

Submission

No 22

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL ZONE SAFETY

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Catholic Education Commission

NSW School Zone Safety Inquiry

Submission to the NSW
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Committee on Road Safety (StaySafe)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
A. FOCUS OF CECNSW INPUT TO THE INQUIRY	5
B. ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION.....	6
C. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL ZONES IN REDUCING PEDESTRIAN CASUALTIES DURING SCHOOL ZONE TIMES.....	7
D. THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO PEDESTRIAN CASUALTIES IN SCHOOL ZONES.....	8
E. AGE AS A FACTOR IN PEDESTRIAN CRASH RISK AND THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR CASUALTIES BY AGE COHORT AROUND SCHOOL ZONES	9
F. THE DEPLOYMENT OF ALTERNATIVE FACILITIES TO REDUCE RELIANCE ON SCHOOL ZONES, SUCH AS GRADE SEPARATION, TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND FENCING	10
G. THE APPROPRIATENESS OF A SINGLE APPROACH SCHOOL ZONE REGIME AS OPPOSED TO MODIFYING ZONES BASED ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER CURRENT SAFETY MEASURES EMPLOYED AROUND SCHOOLS	11
H. THE AVAILABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NSW SCHOOLS; AND	13
I. OTHER RELATED MATTERS.....	15
J. SUMMARY OF KEY ADVICE.....	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEC NSW makes this submission as the body responsible to the Catholic Bishops of NSW/ACT for both the coordination and representation of NSW Catholic schools at the State level.

CEC NSW acknowledges that the World Health Organisation identifies road safety as a key community health issue.

In the context of recent NSW Audit Office evidence CEC NSW supports the retention of the 40 km school zone speed limit. However, CEC NSW also advises that local communities, and particularly regional communities, should be empowered to exercise greater input into school zone management issues.

While children can be better protected within the 40 km school zones the cited casualty evidence suggests that they can be at significant risk outside of these zones. The available casualty evidence demonstrates the need for road safety education that informs and moulds the behaviour and attitudes of children and young people as they become increasingly independent.

While supporting the uniform 40 km school zone strategy CEC NSW is of the clear view that no single strategy will be equally effective at all school sites.

The Committee should consider recommending the devolution of greater policy flexibility to defined regions of the State. These regions should be based on Local Government areas with Great Metropolitan Sydney constituting a single region for this purpose.

School Safety Management flexibility would take as its starting point the 40 km standard school speed zone policy but would allow for local variations in respect of zone management requirements such as times of operation and designated roads and complementary intervention strategies such as road calming or separated pedestrian traffic.

As indicated, implementation of alternative or complementary strategies such as traffic calming and pedestrian separation from traffic should also be available for deployment by local decision makers, especially to enhance safety around schools in high risk areas.

CEC NSW also argues that research demonstrates that environmental change alone is not enough to reduce road user injury. It is essential that a combination of road safety education and appropriate environmental modification be considered when determining local school site road safety response strategies. Such multi factor assessments are best carried out at the local level.

For the purpose of determining local road safety strategies CEC NSW advocates the application of the “due diligence” model to road safety risk assessment by schools. As a consequence, RTA support for schools needs to enable “due diligence” site reviews. Successful implementation of this process will require the devolution of site management strategies to local decision makers.

Individual schools can only be responsible for the development of risk management policies specific to the physical characteristics of their site. Other issues beyond both the immediate school environment and the reasonable control of any individual school need to be addressed by key regional decision makers such as the RTA, bus companies, local councils, other local schools, parent associations and local police commands. Consequently, CEC NSW recommends the creation of Local School Zone Road Safety Advisory Committees broadly based on Local Government Areas and comprised of the above cited local key road safety stakeholders.

Finally, CEC NSW is mindful that any new road safety planning initiative for schools needs to be integrated with existing Local Government Development Application (DA) processes for schools.

A. FOCUS OF CECNSW INPUT TO THE INQUIRY

- A.1 The information in this submission is provided by the Catholic Education Commission (CEC NSW) in response to the NSW Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Stay Safe) request for advice on School Zone Safety policy and implementation.
- A.2 The information set out is intended to broadly address all of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. However, particular emphasis is given to Term of Reference (f), that is, the focus on road safety education. The other matters specified in the Terms of Reference tend to relate to road safety matters that are beyond the immediate jurisdiction of schools. These matters are typically the responsibility of the RTA NSW and/or Local Councils across NSW.

B. ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION

- B.1 CEC NSW is the body responsible to the Catholic Bishops of NSW/ACT for both the coordination and representation of NSW Catholic schools at the State level. It also provides leadership in Catholic education, through service to dioceses, religious congregations and parents. It functions through consultation with Diocesan Directors and Religious Institutes, as well as with Principal and parent associations. However, CEC NSW has no role in the day to day management of NSW Catholic Schools. Responsibility for the direct management of Catholic schools in New South Wales rests with a range of Catholic Schools Authorities.
- B.2 There are 11 separate diocesan school systems, each with a Catholic Education Office/Catholic Schools Office. There are also 47 independent Catholic schools owned and operated by Religious Congregations. Catholic schools in their mission have always endeavoured to welcome and show a special care not only for the financially poor or marginalised but a larger group of students disadvantaged in various ways. Catholic schools seek to enhance the wellbeing, spiritual development and dignity of each child.
- B.3 In NSW there are currently (2010) 583 Catholic schools, including 7 Special Schools, enrolling a total of 240,983 students. More than 40% of Catholic schools are located outside of greater metropolitan Sydney. Of the enrolled students 10,907 are Students with Disabilities (SWDs). Catholic Special Schools currently enrol 483 students. NSW Catholic schools employ 18,250 teachers. In addition, 7,395 non-teaching staff support the educational mission of NSW Catholic schools.
- B.4 CEC NSW administers a \$400,000 grant from the RTA to support Road Safety Education in NSW Catholic schools. This grant enables each Diocese to employ a road safety adviser on a part or fulltime basis dependant on the size of the particular Diocese.
- B.5 The objectives of the Catholic schools Road Safety Education Program are to:
- Provide resources, advice and expertise to support schools with the implementation of road safety education as an integrated component of the School Curriculum K-12
 - Foster greater awareness of road safety issues by teachers, students, parents and other members of each Catholic school community
 - Promote positive road safety risk management by schools.

C. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL ZONES IN REDUCING PEDESTRIAN CASUALTIES DURING SCHOOL ZONE TIMES

- C.1 As noted in the 2010 NSW Audit Office RTA Performance Report the number of school zone casualties is small, ranging between six and twenty nine each year in the sample reviewed. This is equivalent to an estimated 60 casualties annually in all NSW school zones. By comparison, on average there were 2000 school age casualties each year on the wider NSW road system.
- C.2 The Audit Office analysis of school zone casualties found that the largest reduction in road injury incidents over the 10 years was for school aged pedestrians. This reduction was greater than for both overall road casualties as well as all pedestrian casualties. This data would suggest the introduction of a standardised 40 km school zone has been effective.
- C.3 Based on the NSW Audit Office evidence CEC NSW supports the retention of the 40 km school zone speed limit. However, as elaborated below, CEC NSW also advises that local communities, particularly regional communities, should be empowered to exercise greater input into school zone management decisions.

D. THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO PEDESTRIAN CASUALTIES IN SCHOOL ZONES

D.1 Consistent with available NSW Audit Office evidence the following risk factors are identified as being of concern to NSW Catholic schools:

- Traffic density
- Speeding vehicles in school zones
- Community behaviour relating to the parking of cars around schools
- The drop off and pick-up of children at school sites
- Community members ignoring signage around school sites
- Community members exhibiting unsafe behaviour in car parks and streets surrounding school sites
- Multi campus schools and the management of student movement between campus precincts
- Bus interchanges associated with school sites and responsibility for the management of these interchanges.

E. AGE AS A FACTOR IN PEDESTRIAN CRASH RISK AND THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR CASUALTIES BY AGE COHORT AROUND SCHOOL ZONES

Child factors contributing to pedestrian casualties

E.1 Research documents that children under the age of 10:

- do not understand the dangers of the traffic environment, yet they may feel capable of crossing roads alone
- cannot accurately determine the source of a sound or what that sound implies: typically children under 10 do not understand concepts such as speed, distance and safety
- their bodies are small and drivers often are unable to see them
- their bodies are fragile and any injuries caused by a moving vehicle are often severe
- find it hard to stop a movement once they start
- often focus on one thing at a time and can be easily distracted
- cannot respond to sudden changes in the traffic environment.

E.2 In addition young people can be disorientated by the transition from primary to secondary schooling: a transition that often involves different modes of travel, greater distances and a greater requirement for self-management.

E.3 As young people mature they become more independent but they can also be more vulnerable due to risk-taking behaviour, which can be encouraged by peers and other social influences. While children can be better protected within each 40 km school zone the cited casualty evidence suggests that they can be at significant risk outside of these zones. Beyond each Safety Zone, self-management by children and young people is both the required and necessary road safety risk management strategy for every child and young person.

