
FOUNDATIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS GUIDING THE GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS IN EREA

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify core understandings and requirements of the ministry of Catholic education, in particular Edmund Rice Education Australia within the Catholic Church in Australia

Context:

Catholic education is a ministry of the Catholic Church universally. Within Australia, Catholic education through the ministry of schools is fulfilled by:

- *Archdiocesan and Diocesan Catholic Education Authorities* which administer Early Childhood to the Post Compulsory Years (3 -18+years) across the 28 Dioceses under the authority of the local bishop, with the exception of Western Australia where the 4 Diocesan Bishops unite to provide Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) – one entity for the 4 Dioceses. Thus, there are 25 Catholic education Offices.
- *Religious Institutes (RI)* which still administer 60 schools across Australia – 63,236 enrolments.
- *Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (MPJPs)* of which there are 12 which administer 106 schools across Australia with 86,894 enrolments. Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) became a Public Juridic Person on 20 September 2012 and educates 40,000+ students across 55 education settings in 16 dioceses across each state and territory of Australia.

Authority of The Bishop

It is critical to note that Religious Institute and MPJP schools operate in Dioceses with the consent of the local Bishop (canon 801). It is also critical to note that the local Bishop 'has the right to watch over and inspect the catholic schools located in his territory, even those established or directed by members of Religious Institutes (& MPJPs)' (canon 806). Canons 804 and 805 speak to the authority of the Bishop to ensure the quality of Religious Education which is compulsory across all years and which, according to the General Directory for Catechesis is 'the distinctive feature of the curriculum in a Catholic school'.

Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA)

EREA was established by decree of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL)¹ as a *Public Juridic Person* on 20 September 2012. *Public Juridic Persons* ~ parishes, dioceses and religious institutes ~ are formally sanctioned by a Church authority for public ministry. *Ministerial PJP*s have the role and responsibilities of stewardship of ministries, enabling the ministries to relate directly to the Church ~ a ministerial PJP represents the Church in the same way as religious institutes do in fulfilling their designated ministries. MPJPs provide for long-term stable governance of the ministries and continuance of their Catholic identity with the responsible trustees (canonical stewards) of the PJP generally having both canonical and civil responsibilities. There are currently 12 Ministerial Public Juridic Persons in Australia. EREA is a member of the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons (AMPJP).

Canonical Statutes – Edmund Rice Education Australia²

The key purposes of EREA, established as a public juridic person of pontifical right are:

2.1 the purpose of Edmund Rice Education Australia is to own, govern, manage and conduct educational institutions and associated activities, in fulfilment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition.

2.2 Edmund Rice Education Australia's work of evangelisation shall build on the sound traditions of the Congregation of Christian Brothers and ensure the continuation of the Charism of Edmund Rice in school ministry as Church Mission.

2.3 Edmund Rice Education Australia shall ensure, through its governance policies and practices, that each of the works for which it is responsible operates in accordance with the teaching, discipline and laws of the Roman Catholic Church.

¹ CICLSAL Decree - Attachment 1

² Canonical Statutes – Edmund Rice Education Australia – Attachment 2

2.4 Each ministry of Edmund Rice Education Australia is an apostolic work in the local diocese and therefore, in accordance with its approved purposes, is subject to the authority of the diocesan Bishop as defined in canons 394, 806§1.

In summary, the Trustees of EREA are entrusted with stewardship of the Mission of Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition and the Temporal Goods to enable the Mission.

Relationship with the Christian Brothers

The Trustees (5 Members of the Council) of Edmund Rice Education Australia 'are those persons appointed by the Congregation Leader of the Congregation of Christian Brothers with the consent of his Council' (Statutes Section 3). Members are appointed according to clear criteria (Statutes Section 3) and a Membership and Review Advisory Committee external to the Council conducts the recruitment process.

Whilst EREA does not require the approval of the Christian Brothers (Oceania Province) for any matters, regular contact is maintained with mutual support for the continuing ministries of each entity.

Ministry of Catholic Education in Australia

In fulfilling its responsibilities in the ministry of Catholic Education in each state and territory of Australia, EREA seeks to work in strong, harmonious and productive partnership with the Bishops and all education entities in advancing the Catholic education of young people through growth in faith and learning.

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) 'is the peak body for Catholic education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities.' NCEC cooperates with state-based Commissions and the Committee of Religious Institutes and MPJP School Authorities Australia (CORMSAA) in fulfilling this mandate³ from the Australian Bishops in accord with the following proclaimed Mission and Priorities:

Mission: To promote Christ-centred education providing excellent and inclusive schooling.

Priorities: Enliven faith formation and religious education

Support the continual improvement of educational outcomes for all students

Respond to the needs of families through strong advocacy for recurrent and capital funding, legislation and policy

Regulatory Requirements

The Australian Education Act 2013 to be read in accord with the Australian Education Amendment Act 2017, governs the Commonwealth fulfilment of its mandate for Education in Australia. This mandate is of importance to schools other than state government schools, because the majority of recurrent and capital funding for Catholic, other religious and independent schools is provided by the Commonwealth Government. State and territory governments have prime responsibility for the funding of state government schools in each jurisdiction and exercise regulatory authority over all aspects of School Quality and Compliance matters for all schools including Catholic schools within their jurisdiction. Whilst there is strong commonality of requirement across jurisdictions, there are particularities in each context which must be met.

Conclusion

Within this global and Australian context, EREA operates to serve the needs of 40,000+ students and families and articulates the charism and mission of Blessed Edmund Rice through its governance structures and processes, its educational documents and most importantly its witness and practice at all levels. EREA is committed to continually aspiring to be better in serving not only those in its schools but the broader Australian and global society contributing to the common good through offering a *Liberating Education based on Gospel Spirituality within an Inclusive Community committed to Justice and Solidarity*⁴.



Philomena (Phil) Billington

Chair

On behalf of the Council of Trustees

³ [Terms of Reference - National Catholic Education Commission \(NCEC\): Australia's Peak Catholic Education Body](#)

⁴ EREA Charter (2017) www.erea.edu.au