Response to the Interim Report – Review of the National School Reform Agreement

About Catholic Education

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is pleased to present this submission in response to the Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim Report (interim report). The NCEC has consulted with state and territory Catholic education authorities in the development of this submission. The submission, however, is not necessarily reflective of the position of all state and territory Catholic education authorities. Catholic state and territory education authorities may provide individual submissions to the Productivity Commission.

The NCEC is the peak body for Catholic education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities.

Working collaboratively with state and territory Catholic education commissions, the NCEC advocates through effective liaison with the federal, state and territory governments, and key national education bodies. Our role is to ensure the needs of students and staff in Catholic school communities are served through funding, legislation, and policy.

Australia's 1,755 Catholic schools educate one in five, or over 785,000 students and employ over 102,000 Australians. This makes Catholic schools the nation's largest provider of education outside government.

Catholic education works to foster a thriving sector that offers parents affordable access to, and a choice of, a faith-based education for their children. The NCEC continues to advocate for fair and inclusive funding that sustains both public and accessible faith-based school systems across Australia.

In making the choice of a Catholic education, families take on over 26 per cent of the annual cost of their child's education and over 90 per cent of the funding required to support school buildings and capital works in Catholic schools. In 2020, Catholic school families contributed approximately $3.7 billion towards their children's education, representing a substantial saving to Australian taxpayers.

Catholic schools also contribute to Australia's capital infrastructure through the building of school and community infrastructure. In 2020, this investment was worth around $1.8 billion in capital projects, with federal and state governments contributing around five per cent each.

Based on an analysis by Ernst & Young in 2019, Catholic education estimates the total Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution to the Australian economy in 2022 to be more than $12 billion.

The NCEC is committed to full transparency and accountancy and complies with all legislative requirements in relation to both state and federal government funding allocations.

Catholic education continues to work with governments to ensure the information provided is fit for purpose, ensuring a fair, needs-based and sector-neutral allocation of school funding.

Introduction

The findings and recommendations of the interim report can be broken into five key areas. They are:

- declining achievement and engagement across student cohorts
- significant and persistent gaps in achievement for priority equity cohorts

- constraints on the effectiveness of teachers and leaders arising from factors such as teacher shortages in key learning areas and high workloads for teachers and school leaders
- a need to address student wellbeing which impacts learning
- the capacity of the education sector to adapt to changing contexts and needs.

Catholic education supports in principle the rationalisation of National Policy Initiatives (NPIs) and the proposal to focus on a smaller number of reforms that are explicitly linked to increasing student achievement.

The interim report also places significant emphasis on expanded data collection. While the NCEC supports evidence of accountability and use of public funds for all sectors, this will require extensive consultation to determine what data sets are useful, valid, readily obtainable and nationally comparable. The proposed student wellbeing measure is an example.

However, the NCEC would like to identify two other areas which could be included in the broader discussion leading to the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) and bilateral agreements:

- Early childhood education – there is indisputable evidence that early childhood education is essential for developing school readiness and providing learning experiences for children to transition to school successfully.
- Vocational education, training, and skills – focusing on vocational education, training and skills is essential to ensure our school and post-school education sector prepares students for Australia's future workforce needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a particular impact on student wellbeing, student learning, changing pedagogies and workforce development and planning. However, much of the data used in the interim report pre-dates the pandemic with the significant economic and structural impacts on schools and students (particularly in jurisdictions where extensive lockdowns occurred) unacknowledged.

Additionally, the interim report places little emphasis on the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, made by all Australian Education Ministers, which is the foundational document for all Australian schools and jurisdictions. Among other things, this declaration outlines agreed positions on equity groups and inclusivity. The final report may benefit from using the language of the declaration to inform dialogue surrounding its recommendations.

The following sections provide more detailed discussion and analysis of the draft recommendations.

High-Level Assessment of the National Policy Initiatives (NPI)

Draft recommendation 2.1
Parties to the National School Reform Agreement should fulfill their commitments to deliver key national policy initiatives.

