In 2014, some 143,000 or almost 1 in 5 Queensland students are educated in one of 296 Catholic schools that employ more than 17,000 teachers and staff.
The purpose of these guidelines is to set out approaches which Catholic school communities might adopt in their dealings with political candidates especially in the period prior to an election.

Meeting with a politician/candidate

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO APPROACH MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS/CANDIDATES

Probably the best way to communicate our message to politicians is through a ‘face to face’ meeting.

Identify political candidates contesting the next election and either invite them to the school to meet with a delegation or make an appointment to visit them at their office.

School communities could form a delegation of three or four key people to meet with the political candidates or collaborate with other Catholic schools in the electorate and form a delegation that is representative of all the schools.

Members could include:

- School principal(s)
- Parent representative (president of P & F or another appropriate person)
- Parish priest(s)
- Chair of the school board (or member as appropriate)

Political candidates are very busy. It is important that the time you meet with them is well planned and that a professional approach is maintained before, during and after each meeting.

Note: A teleconference could also be an option, particularly in larger electorates.
PRIOR TO THE MEETING

• To gain the maximum benefit from the meeting, members of the delegation should meet prior to each meeting to plan, clarify issues and determine which questions individual members of the delegation will ask. A member of the delegation should also be appointed to act as the chair during the discussion.

• Contact each political candidate to arrange a mutually agreeable time and place to meet.

• Confirm that they have received the documents from QCEC outlining key issues for Catholic education.

• Confirm the date, venue and duration of the meeting a few days prior to the scheduled meeting.

• Advise members of the school community of the meeting.

*Provide the candidate with:*

• the name and role of each person attending the meeting.

• an agenda of items or list of questions as well as material relevant to your local schools.

• a contact name and number of a key representative of the delegation. This gives the candidate a contact point to clarify any agenda issues or meeting arrangements.

AT A MEETING OR CONSULTATION

The following are some suggested guidelines and protocols to help with conducting a successful meeting.

• Confirm how much time the member has available.

• Be polite and introduce the members of the delegation.

• Express appreciation for the efforts of politicians on behalf of Catholic education.

• Perhaps open the discussion with comment about the significant contribution of Catholic schools in educating around 20% of Queensland children *(Source: Queensland Catholic Education Commission statistics)*

• Keep the consultation focused on the agenda items and avoid the discussion being side-tracked on to irrelevant matters. (Be careful not to allow any personal political bias to interfere with the focus of the meeting.)
• Always be respectful and courteous in your discussion with political candidates. (It is about winning friends and influencing people.)

• Take a positive, friendly approach. This will promote good relations and a more successful outcome. Hospitality should be part of the welcome if the meeting is being held at the school.

• In discussions, always be faithful to the ethos and values which underpin Catholic education.

• In your discussions be concerned with the wellbeing of all children and be mindful that advocacy on behalf of children in Catholic schools should not be at the expense of the wellbeing and effective education of those in other education sectors.

• Education issues are complex, particularly those around the funding of Catholic schools. Therefore, do not expect that political candidates will have answers to all your questions readily available to them.

• Arrange a follow-up meeting if required.

• Focus on local issues relevant to your schools eg buildings and grounds.

Advise members to contact either the Queensland Catholic Education Commission or Parents and Friends Federation Secretariat if they require additional information.

AFTER THE MEETING

• The delegation might allow time for a post-meeting discussion to clarify the issues raised and make a summary of the outcomes.

• After each meeting with a candidate formally write to the person, thanking him/her for the time given and summarising any outcomes from the meeting.

• If you intend to provide a report of the meeting to your school community, you should provide a copy to the political candidate prior to publication. This allows the person an opportunity to discuss any amendments or to correct any information.
Consider forming an on-going school political action committee

School communities could also consider forming an ongoing political action committee to further the process. This could be done either by individual schools or in collaboration with other Catholic schools in the electorate/s.

A convenor should be appointed to arrange the meetings and plan the action.

The meeting could then develop strategies to guide the actions that it will engage in for the longer term as well as in the lead-up to an election.

It is important and necessary that the committee works closely with the president of the P&F, the principal of the school, the parish priest and other key stakeholders.

Particularly in the lead-up to an election, but at other times if the issue is important, the QCEC and Parents and Friends Federation would appreciate your keeping them informed of any action taken, issues discussed and decisions coming out of the meeting.

Strengthening relationships in the long term

Many Parents and Friends Associations and/or their school principal or parish priest already have very good relationships with their local Members of Parliament.

These local members are our representatives and the lives of our Catholic school communities are important to them.

In order to develop good relationships with local representatives ensure they are invited to significant school events and that efforts are made to keep them informed about the life of the school community. You could consider adding them to the mailing list for your school newsletter for example.

A further strategy might be to write to all local representatives at the start of the year and provide them with an open invitation to attend key school activities or P&F meetings.
You could include a calendar of school events such as awards presentations, fundraisers etc along with the schedule for P&F meetings. Ideally, politicians should feel comfortable to come to these meetings, even if for a short time, to speak or provide perspectives on current issues. You could also include Senators in these activities and processes as appropriate.

It is only through regular contact that political representatives can come to understand and appreciate what the school is achieving and what its needs are.

Be aware that your invitations may not always attract an immediate response. Sometimes acceptance is impossible because of other commitments, but don’t give up.

Education – The key to our future

Education is regarded as the key to the future of our nation and it is essential that Catholic education is seen as a significant partner in the education of young Australians.

The most powerful argument for the support of Catholic schools is based on principles and values which include:

- That “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Clause 3, Article 26).

- “Catholic schools, like state schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism” (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium).

- That “there must be the closest cooperation between parents and the teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated and teachers are to collaborate closely with parents and willingly listen to them.” (Code of Canon Law, Canon 796.)

- All children are entitled to an education which will enable them to attain their full potential.
Further information

Background information on QCEC and/or P & F policies can be found on the respective websites at: [www.qcec.catholic.edu.au](http://www.qcec.catholic.edu.au) and/or [www.pandf.org.au](http://www.pandf.org.au) (under Political Action – State and Federal Elections).

Further information is available by contacting the Secretariat staff at the Queensland Catholic Education Commission or the Parents and Friends Federation of Queensland.
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