An exploration of inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

July 2022

Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Signature: 

Matthew John Hawkins

Date: 5 July 2022

Statement of Appreciation

Firstly, I acknowledge the First Nations peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of this land. I have been fortunate to work and walk alongside some incredible, talented and wise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and friends throughout my career, and this is something for which I feel very grateful. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, especially those from the countries on which I am privileged to live and work – Turrbul, Yaggera, Quandamooka and Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi. I acknowledge that this land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Secondly, I acknowledge the Congregation of Christian Brothers. The Congregation has in recent years justifiably been forced to face the consequences of the actions of some Brothers who have inexcusably breached the trust of many children and families for whom they had a duty of care. I would like to acknowledge the suffering of all victims of abuse. This pain and suffering notwithstanding, many Christian Brothers have been responsible for some of the most amazingly selfless, compassionate and inspirational work I have encountered, and I am extremely grateful for the example and opportunities I have been provided by so many Christian Brothers with whom I have been privileged to spend time.

I am grateful for the support and access provided me by my employer, Edmund Rice Education Australia, throughout the duration of this study. I thank Dr Wayne Tinsey and Dr Craig Wattam, the immediate past and current EREA Executive Directors for their guidance and support. I also acknowledge the support of each of my principals throughout my 22 years in Edmund Rice schools: Br Vince Skelly, Mr Michael Senior, Mr Daryl Hanly, Dr Michael Carroll, Mr Chris Mayes and Mr Paul Flanders. The Edmund Rice story and charism has become central to my professional and personal life, and I feel extremely privileged to be a teacher and leader within EREA.

I sincerely thank my supervisors who have guided me throughout my study. I am grateful to Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin who started me on this journey. Professor Jim Gleeson then assisted me through the early years before heading home to Ireland. I am fortunate that Professor Chris Branson then agreed to lead me through to submission and was soon joined by Dr Bill Sultmann as Co-Supervisor. I am indebted to both Chris and Bill for their patience and guidance. I simply would not have completed this task without them.

Finally to my family and friends who have supported me throughout these recent years, practically and morally, I offer my sincere thanks. I would like to make special mention of my parents, Ray and Carm, for their continual support, and my three kids, Claudia, Charlie and Rosie, who challenge and inspire me every day to see inclusivity as more than merely an academic task.

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Abstract

The *Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition* (Charter) proposed by Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) calls all schools to be inclusive (EREA, 2017). However, an argument exists that there is a lack of consistency in the ways leaders at the organisational and school levels of EREA understand and implement inclusivity (Tinsey, 2012). Within this contested context, this research sought to explore how inclusivity is understood, interpreted and implemented in EREA. Three research questions focused the conduct of the research:

1. What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?
2. How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?
3. What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

The study examined inclusivity in six EREA mainstream schools in relation to educationally disadvantaged students, nominated as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. An interpretivist paradigm using a constructionist epistemology and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism underpinned the study. The chosen methodology was case study.

Research was undertaken across two inter-related phases. Phase 1 explored the perceptions of the EREA Council, Board, Executive and leadership team, along with principals and deputy principals of all 31 EREA mainstream schools to ascertain understandings and applications of the concept of inclusivity. In the second phase of research, six EREA mainstream schools were purposively selected to develop an understanding of the themes emerging from Phase 1 data. Principals, Identity leaders, business managers, teachers, parents and a small group of senior students were invited to engage with a documentary analysis, open-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed through a constant comparative method and enabled the development of a conceptual framework as to the understanding and implementation of inclusivity in EREA.

Findings from Phase 1 indicated an inadequate perspective of inclusivity as to EREA schools being *open to all*; and, a disconnect in views between EREA organisational and school-based leaders. Findings from Phase 2 built upon these themes and indicated the need for greater clarity and more transparent communication regarding inclusivity within EREA.

The research generated three conclusions that contribute to new knowledge. First, the research supported the literature and confirmed the four aforementioned key groups of young people at a distinct educational disadvantage in contemporary Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The research indicates that these four groups are the most prevalent in terms of educational disadvantage and can be described as the *poor and marginalised* in the context of contemporary Australian education. Second, the research established that any description of inclusivity that suggests that a school is or should be *open to all* is inadequate. Rather, a deeper contextual understanding is required, especially by leaders. The differing understandings of inclusivity, coupled with a lack of clear organisational policy has resulted in some EREA schools becoming more exclusive than inclusive. Third, the clear contrast between espoused EREA values and neo-liberal values emerged from the research.

The research also provided three contributions to quality practice regarding inclusivity in EREA schools. First, inclusive practices rely heavily upon leadership within the school, most significantly the role and person of principal. Second, exclusive practices within some schools necessitate greater critical reflection at an organisational level. The prevailing neo-liberal agenda in contemporary Australian and international education presents significant challenges for school-based leaders, hence clearer direction from the organisational level of EREA is required. Third, the importance of transparent communication between leaders and all school community members emerged as a key aspect of practice regarding inclusivity and the avoidance of perceptions as to elitism in EREA schools.

Recommendations from the research entailed: critical reflection regarding the language which expresses inclusivity is given priority; formation programs give attention the depth of understanding amongst staff, especially current and potential leaders, of inclusivity and its theological and philosophical foundations; EREA critically reflect on the issue of accountability and consider the use of individual and nuanced benchmarks for schools and principals in addressing inclusivity; EREA designs an *inclusivity audit* and tasks each school with completing it in order to provide feedback to EREA as the first stage in the development of a clear plan to achieve essential inclusivity goals in a defined timeframe; the recruitment processes for selection of principals, deputy principals and business managers incorporate an understanding of, and genuine commitment to, inclusivity; and, consideration be given to providing opportunities for the amplification of student voice in relation to inclusivity.

In summary, the research into inclusivity in EREA provides insights into the relevance and nature of inclusivity within a significant group of schools within the Australian education non-government school sector. Implications for the sector are generic in nature and can be considered as a platform for research in other jurisdictions and/or as a base for reflection and action.

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AC	Companion of the Order of Australia
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACBC	Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
AM	Member of the Order of Australia
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia
APS	Associated Public Schools (Victoria)
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATSI	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
CCB	Congregation of Christian Brothers
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CCM	Constant Comparative Method
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
ERA for Change	Edmund Rice Advocacy for Change
EREA	Edmund Rice Education Australia
ERSES	Edmund Rice Special Education Services
FLC	Flexible Learning Centre
GPS	Greater Public Schools (Queensland)
IRSAD	Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Intersex, Queer
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MCTEE	Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NCCD	National Consistent Collection of Data
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIEC	International Office of Catholic Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

PJP	Public Juridic Person
PSA	Public Schools Association (Western Australia)
RI	Religious Institute
RQ	Research Question
SDGs	Sustainability Development Goals
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Chapter 1: Identifying the Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) is a network of schools offering a Catholic education in the tradition of Blessed Edmund Rice (1762–1844) the founder of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. My involvement in EREA schools began in 2000 as a teacher of English, History and Religious Education at a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition in Brisbane. Since that time, I have worked in four EREA schools and held a variety of leadership positions.

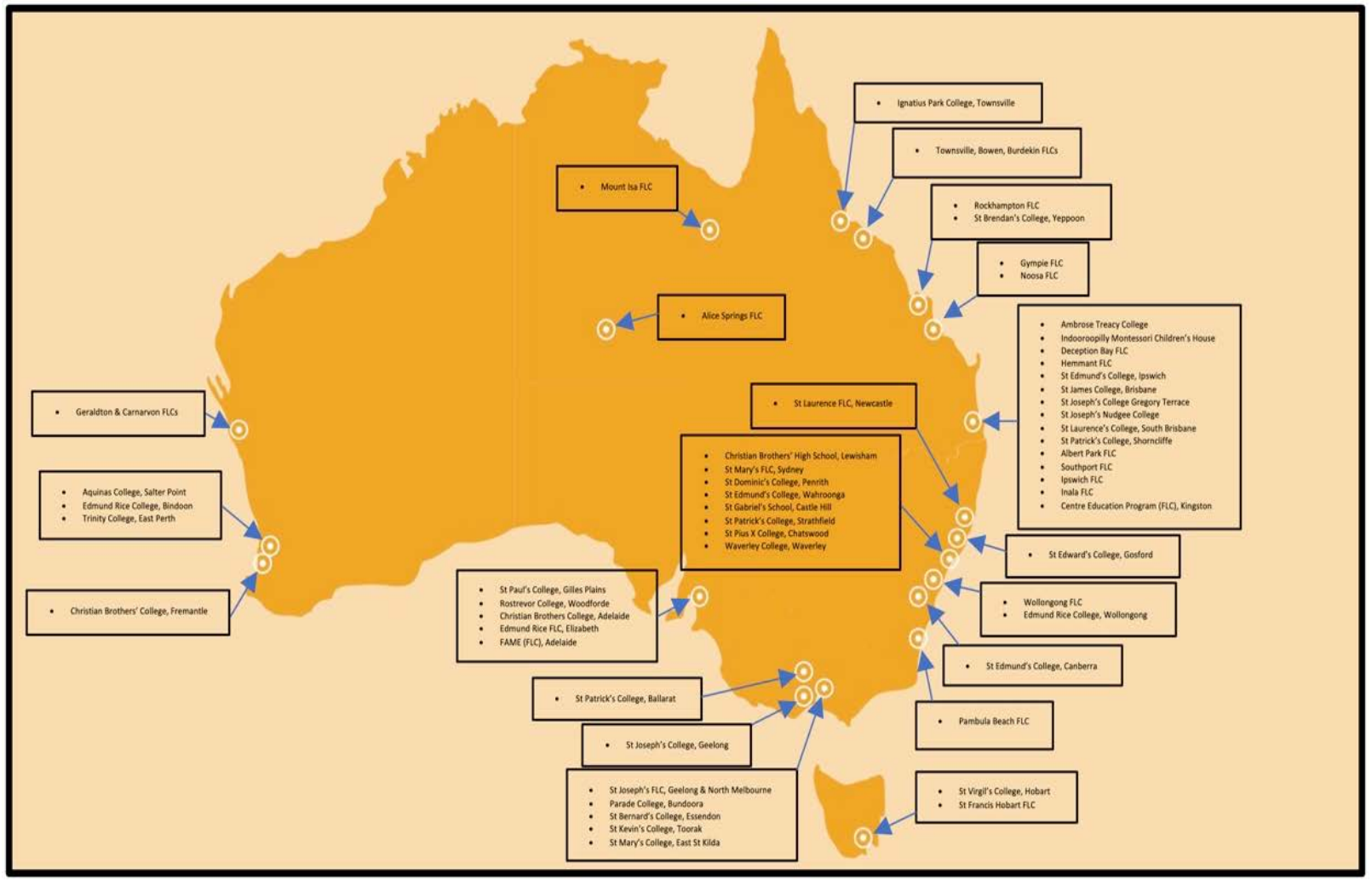
My interest in the concept of inclusivity has evolved. Within my professional life, inclusivity is a cultural characteristic of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition (EREA, 2017) and, as a senior leader in EREA schools, an understanding of inclusivity and inclusive practices has been a central tenet of my leadership. Further, as the father of three children, one of whom has Down syndrome, inclusivity has also become a focus in my life outside of work.

