churches education commission REPORT

**TO THE General Synod / te HĪnota WHĀNUI 2018**

**Introduction from CEO Stephanie Sewell**

On behalf of the Churches Education Commission, I would like to say a huge thank you to the Anglican Church, which is one of the highest contributors for Bible in Schools volunteers in New Zealand. Thank you so much. You are incredible!

I am privileged to serve in this amazing organisation with a 140-year heritage. Across the Nation of New Zealand, each week 2,500 volunteers, teach 60,000 children commonly held values and the basic Christian beliefs. It is their heart for local kiwi children and their communities that are both inspiring and humbling. CEC’s vision is “Inspiring Every Child to Make Positive Life Choices” and this is achieved through the efforts of our volunteers. We celebrate our volunteers and their commitment of time, talents and treasure. It is a celebration of their values and their commitment to building a better New Zealand for everyone.

**Some highlights from the last 12 months are as follows:**

* The Curriculum is continuing to be developed, pushing it towards excellence.
* Increased staffing in the National Office.
* The website is improved and relaunched (www.cec.org.nz)
* We are firmly focused on going forward.

**Encouragement**

Pastor John C Maxwell said

“A word of encouragement from a teacher to a child can change a life. A word of encouragement from a spouse can save a marriage. A word of encouragement from a leader can inspire a person to reach their potential.”

We are in a very privileged position to provide encouragement to so many of our nations young people. Our highest hope and desire is to inspire kiwi kids to make positive life choices.

**A new curriculum relevant to today's society**

In 2015, we decided to re-launch our own Curriculum called "Life Choices". A media-based curriculum is available for large group presentations, as well as a teacher's guide and workbooks for junior, middle and senior levels of primary school. The curriculum operates on a 3-year cycle and is very well received.

This was done to ensure that we have a common voice across the country which is both impactful and sustainable. In the last 20 years, our nation and schools have dramatically changed and so we must also change, while also sticking to our core values. What was relevant and acceptable even 5 years ago is different today, so we need to be wise and not risk losing our ability to inspire tens of thousands of children on a consistent basis. If we communicate in ways that we know the New Zealand public will not tolerate, we will not be around in another five years, and certainly not in another 140 years.

**Dealing with opposing views**

CEC is leading the battle for retaining Religious Instruction in Public Schools. The court case backed by the Secular Education Network, (a lobby group backed by the Humanist & Rationalist Society) has been dropped by the Supreme Court.

However, the battle continues, and they are now seeking a hearing with the Human Rights Tribunal. CEC has been joined to this hearing as an 'interested non-party' and how Bible in Schools programmes are run in schools will essentially be on trial. We are the largest provider of Bible in Schools in the country, partnering with 20 denominations, so we will passionately defend our freedom to impact the 600 schools and 60,000 kids that we engage with each week.

The reality is that opposition to Religious Education will not go away and CEC will keep fighting with you to ensure that kiwi kids get an opportunity to open the Bible and learn foundational values, that will help set them up for life.

**Moving forward**

In some ways, the negative publicity is helping us. We have a waiting list for Bible in Schools programmes and more genuine supporters are seeing the need and contributing to keeping this organisation growing. These funds will help with the Court Case, plus new initiatives such as intermediate school programs and upgrading our curriculum.

Serving this organisation is such a privilege and I can think of no better cause than positively impacting the lives of Kiwi kids, many of which will go on to be the future leaders of New Zealand.

Thanks so much for your involvement and support.

Stephanie Sewell

National Director

Churches Education Commission