

Access to Catholic Schools during Election Campaigns



Position Statement

Purpose

1. This Position Statement provides general guidance to Catholic School Authorities (Diocesan and RI/PJP schools) about the principles which should apply to requests for access to Queensland Catholic schools by Government and Opposition Leaders, Ministers, Shadow Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Members of Parliament, Senators, Councillors or candidates for office (hereafter collectively referred to as 'political representatives') during a Federal, State or Local Government Election or By-Election (an 'Election').

Access ('access') in this context includes the physical access to Catholic schools by political representatives for any events during an Election Campaign.

The 'Election Campaign' commences on the day an Election is called and ceases at the close of polls on the day the Election is held (the 'Election Day').

Access does not include advertising, sponsorships or other promotional material that candidates or political parties want to place within a school or in an official school publication. Those activities must be avoided during an Election Campaign.

This Position Statement will also not apply to the following scenarios:

- a) candidates or political parties lawfully gaining access or lawfully placing promotional material at a school on an Election Day when that school is a place where polling is occurring under the management of the relevant Electoral Commission;
- b) commercial agreements entered into between Catholic schools or authorities and candidates or political parties for the hiring of Catholic school property or facilities for functions during an Election Campaign.

Granting Access

2. Access to a Catholic school by political representatives is at the sole discretion of a school authority in consultation with the relevant school principal and school community.

In Diocesan (or Parish) schools, a school principal or other staff member should not agree to provide access without first consulting and seeking the approval of their school authority (via the relevant school authority's delegated representative).

In RI/PJP schools a request for access should be managed by the school principal who should liaise with the school's governing authority as they determine appropriate. Advice about access may also be sought from QCEC where necessary.

When a decision is made by a Catholic School Authority or school principal (RI/PJP schools)

to refuse access to a political representative as a general rule, that position should be applied equally to all political representatives seeking access to that school during the Election Campaign. This decision must be communicated in writing to the political representative including that it will be applied equally across all candidates and parties. The exception to this general position is cases where a particular political representative is not granted access on the basis the access is inconsistent with or would offend Catholic education values under section 3(b) of this position statement.

In the case of a Diocesan school, where access to a particular school is refused, reasonable efforts should be made by the school authority to provide the political representative with access to an alternative school if deemed appropriate by the school authority.

Principles governing access

3. When a decision is made by a school authority or school principal (RI/PJP schools) to provide access to a political representative during an Election Campaign, the following principles should be observed:
 - a) Subject to section 3(b) of this Position Statement, the same level of access must be provided to all political representatives should they request it. It is up to political representatives to request access and a school authority or school principal (RI/PJP schools) is not obliged to proactively offer access to all political representatives, though they should take appropriate action to avoid perceptions of partisanship.
 - b) All access must involve events, activities and communications that are consistent with Catholic education values. The school authority or school principal (RI/PJP schools), retains the absolute discretion to refuse access to a political representative on the basis the access is inconsistent with or would offend Catholic education values. Catholic education values may include the values and teachings of the Catholic Church.
 - c) If students or staff are directly involved in an event during the access or are photographed or their images or words otherwise captured during the access, the political representative should be reminded that they must not use that material for political or campaign purposes without the consent of the school, the staff member or the student's parent/carer (as relevant to the circumstances).
 - d) Unless directed otherwise, school staff should not say or do anything to indicate particular support for a political representative, a political party or a particular policy of the political representative or party during the access. Where practicable, the Principal should provide a briefing ahead of the access to remind staff that they do not do or say anything that would indicate support for a particular policy or political statement/s.
 - e) The political representative should be advised prior to the access:
 - i. That they must not seek to involve school staff, students or the school community in the promotion or endorsement, of particular issues or policies of the political representatives or their party (or seek to involve school staff, students or the school community in ways which imply such support).
 - ii. They may make announcements or discuss the relevance of a policy or policies to Catholic education and Catholic schools.
 - iii. The usual Health and Safety practices for visitors will need to be followed at all times.

Media Access

4. Most election events involving schools and political representatives will attract media attention. School staff should ensure media representatives observe the rules applicable to visitors within a particular school. This may include:
 - a) Requesting they sign in as a visitor at the school as per usual process; and/or
 - b) Requiring them to wear identification materials that show their name and the media organisation they represent; and/or
 - c) In circumstances where it is impractical to sign in large numbers of media, ensuring the media representatives are part of a wider media group attending the school to provide coverage of the visit by the political representative.

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