Inquiry into the Potential for Developing Opportunities for Schools to Become a Focus for Promoting Healthy Community Living

Submission from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne

In principle agreement is given by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne to the notion of schools as sites for the promotion of healthy community living and further that all schools should be supported in their endeavours and given every opportunity to explore and implement initiatives which enhance and build their capacities in this regard. This is consistent with both Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEOM) policies and initiatives in these areas in particular the Schools as Core Social Centres project.

Terms of Reference

A. existing activities carried out by schools to promote holistic healthy living within their school communities involving healthy eating, active lifestyles, sun smart awareness and appreciation of the effects of harmful substances;

State Projects/Initiatives

- School Focused Youth Service
- Youth Suicide Prevention
- Asthma Friendly Schools
- SunSmart
- Kids Go for Your Life
- Healthy canteens *
- A whole school approach to drug education and harm minimisation *
- Secondary school nurses
- School Aids day *
- Healthy Schools Network
- The walking school bus *
- Mental health initiatives
- Festival for Healthy Living *
- Community garden/s *

* Initiatives which involve the wider community

CECV/CEOM

- Credentialed Sponsorship Program University of Melbourne & Australian Catholic University
- Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools CEOM Policy 2.26 *
- SEL in Catholic School Communities: guidelines for a sustainable whole school approach to social emotional learning (SEL) *

B. successful programs/initiatives which have been instituted in schools in other states or internationally:

- The partnership between the CEOM and VicHealth in the implementation of the Schools as Core Social Centres initiative was the recipient of the VicHealth Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Promotion, Mental Health and Wellbeing 2005. It also resulted in two key international partnerships/collaborations with:
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- Centre for Relational Learning Santa Fe New Mexico
- The development of the CEOM SEL Strategy including the document SEL in Catholic School Communities: guidelines for a sustainable whole school approach to social emotional learning (SEL) has also resulted in collaboration with the Edith Cowan University Western
C. identify whether it is appropriate for the State to encourage schools to extend health programs to be directed at the broader school community and, if so, what the most effective and efficient approaches are;

The Vision of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne clearly identifies that Catholic schools have a key role in promoting healthy living in the broader community.

Key documents that inform the work of the CEOM indicate that students can only reach their full potential when they are healthy and safe; therefore it is imperative that schools create a positive culture to engage and support students in their learning. Initiatives that promote healthy community living are fundamental to student wellbeing.

Evidence shows that when young people are connected to school and the broader community they are more resilient when faced with problems and stress. Partnerships between schools and community based service providers involve acceptance of shared responsibility for addressing common areas of concern and a collaborative approach to developing strategies to reach goals. (Effective Schools are Engaging Schools DEECD 2009 p.12)

To improve the wellbeing of all students in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne the following initiatives and strategies have been introduced:

1. CEOM Student Wellbeing Unit Strategy Plan 2006-2010

Student Wellbeing Coordinators Strategy.
In the 255 Catholic primary schools a Student Wellbeing Coordinator has been appointed to work as part of the leadership team to contribute to positive learning outcomes and the health and wellbeing of staff, students and the wider community. The coordinators are supported by CEOM through professional learning activities and cluster meetings throughout the year. Student Wellbeing Coordinators are sponsored by Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd. to complete Credentialed training courses offered by one of the following :-
- University of Melbourne Masters of Education (Student Wellbeing)
- ACU Postgraduate Certificate (Wellbeing in Inclusive Schooling)

Other strategies and initiatives include:-
- Student Wellbeing Action Partnership(SWAP) website with University of Melbourne
- Schools As Core Social Centres (CEOM/VicHealth partnership)
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategy
- Professional Learning related to Child Protection, bullying & Cyberbullying
- Creating Culturally Respectful Primary schools through Values Education
- Transition & Engagement
- Community Arts
- Student Wellbeing Drama Festival

The most effective way to encourage Catholic schools to promote healthy living is to encourage them to integrate healthy living policies and programs into their existing initiatives through a strategic approach to the implementation of a whole school approach to Student Wellbeing.
The CEOM Student Wellbeing Strategy Plan 2006-2010 Evaluation Report (2009) provides early evidence that the focus on wellbeing is having a positive effect on school culture and student engagement and motivation. This feedback is coming from principals and Student Wellbeing Coordinators.

D. opportunities for linking with community leaders and forming partnerships with business and community organisations;

- The Student Wellbeing Unit of the CEOM currently partners with the following international, national and state government and non-government organisations and agencies:
  - VicHealth
  - DEECD
  - DHS
  - Centacare
  - Ardoch
  - Cancer Council
  - Royal Children's Hospital
  - Centre for Adolescent Health
  - Australian Youth Research Centre
  - University of Melbourne
  - Edith Cowan University
  - Australian Catholic University National
  - Mackillop Family Services
  - School Focused Youth Service
  - Centre for Excellence in Eating Disorders
  - Festival for Healthy Living
  - Local Government Areas (LGA’s)
  - Welfare Rights Unit
  - Victorian Independent Education Union
  - Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services
  - Allanah & Madeleine Foundation

E. existing broader health promotion policies and activities:

- The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) adheres to and is accountable for the implementation of a wide range of National and State government policies and initiatives that promote safe and supportive school communities including healthy living and which are implemented at the school level.

These include:

**National Projects**
- National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) *
- National Schools Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) *
- Values Education
- Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP) (Transition & Engagement) *
- MindMatters
- KidsMatter

F. how school-based activities could relate and coordinate with these to maximise impact and efficiency

The CEOM Student Wellbeing Strategy Plan 2006-2010 is evidence-based and shows that connectedness to school is a key protective factor for young people (Fuller, 1998). It also draws on research from the WHO (1996), Malecki and Elliot
(2002) and Leonard et al., (2004) that supports the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and interpersonal development, healthy living and relationships and mental health promotion into the curriculum teaching and learning of all schools. The CEOM recognised that the rolling out of a five year strategy requires systemic coordination in addition to liaison and support at the school level. The allocation of resources and responsibilities to support the strategy along with collaborative work between schools, the CEOM and universities in the planning, development and implementation has been central to their strategic nature of this work.

The SW strategy is aimed at maximising strategic support to Catholic schools to develop positive classroom climates within safe and effective learning environments supported by strong and inclusive relationships at all levels of the school community. This includes students, teachers, parents and the broader community. The critical nature of these elements has been recognised in the School Improvement Framework (SIF) lenses of Student Wellbeing and School Community. Schools, through their active participation in the SIF School Review Process, are required to develop strategic Annual Action Plans in these two key areas. Through this process the goal is to promote healthy living communities which contribute to young people in Catholic schools experiencing long term health and wellbeing.