Actions to include:

- *Agreeing the design and privacy protections of a Unique Student Identifier (USI); if parties cannot deliver a national USI they should, as a minimum, explain why they have been unable to do so*
- *Developing the national online formative assessment tool in a way that enables jurisdictions to adapt the tool to their needs and their references – including using content and features from their own formative assessment tools*
- *Developing a national model of the teacher workforce to support workforce planning.*

The NCEC is disappointed at the stalling of the USI and the Online Formative Assessment Initiative (OFAI). The advancement of the USI and the development of the OFAI tool to support student learning is critical. Delivery of each of these two significant initiatives will be important outputs which contribute to the improvement in student outcomes.

Universal Student Identifier (USI)

Catholic education supports the USI, as it will be beneficial in reducing the number of students who potentially "fall through the cracks" and in tracking the many students who are geographically mobile. Furthermore, the existence of a USI in post-school education (tertiary and vocational education and training) demonstrates that this can and should be implemented in the school sector.

The NCEC acknowledges that progress towards a national USI has been slow. It is however unclear whether the delays experienced are due to a lack of commitment to the initiative or an issue of policy development processes, and ineffective implementation.

The benefits of a national USI are significant with the potential to provide a valuable dataset to help inform research, policy development, longer-term interventions, and associated funding. The extent of the benefits for students and the broader community will only be realised with full participation from all jurisdictions and sectors, rather than an 'opt-in' arrangement.

Realising the full potential of the USI will also require both intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation. While noting the national USI would only contain a minimum data set with access to further information about students subject to data sharing agreements and/or ministerial approvals; identification and interdepartmental support of students not enrolled in school would assist to better identify, prevent, and respond to incidents and risks of child sexual abuse. This aligns with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Online Formative Assessment Initiative (OFAI)

The NCEC remains committed to the development and implementation of the OFAI. The initiative to develop the tool is important to enable teachers to best meet the individual literacy and numeracy needs of their students and receive real-time data and resources to support their students' learning needs.

In the past 12 months, Catholic education has participated widely in various consultation workshops and meetings to discuss issues and concerns including how the OFAI relates to Catholic education investments and strategies, existing tools supporting formative assessment, and resources currently in use by Catholic school authorities.

While it is acknowledged that some states have chosen to progress their own solution, the NCEC supports the continuation of the OFAI work, particularly to support smaller jurisdictions that may not have the resources or maturity to progress their own solution. It is important that the tool have a singular and simple focus. That is, a platform to provide evidence-based tools that teachers can use reliably and at the point of need. The ability for this tool to link into system tools would likely add value in many jurisdictions.

Teacher Workforce Strategy and Model

Catholic education supports the development of a national model of the teacher workforce while also acknowledging that this will be challenging and require considerable consultation.

As the interim report notes, improved labour supply and demand data should support the development of a national teacher labour market model which could be used to predict teacher

demand and supply. Strengthened relationships between school sectors and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers, informed by an increasing body of data, should assist to ensure the future pipeline of teachers will meet demand from schools across all jurisdictions. Addressing the workload of teachers and reconsidering non-teaching tasks that increase the compliance, regulatory and administrative burdens on teachers will also assist in reducing the attrition rate of teachers once they enter the workforce.

Consideration also needs to be given to more agile ways in which graduates can prepare for teaching. The interim report identifies a potential review of the recent implementation of the two-year master's ITE degree and the possible reintroduction of a one-year diploma as a possibility. Catholic education would welcome further research and a review, especially if the one-year diploma focused more on the craft of teaching and recognised that some level of on-the-job learning could occur in the early years of teaching. This type of model is used by Teach for Australia. Similar models are being considered in other areas such as the police force and health workers.

Lifting outcomes for all students

Draft recommendation 3.1
Implementation plans developed in consultation with affected groups should be used to improve the transparency of reform actions and to hold all parties to account for the outcomes they commit to achieve.

