

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
a system of  
Catholic Schools  
in greater Sydney  
and the emergence  
of Catholic Education  
Offices: 1965-1985**



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## CONTEXT

The NSW Budget 1967-1968 contained a modest allocation for a direct payment to non government primary schools based on enrolments. Initial per capita grants of **\$6 per student** were made in the first half of 1968.

This was the first financial support Catholic schools had received from a NSW Government since **1882**. The NSW Public Instruction Act (1880) sponsored by **Sir Henry Parkes** had withdrawn all funding to Catholic and other Church schools, effective December 1882.

**After 86 years of waiting a little State Aid had arrived and suddenly the future looked brighter.**

## 1880s

The NSW Colonial government **paid the salaries of approved teachers** in Catholic and other Church schools until the Public Instruction Act of 1880 ceased funding for all Church schools. Most of the teachers in Catholic schools were subsequently reassigned to public schools.

To continue Catholic schooling, Religious Sisters, Brothers and Priests were "found" in Europe (Ireland and France in particular) and Australia and for the next eighty years Catholic schools continued with these **pioneering Religious women and men** with support from a small band of lay teachers including Marjory Cantwell, my mother.

Let me jump ahead to the **1960s**.

Catholic schools, parish primary and regional secondary, were stand alone, relatively independent, with zero government funding Each school existed on funds collected locally. In Sydney the WWII immigration resulted in large (and some very large) classes. There was considerable questioning about our very survival ... precarious times. Questions being canvassed included:

- are Catholic schools justifying themselves?
- should we focus on primary OR secondary schools? should we think more about Catholic children in State schools?
- Principals of all Catholic schools were Religious.

Payment of lay teachers' salaries a continuing struggle. Principals and Parish Priests negotiated "salaries" or in-kind payments with individual teachers. There was no Teachers' award.

Archdiocese had an overdraft in the schools account - \$A1 million with CBA.

Let me tell you a story.

After completing a one-year teacher training program at the Marist Scholasticate, I was appointed in 1960 to Parramatta Marist to teach sixty boys in fourth class. The training program was recognized by the Council of Public Instruction of Victoria. In my second year I began a BA degree as an evening student at the University of Sydney.

At Parramatta, I was also responsible for the school canteen, (staffed by the mothers of the students) the profits from which helped pay salaries for three lay teachers. The annual fete

and various concerts were also important fund raisers as were the raffles and bottle drives. With the help of parents, the 18 classrooms were repainted during Saturday working bees.

Each year many students were turned away as class sizes at Parramatta were limited to 60.

I also taught at Marist Brothers Dundas and Eastwood.

In 1968 Cardinal Gilroy approved my appointment as Inspector of Schools, aged 31 and I was to spend the next 40 years in the management and leadership of Catholic schools in this Archdiocese. The position was not advertised.

## 1965 - 1975

During my very early years in the Sydney Catholic Education Office I witnessed four developments that changed permanently the structure, organization and face of Catholic schooling, but not the mission. Namely:

1. **Financial control of schools by the Archdiocese.**
2. **Employment of lay principals by the Archdiocese.**
3. **Government financial assistance for Catholic Schools.**
4. **Establishment of administrative and accountability structures to utilize government funding for systemic schools.**

*Let me offer a brief explanation of each*

### 1. Financial control of schools by the Archdiocese

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In response to a desperate situation and serious questioning about the survival of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney Cardinal Gilroy established the **Catholic Building and Finance Commission** (CBFC) early 1965 which took immediate financial control of income and expenditure of all Parish primary and Regional secondary schools in the Archdiocese. The Cardinal chaired the meetings which lasted one hour!

Parishes, schools and Religious Congregations were informed of this decision to **centralize income and expenditure**. There was no consultation.

Another early decision of the CBFC was to establish a scale of **tuition fees** for Parish and Regional schools from the start of 1966. Fees collected by schools were to be remitted to the CBFC where they were banked in a **common account from which salaries** for lay teachers and stipends for Religious were paid. Principals were delighted to be relieved of the responsibility of ensuring sufficient cash was available for the weekly pay envelopes for teachers.

The CEO began establishing staffing levels for each school.

**Expenditure** was tightly controlled and proposals for additional buildings were submitted to the CBFC Parish priests and principals could not proceed without formal authorization from the CBFC.

**A new financial authority, the CBFC had evolved.** This was separate from the Sydney CEO and eventually located on a different site. Some confusion about who was responsible for what soon emerged!

The first seeds for the development of a System of schools in Greater Sydney were being sown.

## 2. Employment of lay principals by the Archdiocese.

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In 1972 the Provincial of the **De La Salle Brothers** informed the parish priest at St Vincent's, Ashfield that the Congregation was no longer in a position to appoint a Brother as Principal. This took both parish and Archdiocese by surprise. There were no established procedures to engage a lay principal. It was not on our radar.

