

Media Release

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Catholic Education supports Government plans to amend the Copyright Act to protect teachers and parents

Catholic Education supports the Federal Government’s decision to reform Australia’s copyright laws to ensure teachers and parents are not involved in copyright infringement when they provide remote learning for students.

National Catholic Education Executive Director Jacinta Collins said Australia’s ongoing response to the COVID-19 emergency, including the need to provide remote learning for students, has shone a spotlight on a number of problems with Australia’s outdated copyright laws.

“We are pleased the government has recognised the need to urgently update the Copyright Act to ensure that teachers, parents and students do not inadvertently breach copyright laws simply by shifting lessons to the online environment,” Ms Collins said.

“It is important that these planned changes be implemented urgently as part of the government’s COVID-19 response. Catholic schools in Victoria are still delivering learning online during tighter COVID-19 restrictions, so this announcement comes at a critical time for school communities.

“It makes no sense that in the digital age, a teacher can use copyright material in a classroom to teach students, but a copyright exception may no longer apply if the teacher or students are at home, teaching or learning via Zoom or Skype.

“We welcome the recognition that schools should be able to rely on the ‘special cases’ exception to cover reasonable uses of copyright materials in times of regional and national crisis,” she said.

Catholic Education also welcomes the other proposed changes, including:

- Ensuring that educational exceptions apply to all forms of learning, enabling teachers to use copyright materials in lessons, irrespective of whether the teacher and students are in a classroom, learning at home via Zoom, or accessing lessons on-demand.
- Fixing an existing problem where schools may lose the benefit of copyright exceptions if parents and guardians assist children with their home learning.
- Removing a technical anomaly where Independent and Catholic schools are able to play a sound recording for the school bell under a copyright exception, but government schools are not covered by the same exception.

“We urge the government to clarify, as part of these reforms, that schools can display all types of content onto an interactive whiteboard to students for educational purposes,” Ms Collins said.

This measure would rectify an existing problem whereby a copyright exception allows teachers to show a picture, or a ‘clip’ from a TV show/movie on an interactive whiteboard to students in class for free, but licence fees are expected if the teacher shows a page from a book on the same screen.

“Catholic Education looks forward to the further consultation on the amendments,” Ms Collins said. “We call on the Parliament to pass legislation to make these important changes as a priority, given the ongoing need for schools, particularly in Victoria, to provide remote learning options for Australian students during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

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