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Considering Governance of Catholic Schools in Canada: Some Insights for Australia

Richard M. Rymarz

Broken Bay Institute The Australian Institute of Theological Education, rrymarz@bbi.catholic.edu.au

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Introduction: The Scope of Canadian Catholic Schools

Many Australian Catholic educational leaders are now travelling to Canada to learn from the Canadian experience of Catholic education. In light of this, an overview of Canadian Catholic schools is important as this will assist in contextualization and draw out points of difference and similarity. A key difference, for instance, that will be elaborated on in more detail in this paper is that governance and oversight of Canadian Catholic schools in provinces such as Alberta and Ontario lies with elected school boards. In Australia, this governance is usually administered by Catholic School Offices but these are, in turn, within the purview of the local ordinary. To frame this discussion an overview of Canadian Catholic schools is necessary as it will highlight important regional differences.

The term 'Canadian' when used as an adjective may be misleading. It denotes a national or unified approach which is often, in reality, lacking. In education there is not a single 'Canadian' model applicable across the nation, and this is certainly the case in regard to Catholic schools, which operate in a number of contexts (Feehan, 2008; Mulligan, 2005). The most prominent examples are the many publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan. In British Columbia Catholic schools are less numerous. They are clustered around Vancouver and receive substantial but not complete governmental support. In other provinces, Catholic schools receive no government funding and exist as private entities. It is important to note that in some provinces there was a time when Catholic education was far more prominent, a time when they were publicly funded. Historically, there were publicly supported Catholic schools in the province of Manitoba. Much more recently, however, in both Newfoundland (1998) and Quebec (1997–2000), constitutionally protected Catholic schools were incorporated into a single public school system. In both provinces there are still a small number of private Catholic schools.

Funding of denominational schools in Canada has been a critical and very constructive feature of Canadian history (Chaiton & McDonald, 1977). Canada came into being with the passing

of the British North America Act in 1867 (Brock & O'ram, 1994). A key concern of those hesitant about a political union of the various provinces was the vexed issue of minority rights, especially in the two largest provinces of Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). As a way of assuaging concerns, one key protection that was offered was the provision of denominational or separate schools which would be controlled at a provincial level (Morton, 2001). This was set out, in particular, in section 93 of the Canada Act. Subsequent sections of the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms support this provincial control of education. The most relevant part of section 93 is clause 2, which reads: "All the Powers, Privileges, and Duties at the Union by Law conferred and imposed in Upper Canada on the Separate Schools and School Trustees of the Queen's Roman Catholic Subjects shall be and the same are hereby extended to the Dissident Schools of the Queen's Protestant and Roman Catholic Subjects in Quebec" (Jofré, 2014, p.781).

In Ontario, for example, Catholics were given the opportunity to educate their children in a publicly supported school system (Sharp, 1997; Stamp, 1985). This strategy was continued as the nation expanded. Provisions in the Alberta Act of 1905 which incorporated Alberta into the Dominion of Canada provided Catholics with state supported Catholic schools (Tkach, 1983). Similar provisions were made in the British North America Act (1949) which incorporated the Dominion of Newfoundland and Labrador into Canada (Rowe, 1952).

Loss and Gain: Catholic Schools in Atlantic Canada, Manitoba and British Columbia

Until the 1960s, in provinces such as Nova Scotia there was no clear distinction between government and religiously affiliated schools (Russell, 2003). The province approved funding for both and, depending on the demography of the area it served, each school reflected the preferences of the local population. It was possible, for example, to have consecrated religious employed as teachers or principals in public schools that were festooned with the regalia of Catholicism, if most of the students in that area were Catholic. These arrangements did not survive the 1970s, when provincial governments sought to unify educational offerings and provided funding only for newly reorganised,

secular, public schools. A key concern was the general quality of education provided across all schools. Without centralisation, it was seen as being near impossible to lift the standard of schools, especially those away from major population centres (Johnson, 1968). This is a point that will be discussed in later sections as a first-order challenge.