1.2 The Research Context

Within Australian Company Law, EREA was officially formed on 1 October 2007 and, on 1 May 2013, within Church Law, was recognised as a Public Juridic Person (PJP) with "the granting of canonical and civil status to EREA as a Church and legal body in its own right" (EREA, 2013). EREA currently oversees fifty-five schools educating approximately 39,000 students and employing 6500 staff across all states and territories in Australia (see Figure 1.1). Of the 55 schools in EREA, 31 are mainstream schools, two are special education services schools, and 22 are flexible learning centres. While the specific natures of these schools will be discussed in Chapter 2, it is important to note that EREA mainstream schools are the focus of this exploration. By the very nature of special education schools and flexible learning centres, inclusivity is central to their purpose and practice, whereas the call to inclusivity within EREA mainstream schools presents greater need for examination.

Figure 1.1

Map Displaying the Location and Names of the EREA Schools Across Australia



The identity of the authentic EREA school is articulated in the *Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition* (Charter). The Charter is a statement which advances four educational *touchstones* characterising its distinctive educational philosophy:

- liberating education;
- Gospel spirituality;
- justice and solidarity; and
- inclusive community (EREA, 2017).

This study focuses predominantly on the touchtone of *inclusive community*, broadly defined as "our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good" (EREA, 2017). The Charter develops this understanding through nine characteristics of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice Tradition:

1. provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as uniquely reflecting the image of God;
2. demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
3. is sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families, designing school programs to empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
4. welcomes and values all members of the school community regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation;
5. promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
6. works in partnership with the local Catholic community Church in serving the broader mission of the whole Church;
7. acknowledges the services and contribution of the Christian Brothers and works in partnership with Edmund Rice Ministries in furthering the Charism;
8. acknowledges the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and welcomes them into its community;
9. looks beyond itself to contribute, according to its means, to the overall growth and development of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and to Edmund Rice ministries in Australia and overseas. (EREA, 2017)

Clearly, the imperative of inclusivity is argued to apply to policy and practice throughout all EREA endeavours. EREA has a mission with "those made poor and marginalised" (EREA, 2014a, p. 4), inspired by the person of Edmund Rice who "became more aware of the disadvantaged people around him and in 1802, he set up a free school for boys living in poverty" (EREA, 2020) in Waterford, Ireland.

Notwithstanding these historical and ideological foci, contemporary EREA schools are challenged to address inclusivity through an educational provision that is responsive to its tradition while aligned with community expectations. Such expectations demand that inclusion be a foundation milestone to address the educational needs of diverse student populations. However, the challenge for EREA schools to address inclusivity exists in a contemporary educational context dominated by intense pressures, increased accountabilities and competing values. A dominant neo-liberal agenda has increased the risk that inclusivity may indeed be overlooked. This research develops a contemporary and contextual understanding of inclusivity and its relationship with students identified as educationally disadvantaged.

1.3 The Research Design

The purpose of this research is to explore how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA schools. Given the interpretive nature of the research, the research framework shown in Table 1.1 was generated.

Table 1.1

Research Framework

Research element	Research method
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism Symbolic interactionism
Research methodology	Case study
Data-gathering strategies	Open-ended Questionnaire Semi-structured interview Focus group interview Document analysis

1.3.1 Epistemology

The epistemology adopted for this research design was constructionism because it accepts the interpretive nature of meaning-making by human beings (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism was selected to guide this study for two reasons. First, constructionism seeks to explore the ways in which the research participants constructed meaning about what constituted inclusivity and its implementation. Second, constructionism is applicable from the perspective of the researcher endeavouring to make purposeful meaning of the participants' understandings and implementation of inclusivity.

1.3.2 Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective adopted for this study is interpretivism, a research paradigm based on describing the unique ways humans construct understanding or interpretations of their world (Blumer, 1998; Crotty, 1998). A basic tenet of the interpretivist approach is that knowledge is embedded in human experience. Meaning is constructed by and through the interactive process which occurs when humans interact and communicate with others. An interpretive approach aims to generate a deeper, more extensive and systematic representation of reality from the point of view of the participants. In this research, interpretivism provides guidance for the systematic exploration and analysis of the phenomenon of inclusivity from the perspective of participants, including EREA leaders, teachers, parents and students.

1.3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

In this study, symbolic interactionism is the lens through which interpretivism is viewed to construct meaning of leaders' social interactions. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the behaviours and understandings of human beings in their social worlds (Stake, 1995). Symbolic interactionism attempts to offer an understanding of perspective, inter-subjectivity, motive and reason as to how people negotiate reality, and how they act in relation to their perceptions. Participants construct and reconstruct insights of their respective contexts through multiple social interactions. As such, this research seeks to better understand how inclusivity is understood and implemented by participants, rather than seeking to prove or disprove a current theory.

1.3.4 Research Methodology

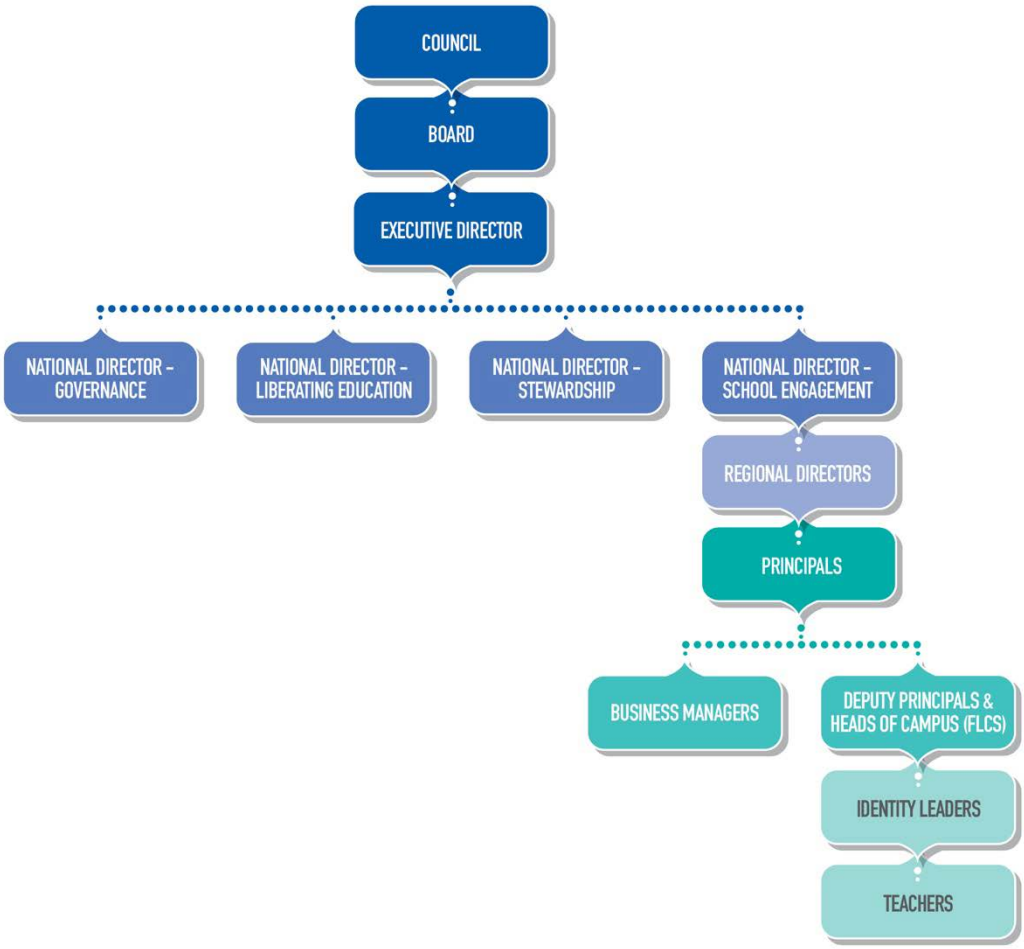
The theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and symbolic interactionism informed the choice of methodology for this research, case study. Case study methodology is appropriate for the research because it allows the focus to be "the case in its idiosyncratic complexity, not on the whole population of cases" (Burns, 1994, p. 316). In particular, the case study provides insight into the research questions which seek to address how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA.

1.3.5 Participants

A selection of key leaders, teachers, parents and students within EREA were invited to participate in this research in order to provide the most relevant insights and data possible for the study. Figure 1.2 displays the governance structure of EREA, specifically as it pertains to the EREA organisational leadership research participants.

Figure 1.2

Governance Structure of EREA



In the first phase of the research, the open-ended questionnaire, there were two cohorts invited to participate:

- The 31 principals and 31 deputy principals from each EREA mainstream secondary school;
- EREA organisational leaders, consisting of members of the EREA Council, EREA Board, EREA Executive and leadership team.

For the second phase of the research, six EREA schools were selected and invited to participate in the research. The six schools were selected to represent a cross section of EREA mainstream secondary schools. Factors used to select the six schools included enrolment numbers, location, gender and boarding school status. At each of the six EREA schools selected, semi-structured interviews informed by the previously completed open-ended questionnaire took place with three key members of each school's leadership: the principal, the Identity leader, and the business manager. Further, in each of the six schools, a group of student leaders was also invited to participate in a focus group interview. A voluntary online questionnaire was also provided for teaching staff and parents.

A summary of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 research participants is provided in Tables 1.2 and 1.3.

Table 1.2

Phase 1 Research Participants – Open-Ended Questionnaire

Participant type	Invitations	Responses
EREA leadership (council, board, executive and leadership team)	20	18
Principal	31	23
Deputy principal	31	26

Table 1.3

Phase 2 Research Participants

Participant type	Data-gathering strategy	Participants per school	Total
Principal	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Identity leader	Semi-structured interview	1 (2 in one school)	7
Business manager	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Student leader	Focus group interview	4, 4, 4, 7, 8, 10	37
Teacher	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 15, 15, 19, 15, 74	138
Parent	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 153, 24, 76, 62, 273	588

1.3.6 Data-Gathering Strategies

Case study methodology adopts data-gathering strategies which involve a broad variety of techniques, rather than a single technique (Patton, 1990). Four data-gathering strategies for this research were adopted: open-ended questionnaire; semi-structured interview; focus group interview; and documentary analysis. An initial open-ended questionnaire was adopted to generate insights into leaders' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Creswell, 2008). During the second phase of the research, an open-ended questionnaire was again utilised to collect data regarding the perceptions of teachers and parents from participating schools. The semi-structured interview enabled conversations which developed and acquired direct quotations from leaders about their perceptions and experiences. Focus group interviews with student leaders allowed the collection of a shared understanding from several participants in an environment which was likely to yield the best possible information (Creswell, 2008). Documentary analysis of data including enrolment and fee policies provided complementary evidence and the potential for triangulation of data in the analysis and synthesis phases of the research.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is important for the following reasons. First, it seeks to provide clarity in relation to the ways in which school and organisational leaders in EREA understand inclusivity, and the ways in which they respond to the call to be inclusive in practice within an increasingly complex educational context. Second, the research gives attention to the young people who are currently considered to be educationally disadvantaged and marginalised in Australian society, and provides school leaders with information regarding those students, whom EREA articulates as a priority for an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. Third, the research generates data pertaining to both the perceived affordances and challenges to inclusivity, providing leaders with current perceptions of key stakeholders which may inform future decisions about inclusivity.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

An outline of the structure of the thesis is given below.