E.4 As already cited, the RTA review of the 1998 - 2009 period shows that fatalities and injuries involving school age pedestrians between 5 and 16 years has decreased significantly. Also, the NSW Audit Office Performance Report (2010) documents that the number of school zone casualties is small by comparison with those school age casualties which occur each year outside school zones. The available casualty evidence demonstrates the need for road safety education that informs and moulds the behaviour and attitudes of children and young people as they become increasingly independent. The key strategy for producing positive change in the road safety behaviour of children and young people is Road Safety Education delivered by schools that:

- is age and developmentally appropriate
- that focuses on young people identifying and assessing risk themselves
- that develops responsible decision-making skills in a context of personal responsibility.

F. THE DEPLOYMENT OF ALTERNATIVE FACILITIES TO REDUCE RELIANCE ON SCHOOL ZONES, SUCH AS GRADE SEPARATION, TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND FENCING

- F.1 While supporting the uniform 40 km school zone strategy CEC NSW is of the clear view that no single strategy will be equally effective at all school sites. CEC NSW acknowledges the dilemma of balancing driver certainty (that is the avoidance of driver confusion) against the need for local flexibility with school site road safety management. In this context, the Committee should consider recommending the devolution of greater policy flexibility to defined regions of the State. Such defined regions could be formed on the basis of Provincial Cities, with Greater Metropolitan Sydney as a single region. This flexibility would take as its starting point the 40 km standard school speed zone policy but allow for local variation in respect of zone management requirements such as times of operation and designated roads. While noting that the RTA Corporate Office can currently approve local variations to school zone policy CEC NSW believes this power should be devolved to local management committees formed on a regional basis. This reform would be an appropriate application of the principle of subsidiarity.
- F.2 Implementation of alternative or complementary strategies such as traffic calming and pedestrian separation from traffic should also be considered to enhance safety around particular schools in high traffic areas. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that research (Di Pietro G, Ivett L. (2003), *Road safety education and training – an alternative perspective*) demonstrates that environmental change alone will not reduce road user injury. It is essential that a combination of road safety education and appropriate environmental modification be considered when determining local school site road safety response strategies. Such multi factor assessments are best carried out at the local level.
- F.3 CEC NSW also observes that differing risk assessment issues and criteria are likely to apply to Primary and Secondary schools respectively. This fact is already acknowledged by the restriction of school crossing supervisors to Primary schools.

G. THE APPROPRIATENESS OF A SINGLE APPROACH SCHOOL ZONE REGIME AS OPPOSED TO MODIFYING ZONES BASED ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER CURRENT SAFETY MEASURES EMPLOYED AROUND SCHOOLS

- G.1 This is the most challenging area to provide advice to the Inquiry. As already indicated there is an obvious tension between the need for certainty for drivers and the need for flexibility for schools to accommodate local road safety circumstances. How these imperatives are balanced is the critical challenge facing the inquiry.
- G.2 At the local level many schools have implemented Road Safety Management Plans. These plans are often developed applying the Occupational Health and Safety Due Diligence Concept for taking reasonable action to protect the health, safety and welfare of all persons accessing a school site. Due diligence is a pro-active management tool that when properly used can foster the careful and systematic identification and assessment of hazards specific to each school site. The “due diligence” approach promotes the realisation of reasonable control measures to help prevent accidents and injuries. CEC NSW advocates the application of the “due diligence” model to road safety risk assessment by schools. As a consequence, RTA support for schools needs to support “due diligence” site reviews. This process can be assisted by the devolution of site management strategies to local decision makers applying the principle of subsidiarity.
- G.3 In the exercise of its duty of care with respect to school site related road safety issues schools need to address a range of matters including:
- Parent drop off and collection of students
 - Parent and staff parking. Also, student parking at secondary school sites
 - School deliveries
 - Bicycle movement/storage
 - Student drivers and their conduct around school sites
 - Pedestrian movement
 - Bus safety, including bus stop and bus interchange management
 - Traffic control on adjacent roads.
- G.4 Catholic sector Road Safety Education Advisers provide support to assist schools with the development of Road Safety Management Plans that address the above cited risk management issues. CEC NSW has developed a resource to support Diocesan Advisers and schools entitled, *Developing a School Road Safety Policy and Management Plan*. CEC NSW is, however, mindful that the development of these plans requires the cooperation of other stakeholders such as local councils, bus companies, other local schools and police.
- G.5 Individual schools can only be responsible for the development of risk management policies specific to the physical characteristics of their site. Other issues beyond both the immediate school environment and the reasonable control of any individual school need to be addressed by key decision makers such as the RTA, bus companies, local councils, other local schools and police. Given this reality

CEC NSW recommends the creation of local School Zone Road Safety Advisory Committees flexibly formed with reference to Local Government Areas and comprised of key stakeholder nominees.

