

in reply please quote: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Dear Ms Stewart

Re: Agency Consultation Draft Education and Training - Victoria Infrastructure Strategy 2030 Review

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Education and Training chapter of the draft Victoria Infrastructure Strategy 2030 under review.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria has considered the documentation provided as part of the agency consultation (May 2023) and provides a response in the attached report (**Attachment 1**)

Our response addresses key areas presenting challenges and opportunities for Catholic Education and makes recommendations in relation to same. The key areas include:

- Level of certainty of provision in securing land for Catholic schools in Greenfield Areas and Urban renewal Areas.
- Cost of land and the increasing cost of construction.
- The timely delivery of non-government schools facilitated by a robust and fair planning approvals process.
- Delivery of Early Learning Centres in conjunction with existing and proposed Catholic Schools.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further, please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Attach: 1
Copy to: [REDACTED]

**Response to Working Draft – Education and
Training Sector – State of Infrastructure
Assessment Infrastructure Victoria, April 2023**

**Opportunities and Challenges Facing
Catholic Education**

1.0 Introduction

Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV) commends Infrastructure Victoria on the review of the Victoria Infrastructure Strategy 2030. CECV is encouraged by the opportunity to provide a submission to this review with a focus on the infrastructure assessment for the Education and Training Sector.

This submission is in response to the workshop and information session held by Infrastructure Victoria in May 2023.

The focus of this submission is to outline the status of Catholic Education infrastructure in Victoria and the challenges and opportunities presented in the delivery of new Catholic schools and early learning centre infrastructure.

Key areas to be addressed include:

- Level of certainty of provision in securing land for Catholic schools in Greenfield Areas and Urban Renewal Areas.
- Cost of land and the increasing cost of construction
- The timely delivery of non-government schools facilitated by a robust and fair planning approvals process.
- Delivery of Early Learning Centres in conjunction with existing and proposed Catholic schools.

This submission also proposes solutions to the issues identified and identifies opportunities to facilitate the delivery of non-government schools and Early Learning Centres.

2.0 Background

Education delivery in the State is a partnership involving government and non-government schools. Non-government schools include the Catholic education sector and the Independent education sector.

Throughout Victoria four main entities are responsible for delivering Catholic Education:

- Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd;
- Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Ltd;
- Catholic Education Sandhurst Ltd; and
- Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Ltd.

In addition, a number of colleges are governed by religious orders or their successor bodies.

The map in **Attachment A** shows the geographical boundaries for the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and the respective Catholic dioceses for the State of Victoria.

Catholic education, as a *not-for-profit* provider of educational services, makes a significant contribution to meeting the existing and future educational needs of Victorians, catering to both Catholic and non-Catholic students.

A clear State Government objective is to provide education choice. Catholic education plays a significant role in delivering this objective.

In Victoria, the Catholic education sector share, based on the 2021 ABS Census, is 20% of all primary school aged students and 23% of all secondary school aged students.

Catholic Education currently has 500 Catholic schools throughout the State of Victoria with the opening of Mary Queen of Heaven in Greenvale this year.

A total of ninety-nine new Catholic schools are proposed throughout the State of Victoria out to full development. Refer to the following table.

Diocese	Total Schools	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11+ Years
Melbourne Archdiocese	64	9	20	35
Ballarat	7	3	4	0
Sale	17	5	5	7

Sandhurst	11	2	2	7
Grand Total	99	19	31	49

3.0 Key Areas

3.1 Land for Catholic schools in Greenfield Areas and Urban Renewal Areas.

Recent experience indicates that the current system of land designation for Catholic schools does not provide adequate certainty of provision.

Sites that are strategically justified for Catholic schools, as part of the Precinct Structure Plans (PSP) process and designated as non-government school on PSPs were sold to other non-government school providers.

By not identifying the relevant lead agency, the current designation approach does not readily identify if the non-government school is intended for the Catholic sector or the Independent sector. An outcome of this approach is that sites strategically justified and identified for Catholic schools are acquired by the independent sector, which results in a lack of provision up to 23% of current market share in greenfield communities.

This approach raises the concern that there is inadequate planning for all non-government schools by the Victorian Planning Authority.

Compulsory acquisition of land for school purposes is not a tool available to the Catholic sector. Catholic Education is dependent on the willingness of a property owner/developer to transact to secure land designated for a Catholic school.

With the uncertainty of provider identified through the current designation approach, developers increasingly opt for an Expression of Interest (EOI) process in selling land identified for a Catholic school. This has resulted in the loss of Catholic school sites in some instances.

In addition, designation does not stop developers pursuing the subdivision of sites intended to accommodate a non-government school for residential subdivision and development.

3.1.1 Possible Solutions

Workable solutions include:

- Include as a requirement of the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) Standard protocol for dealing with Catholic Schools in the PSP process a step to discuss with Council, landowners, and Catholic Education at the planning stage to determine the preparedness of landowners to transact with Catholic Education providers for the purchase of land strategically justified for a non-government school as identified on a PSP.

