An Open Letter to all Catholic School Parents in Diocese of Parramatta

Dear Parents and Carers

On Friday last week, Rev Fr Peter Williams (Administrator of the Diocese of Parramatta), Rev Fr Chris De Souza (Priest Responsible for Education), Greg Whitby (Executive Director of Schools), and I met with MPs and candidates from both the Labor and Coalition parties. Our aim was to ensure that both sides of politics were aware of the key issues affecting Catholic schools and families particularly:

1. To ensure future legislation did not prevent our schools maintaining their Catholic identity and ethos
2. To ensure a commitment to ongoing funding of Catholic schools (the state government contributes about 25% of all government funding to Catholic schools)
3. To seek a commitment to a coherent educational policy (pre to post school)
4. To seek a commitment to an increase in capital works funding and a decrease in local council charges to support the growth of Catholic schools in western Sydney.

Are you concerned that there is no guaranteed government funding to build new schools or expand and improve existing schools in western Sydney?

At present, neither the NSW Coalition or Labor parties has made a long term commitment to fund capital works programs for new and expanding Catholic schools in western Sydney.

The Facts

- Across NSW Catholic schools educate 21% of the state’s students, yet receive just 2% of the capital funding currently provided by the NSW Government to schools for new projects. Expressed another way, Catholic schools receive $30 per student in capital funding from the NSW Government while government schools receive $524 per student.

- To keep up with demand, the Diocese of Parramatta will need at least $19.3 million in 2015-17 to build new schools and learning spaces in the north west sector to respond to growth. The Diocese will need an additional $7.1 million to upgrade schools in Holroyd and Blacktown.

- Local Council infrastructure charges are placing an unfair burden on Catholic schools, incurring substantial additional costs.

- Over the past three years, the metropolitan-based dioceses paid $18.5 million in levies and bonds - almost cancelling out the entire capital funding provided by the NSW Government for all Catholic schools.

Support - Educate - Celebrate
The Facts (continued)

- Local council infrastructure charges for developments at Westmead have been quoted at $464,000. This is money that could have been invested in the schools themselves e.g. the cost of nearly five teachers.

This issue goes beyond party lines - this is about equality and fairness and our rights as parents to be supported in our choice of Catholic schooling.

In the meeting, one MP noted he hadn’t received any indication from any parent in his electorate that they needed a new Catholic school or that their school would require expansion.

Catholic school parents were INSTRUMENTAL in major changes to proposed cuts to NSW state funding a couple of years ago.

DON'T LET YOUR VOICE AS A CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENT GO UNHEARD.

What can you do?
Contact your school principal about inviting local MPs and Candidates to your school prior to the election.

Even if you think that your school requires no assistance at this time, it is the collective voice of Catholic school parents that can make the difference, so write or contact your local MP and candidates.

If you want to some assistance in what to say or write to your sitting MP or candidate or just want to stay in touch about proposed MP visits near you, please email: prcparrapresident@gmail.com.

The election is just a few weeks away on 28 March 2015. Don't let the opportunity slip past!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Selina Calleia
President, PRC
Parramatta Diocese

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Support~Educate~Celebrate
NEXT NSW GOVERNMENT MUST LIFT CAPITAL FUNDING TO ALL SCHOOLS

Enrolments in NSW schools will grow by 267,000 students by 2031, putting more pressure on both the government and non-government school sectors to expand.

Catholic Education Commission NSW Executive Director Brian Croke said the NSW Government must increase capital funding to all school sectors to accommodate this growth in enrolments.

"The NSW birth-rate is now 10,000 per year higher than it was in 2010," Dr Croke said.

"That means 500 extra kindergarten classes are needed each year - which must then become 500 additional Year 1 classes the following year, then 500 Year 2 classes the year after that, and so on.

"This growth rate will be sustained, if not increased, in coming years and it will affect all sectors – government, Catholic and independent.

"The NSW Government and Opposition have already announced several new government schools during this election campaign - which we support - but the government sector alone will not be able to meet this growth in enrolments.

"Catholic and independent schools currently educate 400,000 students or a third of those enrolled in NSW.

"The NSW Government needs non-government schools to grow so that they can continue to enrol their current proportion of this increase - otherwise, taxpayers will be forced to foot the bill for far more classrooms and teachers than is currently envisaged."

Dr Croke said the NSW Government must first reverse its 2012 decision to cap capital funding to non-government schools at $11 million per year and put in place a sustainable, long-term funding framework that grows as enrolments increase.

"Catholic schools, which enrol more than 251,000 students, need to build more than 2,300 new classrooms to accommodate a further 58,000 students by 2031.

"For decades, these building projects have largely been funded by parents - and they will continue to be - but the NSW Government must now ease the pressure on parents by lifting its funding support.

"Catholic schools educate 21% of the state’s students, but receive just 2% of the capital funding allocated by the NSW Government to all schools.

