

# Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Bullying and Discrimination in Tasmanian Schools

## *Catholic Education Tasmania – Response to the recent submission of Concerned Catholics Inc*

### Introduction

Concerned Catholics Tasmania Inc (CCTI) has made a submission to the Inquiry dated 28 August 2024 which has been published in redacted form on Parliament's website.

The CCTI submission contained numerous allegations about CET and particular employees of CET. This is CET's reply to those allegations.

### Overview

CCTI is a frequent and vocal critic of CET and its present leadership.

While CET welcomes genuine criticism and feedback at any time, the repetitive and baseless complaints from CCTI point to a deep personal antagonism from CCTI towards senior leadership of CET. CCTI has made a number of unsubstantiated complaints to various bodies and media outlets in the last 18 months which frequently take the form of personal attacks on CET senior leadership. CCTI's submission to this Inquiry appears to be the latest in this ongoing course of conduct.

CCT's essential assertion is that senior leadership of Catholic Education Tasmania are themselves "perpetrators" of bullying and that they actively condone systemic bullying and discrimination against its employees. This assertion is wholeheartedly rejected. CET abhors bullying, harassment and unlawful discrimination in whatever form it may take. CET treats all complaints seriously and confidentially and in a procedurally fair manner. Where sufficient information is provided, it is our policy to investigate such complaints.

The specific allegations made by CCTI in its submission are either out of context or completely untruthful. Each allegation is responded to below.

## Response to Allegations

### A. Allegation regarding a female student teacher and relocation of an alleged perpetrator

This allegation appears at pages 2 and 3 of the CCTI submission.

CCTI's submission appears to imply that CET has transferred a perpetrator of misconduct against a young person to another school to escape scrutiny. CET has never transferred or employed a perpetrator of inappropriate interactions with children to any position in any Archdiocesan school.

CET acknowledges a complaint about inappropriate adult-adult interactions. It was carefully investigated and resolved, in accordance with our policies. CET will not be providing further comment, consistent with our policy to keep complaints confidential.

### B. Allegation regarding female TCEO employee

This allegation appears at page 3 of the CCTI submission.

In the course of an employee seeking reclassification of their role, CET acknowledges that an informal complaint was made about coworker interactions. The complaint was investigated and dealt with in accordance with our policies. Insufficient information was provided to allow a formal investigation. CET will not be providing further comment noting our policy to keep complaints confidential.

### C. Allegation regarding prospective principal

This allegation appears at page 4 of the CCTI submission.

CET acknowledges that a complaint was made to Equal Opportunity Tasmania regarding this matter. It was one of only 2 matters referred to the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner within the last 5 years that relate to CET. CET will not be providing further comment on this matter.

As to expectations of senior leaders with CET, the Church requirements of school leaders was explicitly restated in the recent Vatican directive: *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* published in 2022 and signed by Pope Francis.

It says:

*"In the formation of the younger generations, teachers must be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life" (n. 47)*

*"School leaders are more than just managers of an organization. They are true educational leaders when they are the first to take on this responsibility, which is also an ecclesial and pastoral mission rooted in a relationship with the Church's pastors." (n.48)*

The document provides clear guidance regarding the role of a Catholic school leader:

*“A further responsibility of the school leadership is the promotion and protection of its ties with the Catholic community, which is realised through communion with the Church hierarchy.*

*Indeed, the “ecclesial nature of Catholic schools, which is inscribed in the very heart of their identity as schools, is the reason for ‘the institutional link they keep with the Church hierarchy, which guarantees that the instruction and education be grounded in the principles of the Catholic faith and imparted by teachers of right doctrine and probity of life.’” (n. 50)*

It is CET’s view that it must uphold the requirements of all these specific Vatican directives in advancing Catholic Education in Tasmania.

At the same time, all parents of students enrolled in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Hobart have the right to require that those appointed to lead their schools are committed Catholics who strive to live and teach in accordance with the doctrines, tenets and beliefs of the Catholic faith.

#### D. Consent and Respectful Relationships Education: Allegation regarding unequal and disadvantageous treatment (Submission p. 5)

This allegation appears at page 5 of the CCTI submission.

The article, original and unabridged, may be accessed here ([The Catholic Standard: December 2023, Page 6](#)). It is now evident that CCTI provided a highly selective and biased critique of the article to the national media.

CCTI’s comment is false. In fact:

- CET has applied for and received funding approval from the Federal government to develop and implement a specific Respectful Relationships and Consent Education (RRCE) program for all students in our 38 schools.
- All teaching staff were advised of this and provided with initial, introductory training for its use at an all-day system-wide formation day held on Friday April 12th, 2024
- CET’s application for RRCE program funding has subsequently been confirmed as fully compliant with all Federal guidelines and requirements for Respectful Relationships and Consent Education.

#### E. Allegation of Maltreatment surrounding Gender Dysphoria (Submission p. 6)

This allegation appears at page 6 of the CCTI submission.

CCTI’s statement is completely false. CCTI should publicly withdraw the allegation and apologise. The CCTI account above trivialises the deep concern that CET has for every

student with particular needs, and the CCTI allegation devalues every family within our school communities.

