Submission to the NSW Curriculum Review

December 2018

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Executive Summary

1. Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) responds to the *Review of the NSW Curriculum* on behalf of the state's 595 Catholic schools. This submission is informed by feedback from Diocesan Catholic Education Offices, individual Catholic schools and the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT [CCSP]. It seeks to provide a high-level 'system-wide' response to the Review's discussion questions and Terms of Reference.

2. In Catholic schools, the curriculum is seen not as an aggregation of individual subjects but as the totality of the students' experience of schooling. The 'total' curriculum encompasses the developmental needs of the whole child, including their intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional needs. The curriculum is also seen as a manifestation of the *Catholic* identity of the school.

3. The Review must consider the rich diversity of school provision across NSW and the ways in which individual schools seek to give expression to the 'public' curriculum through their faith tradition and/or educational philosophy.

4. In order to achieve the stated aims of the Review, and give effect to the change that is needed, CSNSW believes that the recommendations stemming from the Review process must accurately reflect the 'calls' from stakeholders for a new vision for curriculum in NSW. In order to assist young people to confidently take their place in a world that is undergoing constant change, a longer-term and future-focused vision for both the design and the content of curriculum is needed.

5. CSNSW believes the Review represents an important opportunity to deliver greater flexibility and autonomy for schools as they seek to explore and implement innovative, evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning (and indeed new models of schooling) to meet the needs of current and future generations of students.

6. While CSNSW supports an expansive review of the curriculum with a long-term focus, it also acknowledges that NESA continues to review and consult on the current curriculum K-12 in both its translation into e-syllabuses and in relation to the ongoing and currently incomplete incorporation of the Australian curriculum into NSW syllabuses. There is a tension therefore in NESA needing to respond to the demands for change emerging from the Review, whilst adopting a 'business as usual' approach to curriculum development. The relationship of the NSW curriculum to the Australian curriculum and the national reform agenda also needs serious consideration in the Review.

7. CSNSW cautions against the adoption of a utilitarian view of the purpose of learning that seeks only to prepare young people for the workforce[1]. Catholic schools seek to provide an experience
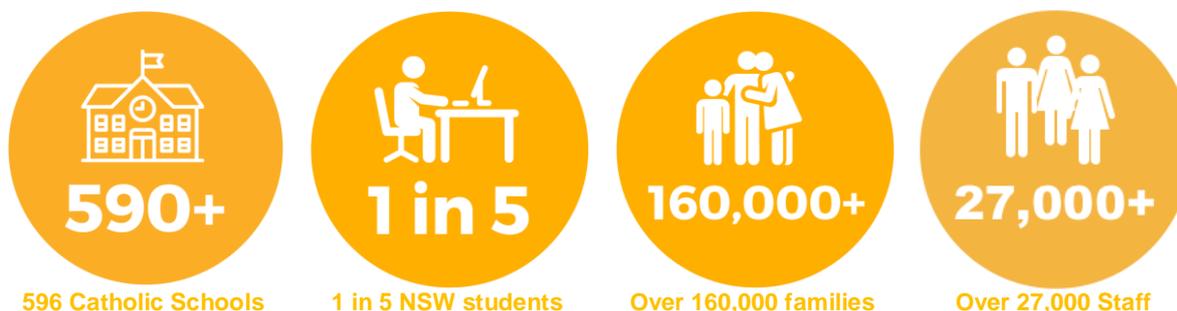
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[1] CSNSW acknowledges, however, that a particular focus in the delivery of VET is work readiness.

of education that reflects the whole child. Self-development of the person and that person's contribution to the 'common good' are the goals and curriculum should be the 'enabler'.

8. CSNSW acknowledges that the curriculum does not stand apart from other critical elements of what might be described as an inter-dependent and inter-related 'eco-system'. Pedagogy, assessment, credentialing, regulatory requirements and the structure of schooling more broadly are all components of this eco-system. The Reviewer must consider these interdependencies in the framing of any recommendations for change.

9. Equitable access and opportunity for all, with a particular commitment to those most in need, should also be key considerations in relation to any reform of the NSW curriculum.

Catholic Schools NSW

10. Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) was established by the NSW Bishops in 2017 and is responsible to them for Catholic school education in NSW.

11. While CSNSW has a leadership role as the peak representative body for Catholic schools, day to day operational responsibility lies with each of the eleven diocesan education or schools offices for Catholic systemic schools and with each individual school for Catholic independent schools.