In Manitoba, the funding of religiously affiliated schools has a long historical association with debate over the place of the province's Francophone community. Although the majority of the first European settlers were French speaking, this group was soon outnumbered by Anglophones. In 1890, the provincial government stopped the funding of Catholic (and Francophone) schools and created a unitary system with only very restricted support for either religious instruction or teaching in French. This decision precipitated a decades-long national debate, often referred to as the 'Manitoba schools crisis' (Russell, 2003). Not until the 1970s did the province allow for the registration of schools outside the unitary system. This new freedom was expanded in 1981 when the province reinstated substantial government support of independent schools. Certified schools received up to 65% of their funding from the public purse if they meet governmental requirements such as teaching the provincial curriculum and employing registered teachers. Despite this, there are relatively few independent schools in Manitoba today. This may be attributed to a number of factors, including the loss of connection to Catholic education over the long period when it received no government support.

In British Columbia, a similar approach to funding Catholic schools and other independent schools has emerged, also involving a restricted amount of government funding (Cunningham, 2002). As in Manitoba the current arrangement came about over time and as a result of public pressure to provide educational alternatives to students. British Columbia was originally an overwhelmingly Protestant community and support for a non-sectarian school system was always strong. Beginning in the 1960s, however, a network of community leaders, including Catholic bishops, began a political campaign to allow some level of funding for independent schools. This

culminated in the passing in 1977 of the Independent Schools Support Act, which allows for 35% to 50% of the proportion of funds allocated to public schools to be directed to other schools— provided, again, that they meet provincial requirements (Cunningham, 2002). In British Columbia, independent schools enrol around 10% of the school-aged population. The majority of these schools are Catholic, and concentrated in the Greater Vancouver area. The number of students in Catholic schools in the province is still far lower than in Australian Catholic schools (NCEC, 2013). The smaller number of schools and the relatively recent allocation of government funding have allowed Catholic schools in British Columbia to develop policy in a much more proactive manner, a point that I will return to in my concluding comments.

Catholic Schools in Eclipse: Newfoundland and Quebec

For many years Catholic schools survived and even flourished in parts of the country where they had formal status as separate schools (Peters, 1998). Separate schools are not classified as independent schools; they were established as fully funded alternatives to public schools. Even in these regions, however, there were rumblings about the wisdom of government funding these schools. Criticism became more vocal in the 1990s and resulted in the loss of Catholic schools, despite deeply rooted constitutional protection, in Newfoundland and Quebec. The complexities of the recent history of Quebec make a detailed discussion of the fate of Catholic schools beyond the scope of this paper, and also limit the parallels that can be drawn between this situation and that of Catholic schools in Australia. Prior to the 1960s Quebec, by any measure, was one of the most religiously observant places in the Western world and the role of the church as a social institution was unsurpassed, controlling innumerable facets of *Quebecois* life. This level of power and influence collapsed suddenly and unexpectedly in a period known as the Quiet Revolution (Christiano, 2007). Given the extent of the societal changes brought about by rapid secularisation, it is remarkable that denominational schools survived as long as they did in Quebec. Beginning in 1997, however,

religious boards were replaced by ones based on linguistic lines. This process was completed by 2000 (Boudreau, 2011).

A much more pertinent example for Australian educators to consider is the fate of Catholic schools in Newfoundland (Fagan, 2004). There has always been a robust Catholic minority in Newfoundland and, at present, Catholics make up around 36% of the population, however, denominational schools here survived for less than fifty years. Despite constitutional guarantees, all denominational schools were collapsed into a single publicly funded system in 1997. Their demise can be traced to developments in the 1980s when the wisdom of funding two school systems was widely questioned and a number of public enquires solidified these concerns. The first of these was a Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment held in 1986 which strongly criticised the existing school system. There was widespread support for this view, and a number of leading public figures and institutions took on the critique as their own. Most significantly, the teacher unions argued passionately for the establishment of a single public system. This led to another Royal Commission, specifically on education, which presented its report *Our Children Our Future* in 1992. It concluded that maintaining denominational schools was needlessly expensive and undermined the quality of education provided to students.

