EB25
Victorian Catholic Education
Enterprise Bargaining

Principal Information Pack

Introduction

On day one of Term 4, the Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA) and Catholic school employers made an offer to improve the wages and conditions of Catholic school employees by the start of the 2026 school year.

VCEA believes Catholic school employers and employees share the same vision. We all want the Common Good. We all want fair wages and conditions for staff in a thriving Catholic education system. We want staff to feel valued, respected and committed to their school communities and we recognise that meaningful changes to wages and conditions are required to support that outcome.

The offer VCEA and Catholic school employers have made gives employees a path to securing improved pay and conditions quickly. It responds to employee feedback on wages being the top priority for the agreement and concerns about delays in the previous negotiations.

We understand that we're asking employees to consider something new and there will be many questions. This information pack is designed to support principals to understand VCEA and Catholic school employers' offer, the rationale behind it, and the process for turning it into an enterprise agreement.

Our goal continues to be ensuring higher pay for all staff from January 2026, and providing the budget clarity employers need to plan for the new school year.

If you have questions or ideas for further support, please contact your Employee Relations Diocesan Representative or VCEA Employee Relations on eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au

About enterprise bargaining and VCEA

- There are currently three enterprise agreements covering most Catholic education employees in Victoria. These agreements expire on 31 December 2025, which means a new agreement can start as early as 1 January 2026.
- VCEA has been authorised to bargain on behalf of 34 Catholic school employers for the next enterprise agreement.
- VCEA aims to negotiate one cooperative, consistent and portable agreement across 34 Catholic school employers and VCEA.

Why has VCEA made an offer to employees?

- VCEA, in partnership with Catholic school employers, has made an offer to improve the wages and conditions of Catholic school employees by the start of the 2026 school year.
- The offer VCEA has made gives employees a path to securing improved pay and conditions, quickly.

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- If there is sufficient support from employees, VCEA will request that the Independent Education Union (IEU) and Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) agree to proceed to a vote on the enterprise agreement. If agreement is withheld, VCEA will ask the Fair Work Commission for a voting order so we can take the offer to a formal ballot to turn it into an enterprise agreement.
- We have taken this step because VCEA's repeated, respectful requests to meet and bargain with the IEU and ANMF for a cooperative agreement have been declined.

About the offer

Catholic education employees make a positive impact on the lives of students and Catholic school communities every day. The offer to Catholic school staff represents the high value placed on employees and their work.

Key features of the offer include:

- **A minimum 7% wage increase for all employees from the start of the 2026 school year** plus further wage rises (including in 2026 if necessary) to match the total percentage increases the Victorian Government agrees to pay government school employees in its upcoming negotiations. This will guarantee parity between Catholic and government school employees over the life of the four-year agreement.
- **A $1500 sign on bonus** for ongoing and fixed-term employees (pro rata for part-time employees).
- **A minimum of 5 days off as time in lieu for full-time teachers**, reducing administrative burden and giving teachers full days off instead of hours here and there.
- **Benefits for non-teaching staff** include changes to the Education Support classifications at Level 3, 4 and 5 which provide higher starting salaries and higher salaries at the top of each level as well as a new top salary band (Level 6).
- **Increased graduate salaries** to help attract more teachers to the profession.
- **Higher leave entitlements** including an extra four weeks of paid parental leave (increasing from 16 weeks to 20 weeks, or 40 weeks at half pay), paid lactation breaks, increased compassionate leave (from 3 to 5 days), leave for employees managing chronic symptoms associated with, endometriosis, menopause, polycystic ovary syndrome and menstruation (5 days where an employee's accrued personal/carer's leave is the equivalent of 15 days or less), and natural disaster leave (5 days).
- **Increases in allowances for positions of leadership** through a revised structure.
- **Benefits for deputy principals** delivering higher starting salaries, and higher salaries at the bottom and top of each level.
- **More recognition for the work of primary principals.** A revised classification structure delivering higher starting salaries and higher salaries at the bottom and top of each level

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Employers are also seeking changes to the agreement and they are clearly outlined in the offer and materials available to explain the offer so employees can be fully informed. These include:

- In exchange for providing teachers with 5 full days off as time in lieu (TIL), the administrative requirement to record each minute of directed additional duties attracting time in lieu will be removed.
- No change to maximum scheduled class time is proposed. However, if scheduled class time is increased in the agreement being negotiated by the Victorian Government for government schools, the same change would be adopted in Catholic schools.
- Attendance at school assemblies in secondary schools will not be treated as SCT.
- Amend current wording regarding Category B non-teacher end of year arrangements to provide that a Principal can direct duties provided such duties are commensurate with the employee's skills and experience.

