

Low-fee Schools (33/94)

(A report from the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation.)

1. On 19 October 1994 Synod resolved -

"This Synod encourages the Archbishop and the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation to develop further the possibility of setting up some new Anglican schools, staffed by teachers who are Christians, in the population growth areas of Sydney, that will be organisationally separate from, financially independent of and interrelated with the outreach programme of the local Anglican Churches. Synod urges the Corporation to institute close advisory links with those Anglicans in each area who are already involved in the management of low-fee paying Christian schools. It asks the Standing Committee to support these endeavours and requests a report on progress at the next session of Synod".

2. The following report is provided in terms of that resolution. It has been prepared by the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation on the basis of feasibility studies and exploratory action taken in 1994 and 1995.

A Rationale for New, Low-fee Anglican Schools

3. In his 1994 Synod address, the Archbishop made the following comments -

"In the 1990's the multicultural character of this nation means that the religious composition of our society comprises more than various denominational expressions of Christian faith. We now experience growing opposition to prayer in State school assemblies, to the birth stories of Christ at Christmas and to the resurrection at Easter. There are groups who would like to promote the view in the schools that all faiths are equally valid and these groups oppose the theory that the Christian faith should be the basis of our education system and our society.

It is appropriate, therefore, that we review our strategy on schooling in relation to the State. I recommend that we should consider two aspects of a new strategy. First, one that continues actively to support the State system seeking to contribute a Christian perspective and enriching it through the provision of a high standard of Special Religious Education. Second, that at the same time we seek to offer some complementary models to the State system, that in addition to our existing schools, we offer some low-fee Anglican Schools that are linked through the local parishes with a strategy of church growth and gospel outreach. I recommend that we explore vigorously this second aspect whilst an opportunity still exists.

The Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation, with my strong encouragement, has been exploring the possibility of setting up as many as 15 new schools over the next decade or so in growth areas of Sydney and with the lowest possible fees. I commend the Corporation's report to you for more detail about this project.

Because of changing Government regulations this may be our last opportunity to develop such a strategy. The movement of our society away from an exclusive commitment to Christian faith and values, makes it imperative that we offer some Christian alternative. Because of the rapid population growth, new schools strategically placed could be a very effective way to reach out to the community."

4. The success of the Christian Community and Parent Controlled Christian School movements over the past decade illustrates most forcefully the demand for Christian education. These schools, now spread across Australia and exceeding Anglican schools in number, demonstrate that it is possible to provide Christian education in areas where the parents do not possess the degree of affluence usually associated with non-government schools.

5. In recent years there has been stability of government funding for non-government schools, though persuasive justification is required if new schools are to be granted funding and all new schools must be in "growth" areas of the State. By being so placed they are not directly in competition with existing non-government schools.

6. Arrangements for special religious education in government schools, the use of Sunday Schools and our existing Anglican schools have certainly made a continuing and highly valuable contribution to Christian outreach but it now seems appropriate to add a further initiative.

7. The proposed objectives for the new schools are -

- (a) To provide a quality education in a caring Christian environment.
- (b) To make Christ known.

- (c) To bring students to a commitment to Christ.
- (d) To enhance the Anglican expression of Christianity by promoting this expression among the young.
- (e) To provide parents and their children with a deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

8. Underlying these objectives is a basic assumption that knowledge of the Christian faith, and first hand experience of those who demonstrate that faith in their daily lives, will lead to a personal commitment to Christ and be a highly effective method of outreach. It is in this that the schools are seen to be part of the process of church planting and church growth. They are a means of drawing non-Christians, parents and students, as well as those who are already committed, into the community of the Church. The school provides the opportunity for links with parents who might otherwise never become associated with the Church.

9. The schools will be linked with parishes, though they will generally serve more than one parish, and will be part of the ministry provided by those parishes. In many cases they will be part of combined school/church centres. They will, however, be operationally and financially independent of the parish. No parish funds will be required; nor will there be any parish legal responsibility. On the other hand, joint activities and co-operative policies will facilitate a common outreach.

10. Christian schools, K-12, with pre schools and day care centres, and with extensive community services, including sporting facilities, will be an effective means of Christian mission because they provide regular links with a far larger number of people across all age groups than might be the case with the more traditional parish model.

11. School/church centres could provide and promote the concept of a "community" of families and individuals, all having a sense that the school/church centre meets their "community" needs in varying degrees and all wishing to visit the school/church centre to obtain fulfilment of those needs. Their visits may range from being regular to irregular just as their commitment to Christ may range from being fully committed to having no commitment at all.