In the next intergovernmental agreement, Australian state and territory governments should ensure:

- *There are reforms addressing the unique barriers and ambitions of students from priority equity cohorts.*
- *Bilateral agreements, developed in consultation with stakeholders, identify how jurisdictions will lift outcomes for students in each of the priority equity cohorts in the agreement, recognising their specific learning needs.*
- *Progress reporting contains sufficient information – and has sufficient oversight – to provide the public with confidence that measures to lift the outcomes of students in priority equity cohorts are being implemented and achieve their intended outcomes.*

Addressing barriers of students from priority equity groups

The NCEC would support any initiative that addresses inequity as this is central to the mission of Catholic education. Catholic education has a strong focus on supporting priority equity cohorts – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, low SES, rural and remote communities, students with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

The NCEC notes that the interim report highlighted differential achievement in priority groups, particularly the failure to meet minimum standards and that the current reforms do not specifically identify how they will support – and report on – priority groups. To address these failures Catholic education recommends that tailored strategies for students for each priority equity cohort be implemented.

The NCEC supports greater cross-sectoral jurisdictional collaboration in the development of bilateral agreements that target specific cohorts of students. While the interim report refers to specific priority equity groups, a lack of interagency cooperation and responsibility can make it difficult for schools to address factors impacting student learning. The NCEC suggests that a future agreement should

explicitly acknowledge that other sectors contribute to student learning outcomes and the importance of shared responsibility and cooperation between government and non-government sectors.

The NCEC will also need to work with the Australian Curriculum Assessment Authority (ACARA) and our Catholic system authorities to obtain consistently agreed data definitions and parameters to allow us to report on student outcomes across these cohorts and any new potential cohort such as students out-of-home care or CALD background students.

Student Wellbeing

Draft recommendation 4.1
Governments should incorporate wellbeing in the next intergovernmental agreement.

In the next intergovernmental school reform agreement, the Australian state and territory governments should

• ***Add improved student wellbeing as an outcome.***
• ***Include local actions that would improve student wellbeing and indicators of progress in bilateral agreements or implementation plans.***
• ***Collect data on student wellbeing from all schools to enable annual reporting on a national measure of student wellbeing.***

Catholic education strongly supports the inclusion of student wellbeing in the next agreement. This is in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry which recommended the rollout of a nationally consistent wellbeing measure across all schools.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that mental health and wellbeing is a broad social issue. The use of schools to measure student wellbeing should not mean that the health and wellbeing of Australia's youth is the sole responsibility of the education system. Furthermore, the agreement should also continue to honour and respect families as first educators and provide for inclusion of parent associations as strategic partners in any initiative.

Both student and teacher wellbeing is crucial to improving long term outcomes for students as learning and wellbeing are closely interconnected. The NCEC would recommend that there be a clear definition about what we are attempting to address in the next agreement regarding wellbeing measures.

The implementation of a measure that could be adapted to unique school contexts while maintaining confidentiality (such as models like the *Tell Them From Me* survey tool) would be beneficial in measuring and informing initiatives to support positive student wellbeing. The provision of indicators to be included in future national measures of student wellbeing would also assist schools to tailor internal data collection towards national measures.

Extensive consultation will be required in the provision of any indicators. It may be worthwhile identifying a 'core' set of data that all jurisdictions can collect. However, it is important to recognise that contextual information or caveats will be required for certain cohorts, especially if there is a disaggregation of data on specific equity cohorts.

The national framework on wellbeing should be the basis for state and territory bilateral initiatives. Catholic education has developed its specific student wellbeing framework based on the national framework. The framework builds a focus on student voice and in supporting teachers in their specific school context.

The impact of COVID-19 in schools on both student and teacher wellbeing and efficacy has been widely documented in research over the last two years and needs to be recognised. Schools have had to make practical changes to the way they operate, from encouraging good hygiene and practising physical distancing, to transitioning in and out of an online learning environment. At the same time, schools have had to manage the anxiety and confusion that comes with an evolving crisis. Dr Joanne Beams, a psychologist based at the Black Dog Institute, commented that "teachers are one of the most affected workforces of the pandemic, and yet there have been few resources brought in to support their mental health".

The NCEC recommends that teacher and leader wellbeing should be considered as part of the next intergovernmental agreement to ensure we have a sustainable pipeline of teachers and school leaders well into the future.