Two obvious questions were *"Where will we find a lay Principal?"* and *"Who will be the employer?"*

While some preliminary discussions considered School Boards, the Sydney CEO soon emerged as the employer of lay Principals and subsequently of teachers and support staff.

**Salary scales** and conditions of employment were progressively developed for lay Principals and teachers. The first Award for **male teachers** in Catholic schools in NSW (effective 1 January 1970) set salaries at 80% of that for NSW government school teachers, with full parity to be phased in over four years.

Award for **female teachers** was initially 70% of that for government teachers with **equal pay** for female teachers to be phased in over four year period. From 1 January 1974 male and female salary differences ceased and salaries for Catholic school teachers were similar to those paid to government school teachers.

A Superannuation fund scheme was established a decade later.

Fortnightly teacher **pay cheques** were delivered to selected schools by couriers on motor bikes and school secretaries would collect their school's satchel.

Concurrently **stipends for religious** were regularised, with significant increases phased in over three years, including the **equalisation of stipends** for female and male religious. Cost of living was the underlying principle.

For the 1976 school year **22 new lay primary principals** had to be found. At this stage the demand for lay Principals was clearly ahead of supply. Leadership development programs were quickly implemented.

Communication to parents that a **lay Principal** was to be appointed to replace Sister was challenging. Initially parents were slow to accept the concept of lay leadership in their schools. "This is unthinkable ... it will never work!" To help smooth the transition at the Parish level I would attend a **meeting of parents** to explain the change - sometimes with the relevant Congregational Leader, generally in the Parish Church on Sunday evenings. There were some fiery exchanges.

History shows the transition to lay leadership was quickly accepted by parents and had nil impact on school enrolments.

**A new employment authority had evolved** and the seeds for a future school System continued to be sown.

### 3. Government financial assistance for Catholic Schools

NSW Budget Papers 1967-1968 (page 144) contained a modest allocation for a direct payment to non-government **primary** schools based on enrolments. Initial per capita grants of **\$6 per student** were made in the first half of 1968.

This was the first financial support Catholic schools had received from a NSW Government since 1882. The NSW Public Instruction Act (1880) sponsored by Sir Henry Parkes had withdrawn all funding to Catholic and other Church schools, effective December 1882.

**After 86 years of waiting a little State Aid had arrived and suddenly the future looked brighter.**

At the secondary **school level** means-tested allowances for eligible students in non government schools were paid to parents from 1963-1964. These were progressively phased out as a prelude to paying grants directly to schools (Askin 9 February 1968).

**Table 1**  
NSW Government Grants to Students in Non-Government Schools 1966 - 1974

	Primary	Secondary
1966-67	0	0
1967-68	12	18
1968-69	24	28
1969-70	30	34
1970-71	36	42
1971-72	60	59
1972-73	61	71
1973-74	75	88

*NSW Hansard*

When this occurred all systemic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney were directed to forward the government cheques to the CBFC which had responsibility for paying salaries and stipends. This procedure continued until August 1983 when **Premier Wran**, following a request from **Archbishop Clancy**, instructed NSW Treasury to stop sending cheques to schools and to send a consolidated payment direct to the appropriate systemic authority

The gradually increasing per capita grants could be seen, in part, as a response of the major political parties to the **relentless campaign** conducted by Catholic parents. In Sydney, the Federation of Parents and Friends' Associations employed a variety of strategies culminating in a **series of public meetings**.

On 7 August 1968 some 700 parents with children in Catholic schools in Sydney gathered at Lewisham. This was the first of eight public meetings called to demand government financial assistance for Catholic schools. The Lewisham meeting was successful and more meetings followed at Manly, Rockdale, Miranda, St Marys (near Penrith), Lane Cove and Eastwood. Most of the venues were packed to overflowing and parents put considerable pressure on political leaders, who had little option but to attend. Parents were very specific in their questions, they demanded justice and they wanted it immediately patience had long gone.

I well remember the meeting in the Odeon Theatre, Rowe Street, **Eastwood** on Sydney evening, 20 April 1969. Some 2,000 packed the venue and those unable to get in were asked to remain on the footpath until all ten Members of Parliament had arrived. The function was brilliantly stage-managed and the State and Federal MPs faced a passionate

and well informed audience calling for specific commitments to future funding  
“How much and when?” MPs had nowhere to hide.

Preselected parents were given prepared questions and sat in designated seats. When the MC invited questions they immediately queued at the two microphones effectively excluding all others.

After the function many MPs accepted the invitation to join the organisers for supper in the Catholic Presbytery in Hillview Avenue. More politicking occurred until midnight. I came away believing that the major parties were heading down the road of accepting the legitimacy of the demands by parents for some direct financial support for their schools.