12. Catholic schools have been an integral part of Australia's education landscape for 200 years and see themselves as partners with families, government and the broader community in delivering a high-quality education across NSW. Today, Catholic schools today educate one in five children in NSW.

13. Catholic schooling in NSW is comprised of 595 schools, which employ 27,000 staff and enrol 255,000 K-12 students. Catholic education, however, is broader than just its schools and covers the continuum of learning through its prior-to-school early learning centres, out-of-school-hours care facilities and Catholic tertiary institutions, including two universities.

14. All NSW Catholic schools are subject to the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) curriculum requirements for their registration, accreditation and compliance. Catholic schools take the NESA syllabuses and develop programs in such a way that they comply with the syllabuses but also embed the Catholic tradition of the integration of knowledge, faith and life. Catholic schools also have Religious Education at the core of their curriculum.

590+
596 Catholic Schools

1 in 5
1 in 5 NSW students

160,000+
Over 160,000 families

27,000+
Over 27,000 Staff

This Submission

15. CSNSW welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the *Review of the NSW Curriculum* and looks forward to collaborating with NESA, the other school sectors, educators, students and families.

16. This submission is informed by feedback from Diocesan Catholic Education Offices, individual Catholic schools and the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT. It seeks to provide a high-level 'system-wide' response to the Review's discussion questions and Terms of Reference.

17. In addition to contributing to this submission, CSNSW has encouraged dioceses and individual Catholic schools to make their own submissions to the Review. These submissions provide more detailed feedback on the technical and process issues arising from the curriculum for schools. In the main these submissions speak to a NSW curriculum which is perceived to be overcrowded and with syllabus documents that are too prescriptive regarding content.

develop a growth mindset and passion for learning and be inspired to aim high and pursue bold goals. The most effective way to inculcate this is by school systems and schools placing the learning growth of each student at the centre of their educational model. By doing this, education can better enrich every element of a student's life and future career."

41. Noting the policy agenda above, the NSW Review will also need to be cognisant of the potential for overlapping reform activity and/or divergent agendas.

NSW Policy Context

42. The *NSW Education Act 1990* also outlines set purposes of schooling in NSW.[13] However, they are largely described in relation to the role of the State in the provision of public education and the rights and responsibilities of students and parents.

43. It is a matter of some concern that an examination of the purposes of schooling is not included in the Terms of Reference for this Review. CSNSW encourages the Reviewer to consider a recommendation to review the purposes of schooling as currently articulated in the *Education Act 1990* to ensure coherence and alignment with any new curriculum design.

44. While it is important to distinguish the purposes of schooling from the purposes of the curriculum, they must ultimately be considered together as curriculum can be seen as a way of implementing the former. A further discussion of the purposes of curriculum can be found in subsequent sections of this submission.

National and Global Context

45. The national and global landscape is changing in marked and profound ways. In many respects, CSNSW agrees it would be "a brave educator who can predict the shape of the world that students entering primary school will inhabit by the time they complete their studies - 12, 15 or 18 years from now".[14] However, educators and policymakers must attempt to discern the future so that schooling, including the curriculum, meets the current and future needs of students and the community.

46. The profound changes taking place underscore the need for students to access a curriculum that:

    a.   is reflective of the world students live in;

    b.   develops their interdisciplinary knowledge through deep and experiential learning,

    c.   develops students' critical and creative thinking skills to solve real world problems;

    d.   allows students to acquire key competencies 'beyond the basics' such as digital, civic, self-knowledge and interpersonal competencies, among others, and;[15]

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[13] "Education Act" (1990) Section 6,6. .

[14] J. D'Orsa and T. D'Orsa, *A Mission to the Heart of Young People: Catholic Curriculum* (Mulgrave: Vaughan Publishing, 2012)..

[15] Reimers, F.M. and Chung, C. K., eds., *Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century: Educational Goals, Policies, and Curricula from Six Nations* (Harvard Education Press, 2016), 1.

e. enables "students who are critical and reflective, open to a lifetime of learning and re-learning, who are comfortable with change and have empathy and a global outlook".[16]