Supporting Teachers

Draft recommendation 5.1
Governments should improve teacher workforce demand and supply data.

The Australian state and territory governments should commit to the continued development of the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative, with a priority placed on achieving full participation from all states and territories. Governments should also improve workforce demand data. This data could be used to underpin the national model of teacher workforce – draft recommendation 2.1

Australian Teacher Workforce Data Initiative and supply data

The NCEC supports the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative, with a priority placed on achieving full participation by all states and territories.

The interim report states that little progress has been made in developing the data and evidence needed for an effective national workforce strategy. The NCEC holds a different view and notes that progress has been made on a national scale to provide data on the commencement, enrolment, and completion of initial teacher education students for each state and territory through the ATWD initiative.

The Key Metrics Dashboard, released on 24 June 2022 provides ITE data with teacher workforce information across Australia and can assist in forecasting the future pipeline through expected completion dates, program or degree type, student demographics and enrolment characteristics.

The ATWD Secretariat has consistently remained open to feedback to ensure the data is accessible and can be used to inform workforce planning decisions. It will be important for this flexibility to remain going forward, and to ensure that the ATWD survey is adjusted regularly in response to emerging issues.

While the ATWD dashboard has been an excellent start in forecasting the future teacher pipeline, it could benefit from the dataset being disaggregated by sector. The NCEC is also keen to work with the Australian Institute of School Leadership (AITSL) to obtain Catholic sector data and strengthen an opportunity for all sectors to access temporary and casual teacher data e.g. through the development of national database that school employers, teachers and prospective teachers could potentially access.

Draft recommendation 5.2
Reducing teacher workload should be a focus of the next agreement.

In the next agreement, Australian state and territory governments – in consultation with teachers and school leaders – should develop a new National Policy initiative that commits all jurisdictions to undertake an assessment of teacher and principal time use. This could include a four-step process whereby Australian state and territory governments:

- *Commit to an assessment of teacher and principal time use across school sectors with a focus on identifying how teachers spend their time and what tasks they rate as low or high value.*
- *Specify how they will remove low value tasks, duplicate tasks and regulatory inefficiencies.*
- *Specify how teaching assistants can be best deployed, including to reduce teacher workload.*

Reducing Teacher Workload

Successive governments over the past decade have maintained the rhetoric of reducing red tape for teachers and school leaders. Despite this, the administrative workload on teachers and school leaders has continued to increase.

The NCEC supports the objective of streamlining the regulatory burden on schools remaining on the education agenda. However, reducing teacher workloads does not come without costs. While many of the individual burdens on teachers which reduce quality classroom time can be removed or transferred to a non-teaching staff member, salaries and wages constitute 75 – 80 per cent of a school's budget, making additional staff resources costly.

The NCEC would support strategies that would:

- remove low-value tasks, duplicate tasks, and regulatory inefficiencies
- specify how teaching assistants can be best deployed, including reducing teacher workload.

It is important that if teacher workloads are reduced, there is a reassessment of funding agreements to recognise the extra support required for this initiative.

There are many strategies that education systems and schools can implement to reduce teacher workload. Many dioceses and Catholic schools are already implementing these. They include:

- Restructuring the timetable and scheduling teacher release time for teachers to plan, collaborate, mentor, and debrief with each other. Eighty-six per cent of teachers reported that they do not get enough time to prepare for high-quality lesson planning and 96 per cent do not get enough time to prepare for effective teaching (Grattan Institute).
- Better matching teachers' work to their expertise. This includes delegating to other staff tasks that do not require teaching expertise and drawing effectively on specialist and support staff for complex teaching and learning tasks. Effective use of the wider school workforce can reduce pressure on teachers' time.
- Utilising non-teaching staff and paraprofessionals to assist with compliance (National Consistent Collection of Data), playground duties, sports coaching and data uploads. There could be some consideration of fourth-year final practicum students to support teachers in the classroom.
- Providing easy-to-use, accessible common templates for planning (lesson plans, unit plans, scope and sequence lessons, bank of assessments, pedagogical approaches and reliable instructional practices for beginner teachers).
- Partnering with other schools to offer shared subjects. This allows the school to offer a broader range of subjects while easing pressure on budgets and overburdened teachers.