Gough Whitlam, Leader of the Federal Opposition, spoke at 7 of the 8 public meetings. His message was always the same:

*“If a Labor Government is elected we will establish immediately an Interim Australian Schools Commission to examine the need of all Australian schools and if elected a Labor Government will fund all schools **“according to need”**.”*

The eighth and final Sydney meeting was held 1 June 1969, a wet Sunday evening, when 5,000 crowded into the **Sydney Town Hall** and the lower hall. (days before Health and Safety Regulations for public buildings) Proceedings were broadcast live on Radio 2SM. There was extensive coverage on television and in the press, including some scuffles with anti-State Aid protestors.

The meeting concluded with a motion asking **Federal** and **State** governments to each **provide \$50 to every student** in a non-government primary and secondary school and that this amount be **increased progressively**. Amounts were modest but attainable.

At the **Federal** level direct **per capita grants** commenced in 1970:

- \$35 for primary and \$50 for secondary
- and for 1972 raised to \$50 and \$68 respectively.

The **campaign for school funding** had a long history In 1962, for example, parents in Goulburn had drawn attention to their needs, - when protesting against the financial impossibility of the upgrading of toilets demanded by Inspectors, they sought to enrol their children in local government schools.

Catholic bishops, various parent organisations, school principals, and parents, clergy and parishioners kept the needs of their schools before politicians. It was a long struggle, with countless **magnificent campaigners**.

And I recall the particular contributions of Mrs Monica Turner (Federation of Sydney Parents and Friends Associations), Mrs Margaret Slattery (Australian Parents’ Council) and Archbishop James Carroll. Sadly but gratefully I attended the funerals of these great campaigners.

Following the election of the Whitlam Labor government on 2 December 1972 an Interim Committee of the **Australian Schools Commission** was established and immediately asked to “examine the position of government and non-government primary and secondary schools throughout Australia and to make recommendations on the immediate financial needs of these schools” and report by end of May 1973.

While recommending increased funding the Report was explicit **‘the (Schools) Commission should not be involved in the detailed operation of schools or school systems’** (14 9) The Catholic Education Commission in each State (and the CEOs) readily accepted a request to

distribute Federal recurrent grants to Catholic systemic schools “according to need”. **This was a game changer**, the equivalent of delegating key responsibilities from a government department in Canberra to Catholic education authorities across Australia.

The Federal budget allocation for Catholic systemic schools for 1973-1974 was \$63m - beyond our wildest dreams! These new arrangements, while restricting the direct involvement of the Commonwealth government in Catholic schools, **increased significantly in a permanent manner**, the responsibilities and spheres of influence of the NSW CEC and the Sydney CEO.

The early 1970s in some ways, marked the end of phase one of the **State Aid campaign**. However, in the decades ahead the campaign in Greater Sydney continued. An ongoing challenge was **the education and support of the electorate** on the justice issue of financial assistance to non-government schools and the rights of parents to choose the schools for their children. It was important that we did not take government financial assistance for granted.

And we needed to nullify the continuing campaigns of those opposed to funding non government schools:

- the NSW Teachers’ Federation,
- the NSW Parents and Citizens’ Association
- and from the early 1990s the Greens political party.

In some ways these three organisations gave Catholic Education a ready platform to explain the “true facts” of government financial assistance.

Effective use was made of the print and electronic media. Messages were clear and concise, professionally printed and widely distributed. Much use was made of school functions, in particular at the blessing and opening of new facilities, to explain to parents and MPs some particular aspects of government financial assistance to Catholic schools. The continuing contribution of parents including responsibility for loan repayments would be detailed along with Commonwealth and State contributions. As Executive Director I viewed these gatherings as an opportunity to cement community support for our schools.

Building and maintaining relationships with MPs and major political parties was another on going priority.

Seeds for the development of a school System continued to be sown and for the decades ahead annual grants from government kept pace with rising costs.

**Table 2**  
**Combined**  
**Federal and State**  
**Government**  
**Annual Grants**  
**for Students in**  
**Catholic Systemic**  
**Schools in NSW**  
**1979 - 2017**

	Primary	Secondary
1979	\$479	\$745
1989	\$1,568	\$2,390
1999	\$3,358	\$4,631
2005	\$5,261	\$7,056
2006	\$5,580	\$7,312
2007	\$6,212	\$7,947
2017	\$10,689	\$12,280

Source: CEO, Sydney Archives/Catholic Schools NSW

## 4. Establishment of administrative and accountability structures to utilise government funding for systemic schools.

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Prior to 1965 Catholic schools in Sydney were relatively independent. Each raised its own funds and lay teachers were paid by the Principal or Parish Priest.

