



**Catholic School Parents Australia**  
Submission  
**National Review of Teacher**  
**Registration**

7 May 2018

## Introduction

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback as part of the National Review of Teacher Registration. CSPA has been appreciative of the opportunities to provide more broad feedback within the parameters of the national consultation. For example, the CSPA Deputy Chair and CSPA Executive Officer contributed through the Brisbane consultation and various CSPA members have provided feedback through these consultations around Australia as participants of their state Catholic parent bodies.

This submission from Catholic School Parents Australia is focussed on Parent Engagement and the benefits for pre-service teachers and teachers to undertake professional training around Parent Engagement. It is timely that in *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018) Parent Engagement is a key recommendation as Recommendation 2 states: `

*Develop and disseminate evidence-based tools and resources to assist early childhood education providers, primary, and secondary schools to implement best practice approaches to supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's learning throughout their education.*

Under the header of *What it means*, in relation to the above recommendation the report states,

*Early childhood education services and schools need assistance (information and tools) to help parents support their children to learn.*

CSPA suggests that the skilling of teachers around Parent Engagement is a foundational requirement if schools are to be able to embrace and implement this recommendation. Teaching staff and school leadership need to be aware of the research on Parent Engagement and be skilled in strategies to promote and implement partnership with parents around their children's learning.

In this submission, CSPA will provide recommendations for pre-service teachers to undertake professional learning on Parent Engagement - professional learning which includes the current research and knowledge on Parent Engagement and the fundamental strategies required to promote and effect the better engagement of parents in their children's learning. This seems fundamental if we wish to see change in how pre-service teachers are prepared for working alongside parents in the profession. In turn, CSPA suggests that professional learning around Parent Engagement should become compulsory for current teachers and school leadership.

## Parent engagement in Learning

Over five decades of research studies link the various roles parents play in a child's education 'with indicators of student achievement including student grades, achievement in test scores, lower drop-out rates, students' sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning, and student's beliefs about the importance of education'. Regardless of this extensive research evidence and the promise it holds for student learning outcomes, there continues to be only 'random acts of parent engagement' (Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenburg; 2010) occurring in schools around the globe.

Therefore, it is appropriate that Parent Engagement in Learning (PEiL) must be seen as one of the key pillars of the Australian Government's schools education policy. Equally appropriate is that support for this pillar is shared by all in the Australian community.

The work of international researchers in education such as Harris et.al (2009), Mapp (2013), Pushor (2017), and Epstein (1996) demonstrate evidence based practice in how parent engagement in learning has and continues to strengthen education and life opportunities for students. In our Australian context, the work of the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, ACER, ACEL and ARACY show similar outcomes and perspectives.

It is the view of Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) that there needs to be a shift in culture and emphasis around promoting Parent Engagement such that the responsibility for the effectiveness and outcomes of Parent Engagement in learning is shared in partnership between school principals, other school leaders, teachers and parents. One must not underestimate the challenges around this as many teachers are somewhat hesitant to interact with parents. A study by Doecke et. al. (2008) for example, found that for 82% of teachers surveyed their greatest professional anxiety was around their work and relationships with parents. CSPA suggests that more formal preparation in Parent Engagement as a requirement in pre-service teacher programs would assist significantly in removing this anxiety for many teachers.

The submission to the National Review of Teacher Registration by Catholic School Parents Victoria (CSPV) (April, 2018) provides rich discussion around Parent Engagement in Learning. A key differentiation is made between Parent Involvement and Parent Engagement. Whilst Parent Involvement is usually driven by an agenda set by the school as to how parents might participate, Parent Engagement in Learning

*“is about developing a culture and environment of supportive learning both at school, ...in the home and throughout the community – a collaborative partnership, bridging the gap between learning environments and recognising the importance and value of all learning experiences for a child's growth and development throughout their formal schooling and into adulthood” (CSPV submission, p. 6)*

Further, the CSPV submission (p. 6) discusses:

- Promoting, supporting and encouraging learning, to connect learning at school by enhancing learning opportunities in the home and in the community;
- Exploring and identifying ways that schools work in partnership with families; and
- School teachers and leaders as the enablers of parent engagement when they provide the opportunity to build connection, confidence, cognition and capacity (Mapp, 2013).