- Streamlining curriculum planning, reducing the variety of subjects for individual teachers, cutting back on lower-priority extra-curricular activities and reducing the number of meetings and administrative requirements.
- Making better use of online portals which contain a suite of learning tasks, objects and high-quality Australian curriculum-aligned resources and a comprehensive bank of instructional materials for teachers to adopt or adapt across subjects and years. Teachers are spending more than 10 hours a week developing and preparing instructional resources; almost 70 per cent are spending greater than five hours.
- Ensuring early career teachers have lighter teaching loads allows them more time to plan and prepare for their classes and a mentor to support best practice.

Catholic education supports teaching assistants in the classroom, especially in assisting higher need cohorts. Increasing the support of teaching assistants also can reduce the administrative burden on teachers.

Draft recommendation 5.3
Encouraging highly effective teachers and maximising their value.

In the next agreement, the Australian State and territory governments should work together, in consultation with teachers and school leaders, to

- *Develop and support localised communities of practice across schools, regions and sectors. These should encompass accessible options for time-constrained teachers as well as subject-specific options to support those teaching out of field.*
- *Ensure that highly accomplished and lead teachers are trained and deployed as intended, to lift the quality of teaching across schools and teachers*
- *Streamline processes for becoming a highly accomplished and lead teacher, including by recognising prior competencies.*

Encouraging highly effective teachers and maximising their value

The NCEC supports all of the above recommendations and notes that many of our Catholic education systems are investing significant resources in teacher professional learning, and implementing local communities of practice across systems. Better use of technology should also be considered to support communities of practice.

Consideration should also be given to a strategic approach for teacher professional development at critical points in their career as well as at induction and existing support for early career teachers. The NCEC strongly supports the principle that all state and territory measures and programs in this regard should also include non-government schools, teachers, and leaders. The Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership is an example of such an inclusive model.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) is the only national framework that defines the work of teachers and makes explicit elements of high-quality teaching to improve the education outcomes for students.

The interim report makes limited references to the APST (generally only in relation to early career teachers completing ITE qualifications and gaining professional accreditation). Better use of the APST as a framework spanning the length of a teacher's career could help address challenges that rely on an improvement in teaching practice across all career stages, while reinforcing that a teacher's professional development and growth should continue throughout their career. By focusing on closing the gap between national policy making and classroom practice, a greater emphasis on the APST

matched with a clearly articulated direction, energy, shared commitment to a clear set of goals, and internal accountability to delivering outcomes would assist in moving beyond system architecture to make real improvements in student learning.

An overview of the connections between the overarching and interrelated policy challenges for the next Agreement and the APST framework has been provided in Appendix One.

Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers

Catholic education supports greater accessibility to teachers achieving and maintaining Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) status. The current system is far too onerous, particularly to those teachers who are mid-career and have family commitments. Streamlining the HALT certification process, including recognising prior competencies, would promote a fairer process for HALT aspirants and build their confidence in HALT program as a potential career pathway.

HALTs can play a key role in acting as mentors for early career teachers. Therefore, adequate time must be allocated for HALT teachers to work with staff to plan, evaluate and modify teaching programs. The NCEC would also like to see a national consistency approach after HALT certification has been reached.

Streamlining pathways into teaching

Under the Request for Information 5.5, the possibility of re-introducing one-year graduate diplomas is raised. The NCEC would welcome dialogue to explore this possibility, partly to address acute workforce shortages. However, any dialogue should occur within the wider framework of quality preparation of teachers and how standards can be simultaneously preserved and enhanced.

School Leadership

The NCEC notes that no draft recommendations are made under this chapter. The explanation of leadership was limited in scope to the knowledge and skills of the leader but lacked reference to the need for them to build trusting relationships, affirm, grow, and transform the school community and look to the future. However, there is much discussion about the significant role that school leaders have. Research by Hattie has found that after teacher effectiveness, quality leadership is positively correlated with learning outcomes.