A number of surveys conducted at this time indicated widespread public support for the establishment of a single school system. The provincial government set about a program which had as its goal the establishment of such a system. In preparation for this, a referendum was held in 1995, in which 55% of the electorate supported an amendment to Term 17 of the provincial constitution, that would allow for the establishment of a single non-denominational school system. On this basis, the government passed legislation to remove funding from all denominational schools in 1996 (Fagan, 2004). The legality of this move was challenged in the Supreme Court of Newfoundland by the Catholic bishops and others and it was ruled that that the government did not

have the authority to abolish separate denominational schools. The government then conducted a second referendum, which received 73% in favour of the proposal. In 1998, with the support of the federal government, the constitution of Newfoundland and Labrador was amended and all denominational schools in the province became public schools.

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from the experience of Catholic schools in Newfoundland, which can be seen as first-order challenges. It is important that Catholic schools in places such as Australia directly address the two arguments that are often the wellspring of opposition to faith-based schools: that they are a cost to the jurisdiction in which they operate, and that they diminish the overall quality of education provided. If Catholic schools are seen as expensive (to the state) and inferior (to public schools), then an argument to sustain them is almost impossible to make.

Another point that can be drawn from this episode is that the struggle to maintain Catholic schools is a protracted one and requires consistent effort to be successful. The strong public advocacy role of parents with children in Catholic schools cannot be overestimated. In Newfoundland, the voice of parents with children in Catholic schools was muted because discussion on the future of denominational schools, particularly of the future of Catholic schools, took place in a variety of arenas (Clemens, 1999). There is also an important role to be played by key individuals and institutions. In Newfoundland denominational schools did not receive support from political organisations. Even after the High Court ruling in their favour, few were prepared to continue to argue publicly for denominational education, while a variety of powerful voices were heard to support a single non-denominational system. It should be noted that just prior to this the first major case of sex abuse to dominate public discourse in Canada occurred in Newfoundland. It centred on the abuse of boys at the Mt Cashel Orphanage in St John's, conducted by the Christian Brothers. As the story of the tragic events there unfolded many saw Catholic education in a different light (Harris,

1991). The challenge of advocating for Catholic schools in Canada was addressed at many levels and in a variety of ways. It could not, however, be left to the bishops alone.

Finally, the Newfoundland experience illustrates the need for the frequent and clear pronouncement of the need, rationale and value of Catholic schools. This pronouncement is in addition to the public advocacy mentioned above. In Newfoundland this would have included an unabashed proclamation of why Catholic schools were established. There is a fundamental injustice when a school system is created to protect minority rights and is abolished by a universal plebiscite. Minorities, by their very nature, tend to lose popular votes—which is the rationale for establishing their rights in law so that they cannot be assailed by the majority. In Australia, Catholic schools do not have constitutional guarantees but as the Canadian situation demonstrates, these may not be as effective as sustained promotional endeavours by those who see the benefits of these schools.

Publicly Funded Separate Catholic Schools: The Case of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario

In Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, separate Catholic schools are a historical part of the educational offering (Baldwin, 2008). The oldest and most entrenched Catholic school system in Canada was established by the British North America in Ontario in 1867, and since that time Catholic schools have received full public funding from 'prep' to Year 10; although, the level of this funding has not always matched that given to public schools (Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association, [OCSTA], 2007). In 1984, after decades of lobbying, the Davis government in Ontario extended full government funding to Catholic schools from Grades 11 to 13 (Gidney, 1999). Due to their longevity and their role in the formation of Canada, Catholic schools in Ontario have a complex political history (Power, 2002). This is not the case in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the establishment of separate schools there did not attract the same level of scrutiny and controversy as in Ontario. At present, all political parties in Ontario support the continuation of full funding to Catholic schools. A more detailed discussion of Catholic schools in Ontario is beyond the scope of this paper.