- G.6 To avoid duplication of effort it needs to be noted that individual Non-Government schools, as a consequence of Local Government Development Application (DA) processes, can already be required to produce a traffic management plan for their school. Any new road safety planning initiative for schools needs to be integrated with existing Local Government DA processes.

H. THE AVAILABILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NSW SCHOOLS; AND

- H.1 The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that road safety is a community health issue and that schools are ideally placed to have a significant impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for students, teachers and other members of the school community. The WHO Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020 recognises road safety as a major global health issue. WHO encourages worldwide action by Governments aimed at saving 5 million lives worldwide over the target period 2011-2020. Road fatalities are estimated to rise to be the world's fifth leading cause of death by 2030, resulting in an estimated 2.4 million fatalities per year. Schools can play an important role in assisting communities avoid this predicted outcome.
- H.2 As the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008) highlights: *"Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians"*. In this context, school communities strive to assist students address their responsibilities as road users for themselves, for their peers, for their families and for all members of their community. The knowledge, understandings, skills, attitudes and values that are necessary to fulfil these responsibilities as a pedestrian, passenger, bike-rider and driver are best developed through sequential, comprehensive and age appropriate educational programs.
- H.3 As indicated above, the greatest road safety vulnerability for children and young people exists outside school zones and this is why education is absolutely essential. NSW is the only State in Australia that has a curriculum based Road Safety Education Program that is taught through each school's program of study and that utilises Roads and Traffic Authority resources: resources that are jointly developed by the RTA and the three NSW education sectors.
- H.4 NSW road safety education is embedded in the Board of Studies *Personal Development, Health, and Physical Education* (PDHPE) curriculum and this curriculum is mandatory across Years K to 10. In the senior years (Yrs 11 -12) road safety education issues are addressed in the Stage 6 Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) syllabus and through school based pastoral care programs. This curriculum based approach means that all children and young people have opportunities to receive road safety education during their Infants, Primary and Secondary Schooling. This integrated strategy is a superior approach to delivering road safety education in comparison with one-off lectures or stand-alone events.
- H.5 The current school-based road safety education program in NSW is effective because it is:
- focused on prevention through developing in children and young people the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for safe road use
 - embedded in the k-6, 7-10 and 11-12 Board of Studies PDHPE syllabuses
 - sequential/across Kindergarten to year 12

- supported by curriculum linked teaching materials, consultancy support and resource development
 - addresses Secondary school young driver imperatives.
- H.6 With respect to resource provision for the support of classroom practice CEC NSW has supported the development of resources such as “*The Revised PD/H Resource*”. This resource incorporates all the RTA primary teaching materials into a teacher friendly format that meets NSW Board of Studies K – 6 curriculum requirements. This resource provides lessons for each Board of Studies Stage of Primary schooling.
- H.7 Finally, CEC NSW draws the Committee’s attention to the current development by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) of a new Health and PE curriculum for Australian schools and the consequent importance of NSW advocating for the inclusion of road safety education in each ACARA Primary and Secondary Curriculum Statement for Health and PE.

I. OTHER RELATED MATTERS

- I.1 There is a need for better coordination between Local Government Authorities and the RTA since schools are often confused about jurisdictional responsibilities for road safety issues and interventions. The RTA resource, *A Practical Guide to Addressing Road Safety Issues Around Schools* is a most useful tool that assists schools address these jurisdictional issues but its implementation needs to be supported through the establishment of local coordination committees formed on a regional basis.

J. SUMMARY OF KEY ADVICE

On the basis of preceding commentary CEC NSW advises that:

1. The uniform 40 km School Zone speed limit should be retained
2. No single strategy will be equally effective at all school sites
3. Local variation in respect of school zone management issues should be provided for through Regional School Zone Advisory Committees
4. Regional School Zone Advisory Committees should be established comprised of members drawn from key stakeholders
5. Implementation of alternative or complementary strategies for School Zone Safety should be facilitated, including traffic calming and pedestrian separation from traffic at high risk school sites
6. A “due diligence” model of site assessment and management should be promoted
7. Road safety education is the essential casualty protection strategy
8. The current NSW model of school-based Road Safety Education should be maintained and promoted with and through both the NSW Board of Studies and ACARA.