



# National Education Evidence Base

## Response to draft report (September 2016)

10 October 2016

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### **About Catholic School Parents Australia**

Catholic School Parents Australia is recognised by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education as the national body representing and advocating for the parents and guardians of over 760,000 children and young people who attend the 1731 Catholic schools across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with the National Catholic Education Commission.

## Catholic School Parents Australia

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) is the peak national body representing the parents and carers of over 765,000 children in 1731 Australian Catholic schools. This represents over 20% of all Australian students.

CSPA's membership is made up of the Catholic school parent associations of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT. In turn, each member parent body plays an advocacy role for all parents and carers through their Parents & Friends associations at the local school level. CSPA Member State and ACT authorities also work in close liaison with their Catholic education authorities at diocesan level and with their State Catholic education commissions.

## Endorsement of the National Catholic Education Commission's submission of 7 October 2016

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) endorses the *National Education Evidence Base* submission made by the National Catholic Education Commission on 7 October 2016.

Further to endorsing the NCEC submission, Catholic School Parents Australia would like to add emphasis around parent engagement within a national education evidence base towards influencing student learning.

## Parent Engagement

Parent engagement has been named by successive governments as a core element of the national reform agenda, yet it has been the least defined and least resourced area. The current federal government's *Students First* agenda also names parent engagement as a core reform area. Yet, even with this important focus, parent engagement remains poorly defined and there is little guidance for schools in terms of *why* it is important and *how* to work with families effectively to support students' learning and development.

CSPA is of the firm belief that the development of a robust Australian evidence base to support effective practice in schools in the area of parent engagement is needed. Research and data, both quantitative and qualitative, will be an essential element of this. Furthermore, CSPA suggests that further research into effective parent engagement practices in the Australian school context should be prioritised as part of any future national research agenda and/or framework.

Catholic School Parents Australia would like to emphasise a key focus from the Productivity Commission's draft report where parent engagement for student learning is referenced. The following extracts are noted and then discussed.

*Participants have indicated that data on other external influences that could be important to education outcomes are not collected to a sufficient degree in any national datasets. For example, the Telethon Kids Institute (sub. 15, p. 3) noted that '[t]he quality of the home environment is the most important factor in a child's social and intellectual development ... Australia has no measure on the quality of parenting or family cohesion'. The Queensland University of Technology Faculty of Education (sub. 19, p. 11) indicated that further data are required on 'the degree of parental engagement with their child throughout their school years; parents' perceptions of the value of education and where they think academic excellence comes from ...'. (p. 92).*

*Research evidence shows that the engagement of a parent in their child's education, and the home environment the child is exposed to, have an effect on the education outcomes of the child. For example, studies using international data have found that parental engagement in the early years of children's development through parent-child reading activities had positive effects on children's cognitive skills such as reading, language and comprehension (Gest et al. 2004; Westerlund and Lagerberg 2008). (p. 92).*

*There is merit in collecting data to produce research into the interactions between external influences and education outcomes, or to control for external influences in evaluative research. However, these data do not have to be collected on all Australian students in order to produce valid results. (p. 92).*

In Catholic education parents are considered an essential part of the educating community of a Catholic school as the first and continuing educator of their child. CSPA and its members also differentiate between opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school through volunteering and participation in governance and advisory bodies and opportunities for parents to be authentically engaged in the learning, well-being and development of their children. It is in the latter context that the greatest impact is evident on student outcomes.

Catholic School Parents Australia suggests that given the research available around parent engagement as an influence on student learning, including Barr & Saltmarsh (2014); Emerson et.al (2012); Goodhall et.al. (2011); Weiss et.al (2010); Harris et.al. (2009); Pushor (2007) and Redding et.al. (2004) as examples, that parent engagement not be viewed as an *external factor* affecting student learning outcomes, but a *partnership factor* towards giving parent engagement more prominence. Further, there seems to be increasing evidence of the positive impact of parent engagement on student learning within lower socioeconomic contexts, and this would provide a welcome variance to the usual trend of lower SES correlation with lower student learning outcomes. As already noted by the Education Minister, parent engagement could be a very cost-effective means of improving student

outcomes – another suggested reason for greater prominence on parent engagement in the final report.

A research project\* underway by Catholic School Parents Australia is investigating current enrolment and transition practices in Australian primary and secondary schools that assist in articulating the culture of partnership and Parent Engagement to enhance student learning. As such data become known, it is proposed that this evidence could benefit all Australian students from best practice examples in some school contexts to what could be done to get started in others. Other aspects of the research include investigating the *blockers* and *enablers* of parent engagement as they influence student learning outcomes – further rich evidence to inform the education agenda.

Catholic School Parents Australia is keen through their advocacy and reach to provide partnership and support around worthwhile initiatives to progress the evidence based decision making agenda within school education.

\*This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training through the Grants and Awards Programme 2015-16 to 2018-19.

## References

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