Chapter 1 – Identifying the Research Problem: Chapter 1 provides background context to the research, and introduces the reasons for the exploration of inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Chapter 2 – Clarifying the Research Problem: Chapter 2 describes the research problem and identifies the purpose of the study which underpins the research. This chapter presents a summary of the educational contexts within which Edmund Rice Education Australia exists, provides a description of the four groups of educationally disadvantaged young people who are foci for the research, and describes the foundation principles of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review: Chapter 3 critically outlines the literature concerning the research problem. As a result, three research questions emerge.

Chapter 4 – Research Design: Chapter 4 presents the research design and describes the methods employed for collection of data.

Chapter 5 – Presentation of Findings: Research Question 1: Chapter 5 presents and justifies the themes generated from an analysis of the first research question and offers justified issues inviting discussion.

Chapter 6 – Presentation of Findings: Research Question 2: Chapter 6 presents and justifies the themes generated from an analysis of the second research question and offers justified issues inviting discussion.

Chapter 7 – Presentation of Findings: Research Question 3: Chapter 7 presents and justifies the themes generated from an analysis of the third research question and offers justified issues inviting discussion.

Chapter 8 – Discussion of Findings: Chapter 8 presents a critical discussion of new findings.

Chapter 9 – Conclusions and Recommendations: Chapter 9 provides a summary of the research, identifies contributions to new knowledge and practice, and suggests recommendations which emerge from the research.

Chapter 2: Clarifying the Research Problem

2.1 Introduction

The intent of this chapter is to describe the research problem which underpins this study. The research problem is located within the context of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) and its Charter that gives significance to the touchstone of *inclusive community*. The research explores how EREA organisation and school leaders understand and implement inclusivity. The significance of the touchstone is evident in the inaugural address by the then Executive Director of EREA who noted that the establishment of EREA was at "a time when Catholic schools in our Australian culture are, to quote the Australian Bishops, at the crossroads; we can either seize the opportunity, fulfill our mission to be counter-cultural, inclusive and embracing of a genuine 'option for the disadvantaged', or have this remembered in the future as our great omission" (Tinsey, 2012).

The research exists within the context of Australian education in which various systems operate. In 2020, 9,620 Australian schools consisted of government, independent and Catholic schools. While all government schools are non-denominational, non-government schools are classified as either independent or Catholic schools. Within the Catholic Education sector, the majority are overseen by Catholic Education Offices, while non-systemic or Religious Institute schools operate independently of those offices. EREA schools are classified as non-systemic Catholic schools or Religious Institute schools.

This chapter explores the issue of inclusivity by examining the demographics of four categories of young people perceived as educationally disadvantaged and marginalised in contemporary Australia. The categories of educationally disadvantaged students were derived from relevant reports from the Australian Government Productivity Commission, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), and most recently the Education Council's December 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe[1]) Education Declaration. The groups chosen for consideration include economically disadvantaged students, students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, students from refugee backgrounds, and students with disabilities. More precisely, the chapter reviews the respective conditions of disadvantage for each of these student categories in Catholic and EREA schools. Subsequently, a description of my professional and personal experiences and understandings associated with inclusivity and its enactment in EREA schools is provided. The chapter concludes by

[1] Mparntwe (pronounced M-ban tua) is the Arrernte name for Alice Springs. The Aboriginal Arrernte (pronounced arrunda) people are the traditional custodians of Alice Springs and the surrounding region.

depicting how this contextual information has informed the conceptualisation and identification of the research problem, purpose and question.

The sequence of the chapter is outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Overview of Chapter 2

Major sections	Subsections
2.1 Introduction	
2.2 Educational disadvantage in Australia	2.2.1 Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds 2.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 2.2.3 Students from refugee backgrounds 2.2.4 Students with disabilities
2.3 Foundational mission of an EREA school	2.3.1 The life and message of Jesus 2.3.2 The Edmund Rice charism 2.3.3 The Christian Brothers in Australia 2.3.4 Edmund Rice Education Australia Charter
2.4 Personal context	
2.5 Conceptualising the research problem	
2.6 The research problem	
2.7 The research purpose	
2.8 The research question	

2.2 Educational Disadvantage in Australia

In *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, the Australian Government Productivity Commission's 2013 Working Paper, disadvantage is defined as "impoverished lives" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 31), as distinguished from poverty alone. "Disadvantage was traditionally understood as poverty, and poverty as inadequate resources or low income. But low income does not necessarily establish disadvantage" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 31). The 2011 Gonski Review had previously established that "there are five factors of disadvantage that have a significant impact on educational outcomes in Australia: socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, English language proficiency, disability and remoteness" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 111). The review goes further with respect to English language proficiency and asserts that of the students with a lack of proficiency, "by far the most disadvantaged group are refugee students who have been in an Australian school for more than one year" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 118). For the purpose of this exploration, four key groups of educationally disadvantaged students have been identified as central foci: students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from refugee backgrounds and students with disabilities.

2.2.1 Students From Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

It is evident that economically disadvantaged students are less likely to succeed in their schooling than students from wealthier backgrounds. The 2013 Australian Government Productivity Commission Paper, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, analysed the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on the educational outcomes of children and reported that "Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform more poorly at school, on average, than those from higher socioeconomic groups" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 17). Moreover, data within this report suggests that any student performance weaknesses evident upon entry to school continues throughout their school years, and in fact, then becomes far more significant (McLachlan et al., 2013). This implies that in contemporary Australia, education not only fails to lift people out of economic disadvantage; indeed, it seems to compound the disadvantage.

2.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

Students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds are statistically at an educational disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous students (Education Council, 2019). The disadvantage is associated with a mixture of causes including economic struggle, remoteness, language barriers and social exclusion. In 2019, the Australian Government re-committed "to empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to reach their potential and to ensuring the education community works to 'close the gap' for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (Education Council, 2019, p. 16).

2.2.3 Students From Refugee Backgrounds

Students from refugee backgrounds suffer educational disadvantage in Australia due to language and cultural barriers, traumatic backgrounds, economic disadvantage, and social exclusion (Earnest et al., 2015; Molla, 2020; Ziaian et al., 2018). While there is a relative lack of longitudinal data and literature regarding the educational outcomes of refugee students, when compared to the other three groups addressed in this study, the evidence suggests that these students often have extensive learning, social and emotional needs, and can be marginalised in an educational setting (Earnest et al., 2015; Molla, 2020; Sidhu & Taylor, 2008; Sidhu & Taylor, 2012).

2.2.4 Students With Disabilities

Students with disabilities are educationally disadvantaged in contemporary Australia not only because of their specific disability and or disabilities but by influences of incorrect assumptions by key

stakeholders, social exclusion and ineffective professional development of teachers (Carrington et al., 2006; Ryan, 2017). Under Australian legislation, specifically the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, "students with disability must be able to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers" (NCCD, 2021, Wider Support Materials section). The definition of disability as described in the legislation is:

> (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
> (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
> (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
> (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
> (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
> (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
> (g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;
>
> and includes a disability that:
>
> (h) presently exists; or
> (i) previously existed but no longer exists; or
> (j) may exist in the future; or
> (k) is imputed to a person. (Australian Government, 2018, Part 1, no. 4 Interpretation section)

The existence of these groups of disadvantaged students in the contemporary national educational context is central to this study. Further, the foundational mission of EREA schools is relevant also to this study as this mission informs the understandings and practices regarding inclusion of disadvantaged students in EREA schools.

2.3 Foundational Mission of an EREA School

An authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition has at its foundations the life and message of Jesus, the Edmund Rice charism, the legacy of the Christian Brothers, and an adherence to the EREA Charter.

2.3.1 The Life and Message of Jesus

The Christian Scriptures portray Jesus as preaching and witnessing to inclusivity. The Christ of the Gospel welcomed strangers and was present to those excluded from society. The Gospel of Matthew captures the emphasis:

> Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"
>
> The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Mt 25: 34–40)

The motivation of Jesus for inclusion is premised on a conviction of individuals and groups being freed from exclusion, prejudice and rejection and in the process becoming "whole" or "fully human":

> When we begin to penetrate this Christ meaning, as it is depicted in the Gospels, we find that what the gospel writers were trying to convey was not the tribal message of rescuing the sinners, saving the lost or attempting to patch up our insecurities. It was rather a message designed to call those who had experienced the presence of Jesus to translate the full humanity they met in him into a new and inclusive kind of life for themselves. … We will never become whole by rejecting others. … You cannot be human, Jesus said, and be prejudiced. (Spong, 2007, p. 247)

The parable of the good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke reinforces the message of inclusion. In this story, the "half-breed, heretical and unclean Samaritan" (Spong, 2007, p. 255) was not influenced by tribal exclusiveness and religious definitions, as were the Priest and Levite before him. Liberated from boundaries, which define a person and restrict one's thoughts and actions, the good Samaritan "was able to see only a human being in need, a need to which he gave his time, his concern and his means" (Spong, 2007, p. 255).

The message was clear. For Jesus, inclusivity was more than treating people well. Inclusivity was fundamental to his understanding of human existence. Importantly then, within the context of this particular study, it is significant to note that the Gospel message of liberation and inclusion, central to Jesus' ministry, is one of the foundational aspects of an authentic EREA school.

2.3.2 The Edmund Rice Charism

Charism refers to "a particular lens into the Gospel story; the vision and experience of one person shedding light on the core priorities of Jesus" (Tinsey, 2011) or "Graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men and women, to the needs of the world" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, par. 799). The term is derived from the Greek word "χαρίσμα", meaning "grace" or "favour" given by God. For the purpose of this exploration, the concept "begins with the founder, who receives a divine insight and grace to respond radically to the gospel" (Finn, 2013, p. 5).

The Edmund Rice charism is foundational to an authentic Edmund Rice school. As a result of McLaughlin's (2007) work, *The Price of Freedom: Edmund Rice Educational Leader*, the concepts of presence, compassion and liberation are now regularly used to articulate the Rice charism. However, Finn (2013) argues that there is a lack of clarity around the Rice charism, and there is a challenge for the Christian Brothers to not only identify the charism, but also ensure it is authentic within each Edmund Rice institution. The lack of clarity about the Rice charism stems from the lack of detail about the man himself (Finn, 2013; Tuite, 2007). For the purpose of this research, the history and charism of Edmund Rice, as they pertain to the concept of inclusivity, will be explored.

Edmund Rice was born in Callan in 1762 and died in 1844. He was a merchant, a husband and a father before becoming an educationalist, opening his first school in Waterford in 1802. Rice's "educational mission focused on the moral, spiritual and intellectual education of poor and marginalized male youth" (Finn, 2013, p. 2).