Before commenting on some of the challenges facing separate Catholic schools, some explanation of the governance of these schools is necessary. There are many broad substantive similarities between these three provinces, but also some variations (Rymarz, 2013a). For the sake of brevity and continuity with the following case study, I will focus here on governance of Catholic schools in Alberta. It should also be noted that Alberta allows for a wide range of school choice, and faith-based schools are part of this diversity (Hoekstra & Brink, 2006). Catholic schools are not owned by the Church and are responsible to a board of popularly elected trustees. The elections are open to all people who nominate themselves as supporting Catholic schools in their electoral districts and are public events, with each school district divided into a number of wards. The districts are not congruent with diocesan and archdiocesan boundaries. The Edmonton Archdiocese, for example, contains several Catholic school districts, the largest being Edmonton Catholic which covers most of the city of Edmonton. For this district seven trustees are elected. Elections are conducted on a 'first past the post' voluntary voting basis. Trustees are paid a stipend but usually hold other jobs; nonetheless, they have a substantial governance role. One of their most important functions is to appoint a district superintendent, roughly the equivalent of the director of a Catholic School Office in Australia. The trustees also approve and review school district policies, and this has important implications for the challenges facing Catholic schools today. The day-to-day management of schools in the district falls to the superintendent and a team which in the larger districts can be sizeable. By Australian standards, however, the level of bureaucratic support provided to schools, especially in the area of strengthening Catholic identity, is low (Rymarz, 2010). This has important implications for developing policy in some complex areas. This point will be returned to in the concluding comments.

In matters of school policy, the trustees make decisions for their district. There is no clear and substantial governance role here for the bishop and the relationship between the bishop and the trustees is best described as advisory. This ambiguity has an impact when it comes to

establishing policy which bears on the Catholic identity of the school. In general, the benchmark for what is considered in keeping with a Catholic identity is lower in Alberta than in Australia (Rymarz, 2010). How the interaction of bishops and schools plays out in Canada may be clearer if an example is considered (Rymarz, 2013b). In 2008, the Roman Catholic and Ukrainian Catholic bishops of Edmonton expressed their concern to superintendents about Catholic school students being taken to the well-known 'Body Works' exhibition at the local science museum. The contentious point was that the anatomical exhibits are not plastic simulations but preserved human body parts (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2300). For the bishops this exhibit impinged on the respect that is due the human body even in death. The superintendents noted the bishops' concerns and schools placed some restrictions on students visiting the exhibit.

In recent times, this policy-making role of trustees has become central in second-order challenges. These are of a generally existential nature and usually arise in response to specific issues, as opposed to a general concern about something like the overall quality of the schools. Across the separate school system, Catholic schools in Canada are widely seen as meeting first-order challenges such as offering an excellent education, and this is not in dispute when second-order issues arise. Rather, what is in question is how Catholic schools respond to changing social mores and the expectations that follow from them. To illustrate the nature of these new challenges a more detailed examination of an indicative case will be given.

Case study: Transgendered students and Catholic schools in Alberta

Two very important specific issues that have arisen recently in Alberta and have a direct impact on Catholic schools, are the provision of so-called Gay Straight Alliances and policy regarding transgendered students. Much of the debate on these topics is similar, so I will focus here on just one, how Catholic schools have responded to transgendered students and the implications this response has for the future of Catholic schools.

In May 2015, after forty-four years of conservative rule, the provincial government in Alberta changed. From being a minor party with a handful of seats the New Democratic Party (NDP) formed a strong majority government after an unprecedentedly strong electoral showing. The NDP sees itself very much as a progressive party, and as part of their mandate they sought to regularise how all schools in the province dealt with what they termed sexual minorities. To this end, they instructed all school districts to develop policies that would reflect new provincial guidelines that, amongst other things, sought to give transgendered students free and full access to all schools and their programs.¹ After reflection, debate and public comment, all boards were required to submit their plans to the Ministry of Education, which would rule whether or not they conformed to the new requirements.

