexual abuse.

The public release of this information has finally provided a voice for the victims of abuse and has justifiably been deeply distressing and confronting for Catholics and society in general. As a Catholic education community in Western Australia and nationally, we are profoundly saddened and shamed by the failures of so many in our Church to care for our children and young people.

It is my deepest hope that the challenging work of the Royal Commission, and its findings, will help heal some of the unimaginable pain of the victims of this abuse. As a Catholic community, we acknowledge the victims who have come forward and shared their stories, and we thank them for their extraordinary bravery and willingness to help Australians understand what happened to them.

As the Archbishop of Perth, the Most Rev Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, has expressed, *“each substantiated case represents a child or young person who had their innocence stolen from them, nearly always with devastating and long lasting effects on their lives. Each incidence of sexual abuse by a priest represents a chilling and destructive betrayal of everything the Catholic Church purports to stand for. Beyond the almost unimaginable suffering of the victims and survivors of this abuse, the circle of suffering widens out to include their families, their friends and the wider community.”*

As a father with children in Catholic schools, I am aware of the burden that is carried by our schools and learning communities at this time. I acknowledge the damaging impact this has on the faith of many in our communities, but also the trust and confidence that families have in Catholic education.

To provide some reassurance to our Catholic education community, I accepted an invitation from the Royal Commission to participate on a panel with other members of Catholic Education in Australia. My participation last Thursday focused on the governance structures in Catholic Education Western Australia, as well as current child-protection and child-safety policies and procedures in Catholic schools.

Significantly, it illuminated the ongoing work of our schools to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all students in our care remains our highest priority. In summarising the panel discussions, Royal Commission Chair, The Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM, acknowledged the important role our schools play in providing safe learning environments and commended Catholic Education for its commitment to child safety.





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I remain enlivened by the deep commitment of Principals, teachers and staff in our schools who reinforce our policies with strong pastoral support and focus on maintaining safe and engaging learning environments where all students can flourish.

This is a time of real change, a time to recognise the opportunity of healing and hope that the Royal Commission provides not only our Catholic community but our society as a whole. It allows us individually, and as Catholic learning communities, to reflect on the healing that is taking place.

This transformation will be a journey, but it is equally an imperative for Catholic Education Western Australia. I am confident that we will emerge from this time of deep reconciliation as a faith-filled Catholic education system; filled with determination and commitment to provide all students with the knowledge, skills, hope, optimism, and a Catholic worldview, to live meaningful lives, and shape and enrich the world.

As we continue to focus on our purpose of transforming learning for all, I thank you for entrusting your child's learning to one of 163 Catholic schools in Western Australia.

Yours sincerely

Tim McDonald