An understanding of Rice's societal context is important in examining his motivations. Like the context in which Jesus of Nazareth lived, Rice's Ireland was dominated by social status and stratification (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 7). In a social hierarchy with five clear levels, the Rice family belonged to the second highest level, the "new-moneyed Catholic tenant farmers, each farming about two hundred acres of land" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 8). The Rices were financially quite stable, as opposed to the bottom level of the hierarchy who were the "abject poor, whose…living conditions [were] pathetic" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 9).

Following the sudden death of his wife, it is said that Rice was "forced to examine his inner life" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 66) and turned to reflective reading, especially of the Christian Scriptures. Rice responded through compassionate action and realised that to follow Jesus authentically, he must engage communally, and thereby "sought out those who were most in need" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 69). When he invited poor children into his home in Arundel Lane, and accepted the responsibility to care for the orphaned Connolly sisters, Rice experienced and displayed compassion through outreach and inclusion.

> From his wife's death, Rice seemed driven to serve these outcasts, and not just contribute financially as so many of his colleagues were contented to do. Compassion became synonymous with the name of Edmund Rice. … He had a compelling passion to embrace society's rejects as the very images of God and he accepted that his mission was to liberate that image. (McLaughlin, 2007, pp. 71–72)

The principal means by which Rice modelled inclusivity was through providing a liberating education. He viewed education as a way to not only help his "dear little ones" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 175) discover the image of God within themselves but also to liberate that image of themselves. Rice sought to help them through education to live as God wishes them to live. "This was the focus of his

liberationary education" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 179). Rice had liberated others outside of his educational context and in at least one example, that of "Black Johnnie", Rice's deed of liberating was through the process of inclusion.

> The story is that he [Johnnie] came to the Port of Waterford on a trading vessel, and for some reason or other the Captain wanted to be rid of him or the boy wanted to be left ashore. At any rate the Captain agreed to hand him over to Edmund Rice. Presumably, a ransom was paid. The testimony says Edmund "negotiated with the Captain" for him. As a young lad, Johnnie became a messenger boy for the nuns. In adult life, with Edmund's help he prospered in business and became a property owner. In his will he bequeathed to the nuns [and Brothers] two houses. (A. O'Neill, "Nuns and monks at Hennesy's Road", as cited in McLaughlin, 2007, p. 71)

The story of John Thomas, "Black Johnnie's" true and more dignified name by which he eventually became known, is often recounted in Edmund Rice schools to demonstrate Edmund Rice's compassion, sense of justice and liberation. Equally, the story is about Rice's ability and willingness to challenge the status quo and include the outsider, as well as the potential for mutual benefit through inclusion.

Each of the schools that Rice personally established was inclusive. However, while "the very poor formed a large minority in Rice's schools…parents from all sections of society, rich and poor, except the very wealthy, sent their children to his schools" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 125). One statement which goes to the heart of Rice's philosophy of inclusivity comes from Thomas Morrissey in 1912: "He educated the rich and the poor, and if he gave preference he gave it to the poor" (Morrissey, 26 August 1912, cited in McLaughlin, 2007, p. 172).

Edmund Rice's life and contribution to his community as a charism can, as McLaughlin (2007) contends, be defined by *presence* to, *compassion* for, and *liberation* of the poor and the marginalised. The comprehensive mission was centred on Rice's desire to include and liberate people, young and old, poor and wealthy, and regardless of ability. It was a way of being that he strove to embed within the life, ministry and identity of the religious community he founded, the Christian Brothers.

2.3.3 The Christian Brothers in Australia

A community of Christian Brothers, led by Br Patrick Ambrose Treacy, commonly referred to as Ambrose Treacy, arrived in Australia from Ireland in 1868 and, between 1870 and 1900, was responsible for the establishment of eleven schools. During the first hundred years of their presence in Australia, the order grew from just four Brothers in 1868 to 1100 in 1968. At that time, the Christian Brothers were working in 140 establishments across Australia and New Zealand and, in 1964, were involved in twenty-seven schools in Queensland, "educating 10,164 boys" (Tuite, 2007, p. 5).

Over time, and subject to a decline in vocations to the Congregation, the dominant presence of Christian Brothers, vowed Religious, in schools diminished significantly. As the number of Christian Brothers decreased, lay (non-religious community members) teachers, middle leaders and, eventually, principals and administrators were appointed in their stead. This transition called into question what constituted an authentic Edmund Rice school in Australia. Within this debate, the transition in language and in governance from "Christian Brother school" to "Edmund Rice school" was an important outcome. While previously it had been accepted that the authenticity of an Edmund Rice school depended on the presence and governance of Christian Brothers (Finn, 2013), this was not the future reality for these schools. Therefore, it was essential that the foundational Christian Brothers' vision, mission and identity was acknowledged and incorporated into what became EREA and its schools.

Important in the context of this particular study is the foundational Christian Brother vision, mission and identity with respect to the concept of inclusivity. An identification of the early tradition of the Christian Brothers provides context and depth to an examination of a contemporary, authentic Edmund Rice education. Hence, the explicit mission of the first leader of the Christian Brothers in Australia offers important perspective. Ambrose Treacy articulated his vision for the inclusive nature of an Edmund Rice education in a letter he wrote to Mr Gardner, the town clerk of Richmond, in 1882:

> The school is open to all who wish to avail themselves of it without distinction or creed, colour or nationality. No child can be refused admission on the score of religion or of payment. (Treacy, 1882, as cited in Hickey, 2012, p. 325)

Treacy shared Rice's view that education was the means by which the poor could be uplifted, and through his key role in establishing schools in Australia, an authentic and inclusive Edmund Rice education was initiated. "Ambrose believed to the roots of his being in the value of Christian education and in working for the uplift of the young men who came into the care of the Brothers. A century after his death the work he began is still vibrant" (Hickey, 2012, p. 348).

The focus on the poor, evidenced in the language within the opening sentences of the *Christian Brothers' Directory and Rules*, written in 1927, also clearly demonstrates the centrality of inclusion to Christian Brothers' education:

> The particular end of this Congregation is that the Brothers endeavour to promote the spiritual good of the neighbour by the instruction of youth, especially the poor, in religious knowledge and their training in Christian piety. (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 1927, p. 11)

Nearly a century later in 2012, the language from the leaders of the Christian Brothers had changed, but the sentiment remained as is evident in then Congregational Leader Br Philip Pinto's address:

> How does a (Edmund Rice) school show that it is tolerant, show that everyone is included? … We are so scared of the outsider. We are so scared of people who are different from us. I think this is where our (Edmund Rice) schools need to come in and say: "This is what we stand for – tolerance and inclusion. Everyone is part of the family. Everyone eats at the same table." (Pinto, 2012, as cited in Finn, 2013, p. 149)

From their early days in Australia to the current day, leadership within the Congregation of Christian Brothers (CCB) has expressed a clear preference for poor and marginalised young people through their ministry of education. Hence, it was of particular significance to this stated aim when, in 2007, the Christian Brothers formally transferred oversight of their schools to lay people under the structure of EREA. The Christian Brothers, from Edmund Rice to Ambrose Treacy and then Philip Pinto, have been clear in their articulated desire for Edmund Rice schools to be inclusive communities. Understanding inclusivity and implementing it has now become the challenge for lay leaders in the new post-Christian Brothers context of EREA. To this end, the principal means by which EREA leaders express the guiding values of a contemporary Edmund Rice education is the EREA Charter.

2.3.4 Edmund Rice Education Australia Charter

The identity of the authentic EREA school is articulated in the *Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition* (Charter). This Charter (EREA, 2017) uses four *touchstones* to describe identity:

- liberating education;
- Gospel spirituality;
- justice and solidarity; and
- inclusive community.

Specific to this study, the Charter touchstone of *inclusive community* provides an expression of an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. The Charter urges each EREA school to express inclusivity through:

- demonstrating a preferential option for the poor by standing with those who are powerless and marginalised;
- providing access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
- being sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families;
- welcoming and valuing all members of the school community regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation;

- promoting social inclusion and viewing diversity as beneficial to a liberating education; and
- acknowledging the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and welcoming them into its community (EREA, 2017).

The place of inclusivity in authentic Edmund Rice education, as well as its inherent challenges, was articulated in 2011 by inaugural EREA Executive Director, Dr Wayne Tinsey, who argued that "materially poorer Catholic families are almost certainly underrepresented in our schools" (Tinsey, 2011). Tinsey then highlighted the common response within some Catholic schools that their modern purpose was to educate "the elite, the future lawmakers and leaders in our society, in an environment where Christian values are social justice are emphasised" (Tinsey, 2011). He lamented that some EREA schools had become places sought after by the elite, to ensure the continuation of this socio-differentiation. As a counter, Tinsey posited the question, "how much more powerful can the formation of these future leaders be if their education takes place in a context of social inclusion and equity?" before providing a response of his own: "we are all liberated through our participation in the liberation of the weakest. The poor enrich us and complete our humanity" (Tinsey, 2011).

Tinsey's 2011 address, in EREA's fourth year of existence, placed inclusivity at the centre of the organisation's national conversation, and posed an explicit challenge to individual EREA schools. As such, it is in the context of each EREA school, not only EREA as an organisation, having as its foundations the life and message of Jesus, the Edmund Rice charism, the legacy of the Christian Brothers, and the articulated direction of EREA, that each school faces the task and challenge of understanding and implementing the touchstone of *inclusive community*. The challenge is significant, yet authenticity demands that the challenge is accepted by all EREA schools.

2.4 Personal Context

I am currently the principal of the Marlene Moore Flexi Schools Network, a network of four EREA Flexible Learning Centres (FLCs) in south-east Queensland: Deception Bay FLC, Gympie FLC, Hemmant FLC and Noosa FLC. EREA operates 22 FLCs in six networks, catering for young people who have become disenfranchised or disengaged from mainstream education. In many but not all cases, these young people have been purposely excluded by and from mainstream secondary schools, most commonly government schools. Prior to my current role, I was Head of Campus at Hemmant FLC, and previous to that I fulfilled various teaching, middle leadership and senior leadership roles at St Patrick's College Shorncliffe and St Joseph's Nudgee College, two mainstream EREA schools in Brisbane.

At St Joseph's Nudgee College, I was in a pastoral care leadership position, Director of Students, before becoming the Dean of Identity at St Patrick's College. The Identity leader is "an appointed leader required to give witness to the distinct mission of their school and promote and give life to the identity of their Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition" (Finn, 2013). As a member of the college

leadership team, I worked with members of the college community to ensure St Patrick's authentically embodied the title, *Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition*. Specifically, I was responsible for the religious life of the school including the organisation of Eucharistic and other liturgies, planning and facilitation of the retreat program, the service and solidarity program including a homeless street van and several local and global immersions, and the oversight of the College's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education program.

At Hemmant FLC, a co-educational secondary special assistance school[2], I had responsibility for the daily operation of the school which caters for 90 young people aged 11 to 19 years. The young people who attend the four FLCs in the Marlene Moore Flexi School Network come from diverse backgrounds with common stories including trauma, abuse, mental health issues, homelessness, domestic violence and behavioural challenges. Many have been excluded and explicitly told or made to feel that they are not welcome at previous schools and/or in family situations.