A range of other changes are outlined in the offer and explained on the EB25 website so employees can see how the changes would affect them.

What is the process for turning the offer into an enterprise agreement?

- The offer has been emailed directly to Catholic school staff, unions and other authorised bargaining representatives.
- Once employees have had an opportunity to consider the offer and provide any feedback, they will be asked to indicate their support in a staff survey.
- If there is sufficient employee support for the offer, VCEA will request that the IEU and ANMF agree to proceed to a vote on the enterprise agreement. If their agreement is withheld, VCEA will apply to the Fair Work Commission for a voting order to allow a formal vote.
- If the voting order is approved and then a formal vote is successful, the agreement will be made and pay rises and improved conditions will flow from the start of the new school year, once the agreement is approved by the Fair Work Commission.
- If the survey is not successful, the offer will be withdrawn and current pay and conditions will continue to apply next year.

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Where to get information

- VCEA is committed to ensuring employees have access to all the information they need to evaluate the offer.
- The offer has been sent directly to employees and their representatives in writing.
- The dedicated VCEA EB25 website www.eb.catholic.edu.au has been updated with calculators and FAQs to help employees understand what the offer means for them.
- A short video update from VCEA CEO Prof. Elizabeth Labone is also available on the website www.eb.catholic.edu.au
- Posters and other printed information have been provided for distribution in schools.
- Updates will be provided to employees through schools, their employers and the VCEA
- The union will also have opportunities to communicate with employees.
- Principals with questions can contact your Employee Relations Diocesan Representative or VCEA Employee Relations on eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au

Consultation with unions and other authorised representatives

- Both the bargaining objectives circulated in Term 3 and the offer have been shared with the IEU, the ANMF and other authorised bargaining representatives.
- The IEU did not agree to meet to discuss what a potential offer might look like when offered the opportunity.
- VCEA does not expect the IEU to support our decision to make an offer directly to employees. The union has repeatedly refused requests to meet and bargain for a cooperative agreement. However, VCEA has again offered to meet with the IEU and ANMF to discuss the offer and would welcome the opportunity should they wish to be more actively involved. VCEA will continue to meet with the other authorised bargaining representatives to discuss the offer.
- The offer gives employees a path for securing extra pay and enhanced conditions without delay, while giving schools budget clarity to plan for the new school year.

Why do employers and the VCEA want an agreement by 2026?

- There are significant benefits for all staff and employers in having a new agreement in place from January 2026.
- Staff have indicated extra pay is their top priority in a cost of living crisis and VCEA and Catholic employers want to deliver that as quickly as possible.

- Employers would have budget clarity to plan for the new school year, and a chance to work on any required administrative changes ahead of time.
- Having an agreement in place for the start of the school year would mean we can all focus on our core work in 2026.

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FAQs

- **How will pay increases be determined?**

The offer includes a minimum 7% wage rise for all employees from the start of the 2026 school year. Additional wage rises will match the total percentage headline increases the Victorian Government agrees to pay government school employees when their deal is finalised next year.

This approach gives Catholic school staff an early wage rise, while still guaranteeing pay parity between Catholic and government school employees over the life of the 4-year agreement.

What if the government agrees to pay more than 7% next year?

If the government school agreement increases wages by more than 7% next year, Catholic school employees will get a further pay rise in 2026 to match the headline increase in Year 1 of the agreement. The headline wage rises in the public sector agreement for Years 2, 3 and 4 will then be adopted for Catholic school staff.

What if the government agrees to pay less than 7% in Year 1?

If the government school sector agreement pays less than 7% in Year 1, the Year 2 pay rise will be adjusted to realign Catholic and government school wages. The headline wage rises in the government school agreement for Years 3 and 4 will then be adopted for Catholic school staff.