CET acknowledges the deep psychological and social complexities and the unique family situations that students and young people experiencing gender dysphoria will encounter.

Accordingly, every person is considered and supported according to the best medical, moral and psychological practice available. No two cases are alike, and no two students should be treated in the same way.

To describe CET's pastoral care policy as, "... *an abuse of power and bullying and harassment*," (Submission p. 7) is to portray gross and willful ignorance of the quality and extent of the suite of pastoral care support provided by CET staff for all our students and families.

The detailed Vatican instruction on the Christian response to Gender Dysphoria: *Male and Female He Created Them*, was issued in 2019 under the authority of Pope Francis. This document laid out in great detail, the Church's underlying understanding and care for people with gender dysphoria - particularly highlighting the innate dignity of every human person - made in the image of God. It also explored the various responses Catholic systems can provide in the care of these individuals. CET has faithfully and constantly followed and implemented all the advice and directives this important pastoral document contains.

## F. Vague allegations against CET senior management

CCTI's submission contains unsubstantiated allegations against individuals in CET. None of these are supported by even a shred of evidence. It is appalling that CCTI's submission is, on the face of it, designed to damage the professional reputation and indeed the livelihoods of workers within CET.

## Information regarding Concerned Catholics Tasmania

CCTI has no official or legal status under the Archdiocese of Hobart. They do not represent Catholics of Tasmania.

They operate as religious activists who explicitly seek to reform or change the teachings of the Catholic Church. According to their constitution, their basic objective and purpose is to "*develop new models of church*". Their website, and publicly available letters and publications reveal that they also oppose a number of the Church's specific moral doctrines.

In pursuing these activist objectives, however, CCTI's stance on many issues appears to be in opposition to current Vatican Instructions and directives, including those endorsed and signed by Pope Francis. They appear to be a very small group of disaffected religious activists who appear to believe that the Catholic Church has not changed to meet their personal expectations.

CCTI and its leadership are openly hostile to CET. Their submissions and activism have shown complete disregard to the two most recent Vatican instructions that directly impinge on the specific issues they have sought to prosecute via this Inquiry, namely (i) responding to gender dysphoria and (ii) religious education and employment practices and a range of policies that nurture a genuine Catholic Educational Identity.

The most recent Vatican instructions governing all the requirements needed for authentic Catholic Educational Identity have been reiterated explicitly in the recent directive: *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* published by the Vatican in 2022 and signed by Pope Francis.

Also, the Vatican instruction on Gender Dysphoria: *Male and Female He Created them*, was issued in 2019 under the authority of Pope Francis. These two documents, highly relevant to Catholic education the world over, are the most pivotal publications to come out of the Vatican on educational matters in the past ten years.

It is telling that CCTI, in their submissions to the State Inquiry and in all their numerous letters to State and Federal educational regulators and to the media, have never referred to these two pivotal documents. Yet CET has always faithfully followed all the directives these instructions contain while discharging its legal obligations.

All of CCTI's allegations and complaints about the mission, direction, philosophy and day-to-day operations of CET appear to completely ignore the requirements of these two Vatican documents listed above.

In making so many extraordinary, unsubstantiated allegations against CET in their recent submission to the State Inquiry, CCTI appear to be intent on subverting the terms of reference of the Inquiry itself. Further, this disregard for the explicit purposes of the State Inquiry works against the legitimate intentions of the Parliament to identify actual cases of bullying and discrimination. It appears that CCTI's religious activism is an attempt to manipulate the State Inquiry for no more than political point scoring.

CCTI have been unremitting in their unfounded criticisms of senior leadership, even though CET has recently received international recognition as a national leader in the Science of Reading and the Science of Learning, and for its creative teacher cadet program, CET is already well on the way to providing educational improvement for our students against national benchmarks.

## Conclusion

The Inquiry will be aware that virtually all 38 Tasmanian Catholic Schools has made their own independent submissions to the Inquiry.

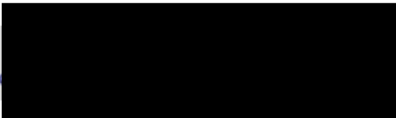
It is evident from these submissions that Catholic Principals, parents and senior Catholic Educational Leaders are justifiably proud of their record of zero tolerance for bullying or unlawful discrimination. This is, in no small part, due to the Christian ethic taught in all our

Catholic schools. We hold that all persons are created equal in the Image of God and deserve respect for their innate dignity. Accordingly, Catholic schools cannot condone or accept unlawful discrimination. It is highly regrettable that CCTI persist with making public and baseless attacks on the persons, reputations and character of CET's senior leadership.

CCTI's unsubstantiated allegations are overtly designed to damage the good names and professional reputation of all those who work tirelessly within CET to educate 17,000 Tasmanian children of all faiths, backgrounds and abilities. Not a shred of factual evidence has ever been advanced to support these vile accusations.

As an education provider, CET complies with every requirement of Federal and Tasmanian law, as well as all directions from the Vatican on ecclesiastical matters.

Our school leaders are equally proud of the way that every Catholic school is open to enrolling anyone who seeks a genuine Catholic education, regardless of whether they can pay for it or not.



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4 October 2024