Catholic education believes this is a priority area that should be reflected in any new agreement. The greatest urgency for education in Australia is the attraction and retention of teachers, but if a breadth of career pathways and leadership development is now established now, an equal if not greater challenge will present itself in future years. Leadership development must consider the knowledge and skill of the leader beyond a simple role as manager.

Many Catholic system authorities have invested in this area and realised the importance of ensuring that we have a continuous pipeline of school leaders coming through. Education systems must provide more opportunities for teachers to take up leadership roles and develop their capacity through coaching and mentoring programs while continuing to teach. AITSL has produced leadership frameworks that system authorities have adapted to provide professional learning support to leaders in different stages of their careers and for varying school contexts.

Catholic education would like the capacity to work with AITSL to create adapt the leadership framework to reflect the missionary lens specific to Catholic education. This would support us in ensuring we have leaders formed specifically for our context. Supporting school leader wellbeing is critical in ensuring we have enough leaders for the future.

National Measurement Framework

Draft recommendation 7.1
The performance framework of the next agreement.

In the next intergovernmental school reform agreement, Australian state and territory governments should

- *Commit to public reporting on each outcome by jurisdiction for students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students in regional, rural and remote areas.*
- *Add new sub-outcome measures for learning gain, post-school outcomes and the measure of student wellbeing proposed in Recommendation 4.1.*
- *Update the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) sub-outcome measure to use proficiency standards rather than learning bands.*

Commitment to public reporting

The NCEC supports the implied proposal (Information request 7.1) for a reporting mechanism to improve the accountability of governments to the community.

Currently Non-Government Representative Bodies (NGRBs) are required to provide annual reports on the progress they have made to deliver reform initiatives under the Non-Government Reform Support Fund (NGRSF). However, states and territories which are parties to the NSRA are not required to provide separate and detailed reports.

In order to see the genuine delivery of committed outputs and outcomes of the future NSRA and bilateral agreements, a reporting mechanism and a revised measurement framework need to be developed and implemented to include accountability and transparency of the progress made by states and territories.

Similarly, in fulfilling obligations under the standalone reporting mechanism, states and territories should collaborate actively and extensively with NGRBs in their jurisdictions, as currently NGRBs already prepare annual reports on their progress in delivering reform initiatives.

The NCEC strongly supports a robust measurement framework that aligns with the NSRA and the Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) declaration. The NCEC is committed to public reporting on students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students in regional and remote areas. Publishing the data may require some agreed caveats or conditional statements to properly reflect jurisdictional and local contexts.

New sub-outcome measures

While the proposed changes to outcome and sub-outcome measures intend to "reflect the aspirations of all Australian students", a few significant prerequisites should be investigated before the changes can be implemented.

Catholic education would need to be involved in consultations to develop greater detail regarding proposed measures of post-school outcomes, noting the different jurisdictional approaches and the inherent difficulties of obtaining complete data sets.

A new sub-outcome for measuring learning gain is supported, assuming this would likely be calculated by ACARA based on NAPLAN data. As previously stated, a list of wellbeing indicators and some agreed core data would help ensure that we have consistency across jurisdictions.

For example, when collecting data on young people in education, training or work, to make the data collected more insightful, the USI project needs to be re-established as a priority to allow the data collected from young people who had left school to be linked to the data collected for the same cohort when they were in schools.

With this linkage, the impact of schooling on young people's success after leaving school will be more evident. It enables principals, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to have a more targeted approach to adjusting curriculum and other aspects of schooling to better prepare young people for success while they are still in school.

At the same time as making changes to outcomes and sub-outcomes, a good opportunity is emerging to review the methodology of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

While ICSEA served its purpose in the past, its role in understanding academic performance in the context of socio-educational advantage should be reviewed, as new academic performance sub-outcomes are being added and existing sub-outcomes are being modified.

Draft finding 3.4, that more students than identified were not included in any existing priority cohorts but faced significant learning barriers, further highlights the need to review the methodology of ICSEA, as the current methodology does not include missing cohorts identified by the interim report (e.g. students who do not speak English as their first language and students in out-of-home care).