- Apply the Special Use Zone-Education as the underlying zone for non-government school sites rather than the Residential Zone currently applied to more readily signal that the intended use of the land is for education to meet the future needs of the population.
- This approach is more likely to provide certainty for delivery of education uses in the future as the designation on the planning scheme map of Special Use Zone -Education clearly signals the intended use of the site. A residential zone indicates that the land can be developed for residential purposes as an alternative to education.
- Re-introduce Catholic Education as the Lead Agency in Precinct Structure Plans where the need for Catholic schools has been identified.
- Remove all provider uses, such as Government school, and designate all sites as Education Use and plan for 100% of required education infrastructure in PSP areas.

3.2 Cost of land and the increasing cost of construction

Delivery of new Catholic education infrastructure is compromised by several factors, including: -

- The cost of land;
- Increasing cost of construction;
- Material shortages and shortage of trades; and
- Uncertainty of the solvency of construction firms.

Cost of Land

Sound town planning principles and practice aspire to locate schools in proximity to other community facilities such as parkland, gyms, sport oval, libraries, and similar uses. As a result, precinct structure planning promotes high residential densities in high amenity areas surrounding parkland and within and surrounding activity centres. This has implications for the cost of land in such areas as the value of land is based on the highest and best use principles. The higher the residential density permitted the higher the cost of the land.

Catholic education has, in recent times, opted for sites outside high amenity areas where high-density residential development is encouraged including in an attempt to mitigate the increased cost of land in these locations.

This is not a preferable outcome, given that students are disadvantaged by not being in proximity to activity centres, transport nodes, open space, and other community facilities. Students and school communities benefit from being near to activity centres and major transport nodes that provide better public transport access.

Increasingly, it is difficult to compete with residential developers to locate schools in the locations that provide the optimal planning outcome. The market for land is increasingly rejecting education uses in the most optimal locations.

Government intervention or a change in planning policy is required to ensure that best practice is achieved in school delivery and location to accord with best planning practice and outcomes for the community.

Whilst the increasing cost of construction, uncertainty of the solvency of construction, material shortages and shortage of trades represent major risks, they are evident across all sectors of the industry and not limited to the delivery of education.

3.2.1 Possible Solutions

Promote discussion with the VPA and relevant stakeholders on the merit of:

- Excluding areas accommodating schools from designation as high amenity areas and high-density residential areas within PSPs.
- Apply Special Use Zone-Education to proposed non-government school sites as opposed to the Residential Use Zone, which encourages residential development.
- Government sponsorship promoting innovation in building practices and manufacture of alternate building materials and cost-effective methods of construction.

3.3 Delivery of Early Learning Centres in conjunction with existing and proposed Catholic schools

3.3.1 Opportunities

Co-located ELCs on school sites present a range of unique benefits such as education quality, improved integration, streamlined enrolment and one stop drop off/pick-up.

Given the significant number of existing and proposed Catholic Schools, Catholic education can be a significant partner with State government to facilitate delivery of the early years education reform commitments.

Within the Melbourne Archdiocese alone there are 13 existing early learning centres (ELCs) on school sites, with several others currently in planning.

Catholic education is currently working in partnership with the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) to facilitate a rollout of future ELCs. Catholic education has access to a \$250m election commitment for co-located ELCs at non-government school sites in addition to the Building Blocks Grant Program for fully funded three year old kindergarten.

Catholic education has completed an initial ELC assessment for all primary and P-12 schools. 160 schools have now been identified with potential capacity for an ELC and flagged with the VSBA. All future Catholic schools will assess the viability of an ELC on site.

3.3.2 Challenges and Issues

Current Local Government Kindergarten Integrated Services Plans (KISPs) do not reflect the kindergarten reform hours. It is understood that all Local Government

Areas (LGA') will receive funding to model demand against the reform hours that will help inform planning.

VSBA kindergarten demand data uses SA2 level information and has not factored in the kindergarten reform hours. This is a risk and in some cases is not aligning with Council and Catholic education data projections and priorities.

Grants available under the building blocks program will not fully fund projects (currently up to \$2m per room). This could impact the viability of projects moving forward given the current volatility within the construction industry. Grant funding amounts should be reviewed annually.

Infrastructure planning for kindergarten reform should be undertaken using a multi-sector stakeholder approach. If the objective of the State Government is full reform of the kindergarten sector it should implement a strategic infrastructure planning forum to harness the expertise of key sector stakeholders, including CECV, to ensure kindergarten infrastructure is delivered using a coherent and efficiently planned program.

It is not reasonable to expect non-government entities to make multi-million dollar infrastructure decisions without a clear understanding of where and when other kindergarten infrastructure providers, including State Government, are planning to deliver.