Forming transgender policy is a task for school boards. One of the largest of these in the province is Edmonton Catholic. Starting in 2015 they met on several occasions to frame their policy. It is important to note that boards are representative bodies, so their deliberations were very much in the public eye. A variety of comments about what course Catholic schools should take were made in the media as this was seen as an issue that would have a profound impact on education in Alberta. One key issue at the centre of this discussion was the role of the Catholic bishops of Alberta in regard to how they influenced trustee deliberations. To reiterate: the policy on transgendered students is set by the trustees and not the bishops; the bishops have an advisory role but this is not decisive. A number of bishops made strong statements about the new requirements as well as the pressure placed on boards to come up with policies which might be in conflict with Catholic teaching. In response, some trustees claimed that they were being placed under undue pressure by the bishops, especially when it came to developing comprehensive educational policy.

There was broad agreement on the general principle that students need to be supported and cared for (Libro, Travers & St John., 2015). As is the nature of second-order challenges, however, difficulties arise when the discussion moves from the general to the particular. This was illustrated in

the development of a transgendered policy. For instance, what should Catholic schools do in relation to provision of bathroom facilities for students? Catholic schools in Alberta have for many years provided gender-neutral toilets alongside male and female ones, which any student was free to use. The gender-specific bathrooms were restricted to students' original gender. This, however, seemed to fall short of the new expectations. These expectations insisted that transgender students should use a toilet of their choosing. This was not the practice in Catholic schools or in certain public school districts.

On closer examination of the response of Catholic schools to the specific issue of transgendered students, a number of salient issues emerged. It is critical that those involved in Catholic education be in broad agreement on the principle or teaching that the schools are trying to uphold. This brings into sharp focus Catholic moral teaching on sexuality (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004). It is clear from research that for some time, many Canadian Catholics (and there is little reason to assume that Catholics involved in education are any different) have not accepted official Catholic teaching on a range of issues, and that many of the contentious areas are moral ones (McDonough, Memon & Mintz, 2013; O'Toole, 1996). This places the leaders of Catholic education in a difficult position as they may be asked to implement a policy that they, and many others involved in Catholic education, do not agree with (Bowen, 2004; McDonough, 2009; McDonough, 2016). One notable group in this position are teachers working in Catholic schools (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2002; Rymarz, 2012). There seem to be clear indications that they favour an inclusivity policy in keeping with practice in public schools. " Trustees themselves may have difficulty accepting some aspects of Catholic teaching and these may be the very ones at the heart of the public debate about how Catholic schools conduct themselves.

This situation highlights a critical difference in the governance of Catholic schools in Canadian provinces, such as Alberta, and in Australia. In Australia, decisions about how Catholic schools manifest their religious identity and how this aligns with Church teaching rest, ultimately,

with the bishop. This is not the case in provinces such as Alberta where the trustees set policy for schools. This policy setting is done in consultation with the bishop but the decisions of trustees and the key educational leaders, such as superintendents, whom they appoint do not need ecclesial approval or authorization.

When the debate about Catholic school policy was played out in the public square in Alberta there was a good deal of confusion. Many instances of this public discourse occurred for example, a quote from a newspaper article from the *Calgary Herald*, this is a leading provincial newspaper, underlines the wide public interest in these issues in the province.ⁱⁱⁱ The article centres on concerns by Catholic educators about the stance of the local bishop. The policy that is cited here as having wide support is the one supplied by the government.

But at a local Catholic school, Bishop Carroll Senior High School, administrators and students lauded the diversity guidelines, promoting their group as a support for students concerned with gender identity and gender transformation. Principal Neil O'Flaherty argued that the evolution of Catholicism has come to gradual acceptance of gender diversity. 'All you have to do is look to our Pope when he said "who am I to judge,"' O'Flaherty said, referring to the famous July 2013 statement by Pope Francis when he affirmed that homosexuality was not a sin in the eyes of the church. In response to questions about whether there was a 'gay lobby' in the Vatican, the Pope had said, 'if a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?'