When I was appointed to the Sydney Catholic Education Office in 1968 as an Inspector of Schools, the staff occupied four small rooms at the end of the Housie Hall, **Cusa House**, 175 Elizabeth Street, Sydney. From memory, the CEO and CBFC had a total staff of about 12-15, mostly priests, religious and semi-retired laymen and two young secretaries managed by Florence Hull. Most of us worked part-time and on a voluntary basis.

Housie regulars would begin taking up 'their' seats during the afternoon and were happy to assist stuffing envelopes for the occasional mailing to schools.

The **development of the Sydney CEO/CBFC quickened** with the election of the **Whitlam Labor Government** and establishment of the **Australian Schools Commission**. Accessing new programs saw the rapid employment of:

- Field and program specialist staff
  - > psychologist and social workers for the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP)
  - > Special Education
  - > Innovations Libraries
  - > Handicapped children program
  - > Hearing Impaired Program established with support of Dominican Sisters
  - > The Child Migrant Program (ESL) was continued
- Human resources
- Industrial relations
- Curriculum support
- Teacher development and Education Centres
- Leadership development of Principals.
- Capital Works
- Payroll Clerks
- Accountants and auditors

The introduction of new national catechetical texts and related pedagogical developments required the employment of many Religious Education specialists and provision for major professional development programs

For a young administrator these were breathtaking days!

**Catholic schools were now part of a developing network** or System characterized by increasing government financial support with a sense of confidence and excitement - particularly in staff rooms.

More appropriate accommodation had to be found and in **1973** the CEO/CBFC moved to **St Benedict's Broadway**.

- 20-30 rooms across three floors of the building. The parish primary school and the parish occupied the rest of the building.
- staff of perhaps 40-50, lay, religious and clergy. Staff received Award wages and conditions. Religious received stipends similar to Religious in schools.

The bureaucratic seeds were germinating fast. There was no turning back.



# 1975 - 1985

*A quick look at the next decade*

Brother Walter Simmons, cfc was appointed Diocesan Director of Schools beginning January 1982 and I was appointed the Deputy Director and Spokesman These positions were not advertised.

Following the establishment of five pastoral regions, each under the care of an auxiliary bishop, the **Catholic Education Office at Broadway was decentralized** and five regional CEOs were established in January 1982. Regional Directors were appointed and staff drawn primarily from the existing office.

While there was much excitement and growing confidence among Catholic School System Leadership, by the early 1980s there was also a developing awareness that **our major goal as Catholic educators** was not primarily the effective implementation of Commonwealth programs. In a prophetic talk to the CEO staff in 1982 Fr Cyril Hally SSC an eminent anthropologist reminded us that ‘as an evangelizer the CEO must begin by being evangelized itself (Evangeliis Nuntiandi (EN) 15, 1976) **“The evangelization of the CEO bureaucracy”** became part of our lexicon for decades.

The role and function of the CEO continued to expand and in April 1983 new accommodation was found in the **St Martha’s complex**, Renwick Street, Leichhardt which the Archdiocese had earlier purchased from the Sisters of St Joseph Staff within 20 years grew from 12/15 to 200 and moved from Cusa House to St Benedict’s to St Martha’s Renwick Street, Leichhardt and into five regional offices.

By 1983 the school system required a different leadership structure and Archbishop Clancy established the **Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools (SACS) Board**, with Archbishop Carroll as the first Chairman followed by Bishop Geoff Robinson in 1986. (The final and 300th meeting of the SACS Board was held last September)

Archdiocesan authorities were responsible in **1985** for the distribution to the 264 systemic schools of student grants from governments exceeding **\$A152 million**, up from zero in 1967. A miracle!!

The rapid growth of the CEO and CBFC/CSFO bureaucracy was a response to the four developments described in this paper

In **1986**, Cardinal Clancy, Archbishop of Sydney responded to the role **conflict and ambiguity** problem when he accepted the recommendation from the **SACS Board** for a restructured administration that saw the **amalgamation of the CEO and the CSFO**.

Press advertisements appeared for a new position, the Executive Director of Schools. In December 1986 following interviews in the Cathedral presbytery Brother Kelvin Canavan was appointed with a five-year contract which included periodic appraisals. His doctoral study of 1985 was to provide helpful background to restructure the administration.

This appointment in **Sydney** coincided with the formation of the new dioceses of **Parramatta** (Director, Ann D Clark) and **Broken Bay** (Director, Br Norman Hart) and the subsequent establishment of separate administrative arrangements and CEOs. The three dioceses operated independently from December 1986.

**Another chapter in the history of Catholic schooling in Greater Sydney had begun.** The doubts of the 1960s had been replaced by excitement and confidence in the future of our schools\*.

*\* This is an edited version of an address given by Br Kelvin Canavan to the Australian Catholic Historical Society at St Patrick's Church Hill, Sydney on 18 March 2018.*