47. The *OECD Learning Framework 2030* identifies the key environmental, economic and social challenges young people will face in the future. [17] The report emphasises the need for a focus on individual and collective wellbeing and a stronger role for learner agency in schooling and identifies the importance of key knowledge, skills, values and attitudes student will need to change societies for the future.[18]
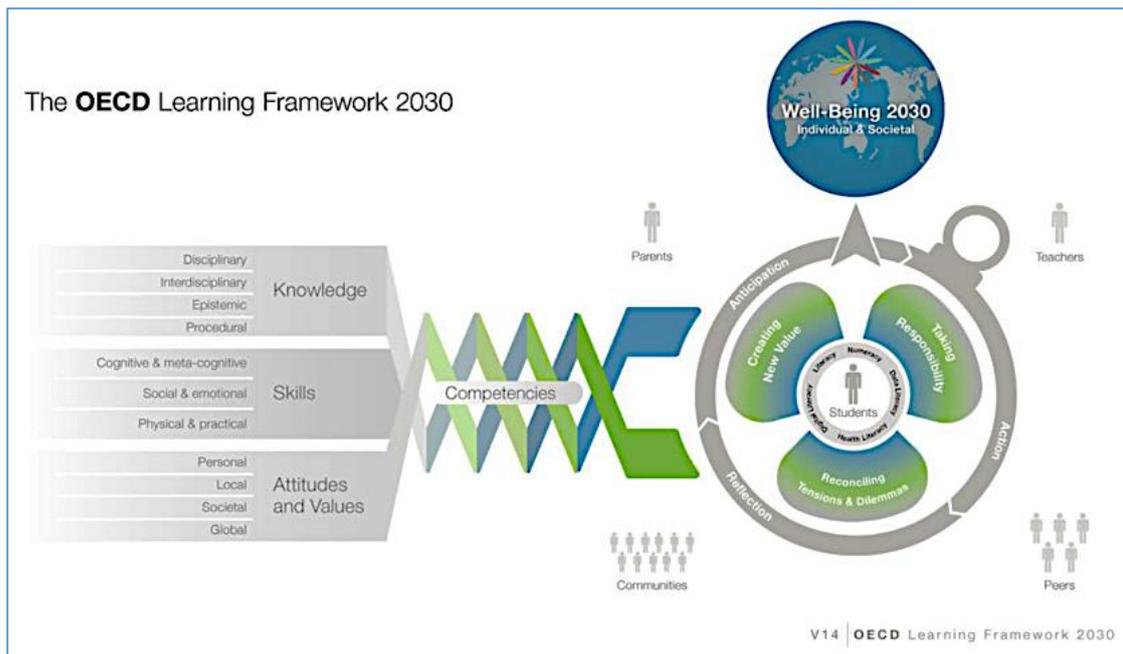

Figure 1: The OECD Learning Framework 2030[19]

48. In a discussion of curriculum design, the OECD identifies five challenges which broadly reflect the feedback provided by Catholic schools and systems to CSNSW:

a. *Confronted with the needs and requests of parents, universities and employers, schools are dealing with curriculum overload. As a result, students often lack sufficient time to master key disciplinary concepts or, in the interests of a balanced life, to nurture friendships, to sleep and to exercise. It is time to shift the focus of our students from "more hours for learning" to "quality learning time".*

b. *Curricula reforms suffer from time lags between recognition, decision making, implementation and impact. The gap between the intent of the curriculum and learning outcome is generally too wide.*

c. *Content must be of high quality if students are to engage in learning and acquire deeper understanding.*

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[16] Loble, L., Creenaune, T., and Hayes, J., *Future Frontiers Education for an AI World* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press in association with the NSW Department of Education, 2017), 98..

[17] "The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030" (Paris: OECD, 2018), 3.

[18] "The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030," 4–5.

[19] "The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030," 4. .

d. *Curricula should ensure equity while innovating; all students, not just a select few, must benefit from social, economic and technological changes.*

e. *Careful planning and alignment is critically important for effective implementation of reforms.*[20]

Responding to the Review Terms of Reference

Term of Reference 1: Purposes of the Curriculum

Defining Curriculum

Curriculum is often defined and understood in quite narrow terms, as, for example, the formal material that educators deliver in order for students to gain knowledge or skills and achieve certain learning outcomes.[21] As stated earlier Catholic education takes a broader view of curriculum.

Curriculum can be conceived as four inter-related parts: the *intended* curriculum, the *enacted* curriculum, the *experienced* curriculum and, weaving through them all, the *hidden* curriculum.[22] Each of these ways of viewing the curriculum need to be considered in future curriculum design.