The point here is not the accuracy or veracity of the principal's comments. The substantive issue is that many of those involved in Catholic education share this view. This point was reinforced in discussions with several Edmonton Catholic School Board trustees.^{iv} Their opinion was that Catholic teaching in these areas was not fixed, and there was scope for accommodating governmental guidelines provided that schools were allowed some flexibility in how they responded, on a case-by-case basis. The trustees did not see themselves as on the fringe of the Church but as people with a passionate commitment to the future of Catholic schools. They commented that the overwhelming majority of the constituents who had contacted them had reinforced their view that the Church might be on the cusp of a major revision of its moral teaching, and that given enough flexibility a mutually agreeable solution was possible, one that could accommodate a politically

acceptable policy on inclusivity along with recognition of foundational Catholic principles. To preempt a key concluding point, a key task of Catholic educational leaders in addressing second-order challenges is to make every effort possible to clearly articulate the Catholic position. This task must be done in public discourse, of course, but it is critical that those deeply involved in Catholic education are included in this communicative dialogue. The Calgary principal quoted earlier is representative of this group.

The timelines set by the government made deliberation and discussion of policy by school boards rushed, as most of the school boards did not have well considered initial positions and did not have resources or structures in place that would assist them. In March 2015 the Edmonton Catholic trustees passed a policy for consideration by the Minister of Education which advocated a general approach to inclusivity. This allowed schools the freedom to respond to particular issues within a general framework. The one-page document concluded with the following statement:

The Edmonton Catholic School Board is committed to ensuring that all students and staff of Edmonton Catholic Schools and their families will be provided with:

- a) a fully inclusive school community
- b) a welcoming, caring, respectful, safe, and Catholic environment
- c) an environment that is free from discrimination of any type including but not limited to discrimination based on race, colour, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical, and mental characteristics, nationality, sexual orientation, family status, or marital status^v

A notable feature of this policy document is that it does not specifically mention LGBT students or a need for schools to provide gay–straight alliance clubs in all schools. Rather it situates the response of Catholic schools within a general philosophical understanding of the Catholic vision of the human person. At the time of writing, the Alberta government has not definitively responded to the proposals submitted by all school boards in the province.

Counter cultural Catholic schools

Discussion of specific instances inevitably brings with it consideration of the broader issue of how Catholic schools situate themselves within the wider culture. A useful hermeneutic for Catholic schools to best situate themselves in a changing cultural context is to ensure that they remain authentic (Rymarz, 2016). Simply stated, this means that the school tries as to be as true to its stated goals as it can. Despite the history of good governance and excellent education, cultural changes have left Catholic schools 'out of step' with some cultural mores of modern Canadian society.

A critical question is this: can Catholic schools in Canada reconfigure themselves to address such second-order challenges? Many responses require Catholic schools to become more counter-cultural (Kanji & Kuipers, 2009). In order to present a credible, comprehensive response, the schools must be able to maintain their reputation for offering a high quality, well conducted education that is not a wasteful duplication of service. This is an important first-order challenge, and if they do not address it, separate Catholic schools will have a nearly impossible task maintaining their position. At the same time, however, they must be able to articulate a response to specific key issues that, on occasion, may be in keeping with their stated aims and aspirations but place them outside governmental and communal expectations.

For the sake of focus, what has been highlighted in this paper are policies on inclusivity broadly understood. There are other many other issues, perhaps of greater significance, such as that of Catholic schools continuing to find places for disadvantaged students who are at risk or who lack personal advocacy. Taking a stance on these issues will definitely be counter-cultural, but authenticity demands that they animate what they claim to be key aspects of their mission (Hunter, 2010). They cannot, however, be so counter-cultural that they sit at the extremes edges of wider society. They must be able to present themselves as having clear alternatives, evidenced by well

thought out and implemented policies. These policies should reflect the common concerns of all schools, but also the distinctive features that are offered by Catholic schools.

Conclusion

A number of comparative comments can be made following consideration of the recent experiences of Catholic schools in Canada. Although Australia is not as politically volatile as Canada, the situation of Catholic schools in Australia may change very quickly. The lesson from Catholic schools in Newfoundland is that constitutionally guaranteed protection may not assure the future of Catholic schools. I think this type of rapid change in Australia is unlikely, but it is worth bearing in mind that there are many examples in contemporary culture where changes in social and political attitudes have been remarkably rapid. It is very important that Catholic agencies in Australia such as the National Catholic Education Commission, Catholic School Offices and Bishops Conferences continue to advocate for Catholic education.

