

**Diocese of Parramatta submission into the
Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020
5 May 2021**

1. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Parramatta (Diocese of Parramatta) makes this submission to the Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No.3 - Education about the *Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020* (Bill).
2. This submission supersedes the submission dated 26 February 2021 (Submission No 32) from Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta.
3. This submission by Diocese of Parramatta proposes improvements to that Bill.
4. Diocese of Parramatta, through its education agency, Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta, runs a system of 80 faith-based schools in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Diocese of Parramatta educates over 43,000 students and employs almost 5,000 staff.
5. Diocese of Parramatta covers 16 State Electorates including: Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Castle Hill, Granville, Hawkesbury, Londonderry, Mount Druitt, Mulgoa, Parramatta, Penrith, Prospect, Riverstone, Seven Hills, and Wollondilly.
6. Diocese of Parramatta is committed to responding to the needs of all students. Diocese of Parramatta collaborates with parents, students, and staff to realise the mission of bringing the person of Jesus Christ into the lives of the young people in its care and their families.
7. Catholic educators are called to accompany students from diverse backgrounds in dialogue with different perspectives.ⁱ All students - including those who identify as gender diverse should have the opportunity to reach their God-given potential, to learn with their peers and feel a sense of belonging in their learning environment.
8. Diocese of Parramatta proposes amendments to clarify and improve parts of the Bill. As an education provider schooling one in five students in Western Sydney, Diocese of Parramatta is trusted by local families to make appropriate discernments regarding sensitive matters in student learning.



9. Diocese of Parramatta strongly affirms the Catholic teaching that parents are the primary educators of their children in matters of faith and education.ⁱⁱ
10. Diocese of Parramatta recognises parents as each child's most influential, primary, and essential educator and actively partners with parents and caregivers, encouraging open communications and supportive learning environments. Diocese of Parramatta works in partnership with parents and carers to provide holistic Catholic education programs for our students.
11. Diocese of Parramatta affirms the prohibition of teaching gender ideology (gender fluidity) in an educational setting. As I explain in my attached Pastoral Letter (attached Appendix 1) I have serious concerns, echoing Pope Francis, about this ideology.
12. Our Catholic position is well outlined in *Male and Female He Created Them: Toward a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*ⁱⁱⁱ and *Amoris Laetitia*.^{iv} In his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis says that "the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created".
13. Our major overriding concern is also to affirm that each and every child is loved, supported, comforted, extended emotional and pastoral assistance, and given appropriate accompaniment. That is our essential mission as Catholics called to live the Gospel and reach out compassionately to those experiencing harassment and marginalisation.
14. Diocese of Parramatta also affirms that parents are the primary educators of their children, provided it occurs within a framework of open collaboration with the school. These two elements should work together harmoniously and with transparency.
15. Parents' role in education is vital, necessary and sought after at all times because parents are their children's first teachers (Canon 793 §1).^v In addition, "the family's right to be recognised as the primary pedagogical environment for the educational formation of children" must be paramount.^{vi}
16. This Bill, in our view, however, should not in any way be used as a means to diminish or reduce the professional capacity and expectations of a teacher and the school community.
17. Certainly, steps must be taken to ensure such legislation respects the rights of children which Australian governments have ratified in international agreements.



18. Diocese of Parramatta therefore encourages respectful and intelligent dialogue with students, with our deeply committed teaching staff, and within a caring Catholic environment about sensitive or challenging topics such as consent, sexuality, and gender. It is important that the school community is able to challenge unhealthy, ill-informed and discriminatory attitudes. Our primary concern is to affirm, like Pope Francis, the absolute dignity and uniqueness of each child of God. This is best fostered where there is an inclusive and healthy atmosphere among all students and staff. ^{vii}
19. We are of the view that the Bill should not be used to prohibit a school from supporting children who are already at risk of marginalisation because of gender identity issues.
20. Diocese of Parramatta supports the individual and loving the individual, regardless of their sexual orientation. Catholic teaching requires us to uphold the dignity of each human person and invites us to accompany all people and provide all people with pastoral care. We strongly endorse the leadership of Pope Francis and his pastoral approach which places great emphasis on inclusivity, dialogue and the acceptance of each unique child of God.
21. I am thankful on behalf of the Diocese of Parramatta for this opportunity to present a submission into this important topic that will impact the lives of children for generations.

+ *Vincent Long*

**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv
Bishop of Parramatta**

ⁱ Congregation for Catholic Education (for Institutes of Study). (2013). *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools. Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*. Vatican City. 28 October, cls. 61-63 Retrieved on 22 February 2021 from https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20131_028_dialogo-interculturale_en.html

ⁱⁱ The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1982). *Lay Catholics In Schools: Witnesses To Faith*. Vatican City. 15 October, cl.12. Retrieved on 22 February 2021 from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19821015_lay-catholics_en.html

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf

^{iv} https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

^v http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann-793-821_en.html

^{vi} http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf

^{vii} See attached Appendix 1 Pastoral letter to the pastors, parents and the faithful of the Diocese of Parramatta on the proposed Parental Rights Bill, April 27th, 2021 <https://parracatholic.org/pastoral-letter-to-the-people-of-parramatta-on-the-parental-rights-bill/>