- **What is the context for the initial, minimum 7% increase?**

Teachers are paid the same wages in Catholic and government schools in Victoria. This is called pay parity, and it has been in place since 1997.

The Victorian Government and the Australian Education Union are currently negotiating for a new enterprise agreement, which is not expected to be finalised until the second half of 2026.

In order to deliver benefits to Catholic school employees at the start of 2026, VCEA has made an offer that includes an initial minimum 7% increase, plus a commitment to further increases (including in 2026 if needed) to match the government sector wage outcomes over the life of the agreement.

We think 7% is a reasonable starting point given:

- The Victorian Government Wages Policy allows for a 3% annual increase.
- The minimum 7% wage increase is the largest single year pay rise in the last 25 years for Victorian Catholic school teachers and non-teaching staff.
- Additional wage rises will flow to match government school employees.

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- **What is the full pay rise over four years likely to be?**

The offer proposes a minimum 7% increase in year one, with further increases matching the headline pay rises in the Victorian Government agreement with government school employees.

To provide some context, the Victorian Government's wages policy provides for maximum increases of 3% each year over the life of a four year agreement. However, recent Victorian Government enterprise bargaining outcomes include 20% over 4 years for Victoria Police (i.e. 5 per cent a year), 28.4% over four years for nurses and midwives, and 21% over four years for Victorian TAFE teachers.

- **How did VCEA and Catholic school employers build the offer?**

VCEA and Catholic school employers engaged in school based consultation to listen to employees and understand their priorities. The offer addresses pain points and difficulties. We looked at relevant wage outcomes in other sectors to ensure our year one offer is highly competitive and we developed a structure to ensure Catholic school employees are guaranteed the same headline wage increase figure over the life of the agreement with government school employees.

The offer also includes provisions to make Catholic schools an employer of choice, while ensuring Catholic education remains accessible for Victorian families and supports the Common Good.

- **Are employers allowed to put an offer directly to employees?**

Yes, an employer or an authorised bargaining representative of employers can put a genuine offer directly to employees to gauge their support of an offer and this approach is consistent with good faith bargaining requirements.

The IEU and ANMF have refused to meet or bargain with VCEA for a cooperative workplace agreement since 21 July, and VCEA considers it is very unlikely that they will join negotiations this year. VCEA has sought recent meetings with the IEU to discuss what an offer might look like and they declined the requests to meet. VCEA shared the offer with the IEU, ANMF and the other authorised bargaining representatives before sharing with employees. VCEA will meet with the authorised bargaining representatives other than the IEU and ANMF this week to discuss the proposal and has again extended the invitation to the IEU and ANMF.

VCEA has decided to do something bold to try to move this forward because we believe employees want wage benefits as soon as possible and it is important to employers to have budget certainty for 2026.

VCEA and Catholic school employers have maintained a very positive and constructive relationship with the IEU for many years. VCEA respects the IEU's position on the type of agreement they are pursuing, however we are concerned that the position maintained by the IEU regarding the type of agreement is not necessarily the prevailing view of all staff. We have heard from employees regarding the need for meaningful wage increases and for those increases to be delivered in a timely manner. There is a lot of frustration about delayed negotiations last time, and VCEA has listened to those concerns and is trying to address that in a very practical way.

- **What is the process for turning the offer into an enterprise agreement?**

Once employees have had a chance to review and provide feedback on the offer, which includes a minimum 7% pay rise from January 2026, additional wage rises if required to ensure pay parity with government school employees, five days off for time in lieu, and other benefits, VCEA will conduct a staff survey to gauge support.

If the survey indicates most staff support the package and want the opportunity to take a binding vote, VCEA will request that the IEU and ANMF agree to proceed to a vote on the enterprise agreement. However, if agreement is withheld, VCEA will ask the Fair Work Commission for a voting order.

If the IEU and / or ANMF agree or an order is granted, employees will be able to participate in a formal vote to accept the agreement. If a sufficient number of employees vote yes, new wages and conditions will apply from January 2026.

- **How do employees accept the offer?**

There are few steps in the process before this offer can become a formal agreement.