Purposes of the NSW Curriculum and the NSW Education Act

49. *The Education Act 1990* was the first Education Act in NSW to define the "School Curriculum".[23] The curriculum as outlined in Part 3 of the Act supports the implementation of the purposes of school education which are defined in Part 2, Section 6 of the Act. The curriculum is described as a set of key learning areas and courses of study constituting a 'minimum' curriculum. This is a narrow view of curriculum and should not constrain the Review.

50. Consistent with the Catholic view of curriculum, CSNSW encourages the Reviewer to regard the curriculum as more than just a collection of courses or syllabuses for students of different ages. The curriculum in NSW ought to be understood as a "system" of interacting components.

51. CSNSW also supports the proposition that the fundamental purpose of curriculum should be to "ensure that students receive integrated, coherent learning experiences that contribute towards their personal and academic learning and development."[24]

52. Given this fundamental purpose, the importance of getting the curriculum design right cannot be overstated. While there is an important relationship between curriculum and the student, *what* is taught should not be privileged over the needs of the learner. With many stakeholders involved in curriculum development, CSNSW acknowledges the balance can sometimes shift.

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[20] "The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030," 6.

[21] Arafeh, S. (2015). Curriculum mapping in higher education: A case study and proposed content scope and sequence mapping tool. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 1-27.

[22] Australian Department of Education and Training (2017). *Lighting the path(way): articulating curriculum design principles for open access enabling programs – Final Report, 3.*

[23] Education Act Part 3 – School Curriculum.

[24] Flinders University (2018). *Curriculum development*. Retrieved from http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/teaching-strategies/curriculum-development/curriculum-development.cfm

53. The discussion under *Contextual Matters* above is also instructive here.

Term of Reference 2: Common Entitlement of Every Learner

54. At a fundamental level, CSNSW believes the common entitlement of every learner is that they are given the opportunity to achieve to the maximum of their potential. CSNSW believes *every* student is entitled to enriching learning experiences across *all* areas of the curriculum. This is particularly so for students with diverse learning needs who have a right to access a full and engaging education on the same basis as their peers.

55. Curriculum and assessment practices therefore should be flexible, build on learner's strengths, support academic and social capabilities, and cater for each student's learning needs. Teachers should be supported and empowered to differentiate the curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of each student.

Essential knowledge, skills and attributes

56. The current curriculum is constructed around the assumption that there is "essential knowledge, skills and attributes" which every child needs prior to leaving school. This common learning entitlement with respect to these needs has been negotiated between administrators, teachers, parent, students and the wider community.

57. CSNSW strongly believes that as part of a common entitlement, the curriculum must acknowledge the unique place and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. To this end, every student should have an opportunity for deep learning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. This is essential for true reconciliation.

58. Furthermore, a curriculum that is enriched through the incorporation of cultural ways of knowing and being will help make the curriculum more relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children and young people. It will also serve to strengthen their engagement with schooling and improve their outcomes by delivering a curriculum supported by contemporary pedagogical practice, providing opportunity for educators to integrate cultural knowledge and Aboriginal ways of learning through innovative technology.

59. While there is strong agreement among stakeholders that every student should receive a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy, there is an on-going discussion regarding which disciplines and skills should constitute a common and/or minimum entitlement for every student. While some maintain that music, art and languages, for example, should be included others are championing 'modern' disciplines such as technology and engineering, media, entrepreneurship.[25] More recently the interdisciplinary approach to the delivery of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with the inclusion of the arts has been

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[25] Fadel, C., "Redesigning the Curriculum for a 21st Century Education" (Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2015), http://www.curriculumredesign.org/wp-content/uploads/CCR-FoundationalPaper_FINAL.pdf.

advocated as the entitlement of all students. A negotiated compromise will likely be needed but to some extent the dichotomies are false.

60. In relation to the desired skills and capabilities all students should acquire, an extensive list is emerging, including:

• Resilience	• Teamwork	• Critical thinking
• Focus	• Collaboration	• Problem Solving
• Tolerance	• Communication	• Analysing
• Confidence	• Leadership	• Questioning
• Resourcefulness	• Empathy	• Creativity
• Curiosity	• Influence	• Innovation
• Ethics	• Responsibility	• Imagination

Term of Reference 3: Redesigning the Curriculum

Guiding Principles

61. As described earlier in this submission, the world is experiencing transformative change. In order to be responsive to this change and meet the needs of a new generation of learners, the school curriculum, and potentially the structure of schooling, will need to be quite different from today's. CSNSW offers the following guiding principles to inform a redesign of the curriculum:

- **Holistic view of the student**

  A curriculum that promotes a holistic view of the student attends to the academic, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of the learner. It provides opportunities through the curriculum to give expression to each of these dimensions.

