

Australia needs a National approach to child safety in schools

Francis Sullivan – 24 September 2015

This week we sent off to the Royal Commission our latest response to its policy development program.

This is the ninth Royal Commission Issues paper we have responded to on behalf of the Catholic Church in Australia. This time the policy issue is focused on ensuring children are safe in schools.

[Our submission](#) has been developed with major contributions from Catholic school authorities across Australia.

One of the great tragedies revealed over the past three years of Royal Commission public hearings is the extent to which children have been sexual abused in schools – private and public.

According to the Commission around a third of people who have come forward to tell their story suffered sexual abuse at their school.

Sadly, the people they should have been able to trust the most, teachers, religious and clerics, took advantage of their positions of authority to abuse the most vulnerable.

In this submission we have recommended to the Commission a series of common-sense proposals that would make schools safer and make it simpler for school authorities to understand regulatory requirements across all states and territories.

We have called for national consistency in school registration, teacher training and mandatory reporting requirements.

We have asked the Commission to consider recommending national protocols to define more clearly how schools and police work together when investigating allegations of abuse within the school.

We have recommended a national Working With Children Check be implemented as soon as possible, national standards through the National Safe Schools Framework and consistent legislation for government and non-government schools.

One of the huge challenges the Commission and governments face when trying to put in place more effective protections for children is the very nature of our federation: a political system in which states and territories are for the most part independent of each other and the Federal Government.

One of the great achievements of this Royal Commission would be if it were able to convince governments to 'harmonise' the many different laws that relate to child protection.

This would provide a more secure safeguarding environment for our children across Australia, simplify enforcement processes and ensure that the responsibilities of all institutions, regardless of where they operate, were known and understood.