



**“FROM GOOD TO GREAT”
STRENGTHENING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND
OVERSEEING ASPECTS OF SCHOOL VIABILITY
August 2008**

“The essence of leadership is to recognise a problem before it becomes an emergency.”

This paper relates to:

NZCEO STRATEGIC PLAN 2006-2010

Goal One: Futurewatch

Strategy 1.4 Develop and implement plans to deal with external or internal developments which might either enhance or threaten the viability and quality of the Catholic education system or its Catholic Character.

Strategy 1.5 Identify schools at risk of closure and develop actions to support their viability.

Goal Eight: Viability

Strategy 8.4 Develop strategies to assist dioceses in the management of appropriate responses to projected demographic changes in school intakes in both urban and rural areas, and act as a catalyst to enable appropriate clustering to happen.

EXTERNAL ANALYSIS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

The Office is charged with carrying on a continuing external analysis to ensure that it understands the changing external environment that may impact on Catholic schools, and Catholic schooling. Therefore it continuously:

- scans the environment to identify changing trends and patterns
- monitors specific trends and patterns
- forecasts the future direction of these changes and patterns, and
- assesses their organisational impact.

The Office engages in environmental scanning in order to:

- detect social, political technical and economic trends and events important to Catholic schooling
- define potential threats, opportunities or changes for Catholic schooling implied by those trends and events
- promote future orientation in the thinking of those responsible for Catholic schooling
- alert all those concerned to trends that are converging, diverging, speeding up, slowing down, or interacting¹.

Key changes or trends relevant to this paper include:

- **demographic trends**
- **educational and curriculum changes requiring strong leadership**
- **the development of the clustering of parishes in pastoral areas**

Other trends identified by NZCEO but not covered in this paper include:

- building and hardware trends and costs
- aging of teaching work force

¹ General framework of comments developed from Coates (1985)
<http://horizon.unc.edu/courses/papers/enviroscan>

- evangelisation aspects of schooling, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The Board of NZCEO considers that it is vital that Proprietors constantly monitor the viability and the strength of each Catholic school, to ensure that action is taken to strengthen schools at risk, and to ensure that every school is enabled to move “from good to great”, or to further improve its current high standards.

Proprietors have a legal right and responsibility, given to them in the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, to oversee the Special Character and the viability of the school. Viability is a matter both of ensuring survival and of encouraging the highest possible standards. The Proprietor is entitled to intervene in such matters, and may approach the Secretary for Education requesting support, if this is needed.

Diocesan offices, as agents of the Proprietor, already do much work in this area. Proprietor’s Trusts also are wise to take a strong interest in this work.

This paper considers the three key changes or trends identified in bold at the bottom of page one: demographic trends, educational and curriculum changes requiring strong leadership, clustering.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

The Bishop Proprietors and Proprietor Trust Boards, have received communications from NZCEO, including recent sets of statistics that repay careful study, in order to predict the rolls for specific schools. A recent paper from NZCEO pointed out that falling rolls signal the need to consider viability. Falling rolls that stand out against the demographics of the particular area are likely to be a signal that the school needs some support. Proprietors are urged to provide assistance to such schools as quickly as possible. Diocesan offices are usually able to provide a range of useful support, and proprietor Trust Boards may wish to liaise with them for information and suggestions. Falling rolls may signal the need to request Ministry of Education intervention.

EDUCATIONAL AND CURRICULUM CHANGES REQUIRING STRONG LEADERSHIP

While Proprietors are not mandated to intervene directly in schools on educational and curriculum change, they nevertheless are wise to keep careful watch on all such changes. There are times when a principal or a Board does not have the strength or expertise to lead the necessary changes. In these cases the proprietor does well to initiate external support, including seeking a Ministry of Education intervention, earlier rather than later.

The upholding of Catholic Character and particular charism may require support at times. Proprietors are wise to ensure that their proprietor’s appointees are clear on the appointment of teachers to tagged (S65) positions. A number of proprietors are providing excellent support of the particular charism on which their school is founded; some very good schools have expressed a desire that proprietors provide further support for developing an enriched understanding of their founding charism, particularly as congregations are no longer “hands on” in the school that their members once taught at. Such support strengthens the education, curriculum and Catholic Character of the school.

CLUSTERING

The Office considers that it is vital to seriously promote ever more urgently the need for clustering, particularly in parish pastoral areas, for the survival of some schools, for the rationalisation of resources, and for the promotion of best possible leadership and education. The changing local structures of the Church require a parallel analysis of the relationships of Catholic schools.

The Office has been approached by a number of principals in some areas with the request that NZCEO provide leadership in promoting the benefits of clustering, which has worked successfully in South Auckland and in a number of other parts of the country.

Directors and Managers of diocesan Catholic education offices recognise the issues involved for our schools, which in a number of cases could be strengthened by more active clustering links. Schools are at the heart of parishes and pastoral areas, and it is important to retain a network of schools within easy distance of families, particularly for the wellbeing of young children in their first few years of schooling. However, in some urban cases the provision of schooling could be rationalised.

Small schools can be strengthened by various forms of alliances, for example:

- Schools within a pastoral area can be encouraged to work together as far as possible.
- Formal alliances between schools could be initiated under the guidance of the diocesan bishops. Two schools could become formally merged into one administrative unit, governed by one board of trustees, with both sites remaining intact.
- Two smaller schools could cluster around a larger one, with governing administrative units determined according to the best interests of each site.
- Three smaller schools could unite under one administrative unit, with one board of trustees and administration (cf. Trinity Schools in Southland).
- Some limited rationalisations of primary schools in urban areas could be undertaken, where two or more very small schools are quite close to each other. There are some urban areas, such as parts of Dunedin City, Wellington, the Hutt Valley and Christchurch City, where this might apply. Diocesan education office staff recognise the specific issues and possibilities in these areas.
- Existing strong small schools could be kept, further encouraged, and enabled to form alliances with their neighbours.

CONCLUSION

The leadership of proprietors, working with administration boards and diocesan leadership and with the schools themselves, is now required for the enactment of appropriate local strategies to ensure viability, to support schools at risk and to move schools from good to great.

NZCEO
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