It is essential that educational leaders in Australia develop clear and well thought out policies that meet what I have called 'second-order challenges'. The fact that Catholic schools are well patronised and deliver an excellent education is not in dispute. The question is, how do Catholic schools address second-order challenges such as policies on inclusivity? The situation in Alberta is not desirable—a change of government left trustees scurrying to develop a new policy dictated by government mandate in very little time. I think it is fair to say they found this task overwhelming. It would be far better if such policies were developed in anticipation of the inevitable challenges to the legitimacy of practices in Catholic schools. This is especially important if there is disquiet about what Catholic teaching in this area should be.

Strong coherent policies should be developed that take into account the demands of living in a modern secular democracy while keeping accord with the perennial wisdom of the Church. These policies will provide a specific focused response to key second-order challenges. It will also put

Catholic schools in a far stronger position when it comes to negotiating with governmental agencies about the scope of curriculum changes. This negotiation would be easier if Catholic educational leaders were working from a clear, well established position. This is no small task, but possible given the substantial resources available to Catholic schools in Australia, which are not available to the same extent in Canada. It is imperative that this policy development be done in a comprehensive and transparent way that allows for a consideration of the positions of those involved in Catholic schools. It is also worth noting again that as bishops in Australia have a key governance role as they are the owners and employers of Catholic schools. Any such policy will likely reflect a higher standard of Catholic identity than that seen in the separate Catholic schools in Canada. This makes the importance of clear and considered policies even more urgent.

A broader educative process could be undertaken with all those involved in Catholic education—families, teachers and students—to better inform them of the rationale for the Catholic position and how this can be integrated with the existing strong features of Catholic schools. One of the distinctive features of being counter-cultural is the awareness that the responsibility for passing on the key narrative of the institution lies with the institution itself. More passive methods are ineffective because the general cultural consensus often favours a different narrative. Articulating its message to those involved in school communities with greater clarity, and committing to do this over time, will also assist the case in wider societal forums as the schools will be seen as having strong grassroots support that embraces the distinctive features of Catholic schools.

Endnotes

- ⁱ To see a copy of the Guidelines go to <https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626737/91383-attachment-1-guidelines-final.pdf>. In 2014 the Catholic Independent Schools of Vancouver (CISVA) became the first Catholic school system in Canada to develop a policy on transgender issues: CISVA Elementary School Policy Regarding Gender Expression and Gender Dysphoria, see http://www.cisva.bc.ca/policy_manual/400-general_school_admin/431-CISVA_Gender_Dysphoria_Policy.pdf
- ⁱⁱ The Ontario Catholic teacher union have made a series of statements on their stance on inclusivity policy and how this is at variance with that of trustees. These can be viewed at: http://www.oecta.on.ca/wps/portal/search?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=http://localhost:10038/wps/wcm/connect/web+content/OECTA/News+and+Events/News/News+Items/News+Archives+2012/gay+letter. A similar view has been articulated by the corresponding teacher union in Alberta.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The title of this article published in the *Calgary Herald* on 19/1/16 is instructive: 'Catholic schools to uphold inclusive communities'. <http://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/alberta-tells-catholic-school-trustees-to-sort-themselves-out-over-transgender-issue>
- ^{iv} To get a sense of the views of trustees on these issues see the following platforms of two trustees, Patricia Grell at <https://grellblog.wordpress.com/> and Debbie Engel at https://twitter.com/debbie_engel
- ^v The entire statement can be seen at https://www.ecsd.net/BoardofTrustees/overview/board_governance/Documents/GP-14.pdf. By way of comparison a similar but more specific policy was developed by Catholic schools in Vancouver. This policy can be viewed at http://www.cisva.bc.ca/policy_manual/400-general_school_admin/431-CISVA_Gender_Dysphoria_Policy.pdf

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