EREA FLCs express the EREA Charter in significantly different ways when compared to mainstream EREA schools. While there is no formal liturgical program, Gospel spirituality is at the heart of the work. The school attempts to provide a truly liberating education which breaks cycles of poverty, domestic violence and welfare dependence. By walking with disenfranchised youth and working on common ground, justice and solidarity are central to the school's character. Finally, by welcoming the most excluded and marginalised young people, EREA FLCs strive to be genuinely and radically inclusive communities. As inclusion is innately fundamental to the work of FLCs, this alternate arm of EREA is not a focus of this study; rather, the ways in which inclusivity is understood and implemented in the more traditional mainstream context form the basis of this exploration.

In addition to my professional context, I have a particular personal interest in the articulated touchstone of *inclusive community*. As the father of three children, the youngest of whom has Down syndrome, I have a heightened personal and professional interest in inclusivity, particularly in educational contexts. Further, my professional experiences explained above, along with my involvement in immersion programs in the Philippines, India, South Africa, and with First Nations Peoples from remote communities, have increased my passion and desire to ensure the educational communities in which I work are authentically inclusive.

2.5 Conceptualising the Research Problem

Australian students come from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and attend government and non-government schools, including Catholic schools. EREA schools, though not under

[2] A 'special assistance school' provides an alternative educational setting for students with high-level needs, as well as students who are at risk, have behavioural difficulties, or whose needs are better met by flexible learning structures that may not be available in all mainstream schools.

the direct governance of diocesan Catholic Education Offices, are Catholic schools. In the national context, the demographic as well as the purpose of Catholic schools is changing.

> Catholic schools have always provided educational opportunities for the children of poorer and disadvantaged families, for indigenous students, for refugee and migrant children, and for children living in remote areas. … However, in 2010, just 21 percent of students in Catholic schools were from the lowest quarter of socio-educational advantage, compared to 36 percent of all students in government schools, and 13 percent in independent schools. … This suggests that some Catholic schools have moved away from "the option for the poor", and tended towards exclusivism and elitism. (Wilkinson, 2012, p. 40)

EREA is one organisation which articulates a desire to address the challenge of inclusivity within Catholic education. As described previously, authentic Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition are called to be inclusive communities (EREA, 2017). These schools are founded upon and guided by the life and message of Jesus, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, the work and legacy of the Christian Brothers, and the direction of EREA as articulated in its Charter.

Key leaders in Edmund Rice education have repeatedly sought to highlight that authentic inclusivity in EREA schools can remain as an aspiration or, more appropriately, become a challenge for implementation. Tinsey (2011) stated:

> We have collectively committed to an active and real option for the disadvantaged; to inclusion as a key element in our policies and priorities and to a growth strategy that will necessarily take us towards the margins and increase our collective capacity to make a difference in this country in our service of those young people who are marginalized. … We hold inclusion to be at the heart of our Charter and the Gospel itself. (Tinsey, 2012)

Moreover, the second and current Executive Director of EREA, Dr Craig Wattam, referenced inclusivity in his first Welcome Address soon after beginning his tenure in 2021:

> I commit to the values and work of the Catholic church, and the family that constitutes EREA across Australia and beyond, to ensure that we offer an excellent education for all – in short, to ensure we provide an education that liberates, because this is our core business. To do this, we need strong and authentic leaders, and we need all of us to be workers. Our inspiration is the person and message of Jesus. Our call is to love one another, and our challenge is to find ways to bring those who are outside, the other, inside, and to make them, us. (Wattam, 2021)

On the occasion of the Feast Day of Blessed Edmund Rice on 5 May 2021, the EREA Council published a letter to all staff, in which they wrote:

> Edmund's charism and mission is ours – ours to shape and to turn into a dynamic, contemporary force. Such a force is very much needed in our complex and fragile world where both its peoples and its environment need the protection of a courageous loving hand. What does this mean for EREA and for those of us privileged to belong to such an organisation? Three questions come to mind:
>
> 1. As an organisation how do we build community?
> 2. Are our schools inclusive of all and do all experience a strong sense of belonging?
> 3. In our world, our Global Village, how can we, as part of EREA, be good, responsible and caring neighbours? (EREA Council, 2021)

Catholic schools, particularly those in the Edmund Rice tradition, are challenged to be authentically inclusive: to be aware of the national demographic and context; to be authentic to their foundations; to come to an understanding of inclusivity; to invite people at the margins into their school communities; and to effectively cater for their needs. In other words, EREA schools must answer these questions:

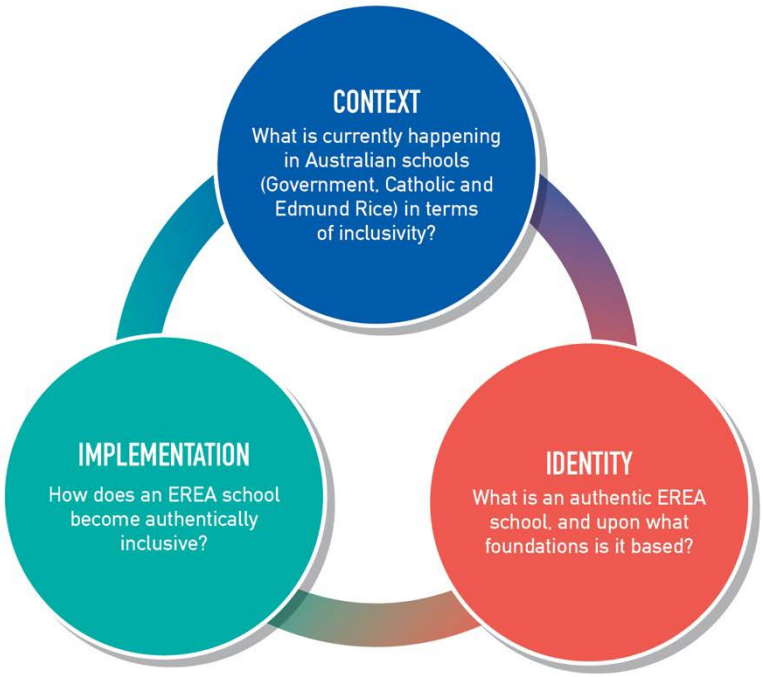
1. What is happening here and now? (Context)
2. Who are we? (Identity)
3. What do we do and how do we do it? (Implementation)

2.6 The Research Problem

The research problem is diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.1. This diagram provides structure for the exploration of how leadership teams within EREA schools implement the Charter touchstone of *inclusive community*. The journey to authentic inclusivity is represented as a continuous cycle of review, reflection and implementation.

Figure 2.1

Conceptualising the Research Problem



The EREA Charter touchstone of *inclusive community* provides an expression of an authentic EREA school with respect to inclusivity. Individual EREA school communities and the leaders within them identify and embody this touchstone in varying ways and to differing extents. The research problem concerns how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA.

2.7 The Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA. Given the important place of inclusivity in defining a key aspect of the nature and function of an EREA school, the intention of this study is to examine the ways in which EREA as an organisation, and the people within it, address the call to inclusivity.

2.8 The Research Question

How is *inclusivity* understood and implemented in EREA?

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the literature which contextualises the current research in response to the problem developed in Chapter 2. The chapter begins with a review of the macro context of education in the 21st century and its influence on Australian school systems, inclusive of the national schooling context, the Catholic school context and the Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) school context. Within this discussion, the respective purpose, mission and identity of these educational contexts are detailed. The concept of inclusivity is shown to be a critically essential aspect of the purpose, mission and identity of EREA schools. Thus, literature focuses on the concept and definition of inclusivity, the relationship between inclusivity and educational disadvantage in Australia, the challenges to inclusivity, and the role of authentic Edmund Rice leadership in the practice of inclusivity.

These matters are presented in more detail in Table 3.1 where an overview of the discussion within this chapter is displayed.

Table 3.1

Overview of Chapter 3

Major sections	Subsections
3.1 Introduction	
3.2 The context of education in the 21st century	3.2.1 The international and Australian contexts 3.2.2 Education sectors within Australia
3.3 Inclusivity and educational disadvantage	3.3.1 Theological and philosophical foundations of inclusivity 3.3.2 Economically disadvantaged students 3.3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 3.3.4 Students from refugee backgrounds 3.3.5 Students with disabilities 3.3.6 Challenges to inclusivity
3.4 Leadership	3.4.1 Relational leadership – presence 3.4.2 Servant leadership – compassion 3.4.3 Prophetic leadership – liberation
3.5 Conclusion and research questions	

3.2 The Context of Education in the 21st Century

Globalisation impacts national and international economic and educational development. There is a desire by governments within their respective economies to view economic development with education and in the process to exercise international competition (Ball, 2010; Clarke, 2012; Woodrow et al., 2018). This relationship between the economy and education can be traced to the global recessions of the 1970s and the market-based reforms of the 1980s, periods during which "new rationalisations of the relationship between education and the economy emerged" (Savage, 2013, p. 186). In the national education conversation in Australia, "notions such as 'the tough reality of international competition' and the dominance of an economic agenda in general are stated categorically as matters of incontrovertible fact" (Clarke, 2012, p.299). In fact, the notion of international competition, comparison and its impact on national approaches to education was highlighted in the opening sentence of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education at a Glance 2020* report:

> Governments are increasingly looking to international comparisons of education opportunities and outcomes as they develop policies to enhance individuals' social and economic prospects, provide incentives for greater efficiency in schooling, and help to mobilise resources to meet rising demands. (OECD, 2020, p. 3)

This section explores the international and national educational contexts. The neo-liberal agenda and its convergence with the espoused purpose and mission of various sectors of Australian schooling is examined.

3.2.1 The International and Australian Contexts

The neo-liberal agenda in economic and educational settings supports a national and international competitive market-based approach in order to drive economic growth and educational improvement (Ball, 2010; Bartlett & Clemens, 2018; Gormley, 2018; Hedegaard-Soerensen & Grumloese, 2018). "Globalisation as experienced over the past thirty years or so has been neo-liberal globalisation, an ideology that promotes markets over the state and regulation and individual advancement over the collective good and common well-being" (Lingard, 2010, p. 141). Contemporary, neo-liberal education policies "tie together individual, consumer choice in education markets with rhetorics and policies aimed at furthering national economic interests" (Ball, 2010, p. 122). In the extension of the neo-liberal promotion of marketisation from the economic into the educational realm, schools adopted the core values of neo-liberalism, such as competition, outcomes, accountability and management by objectives.

This neo-liberal approach emerged in order to rectify a perceived problem. “We are living in a period of crisis [which has] affected all of our economic, political, and cultural institutions [including] the school. We are told by neo-liberals that only by turning our schools, teachers, and children over to the competitive market will we find a solution” (Apple, 2001, p. 409). However, there are inconsistencies in the current Australian education policy rhetoric, and these inconsistencies are directly relevant to the concept of inclusivity in Australian schools. These inconsistencies, particularly as they influence inclusivity in Catholic and EREA schools, will be explored in this chapter.