As a precursor to discussing AITSL's Teacher Standards as part of National Registration, CSPA notes that much is happening in the public space about the learning outcomes of schooling for young Australians and the role that Parent Engagement for Learning could play in improving these outcomes. It is suggested that implications can be drawn from each of these discussion points below to inform a review of the national teacher standards. These include:

- In an address to Directors of Catholic Education (March 2016), Minister Birmingham pointed to the potential for better tapping the benefits to children's learning outcomes

through more effective Parent Engagement and further highlighted the favourable cost benefits of this approach.

- In the recently released *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018), Finding 3 states:

*There is strong and developing evidence of the benefit of parent engagement on children's learning. This will be further enhanced through the work currently underway to develop an evidence-informed definition of parent engagement, which will allow for a core set of agreed measures aligned to the definition to be established and used to drive improvements in policies and practice.*

- CSPA's DET funded national, P-12, cross-sector project *Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools - Growing relationships to enhance student learning - from first connections and beyond* which is nearing completion. CSPA have formally partnered with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and Professor Sue Saltmarsh (University of Southern Queensland) (Saltmarsh et.al. (2014); Barr and Saltmarsh (2014)) for this project. Findings from this investigative work around Parent Engagement have informed by a national survey of principals, interviews with principals and interviews with focus groups of parents. Surveys and interviews have involved primary and secondary principals from Catholic, Independent and Government schools nationwide and focus groups of parents from all sectors of schooling. Parent Engagement Tool Kits which will result from this work will be completed by December 2018. These Tool Kits will outline strategies for the promotion and implementation of Parent Engagement to leverage improved student learning outcomes.
- Working in partnership with families and communities is central to the broader contexts of Government, Catholic and Independent schools. Much has been written, for example Emerson et al (2012); Epstein & Sheldon (2006) around the student learning and development benefits when family, school and community play collaborative, complementary and supportive roles.
- As part of a process of accountable stewardship, all schools are required to undertake a well-documented process of on-going school improvement. Strategically, Parent Engagement is a school improvement focus area in relation to the professional roles of principals and teachers around maximising the learning outcomes for students. The National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) (ACER, 2012) makes reference in four of the nine domains as to how parents should be engaged towards improving student learning outcomes. For reference, relevant extracts, which include 'parents' from these NSIT domains, are listed below.

#### **Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda**

- *Explicit targets for improvement in student achievement levels have been set and communicated to parents, staff and the wider school community (p. 2).*

### **Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning**

- *Interactions between staff, students, parents and families are caring, polite and inclusive;*
- *The school views parents and families as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning;*
- *All students and staff have an obvious sense of belonging, all parents are welcomed and all staff, students and parents speak highly of the school (p. 6).*

### **Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning**

- *Teachers consult with parents and with students themselves to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including through the development of individual learning plans;*
- *Communication with parents and families provides information about where students are in their learning, what progress they have made over time, and what they might do to support their children's further learning (p. 14).*

### **Domain 9: School-community partnerships**

- *The school builds partnerships with parents, families, local businesses and community organisations (including allied health, family support, counselling and rehabilitation services) to improve opportunities and outcomes for students.*

Parent Engagement is a foundational cornerstone to schools undertaking on-going improvement as recommended within the NSIT, which was generated after consultation with twenty international researchers of education. This is a further example of how Parent Engagement will assist in leveraging better student learning outcomes.

Given these realities as outlined above, Catholic School Parents Australia would now like to emphasise and reference Parent Engagement as a key focus in the registration of teachers in the profession to:

- improve the standard and quality of teaching across all schools;
- improve the transition of initial teacher education students into the profession;
- include Parent Engagement in learning as a compulsory standard for teacher registration; and
- highlight the need for explicit referencing and understanding of Parent Engagement in learning as a key strategy to improve student learning outcomes and how and why Parent Engagement should be integrated within each of the AITSL Teacher Standards.

## **Feedback on the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL)**

The *Students First* agenda sets a context of national expectation around Parent Engagement with schools, and through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers CSPA sees an opportunity for Parent Engagement in Learning to be better integrated into each of the teacher standards. It is suggested that Parent Engagement should be integral to best practice as part of teaching rather than a stand-alone standard or add-on and CSPA will now attempt to explain how such integration could occur. Each of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* will now be discussed.

It is noted that CSPA endorses the thorough discussion around each standard as set out in the submission by Catholic School Parents Victoria (CSPV) to the National Review of Teacher Registration and CSPA has drawn from this submission as referenced.

When speaking of *Parents*, CSPA takes parents to include the multiple definitions of parents including natural and adoptive/foster parents, and guardians/care givers.

## **Standard 1: Know students and how they learn.**

Of the six Focus Areas within this standard, *Parents* are mentioned once as set out below.

