



CATHOLIC
education office
HOBART

Equity Review conducted for the Catholic Education Office

Information for all parents

Dear Parents

The Review of Equity Programs undertaken by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission (TCEC) is unique in its scope. It is the first reported in Australia with the aim to review all equity programs, treating them as a single unit.

The discussion centred around the view that equity provision is a number of inter-related programs, each with its own accountability needs, and all sharing a common value/policy base. The operation of these systems is the responsibility of the CEO. However, as part of its responsibilities, the TCEC needs to be assured that they operate effectively in the interests of educationally disadvantaged children.

The understandings of "disability" and "inclusion" have had significant development since antidiscrimination legislation was introduced in the period 1975-1995. These developments have been considered in recent Australian reviews of the education of students with disabilities, beginnings with the Senate Inquiry in 2002. The differences between Commonwealth and State criteria for disability, the problems associated with defining the students with "significant learning difficulties", and the impact these factors have on the design of equity programs is common across all states of Australia. Due to personnel changes in the CEO immediately prior to the review commencing meant that a full review of the Aboriginal Education Program was deferred to a later time. This has now occurred in May 2008. Outcomes still to be published.

An assumption behind the recommendations is that the Catholic education system in Tasmania is rapidly approaching, if it has not already reached, a critical point in its development. The system as a whole must face the challenges that its fellow Catholic systems in other states have had to face as student numbers approach 15,000. The recommendations of the review take into account some of the wisdom that has emerged as other Catholic systems have faced this challenge. It was noted the positive feelings evident in the Catholic school system at the present time. There seems an underlying belief that Catholic education is on the move, the place to be. This belief was seen among the majority of parents, SLN teachers, teacher aides and principals taking part in the review. It seems to inspire the efforts of the many dedicated teachers met during the review who seek to make a difference for students who are educationally disadvantaged, and who are likely to be undaunted by the difficulties of the task or the conditions in which it is carried out.

The Report lists 31 recommendations that can be broken down into five categories.

The Responsibilities of the TCEC

- Update the TCEC policy on equity and inclusion (R1)
- ensure that the production quality of TCEC policies and communications reflects best practice in other comparable Catholic systems (R2)
- develop a policy on cost-sharing for assessment (R4)
- advocacy on behalf of students with disabilities and significant learning difficulties (R5)
- contribute to the current DEST Review on *Flexible Funding Arrangements* (R6)
- seek legal clarification of school responsibilities under the DDA, (R11)
- ensure that the staffing level of the CEO is appropriate to its responsibilities as the secretariat of the TCEC (R20)

The Responsibilities of the CEO as Secretariat of the TCEC

- develop a *Register of Educational Disadvantage* as a database which tracks students with disabilities and severe learning difficulties, the programs set for them, and the outcomes of participation in these programs (R14)
- develop Guidelines for determining the allocation of SLN teacher time applicable across systemic schools (R19)
- set requirements for the Equity Reference Group in reporting to the TCEC (R16)
- establish the position of Administrator Equity Programs (R20b)

Operation of the Eligibility, Allocation and Service Provision Functions

- develop an accessible screening process for identification (R3)
- map the decision making process to determine eligibility (R7)
- delineate the responsibilities of the *Head of Educational Services* and *Team Leader, Equity Programs* (R8)
- modify the *Integrated Planning Mode* (R9)
- conduct an internal review of efforts to promote inclusion (R10)
- create a system wide Model of Service with *Teacher's Manual* and *Parent Brochures* to disseminate it and assist in its implementation (R12 & R13)
- CEO reviews the current allocation system with a view to simplify it and make it more intelligible for school administrators (R17)
- report both input and output allocation data to schools (R18)

Improving the Organisational Capability of the CEO

- create the Equity Reference Group to broaden the knowledge and experience base for thinking about Equity matters and to advance the implementation of priority issues identified in the Review (R15)
- establish Educational Services as a division within the CEO (R21)
- establish the position of Team Leader: Equity Programs (R22)
- strengthen accountability by clarifying the line of responsibilities in all Equity Programs (R23)
- clarify responsibility within Educational Services for communications addressed to all principals or all schools (R24)
- increase the "effective time on task" for members of the SLN Team (R25)

Strengthening Support for SLN Education in Schools

- develop processes and protocols to enable primary SLN teachers to conduct effective screening of students with high needs (R3)
- develop the role of the Senior SLN Teacher and use the Cluster Model as the basis for professional learning and support in SLN education (R26)
- implement a certification process for SLN teachers (R27)
- establish bursaries to advance the professional learning of SLN teachers (R28)
- implement a certification process for teacher aides (R29) and establish bursaries for teacher aides in rural and remote areas to undertake teacher training by distance mode (R30)
- explore the options open to the CEO to establish a parental voice in policy determination and service

A Manager of Equity has been appointed and progress has been made in unpacking the review, prioritizing the recommendations and undertaking more evidence gathering and forming proposals to bring about the changes required for an improved outcome for all children in our system. As information is available this will be shared with our parent body at regular intervals.



Christine Butterworth
Manager Equity Programs