Proficiency standards

Catholic education supports the inclusion of NAPLAN proficiency standards in the performance reporting framework of the next agreement.

Draft recommendation 7.2
Review of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia.

ACARA's next review of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia should:

- ***Create a performance indicator framework aligned to the NSRA outcomes and sub-outcomes to which Key Performance Measures are mapped.***
- ***Consider the inclusion of system performance Key Performance Measures relating to the teaching workforce.***
- ***Consider the inclusion of additional contextual information relating to influences on learning based on Australian Early Development Census data and information on English language proficiency.***
- ***Deliver improved reporting on outcomes for students from priority equity cohorts.***
- ***Be undertaken in consultation with students, teachers and communities.***
- ***Document remaining gaps.***

Key Performance Indicator Framework and measures

The NCEC supports the inclusion of the above recommendations in the next review of the Measurement Framework as undertaken by ACARA. Jurisdictional consultation will be required through School Policy and other working groups in the development of Key Performance Indicator Framework. The key performance indicators relating to teacher workforce require further elaboration as they are broad and may cover any number of sub-areas.

In Draft finding 2.2, the interim report refers to "an apparent disconnect between policy and measurable outcomes which make a difference." The information requested under this draft finding will require considerable consultation, especially if performance measures are to have some sort of

jurisdictional comparability that the recommendation seeks. Achieving comparability in performance measures within a state or territory will require planning. A suitable approach might be for each system authority to provide details of their accountability and reporting processes in relation to student outcomes and be able to produce the evidence if requested.

Australian Early Development Census data (AEDC) data collection

Catholic education strongly supports the inclusion of Australian Early Development Census data (AEDC) data which provides a national measurement to monitor children's development across five domains (physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication skills and general knowledge) as they arrive at school. This allows schools to consider how they can best support children and their families.

For example, between 2018 and 2021 the language and cognitive skills domain saw the most significant shift in 2021. The percentage of children who were developmentally vulnerable in this domain increased from 6.6 per cent in 2018 to 7.3 per cent in 2021. This data allows schools to better understand the degree and concentration of developmental vulnerability which will enable them to improve transition program plans for children arriving at school.

Reporting outcomes for student priority equity groups

As previously stated, the NCEC will need to work with ACARA and our Catholic System Authorities to obtain consistent and agreed data definitions and parameters to allow us to report on student outcomes across these cohorts and any new cohort such as students in out-of-home care.

Collection of further data will need to be considered together with current data collection obligations and capabilities, benefit, and regulatory requirements.

As noted above, Catholic education supports the principle that public reporting for progress and outcomes should be sector neutral with regard to government and non-government schools and systems.

Consultation with students, teachers, and communities

The interim report highlights that consultation with students, teachers and communities will require a structured methodology process so that it is consistently applied. Many education authorities routinely survey their students, teachers and parents.

Catholic education believes that system authorities and schools are best placed to determine how and when they consult with students, parents and communities, and it will widely differ based on local contexts. The ability of Catholic schools to leverage their systemic nature forms an inherent strength and a significant tool for progressing this outcome.

Remaining gaps in the interim report

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a missed opportunity in the interim report. Access to high-quality early childhood programs and services is key to achieving equity and positive developmental outcomes for all school children. The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (Gonski Review) found that quality early childhood education builds the foundation for future learning and is an equitable and cost-effective way to narrow the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Children who transition well perform better at school and are likely to have positive expectations of their ability to learn and succeed.

Any future agreement should also highlight productive pathways to meet current and future employment needs such as skills required in science and technology. Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) has emerged as a priority area for schools, and schools find it challenging to find suitably qualified staff, particularly in regional and remote schools.

Australian and state governments are subsidising technical training, providing an opportunity for schools to increase vocational training connections to these post-school destinations.

A future agreement could also focus on vocational education, training, and skills to ensure that our school and post-school education sectors prepare students for Australia's workforce needs. Evidence could be included to develop and measure vocational education opportunities entered into by state and territory jurisdictions.