### **1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

- Graduate Teachers
- Proficient Teachers
- Highly Accomplished Teachers
- Lead Teachers - *Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and **parents**/carers.*

There has been much research around the benefit of Parents Knowledge (e.g. Pushor, 2013) to inform the education of children at school. It would seem beneficial therefore for all teachers to be knowing of strategies of contextualised effective practice, especially in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Further, the focus for teachers to become knowledgeable of other cultures not their own, and to become aware of the Parent Knowledge of every child in their care, would seem fundamental for partnering with parents in the learning journey of their children. It is suggested that this could be addressed if Graduate Teachers, Proficient Teachers and Highly Accomplished Teachers had an expectation similar to that of Lead Teachers for #1.4, and that there be due consideration of Parent Engagement to inform expectations within all Focus Areas in this Standard – *Know students and how they learn.*

CSPA endorses CSPV comment that “*all stages in the standards should set the expectation that all teachers at every career stage should be focussed on developing qualities and standards related to parent engagement in learning, including developing positive relationships with families*”. Further, CSPA agrees that “*initial teacher, principal leadership programs and teacher registration include explicit training and professional development in the area of family-school-community partnerships with a specific focus on parent-teacher relationships and parent engagement in learning to build capacity of leaders and teachers as enablers of engagement and to improve the teaching profession*” (CSPV submission, p. 8).

## **Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it**

While there is no reference to *Parents* in relation to the six Focus Areas within this standard, CSPA believes that Parent Engagement could be intrinsically woven into this standard through a collaborative approach to understanding content, and through the engagement of parents in the development and even in the delivery of content.

The Case Studies discussed in the CSPV submission illustrate how this could be played out and with the implied reality that Parent Engagement be interweaved into the fabric of many Focus Areas within Standard 2.

### **Standard 3: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning**

Within this standard, *Parents* are mentioned as set out below.

#### **3.6 Evaluate and improve teaching programs:**

- Graduate Teachers
- Proficient Teachers
- Highly Accomplished Teachers
- Lead Teachers - Conduct regular reviews of teaching and learning programs using multiple sources of evidence including: student assessment data, curriculum documents, teaching practices and feedback from *parents/carers*, students and colleagues.

It is important for all teachers, beginning with pre-service teachers, that they build their understanding and implementation of Parent Engagement in Learning (PEiL) across the profession. Leaders are the key drivers of the culture of Parent Engagement and need the skills to lead this work and their proficiency needs to be developed over time to become a leader in the cultural development and implementation of PEiL across a whole school - staff and families.

#### **3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process:**

- Graduate Teachers - Describe a broad range of strategies for involving *parents/carers* in the educative process.
- Proficient Teachers - Plan for appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for *parents/carers* to be involved in their children's learning.
- Highly Accomplished Teachers - Work with colleagues to provide appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for *parents/carers* to be involved in their children's learning.
- Lead Teachers - Initiate contextually relevant processes to establish programs that involve *parents/carers* in the education of their children and broader school priorities and activities.

It is noted that while *Parents* are mentioned in all Teacher categories of #3.7, as would be expected within this Focus Area, it is proposed that the descriptor for Proficient Teachers would seem relevant to Graduate Teachers as well; and if the verb used to describe this process was '*engage*' not '*involve*'. It is assumed that the descriptor for Proficient is also implied for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers.

In reflecting further around how Parent Engagement might become more prominent in the Focus Areas within this standard, it is suggested that the research of Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity Framework (2013) could be drawn upon to investigate how each of the following professional actions of teachers could be linked to and described within each stage of the profession:

- Confidence in building relationships with parents;

- Confidence in communicating with parents;
- Connection of learning at home with learning at school;
- Connection with families and their ‘unifying family stories’;
- Cognition and understanding the difference between involvement and engagement;
- Cognition of their role as enablers of parent engagement in learning;
- Cognition of the important role of parents in engaging with their child’s learning;
- Capability as an enabler of engagement in learning – developing strategies alongside parents; and
- Capability in embracing parents as partners in learning and co-designing projects together.

An exploration of hierarchical expectations within the above professional actions across all stages of teaching will give some structure to the professional learning required within this standard. In turn, this could form part of the expectation around the on-going registration of teachers.

#### **Standard 4: Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments**

While there is no reference to Parents in relation to the five Focus Areas within Standard 4, it would seem that a teacher’s acquisition of Parent Knowledge about each child and generally working together in partnership with parents are essential for creating safe environments and also for creating ‘opportune conditions’ for student learning at school and in the home. The engagement with parents for the Focus Areas of 4.3 *Manage challenging behaviour*, and 4.5 *Use ICT safely, responsibly and ethically*, would seem to be a fundamental expectation for all teachers.