Feasibility in Terms of Commonwealth Policy

12. Funding for a non-government school comes from -

- (a) Parents fees
- (b) Commonwealth grants
- (c) State Government grants

13. The proportions vary depending upon the category of funding granted by the Commonwealth. Recurrent funding is made available to schools by placing schools in one of 12 categories -Category 1 receives least funding and therefore the school must charge high parent fees; Categories 10, 11 and 12 receive most funding and these schools may therefore charge lower fees. Categories 11 and 12 are available only to schools with large numbers of students with special needs; Category 10 is the highest category of funding normally available. Funding in Categories 7 to 10 is however, restricted to schools which are members of systems. New, non-systemic schools may receive a maximum of Category 6 funding. The difference in the fees for parents is significant. If a school is classed as Category 10 it may set fees at about \$1900 pa for primary and \$2,300 pa for secondary. If it is classed as Category 6, its fees will have to be \$2,400 pa for primary and about \$3,000 pa for secondary.

14. To establish new Anglican low fee schools, either the Commonwealth Government must be persuaded to change the rules for funding or, the schools must be part of a system.

15. The Commonwealth requirements for establishing a system are very difficult to meet, including a basis of 3 existing schools for each new school. The existing schools must be at Category 10 if the system is to be a Category 10 system.

16. Among the Anglican schools in New South Wales there is only one at Category 10 prepared to join a system and this school is in Grafton Diocese.

17. Approaches to the Commonwealth for some form of special arrangement for Anglicans in New South Wales were not successful but the suggestion of an interstate system was proposed. Across South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales there are sufficient Category 10 schools prepared to join a system to meet the Commonwealth's requirements. However, an interstate system would necessitate changes in Commonwealth legislation and before considering such action, the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Mr Ross Free, has instituted a complete review of the Commonwealth New Schools Policy. This review, being undertaken by Professor Ken McKinnon, recently retired Vice Chancellor of Wollongong University, will not be complete till early 1996. An interim discussion paper, released in July, acknowledges the need to change

the rules governing the formation of systems. The discussion paper foreshadows a progress report prior to the final report.

18. An alternative to forming an interstate system is the removal of the cap on Category 6 funding for new schools. This measure, being strongly proposed by the Christian Community Schools and Parent Controlled Christian Schools, would also provide the means of allowing the Anglican Church to establish new schools at Category 10. It is a simpler solution and is the preferred option.

19. Overall, the prospects for changes which will meet our needs are quite promising but delays into 1996 are now inevitable.

Feasibility in Terms of Location

20. The Commonwealth requires a 2% increase in government school enrolments, projected over each of 5 years, in the locality proposed for the new non-government school, before it will grant funding. There is also a requirement for "planned educational growth" which means that existing schools must not be adversely affected by the new schools. These requirements severely restrict the areas in which new Anglican schools may be established.

21. The following localities in Sydney Diocese, on present demographic trends, may qualify:

- Cranebrook
- Orchard Hills
- Oakhurst (approval already granted but at Category 6)
- Abbotsbury
- North Quakers Hill
- Mungerie Park

22. There are several other possibilities within the Diocese, and several localities in other New South Wales Dioceses, which may also qualify.

Feasibility Financially

23. The Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation has examined the finances for a Category 10 school in detail and has produced a model budget which is clearly viable. The model allows for school construction (based on fees, grants and interest subsidy) and also all operating costs, at resource levels that would provide a high quality education.

24. While the new schools will operate at no cost to the Diocese, assistance in obtaining sites would greatly facilitate their establishment.

25. There is a problem in purchasing sites, for while, once the school is established, income to repay loans may be generated, sites need to be obtained well in advance of the school's commencement. The Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation has purchased one site (at Cranebrook) and is negotiating on two others but needs a source of funds beyond its own finances. Each site might be expected to cost about \$1.5m. Delays in obtaining sites significantly increase the site costs.

Feasibility in Terms of Curriculum

26. A curriculum structure K-12 has been developed for the new schools which emphasises Christian studies while meeting all requirements of the N.S.W. Board of Studies. The study of the Christian faith can be effectively integrated across the curriculum.

27. The range of subjects that may be offered for the H.S.C. is sufficiently broad to meet the needs and interests of students, and their parents. 3 Unit courses will be available, as well as the usual range of courses within subjects.

Feasibility of Employing Christian Staff

28. It is possible, provided no changes are made to Anti-Discrimination Legislation, to employ staff with one of the criteria for employment being that they are Christians. Some Anglican schools in the Diocese (and all Christian Community Schools and Parent Controlled Christian Schools) have such requirements. It will be the aim of the Corporation that this requirement apply in the new Anglican schools.

Feasibility of Governance

29. Each new Anglican school will have its own Council under the Corporation which will determine, with the principal, operational matters. The schools will be separately incorporated and will be owned by the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation in fashion similar to the arrangements currently applying to two of the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation schools. Should the interstate system be established, and the new

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schools become members, the structure of the Federation will not impinge significantly upon the governance of the schools, nor upon the rights of the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation.

Recommendations

30. That Synod endorses and supports the concept of new, low fee Anglican schools.

31. That Synod requests diocesan bodies and parishes to give support wherever possible to the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation in its task of establishing new, low fee Anglican Schools.

For and on behalf of the Corporation

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10 July 1995