There is an emerging theme of dual values-based approaches to Australian education policy broadly, and more specifically in relation to this study, to the concept of inclusivity in Catholic and EREA schools. There is the neo-liberal, market-based agenda, highlighting the importance of competing internationally in a global economy; and there is the articulated aim of education being accessible to all, so that no matter a child’s background, they have the opportunity to succeed. An inherent conflict is therefore created; a conflict between individual success and the common good, between quality and equity, between economy and society.

> This reconstitution of education reflects the convergence of, on the one hand, *economic* concerns with productivity in the face of global competition (reflected in education policy’s focus on “quality”) with, on the other hand, *political* concerns about sustaining democratic ideals of access, inclusion and participation in the context of increasingly multi-ethnic nature of the nation in an era of rapid social change and global migration (reflected in education policy’s focus on “equity”). (Clarke, 2014, p. 3)

Quality and equity in education are not mutually exclusive concepts. In Australia, education policies since the early 2000s have reflected a rise in what Savage refers to as “a ‘social capitalist’ political imagination, whereby equity is framed primarily as a *market enhancing* mechanism…[and] education as both a social *and* economic investment in a globalising marketplace” (Savage, 2013, p. 186). This desire to link quality with equity is understandable. Governments of all persuasions “strive to identify themselves and their education policies with the twin values of quality … and equity” (Clarke, 2014, p. 1). In fact, these dual values “might be described as interdependent touchstones of contemporary education systems” (Clarke, 2014, p. 1).

These dual values are explicit in Australian education policy direction, most recently articulated in the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, which followed previous declarations signed in Hobart (1989), Adelaide (1999) and Melbourne (2008). The Mparntwe Declaration describes the promotion of excellence and equity as the first goal of the Australian education system and states:

> Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face. (Education Council, 2019, p. 2)

Questions emerge as to whether excellence, or the more widely used term of quality, and equity are either competing or interdependent values, and thereby invite an examination of what is understood by the terms, *quality* and *equity*, and whether it is possible to meet the requirements of both. For example, equity presumes the distribution of something. In education, does *equity* refer to the equal distribution of opportunities or outcomes? To whom? How will it be distributed? Does *quality* refer to process or product? (Clarke, 2014) Context and values therefore become very important across Australian educational sectors and how each reconciles the relationship of equity and quality in a context of competing values, external pressures and tensions. These competing agendas within the non-government Catholic sector are highlighted by Gleeson (2020):

> In the prevailing neoliberal environment however, Catholic schools in Australia and elsewhere are increasingly challenged to maintain their overall identity, character and ethos in a changing religious and social reality [and to] prove their validity as viable educational institutions, as well as satisfy the requirements of the Church, while simultaneously responding to government accountability and Church expectations. (p. 3)

Any assessment of the relative quality of an education by definition requires a measure. Further, competition is central to neo-liberalism, hence the prevalence and priority of international and national standardised testing. Indeed, international competitiveness is seen as the goal of a quality education. The focus on measurable outcomes in education is evident in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); and, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In this light, Lingard (2010) argues that there has been "a globalising of the policy-as-numbers approach" (p. 136).

International and national education policies are, at least in part, shaped by PISA results. In support of this claim, Gorur (2008) states that "increasingly nations are using PISA scores as measures of the success of their education systems and their policies and to compare themselves with other countries" (p. 4) in what is known as the "PISA effect" (Ditchburn, 2012, p. 265).

In Australia, constitutional responsibility for school education rests predominantly with the Australian States and Territories (ACARA, 2014; Lingard, 2012). The States and Territories, in collaboration with the federal government, develop agreed goals for improving educational outcomes for students through intergovernmental policy councils. These have included the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) [formerly the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)], the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (ACARA, 2014). Currently, the body which has responsibility for oversight of schooling in Australia is

known as the Education Council. The Education Council comprises of relevant state and federal Education Ministers and "provides a forum through which strategic policy on school education, early childhood and higher education can be coordinated at the national level" (COAG, 2020, p. 18).

The Education Council also has responsibility for overseeing the progress of the achievement towards Educational Goals for Young Australians established in the Melbourne Declaration of 2008 and restated in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration of 2019. In order to assess the progress toward achieving the goals of the Mparntwe Declaration, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) releases an annual report. Until 2018, this report was known as the *National Report on Schooling in Australia*. Following the Mparntwe Declaration of 2019, the Education Council delegated ACARA to compile and release the annual *Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia* report (ACARA, 2020).

There is an established clear direction towards a consistent national approach to education, evident in the 2008 COAG National Education Agreement, the Melbourne Declaration of 2008, the subsequent emergence of the Australian Curriculum, the Mparntwe Declaration of 2019, and the 2019 COAG *National School Reform Agreement.* This Agreement, which commenced on 1 January 2019 and will expire on 31 December 2023, articulates objectives, outcomes, targets and measures for Australian schooling. Educational quality and equity remain the central foci of the national agenda, with the articulated targets including: "Australia to be considered a high quality and high equity school system by international standards by 2025" (COAG, 2020, p. 7).

The Agreement also highlights what it refers to as *priority equity cohorts* and defines these groups as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with a disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds" (COAG, 2019, p. 8). Congruent with the neo-liberal approach to education, the Agreement proposes to utilise results from external testing programs such as the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and PISA to measure outcomes against articulated targets.

In Australia, the instigation of NAPLAN as well as the website *My School*, both developed by ACARA, has provided a means for measuring and comparing school performance. The NAPLAN tests in literacy and numeracy are taken annually[3] by all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN and *My School* "enable what the government defines as transparency of school performance, for parents who are both better informed and empowered enough to demand high-level educational services for their children, regardless of education system or location" (Lingard et al, 2012, p. 320).

Within education there exists a concern that the intentional focus on measurable outcomes presents a danger if it is the predominant driver of educational policy and reform (Appel, 2020; Howell,

[3] Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, NAPLAN was not administered in 2020.

2017). For example, a "focus on improving test scores can lead simply to enhanced capacity to take tests, rather than enhanced and authentic learning across a broad and defensible range of schooling purposes" (Lingard, 2010, p. 135). Once these test scores are measured, there is a desire to compare schools in terms of their performance, hence the creation of school league tables. As a result: "what we see is a focus on 'being seen to perform' – or fabrication – as much as authentic performance and outcomes" (Lingard, 2010, p. 137).

Another risk of placing excessive emphasis on standardised testing as a way of comparing schools is framing education as merely an assembly line, where students are products and teachers are "factory workers" (Au, 2011, p. 38).

> In this way, standardized testing essentially commoditizes students, teaching, and education, and, through this commoditization, standardization enables systems of education to be construed as systems of commerce operating along the logics of capitalist production which require products (commodities) to be made, assesses, compared, and exchanged on the market. (Au, 2011, p.38)

Increased pressure on students, teachers and parents as a result of standardised testing such as NAPLAN "have trapped teachers in a dilemma between schooling for social capital and moral purpose with student-centred pedagogy and learning on one side, and efficiency-driven education with teacher-centred instruction and achievement on the other" (Sahlberg, 2008, p. 49). Appel (2020) further contends that, "Serious damage to teacher professionalism is being triggered by the current performance dominated culture caused by neo-liberal global conditions (performativity) in Australian schools" (p. 301).

The potential lack of authenticity in *glossifying* school achievements, along with the view of schools as mere production lines, pose serious challenges for all sectors of Australian schooling. This is particularly the case for school systems that hold to an educational philosophy informed by values such as with faith-based schools within the non-government sector. The disparity between a focus on individual success and wealth rather than the common good, on quality rather than equity, on neo-liberal ideology rather than espoused values requires further examination of the governance, policies, funding arrangements, purpose and mission of schools from the Australian education sectors.

3.2.2 Education Sectors Within Australia

There are various educational systems in operation in Australia. In 2020, 4,020,736 students attended 9,620 Australian schools. These schools were government, independent and Catholic schools. While all government schools are non-denominational, non-government schools are classified as either independent or Catholic schools. Most Independent schools have a religious affiliation, but some are non-denominational. Within the Catholic Education sector, the majority are overseen by

Catholic Education Offices, while non-systemic or Religious Institute schools operate independently of those offices. EREA schools which are a focus of this study are classified as non-systemic Catholic schools or Religious Institute schools. EREA operated 31 mainstream schools across Australia in 2020, along with 22 flexible learning centres, two special education schools and the Indooroopilly Montessori Children's House. Table 3.2 illustrates the numbers and percentages of students who attended government, Catholic and EREA schools in 2020.

Table 3.2

Number of Schools and Students Across Sectors in 2020

Sector	Number of schools (% of total)	Number of students (% of total)
Total	9,620	4,020,736
Government	6,747 (70.14%)	2,643,597 (65.75%)
Independent	1,170 (12.16%)	643,046 (15.99%)
Catholic	1,703 (17.70%)	734,093 (18.26%)
EREA mainstream schools[a]	31 (0.32%)	36,471 (0.91%)
EREA flexible learning centres[a]	22 (0.24%)	2,466 (0.06%)
EREA special education services[a]	2	207

Note. EREA = Edmund Rice Education Australia. From personal communications.

[a] These EREA school and student numbers are also included in the Catholic sector school and student numbers.

Each sector of Australian schooling, whether government or non-government, attracts state and federal government funding. This has and continues to be a topic of debate in Australian society and politics, especially as it relates to the stated national goals of excellence and equity across all schools. In the 2008 National Education Agreement, COAG agreed to review funding and regulation across government and non-government schooling sectors (Gillard, 2010). In an initial discussion paper, the then Federal Minister for Education, the Honourable Julia Gillard MP, outlined some "fundamental questions" (Gillard, 2010) which should be addressed in the terms of reference for the review:

- What are the principles against which schools funding should be measured?
- What is the right level of resourcing needed to provide a child with a high quality education? What are the most effective means of distributing those resources?

- How do we ensure all students have access to a high quality education? How do we best support students with a disability, Indigenous students, students at risk of leaving the education system and other vulnerable students?
- What funding models are used overseas and how do these link to outcomes and quality in their respective education systems? Are there lessons that Australia can learn from other countries?
- What does data tell us about the relationship between resources and outcomes for students? (Gillard, 2010)

The panel appointed to conduct the review process consisted of David Gonski AC (Chair), Ken Boston AO, Kathryn Greiner AO, Carmen Lawrence, Bill Scales AO and Peter Tannock AM. The December 2011 *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report* became colloquially known as "the Gonski report" or "the Gonski review", or simply "Gonski" (Kenway, 2013, p. 286). The panel's proposed funding arrangements were designed "to drive improved outcomes for all Australian students, and to ensure that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. xiii). The review considered funding arrangements for the three major providers of education in Australia – government, Catholic and independent (Gonski et al., 2011).

Gonski's recommendations were based on three imperatives – comparative, economic and moral (Kenway, 2013, p. 288). First, the report compares Australia with other countries assessed by the OECD, and concludes that in terms of equity, the current Australian education system is at best, average (Gonski et al., 2011; Kenway, 2013).