  A holistic approach to curriculum recognises that children's learning is integrated and interconnected and promotes social growth and community participation. It identifies ways of knowing and understanding the values and cultures of students' communities and life experiences and creates opportunities for families and communities to participate as partners in children's education.

- **Student Centred**

  A student-centred approach to curriculum shifts the focus from the content to the student and provides opportunities for the student to be more invested in the development of the learning experience. Teachers take on the role of a guide or facilitator for students' learning experiences.

  A student-centred curriculum is designed to support personalised learning, mapped on a continuum which reflects each student's progress rather than their age. It takes into account the diversity of prior academic achievements and life experiences of students and empowers them to explore their interests and passions, taking ownership of their learning.

- **Inclusive**

  An inclusive curriculum promotes 'diversity as the norm'. It acknowledges and respects learners with diverse abilities and interests. It ensures that learning is accessible to all, based on Universal Design for Learning principles. [26] An inclusive curriculum reflects the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the community and pays particular attention to Australian Indigenous history and culture.

  It promotes inclusive teaching and equity to provide learners with meaningful ways to acquire, engage with and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, increasing student engagement and the motivation to learn.

- **Reflects the continuum of learning**

  A curriculum that reflects a continuum of learning recognises and leverages the fact that learning occurs both before and after a child's formal years of schooling. It is structured as a continuum across levels of learning achievement not years of schooling and provides for 'seamless' transitions.

  It supports and actively encourages lifelong learning across all life-wide contexts (family, school, community and workplaces) and through a variety of modalities (formal and informal).

- **Responsive and adaptable**

  A genuinely responsive and adaptable curriculum will look and feel different in each school and community. It responds and adapts to the interests and abilities of students and their context. It addresses students' needs and interests by providing choice and flexible learning and qualification pathways. It provides opportunities to engage with real world problems through enquiry-based learning.

  It is also flexible enough to adapt to changing needs, balancing a common curriculum with the continuously changing realities of everyday life and the world of work.

  Within a responsive curriculum framework, teachers are able to exercise greater professional judgement in making context-specific, student-centred decisions about what is taught and how it may be taught and the time needed to teach it.

Term of Reference 4: Implications of New Approaches

62. The curriculum does not stand apart from other critical elements of what might be described as an inter-dependent and inter-related 'eco-system'. Pedagogy, assessment, credentialing, regulatory requirements and the structure of schooling more broadly are all components of this eco-system. The Review must consider these interdependencies in the framing of any recommendations for change. The following section highlights some of the areas requiring further examination in the Review.

Curriculum Documents

63. The current approach to syllabus design in NSW is inhibiting the flexibility required to meet student need and is perceived to undermine the professional judgment and expertise of teachers. The current suite of curriculum documents, including syllabuses, needs to be significantly redesigned.

64. A redesigned curriculum also needs to manage the current tension between depth and breadth, with the balance shifting to the former. Currently, there is a risk that content is taught only superficially to the detriment of students and their learning. A redesigned curriculum should also provide greater opportunities for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary connections.

Assessment and Reporting

65. The work currently being undertaken by ACARA and others on learning progressions, recommended in the Gonski 2.0 report, should be complemented with teacher identified formative assessment tools integrated into teachers' online programs to assist developing an integrated picture of each student's progress.[27]

66. Current assessment practices are not necessarily accessible to all students. Students should be afforded the opportunity to demonstrate in multiple ways what they have learned and avoid the exclusive reliance placed on traditional approaches to assessment.

67. The review of the curriculum must include an examination of the fitness for purpose of the HSC and the, at times, undue emphasis that is placed on it. Associated with this examination must be the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the current distinction between vocational and other subjects.

68. Similarly, the impact of high stakes standardised testing on the delivery of the curriculum and teaching and learning should be examined.

Pedagogical Practices and Teacher Workload

69. There are clear implications for teachers and their practice if the curriculum is reorientated to focus more on personalised learning and being responsive to real world issues. A redesigned curriculum should empower teachers to make professional judgements about curriculum (what is taught, how it is taught and when it is taught), pedagogy, and assessment. The Review will need to consider how teachers will be involved in any redesign of the curriculum and how they will be supported to deliver it.