"Last year, Catholic schools received just $7.6 million in capital funding from the NSW Government. That’s less than what was received in 2011 – and since then, Catholic school enrolments in NSW have grown by more than 10,000, or the equivalent of 12 new secondary schools."
"By comparison, government schools will receive $399.1 million for capital works in 2014-15.

"To put it another way – that's $524 per government school student and $30 per Catholic school student."

Dr Croke said Catholic schools save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year because Catholic school parents met most of the capital costs.

"Without Catholic schools, taxpayers would have to fund hundreds more government schools because those students have to be educated somewhere."

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Capital Funding - Fact sheet

- In 2014, NSW's 584 Catholic schools educated 21% of NSW students but received only 2% of NSW Government capital funding for schools.

- The NSW Government provides $7.6 million in capital grants to Catholic schools – or $30 per student.

- In 2012, the NSW Government capped its capital funding to non-government schools, but enrolments have continued to grow by 10,000 students – the equivalent of 12 new secondary schools or 400 new classrooms.

- The $7.6 million provided by the NSW Government in 2014 was only enough to part-fund seven of the 39 Catholic school building projects which sought funding that year.

- NSW Catholic schools educate almost 254,000 students and will need to accommodate a further 58,000 students by 2031 – the equivalent of more than 2300 additional classrooms.

- Catholic school parents fund the bulk of capital works projects in their children's schools through school building levies and the repayment of loans. But the rising cost of land, construction and technology mean that parents cannot shoulder this burden to the same extent indefinitely.
Capital Funding – Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many Catholic schools and students are there in NSW?
   At the end of 2014, there were 584 Catholic schools in NSW, educating almost 254,000 students. Catholic schools educate one in every five NSW students (21%).

2. How are NSW Catholic school buildings and facilities funded?
   Capital funding - which is used to build, expand or upgrade NSW’s Catholic schools - comes from parents, governments (Federal and State) and the parish community.
   The majority of capital funding comes from parents repaying loans.

3. How much capital funding does the NSW Government provide to all schools each year?
   On a per student basis, the NSW Government allocates $524 per government school student in capital funding for new projects while Catholic schools are allocated $30 per student.
   In the 2014-15 Budget, the NSW Government provided:
   - $399.1 million for capital projects in the state’s 2,196 government schools, and
   - $54.6 million for the state’s 974 non-government schools.
   Of the $54.6 million allocated to non-government schools, $43 million is needed to subsidise interest payments on loans taken out for projects commenced before 2006-07 under the now-closed Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS).
   This leaves just $11.6 million to fund new capital projects in Catholic ($7.6 million) and independent ($4 million) school sectors.

4. What happened to the Interest Subsidy Scheme?
   The ISS was introduced in 1968 to help non-government schools borrow to finance capital projects. By 2006/07, it was costing the NSW Government $67 million per annum.
   It was closed to new loans that year and a new program - the Building Grants Assistance Scheme (BGAS) - was introduced to provide cash grants to non-government schools.

5. How is the BGAS funded?
   As schools loans expire and interest subsidies are no longer required, the money that becomes available is redirected into the BGAS to ensure that $67 million continues to be available to non-government schools each year (either as interest subsidies or grants).
   However, since 2012, that is no longer the case and only $54.6 million is now available (2014-15).
6. **What happened to the BGAS in 2012?**

In the 2012-13 Budget, the NSW Government capped capital funding to non-government schools by stopping any further money being redirected into the BGAS.

This has meant that the amount available as grants to Catholic and independent schools each year remains at around $11 million, despite enrolments growing each year in both sectors.

Catholic school enrolments have grown by 10,000 in that time – the equivalent of 12 new secondary schools or 400 classrooms.

7. **Where will the fastest growth in enrolments occur by 2031?**

In terms of the number of students, the local government areas predicted to have the fastest enrolment growth are Blacktown, Liverpool and Camden. These are geographically large council areas with space to expand.

The real pressure is in established areas such as Parramatta, the City of Sydney and Canada Bay where a boom in apartment living has increased the number of families living in areas where there are geographic limits to the number and size of schools.

8. **Why do NSW Catholic schools need capital funding support from the NSW Government?**

By 2031, all NSW school sectors will need to accommodate an additional 267,000 students (according to the Government’s figures).

NSW Catholic schools will need to create an additional 58,000 places to accommodate their share of this growth - the equivalent of more than 2300 new classrooms.

Most of this expansion will be funded by Catholic school parents, as has been the case for decades.

But the increasing cost of land, construction and education technology means parents will not be able to meet the costs of supporting enrolment growth to the same degree.

The next NSW Government must lift its capital funding support to Catholic schools to help them accommodate this additional growth – otherwise, the Government will be forced to build and staff more new government schools than it has currently planned for.

9. **How does financial support to Catholic schools save NSW taxpayers money?**

It is financially more sensible for the NSW Government to help Catholic schools accommodate their share of enrolment growth.

This is because Catholic school parents meet most of the capital costs, thus easing the pressure on state taxpayers.

If Catholic schools do not have enough places to accommodate their current proportion of this growth in students, the Government will be forced to spend more taxpayer funds to build and staff more new government schools than currently planned.