> The most successful schooling systems internationally are those where students achieve to the best of their ability, without their background or the school they attend impacting on their outcomes… While we are achieving above the OECD mean in international assessments such as PISA, we are categorised as a system that is achieving only average equity, meaning the impact of student background on educational outcomes is stronger in Australia than it is in other OECD countries. The practical effect of this rating is that across Australia, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are consistently achieving educational outcomes lower than their peers. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 105)

Second, Gonski argued an economic imperative in recommending fundamental changes to funding models. "Funding for schooling must not be seen simply as a financial matter. Rather, it is about investing to strengthen and secure Australia's future. Investment and high expectations must go hand in hand" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. xiii). The panel also argued that this investment in high quality

schooling "leads to many benefits for individuals and society, including higher levels of employment and earnings, and better health, longevity, tolerance and social cohesion" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. xiii).

The panel further argued a moral imperative relating to Australian schooling:

> Ensuring that all Australian children, whatever their circumstance, have access to the best possible education and chance to realise their full potential can also be considered the moral imperative of schooling. In countries such as Australia, this moral imperative goes beyond the legal obligation of governments to provide the opportunity for schooling for all children that is secular, compulsory and free. Governments must also, through addressing the facets of disadvantage, ensure that all children are given access to an acceptable international standard of education necessary to lead successful and productive lives. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 105)

This moral imperative and its explicit link to an "acceptable international standard of education" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 105) was reinforced in the March 2018 follow-up report, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australia*. Also chaired by David Gonski, it became known as *Gonski 2.0*. The review found that, when viewed through the lens of an international competitive educational market, utilising PISA and NAPLAN scores, improvement was still required if Australian students were to be provided with the promised opportunities of excellence and equity:

> Academic performance has declined since 2000 as measured by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test… Moreover, Australian student achievement has stagnated in the last decade, measured by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), and has declined relative to its past performance in PISA. Academic achievement is only one dimension of education and not the sole measure of success. Proficiency across the curriculum, however, and especially in areas such as literacy and numeracy…matters deeply to economic and social opportunity. That is why turning around the slippage in student outcomes, and regaining Australia's standing as a world-leader in schooling, must be a priority for Australia and all its educators. (Gonski et al., 2018, p. 2)

The reference to economic and social opportunity as parallel issues reaffirmed the prevailing neo-liberal discourse in Australian schooling. Further, *Gonski* and *Gonski 2.0* clearly made the link between student outcomes and appropriate models of funding, and noted that imbalances exist between the funding responsibilities of federal, state and territory governments across schooling sectors (Gonski et al., 2011; Gonski et al., 2018). In light of this, and in relation to this study it is

important to more closely examine these schooling sectors: government, independent, Catholic and EREA schools.

3.2.2.1 Government Schools

Australia has a federal political structure in which schooling remains, under the Constitution, a "residual power" of the states and territories (Lingard, 2012, p. 318). State and Territory governments are responsible for ensuring "universal access to education for all Australian students" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 5), and this responsibility extends to "providing government schools or support (through distance schooling options) in all populated areas, including very remote areas" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 5).

Government schools in Australia were established to provide "free, compulsory and secular education for all students" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 5). However, funding arrangements to ensure the existence and effectiveness of government schools have been and remain complex, as there are significant differences in funding models across sectors, states and territories, including varying approaches to supporting educationally disadvantaged students (Gonski et al., 2011; Gonski et al., 2018; Gormley, 2018; Kenway, 2013). One of "the fundamental questions in public education is how to provide an optimal level of education using minimum amount of resources" (Chakraborty & Blackburn, 2013, p. 129).

The 2012 COAG National Education Agreement outlined the overall objective that "all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy" (SCRGSP, 2013, p. 3). The Agreement addressed the purpose of Australian schools and established five desired outcomes:

(a) all children are engaged in, and benefit from schooling;
(b) meet basic literacy and numeracy standards and that levels of achievement are improving;
(c) Australian students excel by international standards;
(d) schooling promotes social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children; and
(e) young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study. (SCRGSP, 2013, p. 9)

Further, the Mparntwe Declaration set out two explicit goals of Australian schooling:

Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity;

Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community (Education Council, 2019, p. 4).

While these goals pertain to all Australian students across every educational sector, an examination of the differing individual contexts of non-governmental sectors is also required.

3.2.2.2 Independent Schools

The independent school sector is significant in the landscape of Australian schooling, educating approximately 15% of Australian students (ACARA, 2020). Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools, serving a range of different communities. Independent schools can be boarding and day schools, single sex, co-educational, primary, secondary, and located in urban, rural or remote areas. Many independent schools provide "a religious or values-based education [while] others promote a particular education philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education" (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014a).

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is the national peak body for the Australian independent schools' sector. Independent schools include schools affiliated with Christian denominations (Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian), non-denominational Christian schools, Islamic schools, Jewish schools, Montessori schools, Steiner schools, Aboriginal community schools, and some schools which specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities (ISCA, 2014a). The majority of these schools are independent entities established, owned and governed on an individual school basis, though some philosophically aligned schools are administered as small systems, such as the Lutheran system. All government-funded independent schools are not-for-profit institutions registered with the relevant State or Territory education authority.

Within this diverse education sector, student diversity is also quite high. "As a group, independent schools draw students from all sections of the Australian community…including indigenous students, gifted students, students with disabilities and learning difficulties and also overseas students" (ISCA, 2014a). Each independent school has its own enrolment policy, often reflecting the characteristics of the school (ISCA, 2014a). However, unlike free government schools, parents agree to pay fees at independent schools, presumably precluding some students from attending.

> Fees vary widely between independent schools, with this being related to the level of government funding they receive. Some schools receive only a small amount of government funding and consequently have to charge quite high fees. Other independent schools, serving more needy communities and receiving significantly higher levels of government funding, are able to charge modest fees. … Many independent schools offer a range of scholarships and bursaries to students to assist with the payment of fees. (ISCA, 2014a)

ISCA espouses the benefit of parental choice in Australian education and argues that increased government funding allows greater choice. “Governments must be responsible funding partners with parents if families are to have freedom to choose the school they believe best meets the needs of their child” (ISCA, 2014b). ISCA also argues that “growing numbers of Australian families are choosing non-government schools for their children despite the financial cost [and that] parents increasingly expect government funding of school education to focus on their child’s access to education rather than on who owns the school” (ISCA, 2014b).

> Evidence that public funding increases access to non-government schools and avoids their being exclusive and accessible only to the wealthy comes from international research. The trend in OECD counties is towards supporting more choice in schooling, including through providing public funds for private schools. The main constraint on individuals exercising choice is affordability. (Daniels, 2011, pp. 333–334)

The goal of schools achieving both quality and equity, with a focus on individual success and the common good, is addressed specifically by proponents of the independent school sector. “Schools provide a benefit to individuals by equipping students with skills and knowledge to prepare them for life and employment, and a benefit to society by providing students with skills and knowledge to contribute to the social and economic development of the nation” (ISCA, 2014c). The neo-liberal positive view of competition in educational sectors is also used to support the argument for increased funding for non-government schools. “Giving parents choice and enabling private providers to receive government funding are mechanisms designed to release competitive forces that will drive school improvement” (Daniels, 2011, p. 335). The particular benefits of independent schools in this environment are further argued by Daniels (2011):

> Certain attributes of school systems, school operations and resourcing policies are associated with both improved achievement and greater equity. Characteristics of independent schools (a clear focus on quality and achievement, the flexibility to respond to the educational needs of individual students, strong systems of accountability to parents and government and the capacity to recruit high-quality staff) are associated with quality outcomes and these, in turn, contribute to greater equity. (p. 336–337)

Independent schools educate approximately 40% of students within the non-government education community, while the other 60% are educated in Catholic schools (ACARA, 2020).

3.2.2.3 Catholic Schools

The Catholic Church in Australia is divided into seven Archdioceses which embrace twenty-one smaller Dioceses (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2021). Each Archdiocese is overseen by an

Archbishop and each Diocese by a Bishop. These Dioceses each have a respective Catholic Education Office which administers the Catholic Diocesan schools. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that a major change occurred in the organisation of Catholic education in Australia, with the formation of systems of Catholic schooling, with the financial support of federal and state governments, under the authority of Diocesan Bishops. Prior to this change, "Catholic schools had become a jumbled collection of parish primary and secondary schools and various kinds of schools run by the religious orders with varying degrees of autonomy from the diocese in which they were located" (Wilkinson, 2012, p. 44).

Catholic schools in Australia are either Arch/diocesan and administered by Catholic Education Offices, or Religious Institute schools, owned and administered by religious orders or entities. EREA schools fall into the latter category. In 2020, Catholic schools in Australia educated approximately 18% of the student population in 1,703 primary and secondary single sex and co-educational, day and boarding schools (QCEC, 2021). As with government and independent schools, Catholic schools are accountable to the relevant State and Territory education authorities. In addition, Catholic schools are also accountable to the Catholic Church, albeit with varying governance structures dependent upon whether they are Arch/diocesan or Religious Institute schools. In support of administration and governance arrangements, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is the body established in 1974 by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) to liaise with the Australian government, and to support the work of the State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions.

An examination of the beginnings of Catholic education in Australia is relevant as it provides some historical perspective to the concepts of equity, quality and inclusivity as they have been perceived and implemented in Catholic schools. Catholic education in Australia began in a setting of a newly established penal outpost of the British empire, and the first Australian Catholics were convicts, "largely peasants, some speaking only Gaelic, and possessing nominal faith" (Sultmann & Hall, 2021, p. 5). The first Catholic priests arrived in 1920, and in 1935, Bishop Polding was appointed the colony's first Bishop. Australia's strong link to Irish Catholicism can be traced back to a shortage of priests in England at this time, with priests being "recruited from Ireland and in the decades that followed the arrival of Irish religious orders provided a basis for significant growth and consolidation of a Catholic presence within the community" (Sultmann, 2011, p. 43). McLaughlin (2006) further asserts this claim: "As in Ireland, so in Australia, the Church became the focus of Irish identity and culture and the strongest political vehicle to gain and bargain for social gains" (p. 217).

As a sign of the early focus on inclusivity in Australian Catholic schools, the Catholic convicts were for the most part uneducated, and both the Anglican and Catholic Churches saw the need for education as a "practical means for civilising the population and reducing crime and disorder" (Sultmann, 2018, p. 72). These early days of Catholic education were informal, with the formal beginnings of Australian Catholic education emerging in the 1880s "in defiance of the free, secular and

compulsory schools that the various colonial governments began to provide" (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 216).

Catholic education in Australia continued to expand. "From 695 primary and secondary Catholic schools educating 67,908 children in 1889, the number grew to 1,950 schools educating 424,347 children in 1961, almost one in every five Australian students" (Wilkinson, 2012, p. 44). This growth necessitated a more systemic approach and effective liaison with governments in relation to policy and funding.

