

12 November 2010



TASMANIAN  
**CATHOLIC**  
education office

The Secretary  
Select Committee on Child Protection  
Parliament House  
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Mr Donnelly

RE: TASMANIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE'S (TCEO) SUBMISSION TO  
THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILD PROTECTION

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the TCEO's response to the Select Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of Tasmania's child protection systems.

I have briefly commented below as appropriate according to the Terms of Reference as provided.

- (a) *Early identification, intervention and prevention strategies currently in place within all relevant agencies including the Department of Health and Human Services .....*

We were surprised to learn that Child Protection Services is an avenue for 'early intervention' and 'prevention' (or have we misinterpreted the Terms of Reference text?). Given the current workloads of child protection workers, we understood that they would rely upon other services and the community for early intervention and prevention. Child Protection Services could, however, enhance outcomes for children at risk by linking their clients up with these programs.

- (b) *Mechanisms currently in place, and where improvements can be made to enhance the integration between all relevant agencies .....*

Communication between Child Protection Services and outside services needs to be strengthened to allow greater information sharing about children at risk. Because of perceived significant caseload pressures, it's hard to see how child protection workers would have the capacity to network with outside services with a view to benefitting their client group. This works against the provision of best practice care and service delivery.

- (c) *Review the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997, including all proposed amendments to the Act .....*

It would be better for all were the review and inquiry to be part of a regular, planned, proactive action for the purposes of protecting children, rather than a reactive one.

- (d) *Other long term contributors to child abuse and neglect, such as poverty, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health issues .....*

Though all other long term contributors to child abuse and neglect are issues of some significance, the issue that is drawing most concern for many is that of mental health.

- (e) *The appropriateness, and need for, any further enquiry including but not limited to a Commission of Inquiry .....*

Clearly, this would be contingent on the outcomes of this Select Committee's inquiry and whether or not such outcomes were to lead to action which ultimately delivers greater protection for children in Tasmania. Were this not to be the case, then a Commission of Inquiry may well be the best path to take to achieve desired outcomes.

- (f) *Other matters incidental thereto.*

One of the concerns that our school system has is the emerging trend for child protection workers to turn responsibility for managing reasonably low level child abuse and neglect cases back to schools who more often than not have neither the expertise nor the resources available to them that are available to Department of Education schools. We work from a resource base far less than the Government school system.

This comment should not be misinterpreted as a criticism of child protection workers who do an excellent job in a most demanding and stressful work environment, a work environment where there is obviously too much work and too few people on the ground to manage the workload.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to submit some thoughts, brief though they may be, on the adequacy of current child protection systems as perceived by the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Allan Clark', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Allan Clark  
DIRECTOR: HUMAN & EXECUTIVE SERVICES