Staffing the large number of new (and expanded) kinder facilities once the reforms come into effect will be a major challenge. Recruitment, training, and better conditions for early years educators needs to be a high priority.

3.3.3 Possible Solutions

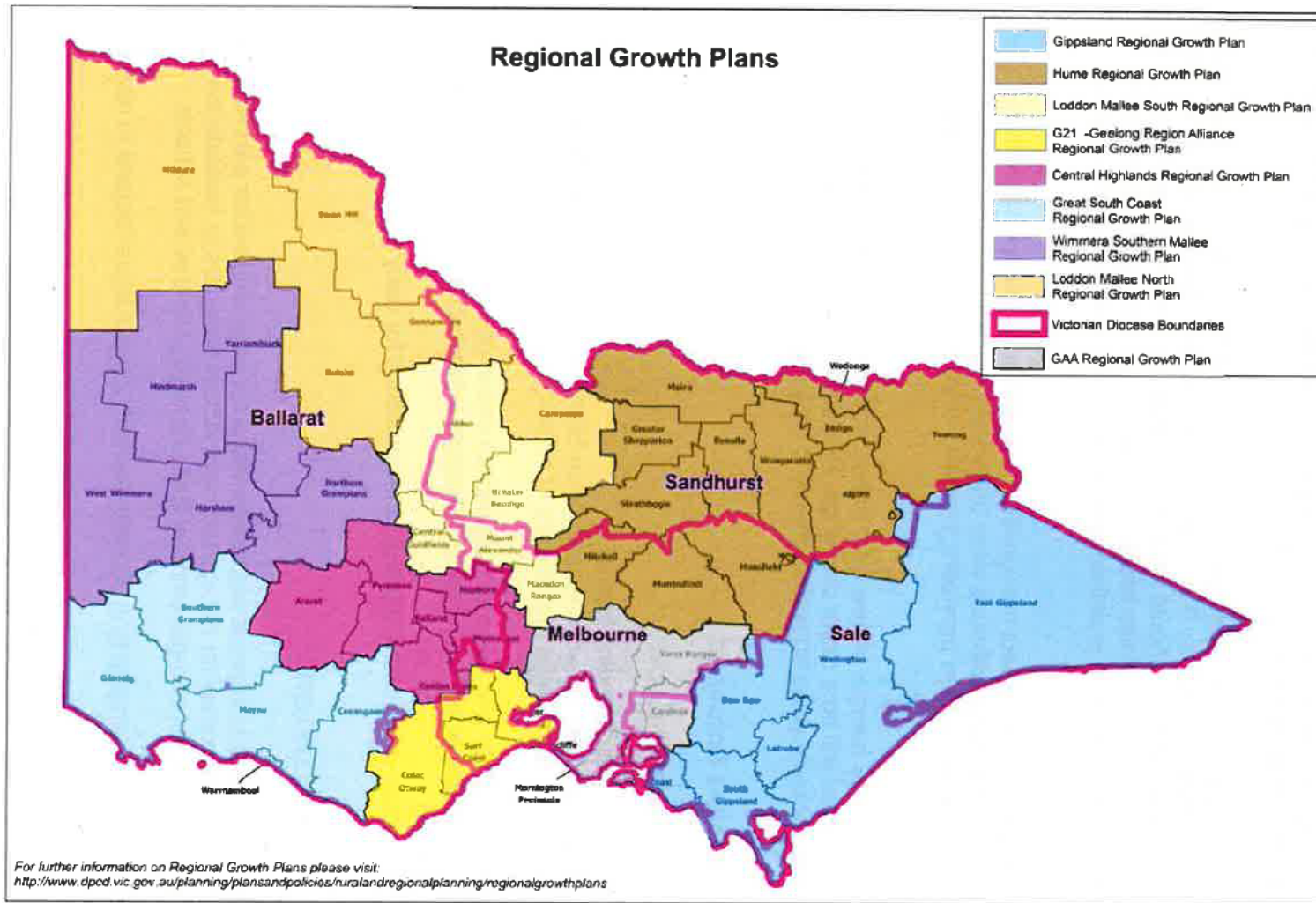
Workable solutions include:

- Review grant funding annually.
- Establish a sector wide Kindergarten Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Working Group to coordinate the delivery of infrastructure to support kindergarten reform.
- Invite CECV and member Catholic education governing authorities to participate in the Kindergarten Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Working Group
- Prioritise recruitment, training, and conditions for early years educators.

4.0 Conclusion

Opportunities exist to improve standards and processes, and sector partnerships, to provide better outcomes for non-government school providers to facilitate the efficient and timely delivery of non-government Early Learning Centres and schools.

We look forward to engaging in consultation with Infrastructure Victoria in relation to this submission.



Regional Growth Plans in the Context of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and Catholic Dioceses of Victoria