70. Compliance and teacher workload concerns are also issues the Review will need to consider. Feedback from teachers is clear that NESA, school authority and school compliance requirements are getting in the way of teaching and learning, undermining teacher professionalism and inhibiting innovation.[28]

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[27] Adams, R.J., Jackson, J., and Turner, R., *Learning Progressions as an Inclusive Solution to Global Education Monitoring* (Melbourne: ACER, 2018).

[28] McGrath-Champ, S. et al., "Understanding Work in Schools: 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation" (Foundation for Teaching and Learning, University of Sydney and Curtin University, 2018); Riley, P., "The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey 2017 Data" (Fitzroy, Vic.: Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, 2018).

Transitions and Pathways

71. A curriculum which genuinely reflects a continuum of learning from pre-school to post-school, provides an opportunity to address some of the traditional transition issues that occur for students entering kindergarten, Year 7 and Year 11. It also provides an opportunity for schools to think differently about how they structure themselves.

72. CSNSW supports the view that the curriculum should not be conceived as a "single running track but as 'pathways', of several alternative routes through a plurality of learning programmes". The curriculum should be able to be "'modularized' for multiple usage, and…be assembled into optional packages".[29] This way of organising the curriculum has implications for more flexible and responsive credentialing, including micro-credentialing and portfolios.

73. There is a clear distinction between academic and vocational courses as part of the HSC. It is observed that academic courses are centred on the development of abstract analytical skills, whilst vocational courses focus on the development of technical mastery related to a job outcome. [30] Whilst academic courses need to have broader post-school relevance it should be acknowledged vocational courses develop broad employability skills that are invaluable to students as they transition from school to further study or work. The current distinction between vocational and academic courses in the final years of schooling ought to reviewed.

Legislation

74. As the enabling instrument for NSW school curriculum, the Education Act of 1990 will need to be reviewed. There needs to be a fresh articulation of the purposes of schooling in NSW, reflecting the changes in the last 20 years and a future orientation.

Measuring the Quality and Impact of Schooling

75. Quality and success may look very different for different cohorts of students in different contexts; there is no one-size-fits-all measure. Success is not just about academic achievement. There are aspects of schooling, including the acquisition of certain skills or attributes, that may be difficult to assess and measure. This should not be taken to mean they are not valuable or worth pursuing.

76. Furthermore, schooling should not be measured against other nations as an "educational arms race".[31] It is helpful to note what other nations are doing with their school systems but the purpose of the comparisons should not be ranking.

77. The issue identified earlier in this submission, of the need to articulate a contemporary and shared understanding of the purposes of schooling, is an important one if we wish to measure quality and impact.

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[29] Beare, H., *Creating the Future School* (London: Routledge Falmer, n.d.), 152.
[30] Buchanan, J. et al., "Preparing for the Best and Worst of Times" (Sydney: University of Sydney Policy Lab, 2018), 44.
[31] Viz: "Asia's Educational Arms Race," accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/asias-educational-arms-race.

Parent and Community Engagement

78. Fundamentally, any curriculum that seeks to educate students for the 'common good', must recognise learning as a shared responsibility. When schools meaningfully engage families and the broader community in the curriculum there are clear benefits for students and their learning and wellbeing. The curriculum must acknowledge, value and respect the role of parents and families as the first and continuing educators of their children, and the value of collaborative partnerships with the wider community. This needs to be underscored in the curriculum by explicit and ongoing points of connection with students' family and community contexts.

Concluding remarks

79. Catholic schools make a significant contribution to the education of children and young people in NSW with one in five children attending a Catholic school. Catholic schools have a particular understanding of curriculum which is more than the sum of the courses or syllabuses. The curriculum is the totality of the students' experience of schooling. The 'total' curriculum encompasses the developmental needs of the whole child, including their intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional needs. A future curriculum should afford the flexibility to accommodate these diverse aims.

80. CSNSW encourages the Reviewer to take a bold and expansive approach to the review of the NSW curriculum. Feedback from Catholic educators and parents suggests that there is a desire for a new vision for curriculum in NSW.

81. CSNSW believes the Review represents an important opportunity to deliver greater flexibility and autonomy for schools as they seek to explore and implement innovative, evidence-based approaches to teaching and learning (and indeed new models of schooling) to meet the needs of current and future generations of students.

82. CSNSW, and the Catholic sector more broadly, looks forward to working with the NSW Curriculum Review taskforce and the other school sectors as the Review progresses. In particular CSNSW looks forward to detailed consultation on the draft report, prior to submission to the Minister for Education.

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