Once staff have had time to review and provide feedback on the offer, VCEA will conduct a staff survey to gauge interest in progressing the offer.

If the survey shows a sufficient number of staff want to accept the offer, VCEA will request that the IEU and ANMF agree to proceed to a vote on the enterprise agreement. If their agreement is withheld, VCEA will apply to the Fair Work Commission for a voting order so that employees can participate in a formal and binding vote. The new enterprise agreement can only be approved if the majority of employees who vote, vote in favour of the approval of the agreement.

- **What happens if staff do not support the offer?**

If the staff survey does not indicate majority support for the offer, VCEA will not take the offer to a formal vote for a new enterprise agreement and the offer will be withdrawn. Current pay and conditions will continue to apply after the current agreements expire on 31 December. While VCEA would remain committed to bargaining for a new enterprise agreement and delivering wage increases at the start of the new school year, if the union continued to resist actively bargaining for a cooperative workplace agreement, and maintained its current position, we expect further negotiations on wages and conditions would be delayed until well into 2026.

- **Why does VCEA want a cooperative workplace agreement instead of the union's preferred agreement type, a Single Interest Authorisation?**

VCEA strongly believes that the current cooperative workplace agreement framework is the most effective and efficient way to deliver benefits to employees as soon as possible.

The idea that a different agreement type automatically delivers a better deal does not stack up – Catholic sector and public sector workers already have the same wages but different agreement types.

Catholic employers' school-based consultation told us employees want to focus on wages, and we're going to keep working towards a cooperative workplace agreement that prioritises wages in a cost of living crisis.

- **What is a cooperative workplace agreement?**

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), a cooperative workplace agreement involves at least two employers and their employees, allowing multiple employers to be covered by the same agreement.

VCEA is seeking to negotiate a cooperative workplace agreement (a multi-enterprise agreement) covering 34 Catholic school employers and VCEA with the aim of achieving unity, consistency and portability across and between Catholic school employers.

This is in keeping with the approach in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022 where employees, the IEU and Catholic school employers successfully made multi-enterprise agreements covering the great majority of Catholic schools in Victoria.

- **Why should employees support a cooperative agreement instead of the union's preferred agreement type?**

Catholic employers have consistently shown a willingness to respond to the needs of staff. The agreement type has not prevented progress - it has enabled it. It has allowed us to negotiate improvements collectively, ensuring that no school or system is left behind.

Different enterprise agreement types do not necessarily lead to different outcomes – the current Victorian government schools and Catholic education agreements are different but deliver similar benefits.

VCEA and Catholic school employers have built an offer that seeks to meet employee and employer needs. If employees support it, VCEA will request that the IEU and ANMF agree to

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proceed to a vote on the enterprise agreement. If their agreement is withheld, VCEA will seek a Fair Work Commission order to put it to a vote and start delivering additional pay and improved conditions as early as the start of the next school year.

VCEA and Catholic school employers have heard directly from employees and principals on the importance of delivering a timely outcome ensuring that wage improvements are provided to employees as soon as possible.

- **What happens when the current agreements expire?**

The current agreements expire on 31 December 2025. Even after the expiry date, the current agreements remain in effect until replaced. Employees will continue to work under the terms of the existing agreements until a new one is approved.

- **How does this process align with Catholic Social Teaching?**

Catholic Social Teaching is a rich and interwoven framework that calls us to hold multiple ethical principles in balance and to act in the best interests of staff, our communities, and the mission of Catholic education.

Catholic education in Victoria has long demonstrated a deep commitment to sector-wide solidarity. Despite the reality that our schools are operated by many different employers, we have consistently worked together to ensure, under the framework of the Common Good, that all staff receive equal rights and compensation.

This unity across diversity is not just operationally efficient - it is ethically profound. It reflects our shared commitment to the Common Good, ensuring that no school community is left behind and that every employee is valued equally.

VCEA and Catholic employers remain committed to fair and competitive compensation and are committed to engaging in the bargaining process with integrity, transparency, and a deep respect for staff.

VCEA and Catholic employers will continue to listen, to collaborate, and to uphold the values that define Catholic education.