Conclusion and summary

The recommendations from the interim report for the next Agreement centre around the four overarching and interrelated policy challenges facing Australia's school systems including:

- Constraints on the effectiveness of teachers and leaders arising from such factors as:
  - Teacher shortages in some places and in key learning areas
  - High workloads for teachers and principals
  - Limited opportunities to develop and share best practice
  - Lack of career pathways for mid-ranking teachers and principals
- A lack of equity in student outcomes. This has several dimensions including:
  - A core of students who do not meet minimum standards
  - Significant and persistent gaps in outcomes for many students in the NSRA's priority equity cohorts
  - Gaps in outcomes for students in other cohorts facing disadvantage
  - A lack of recognition of the unique educational ambitions of particular cohorts and their families
- Poor student wellbeing
- The capacity of the education sector to adapt to changing contexts and needs.

The NCEC supports the above recommendations as targeted areas for a future agreement, recognising that each jurisdiction will require nuanced approaches, particularly in remote areas and for priority equity student cohorts. The NCEC however believes that there will a missed opportunity if teacher wellbeing, early childhood education, and vocational education pathways are not included in discussions for the next NSRA and bilateral agreements.

The importance of early childhood education in developing school readiness and continuity of learning from the early years to primary school, and the need to identify critical vocational pathways and skills needed for senior students to participate in the future workforce should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, specific recommendations in terms of leadership pathways and development would also assist in delivering direct action to meet this emerging challenge.

Appendix One

Overarching and interrelated policy challenges for the next intergovernmental agreement	Alignment with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers – Proficient Level
Constraints on the effectiveness of teachers and leaders arising from such factors as: • Teacher shortages in some places and in key subjects • High workloads for teachers and principals • Limited opportunities to develop and share best practice • Lack of career pathways for mid-ranking teachers and principals	• 5.3 Understand and participate in assessment moderation activities to support consistent and comparable judgements of student learning. • 6.1 Use the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and advice from colleagues to identify and plan professional learning needs. • 6.2 Participate in learning to update knowledge and practice, targeted to professional needs and school and/or system priorities. • 6.3 Contribute to collegial discussions and apply constructive feedback from colleagues to improve professional knowledge and practice. • 6.4 Undertake professional learning programs designed to address identified student learning needs. • 7.4 Participate in professional and community networks and forums to broaden knowledge and improve practice.
A lack of equity in student outcomes. This has several dimensions including: • A core of students who do not meet minimum standards • Significant and persistent gaps in outcomes for many students in the NSRA's priority equity cohorts • Gaps in outcomes for students in other cohorts facing disadvantage • A lack of recognition of the unique educational ambitions for particular cohorts and their families	• 1.1 Use teaching strategies based on knowledge of students' physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics to improve student learning. • 1.2 Structure teaching programs using research and collegial advice about how students learn. • 1.3 Design and implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. • 1.4 Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. • 1.5 Develop teaching activities that incorporate differentiated strategies to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities. • 1.6 Design and implement teaching activities that support the participation and learning of students with disability and address relevant policy and legislative requirements. • 2.1 Apply knowledge of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area to develop engaging teaching activities. • 2.2 Organise content into coherent, well-sequenced learning and teaching programs. • 2.4 Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Overarching and interrelated policy challenges for the next intergovernmental agreement	Alignment with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers – Proficient Level
	• 2.5 Apply knowledge and understanding of effective teaching strategies to support students' literacy and numeracy achievement. • 3.1 Set explicit, challenging and achievable learning goals for all students. • 3.5 Use effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student understanding, participation, engagement and achievement. • 4.1 Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities. • 5.1 Develop, select and use informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment strategies to assess student learning. • 5.4 Use student assessment data to analyse and evaluate student understanding of subject/content, identifying interventions and modifying teaching practice.
Poor student wellbeing	• 4.4 Ensure students' wellbeing and safety within school by implementing school and/ or system, curriculum and legislative requirements. • 4.5 Incorporate strategies to promote the safe, responsible and ethical use of ICT in learning and teaching.
The capacity of the education sector to adapt to changing contexts and needs.	• 2.6 Use effective teaching strategies to integrate ICT into learning and teaching programs to make selected content relevant and meaningful.