14 March 2014

Prof Ken Wiltshire & Dr Kevin Donnelly
Review of the Australian Curriculum
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Sirs

The Australian Parents Council is the national organisation that represents parents of students attending Catholic and independent schools.

In representing parents of school students we have a deep interest in the development of the Australian Curriculum by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and its implementation across the states and territories. ACARA has considered the Australian Parents Council to be a key stakeholder during the development process and we have consequently been invited to participate in regular briefings and to provide feedback to ACARA on progress as it has been made.

We note that ACARA was established and continues to function as an instrument of the Australian Government and state and territory ministers for education through the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). It therefore operates with a high level of oversight by a diverse range of education jurisdictions.

In addition, the services of a wide range of curriculum experts from across the curriculum spectrum was engaged by ACARA in drafting and shaping the curriculum materials. We further note the broad national public consultation that ACARA initiated in respect of the materials as they were developed, particularly at the draft shape papers and the draft curriculum stage.

While in the early days the understanding of ACARA about engaging in effective consultation processes and its consequent capacity to do so appeared to be somewhat lacking, the Australian Parents Council has noted that ACARA has taken significant steps to improve in those areas and has apparently been diligent in responding to the feedback that was provided by many organisations and individuals. We have therefore been satisfied with improvements in the level of consultation and responses to feedback that ACARA has demonstrated in recent years.

Like some other organisations the Australian Parents Council was critical of the early attempts that ACARA made to address the needs of students with disabilities in the Australian Curriculum. However, through our representation on the Students with Disability Advisory Group that was established by ACARA we have noted that things have markedly improved in this area, particularly across the past year or so.
We fully support the seven general capabilities that are designed to assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. From APC’s perspective these are a most important element of the Australian Curriculum in relation to what is most important to families.

Further, at this point in time we consider the cross-curriculum priorities comprising

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia and
- Sustainability

to be reasonably appropriate, timely and worthwhile pursuing into the future.

**Crowded curriculum**

We have noted recent media commentary surrounding the current review that points to the curriculum being over crowded. This is an issue that has been spoken about for many years and in fact predates the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

There may be a need to reduce the amount of content in the Australian Curriculum but we will leave it to others to comment on how that might be achieved should it be deemed an appropriate step to take.

However, there is a strong imperative for governments and policy makers to broaden their thinking to give greater consideration to the role that parents can play in taking some of the pressure off teachers and schools. This will require serious efforts to connect learning at home and school and to resource and support parents as the first and continuing educators of their children.

Research has shown that while parents may lack knowledge and understanding about the crucial role they can play in their children’s education and in support of their children’s schools, they do not lack good will. Most parents want to see their children do well at school and in life. When parents understand they have a role to play, that what they do will make a difference and are provided with encouragement and support most will engage happily and effectively.

The somewhat blinkered approach that sees the vast bulk of policy, resources and effort aimed at improving schooling outcomes poured into schools ignores the engagement of parents with their children’s education which can take place from very early in a child’s life and continue every day at home, in the car, at sporting venues and elsewhere.

School leaders and teachers must make way for approaches that acknowledge and bring parents back to their role as the primary educators of their children. Parents will then be able to equip their children for the lifetime journey of learning in ways that take pressure off teachers and school leaders to try and fill the gaps in children’s preparedness for and engagement in learning.

**In conclusion**

The development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum has been and will continue to be a complex and demanding undertaking. There is a range of competing interests and ideologies that must be negotiated for a successful outcome to be achieved.

The Australian Parents Council believes that ACARA has successfully negotiated those challenges to this point in time and, while there will always be room for improvement, we will have an Australian Curriculum that is balanced and offers students an appropriate degree of choice and diversity.

With continued direction and oversight by SCSEEC and continuing endeavours on the part of ACARA to sustain and improve its collaborative endeavours should ensure that the ongoing monitoring,
evaluation and review of curriculum content by ACARA will ensure independence, rigour and balance in the Australian Curriculum.

However, curriculum and pedagogy alone are not enough to build life long learning in our children. The sooner we develop culture and environments in schooling that value and support partnerships between parents and teachers, schools and homes, the faster we will have improved student engagement and learning outcomes for young people across the board.

We urge you to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the current review to point your audience to the potential of parent engagement policies and well resourced parent engagement strategies to ease some of the pressure on schools and teachers that impact upon their capacity to deliver a robust Australian Curriculum.

Yours faithfully

IAN DALTON
Executive Director