#### **Standard 5 – Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning.**

Parents are referred to as set out below in one of the five Focus Areas of Standard 5.

##### **5.5 Report on student achievement**

- Graduate Teachers - Demonstrate understanding of a range of strategies for reporting to students and parents/carers and the purpose of keeping accurate and reliable records of student achievement.
- Proficient Teachers - Report clearly, accurately and respectfully to students and parents/carers about student achievement, making use of accurate and reliable records.
- Highly Accomplished Teachers - Work with colleagues to construct accurate, informative and timely reports to students and parents/carers about student learning and achievement.
- Lead Teachers - Evaluate and revise reporting and accountability mechanisms in the school to meet the needs of students, parents/carers and colleagues.

While it is seen as appropriate that each of the categories of Teacher have expectations in relation to Parents, it is suggested that for emphasis, the expectation for Proficient Teachers of *Report clearly*,



*accurately and respectfully to students and **parents**/carers about student achievement, making use of accurate and reliable records* should be at least part of the expectation for Graduate Teachers as well. It is assumed that this expectation is implied for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, and if not, it is recommended that it is.

Standard 5 is one of the most important standards as the effectiveness of communication with parents requires the building of trusting relationships which contribute to having constructive conversations with parents about their child's progress and learning – setting goals together, providing parents with continuous knowledge of what their child is currently learning, understanding where their child is heading and how to support their learning at home. This Standard is about the teacher and the parent being on the same page and supporting the child. It is not about meeting the needs of parents, it's about meeting the needs of the child and working together to achieve this.

### **Standard 6: Engage in professional learning**

While there is no mention of Parents in Standard 6, CSPA recommends that Parent Engagement must become a core component of study in all pre-service teacher education programs. If schools are to genuinely partner with parents to improve the learning outcomes of their children, teachers need to be skilled around both understanding the impact of engaging parents through this partnership and utilising the strategies to achieve this. Key work needs to be also undertaken to develop the knowledge and skills of parents in relation to parent engagement.

CSPA suggests that compulsory professional learning around Parent Engagement needs to become a vital component if not a mandated component of Professional Learning Plans for all teachers. CSPA also suggests that as Parent Engagement becomes more prevalent, outcomes will be not only linked positively with student learning, but also the potential for significant improvement to the wellbeing of teachers.

### **Standard 7 – Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community**

Parents are mentioned in Standard 7 as set out below.

#### **7.3 Engage with the parents/carers**

- Graduate Teachers - Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers.
- Proficient Teachers - Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/carers regarding their children's learning and wellbeing.
- Highly Accomplished Teachers - Demonstrate responsiveness in all communications with parents/carers about their children's learning and wellbeing.
- Lead Teachers - Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.

CSPA recommends that the expectation that Lead Teachers will *Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school* should be part of the expectation for all Teachers.

A key question which emerges around Standard 7 is how should the changing landscape of Parent Engagement, as outlined in this submission, impact the requirements of teacher registration in Australia? What are the *professional ethics and responsibilities* (#7.1) around engaging parents in student learning? More broadly, what does “*engaging professionally with parents*” really mean and what are the minimalist expectations of Parent Engagement with which Teachers must comply? As Australia works towards raising the status of the teaching profession, a key component must be around what are the reasonable expectations for all teachers in relation to engaging parents around their children's learning.

## Conclusion

Catholic School Parents Australia recommends that the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* be revised to include elements of Parent Engagement in Learning in each of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and that, as required, descriptors be generated for all teacher career stages. CSPA also recommends that Parent Engagement in Learning becomes a compulsory component of every pre-service teacher training program and also a component of the Professional Learning Plans for teaching staff and leadership in all schools.

It is timely that in *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018) Parent Engagement is a key recommendation towards improving the learning outcomes of students. For this to occur however, Parent Engagement must become a compulsory component in the training of teachers and part of the professional learning plans for teachers and senior and middle leadership in schools.

CSPA believes that Parent Engagement Tool Kits which will result from CSPA's DET funded national, P-12, cross-sectoral project *Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools - Growing relationships to enhance student learning - from first connections and beyond* will ably inform this agenda. These Tool Kits, which will be completed by December 2018, will outline strategies for principals, teachers and parents around the promotion and implementation of Parent Engagement towards leveraging improved learning outcomes for all students.

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