The Commonwealth began allocating funds to Catholic and other non-government schools in 1963, under then Prime Minister Menzies, who said, "that we would find £5M a year for the improvement of scientific teaching facilities in secondary schools and that we wouldn't discriminate between State secondary schools or what are called independent secondary schools" (National Museum of Australia, 2020). Then in response to the 1973 Karmel Review, government funding was allocated to Catholic and other non-government schools through recurrent needs-based block funding (Lingard, 2012). This money was to be allocated to Catholic system authorities for distribution to parish and secondary schools, and in turn led to the establishment of the NCEC.

Catholic schools in Australia are currently funded through Commonwealth, State and private income, mainly from school fees. In 2020, the national average net recurrent income per student in Catholic schools was $16,878, with 55% of this coming from the Commonwealth, 16% from the State and 29% from private income (NCEC, 2020).

While Catholic schools in Australia continue to attract a significant proportion of students, the demographic of Catholic schools has shifted since they began educating the poor, socially disadvantaged, non-English speaking, Irish convicts in the early 1800s. Catholic schools are now credited with achieving their aim of uplifting the poor and have become established and sought after educational institutions for middle class and wealthy families (Furtado, 2000; McLaughlin, 2006; Sultmann, 2018; Sultmann & Hall, 2021; Tinsey, 2011).

Indeed, the success of Australian Catholic schools has been in their ability to promote the upward social mobility of Catholics over the past fifty years, particularly evident in the rise of Irish Catholics Paul Keating, Sir William Deane and Sir Gerard Brennan to the respective roles of Prime Minister, Governor General and Chief Justice of the High Court in 1996. This success notwithstanding, the need to educate the poor and socially disadvantaged remains.

Therein lies a challenge for Catholic schools in addressing their original purpose and place in Australian education, particularly in a 21st century context of neo-liberal ideology in public education policy. The original beneficiaries of the upward social mobility afforded by a Catholic education, chiefly the Irish poor, do not represent the contemporary "poor and marginalised", the articulated priority of

Catholic schools. Therefore, a tension has arisen in regard to whether the focus of Catholic schools has likewise shifted or indeed, whether it needs to.

> As the war of position within Catholicism in its various cultural settings continues in the 21st century, the key question is whether Catholic schooling will strengthen its alliance with and service to the poor and oppressed, or instead become increasingly incorporated to serve the interests of a globalised and materially "successful" elite and an expanded Catholic middle class for whom academic success is the main purpose of schooling. (Grace, 2003, p. 48)

Current enrolments at Australian Catholic schools highlight the challenge that exists. According to the 2016 Census, administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 22.6% of the Australian population were Catholic (ACBC, 2019). However, only 53.7% of Catholic students attended Catholic primary or secondary schools (ACBC, 2019). Almost half of all Catholic students do not therefore attend Catholic schools. The data shows that most of those students attend government schools, but that 5.9% of Catholic primary and 10.4% of Catholic secondary students attend other non-government schools (ACBC, 2019). The situation is further complicated in that Catholic children from wealthier families are now increasingly not attending Catholic schools (Griffiths, 1998; McLaughlin, 2006). Catholic schools are becoming schools of choice for middle class non-Catholics, and their presence, particularly in Catholic secondary schools where over 40% of students are non-Catholic, helps to ensure the Catholic schools' viability. In light of this enrolment profile a serious challenge posed to Catholic schools lies with enrolment policies and how to cater for diversity, specifically, children from poorer families.

The dilemma has at least in part been caused by the success of early Australian Catholic education, and now that families have grown accustomed to the resources and standard of their Catholic school, they are predictably reluctant to relinquish them.

> One of the problems with this changing demographic is that, at least in some places, this changing parent population wants the Catholic school to welcome a grammar elitist school culture. The point to note is that the financial tail could well wag the Catholic dog up the semi-elitist path. Elitism and Catholic education is a supposed oxymoron. (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 219)

Further, the competitive education market of a neo-liberal society sees Catholic schools seeking to attract wealthy Catholic families, rather than see them attend an elite independent school. In this 21st century Catholic context, where Catholic faith is not a main reason for parents to enrol their children in a Catholic school (Elphick & Associates, 2018; McLaughlin, 2006; Sultmann et al, 2003), there is risk that Catholic schools will themselves seek to become elitist. This in turn could well create a further class division between *Catholic schools for the wealthy* and *Catholic schools for the poor*,

bringing into question fundamental principles of Catholicism and questions of equity that are embedded in the values that underpin school philosophy. This dilemma goes to the heart of authentic inclusivity in Catholic schools. In order to address this dilemma more adequately, a deeper analysis of the mission of Catholic schools is required.

Mission of the Catholic School

There has been an abundance of research into and subsequent articulation of the mission, purpose, goals, culture, ethos and identity of Catholic schools, much of which follows common themes but may use a variety of language. The term *mission*, as opposed to *purpose* is used here specifically as it bridges a relationship with the *mission of the Church* and the *mission of Jesus*. "In its simplest form the mission of the Catholic school imitates exactly the mission of Jesus" (Coughlan, 2009, p. 65).

At its core, the mission of the Catholic school is to mirror the mission of Jesus Christ: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This fullness of life has been described also as becoming fully human. "Since Christ is fully human, to aspire to become fully human is essentially to become more Christ-like" (McLaughlin, 2006, p.230). An understanding of the human person, and of Jesus as fully human, is at the core of authentic Catholic education (Egberts, 2010; Sultmann & Hall 2021). The centrality of Christ to the mission of the Catholic school is clear in the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) document, *The Catholic School*:

> Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. The fact that, in their own individual ways, all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school "Catholic"; principles of the gospel become the educational norms, since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal. (CCE, 1977, para. 34)

Grace (2003) contends that this document set out three principles for Catholic schooling: commitment to the common good, commitment to solidarity and community, and commitment to the service of the poor (p. 40). It called for a new school environment where schools were engaged with the community and should "teach the message of hope, build community, and serve all mankind so that above all, schools should be instruments of social justice" (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 53). Scholars since have built upon, shifted and created their own ways of describing the mission of Catholic schools. Sultmann and Hall (2021) contend that a Catholic school is:

- a place of care: where all are invited, respected and loved;
- a place of relationship: where people know, share and learn together in harmony;
- a place of learning: where students, teachers and families journey in learning inspired by Christ;
- a place of service: where learning empowers self in service of others and the world; and

- a place of transformation: where education of all is shaped and reflected in learning success, confident and creative individuals and being active and informed within the community. (p. 12)

In the International Office of Catholic Education (OIEC) publication, *Global Catholic Education Report 2020*, the mission of Catholic schooling is articulated in the context of the international community:

> As the largest non-governmental network of schools in the world, Catholic schools contribute in a major way to achieving the fourth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. (Wodon, 2020, p. 3)

McLaughlin's (2006) summary is a succinct and relevant description of the mission of the Catholic school which corresponds with several recent descriptions, including those aforementioned. It is suitable for the purpose of this particular exploration, and will be used to frame some of the literature pertaining to the concept of mission. McLaughlin contends that the mission of the Catholic school can be defined by three core aspects:

- an integral quality education;
- the nurturing of human community; and
- a liberation of forms of oppression (McLaughlin, 2006).

An integral quality education is described as "a vehicle to enhance the individual's and community's humanity" (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 230), touching upon the notion of a Catholic education aspiring for the common good. This perspective recognises the need for a Catholic school to provide a relevant and holistic education which teaches students to be critical thinkers. Students are then able to devote their individual knowledge and skills toward the betterment of wider society. A commitment to the "common good" is a stated aim of Catholic education (CCE, 1977) and a clear direction of Catholic Social Teaching but at the same time is open to challenge, with an inherent encouragement for students to critically reflect on what the "common good" is, and what role they may play in helping to create it (Coughlan, 2009; Tuite, 2007). This is congruent with a foundational characteristic of Catholicism and of Catholic schooling, the concept of "rationality": "the capacity for insightful and reasoned thinking that incorporates the notion of 'faith seeking understanding'" (Sultmann, 2018, p. 85). Rationality entails "helping people to think with imagination and perception, to discern the ultimate in the immediate, and to be critically conscious about society" (Groome, 1996, p. 121). Catholic schools are therefore called to intentionally provide ways for students to engage with the concept or rationality in their educational offerings.

In a quality Catholic education, there are opportunities for students to engage in private and meaningful communal prayer, as well as collaboratively planned retreats aimed at nurturing participants' spirituality (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 230). Similarly, Groome (1996) describes one of the defining perspectives to Catholicism and Catholic schooling as "sacramentality", "a belief that God's presence and grace are manifested through the ordinary events of life" (p. 112). Moreover, Sultmann and Brown (2011) explain that one's awareness of God's presence becomes clearer "in the unfolding of knowledge in the people, events, rituals and processes through which learning and teaching occur" (p. 75). In his research in three Victorian Catholic schools, Frijo (2009) noted a clear role of the Catholic school "as building a connection with sacraments" (p. 228), aligning with McLaughlin's (2006) argument that an integral quality Catholic education requires "the systematic, scholarly and critical exposure of students to the essentials of the Catholic tradition" (p. 230). Sultmann and Brown (2011) approach this aspect of mission from a slightly different angle in describing a defining characteristic of Catholic schools as a "commitment to tradition and to the message of Christ … represented in creeds, dogmas, doctrines, rituals, theologies, symbols, language and gestures" (p. 75).

It is noteworthy that while others highlight the specific role that Catholic schools have in evangelisation, McLaughlin (2006) appears to take a more open, perhaps a more inclusive approach to Catholicism in Catholic schools. Indeed, as evident above, McLaughlin applies less traditional Catholic language in his description of Catholic schools' mission than many of the other writers. Egberts (2010) describes evangelisation as one of the "pillars of Catholic schooling" (p. 90) while Coughlan (2009) contends that "it is increasingly obvious that Catholic schools are now the pre-eminent place of evangelization in the Church" (p. 82). McLaughlin (2006) echoes this sentiment in his more secular description of one aspect of an integral quality education in the "presentation of education through the perspective of a Catholic "world view" or anthropology and its accompanying values" (p. 230). Sultmann and Brown (2021) further support this notion by highlighting Catholic schools' purpose as including "service of others and the world" (p. 12).

The second, yet interrelated, core aspect within the mission of Catholic schools is the nurturing of human community. This aspect recognises not only that individuals become more fully human when they are in relationship, but that individual Catholic schools become more authentic when they are in relationship with the wider community. Of course, this concept while profound, is not new. It is reminiscent of the African concept of *ubuntu*: "People are not individuals, living in a state of independence, but part of a community, living in relationships and interdependence" (Lutz, 2009, p. 314). The concept is also strongly connected to the concept of the common good: "In a true community, the individual does not pursue the common good *instead* of his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good *through pursuing* the common good" (Lutz, 2009, p. 314).

McLaughlin (2006) explains the nurturing of human community in a Catholic school setting by highlighting a preference for collaborative learning, the allocation of resources that prioritise student welfare and the less fortunate, an organised and professionally resourced pastoral care program, and targeted staff professional in-service which addresses students' developmental growth issues.

Other researchers have explored the same or similar themes in their work. Frijo's (2009) study in Victorian Catholic schools discovered a clear articulation of a core goal of authentic Catholic schooling to be "community building and inspiring the school community with Gospel values" (p. 228). In his exploration of the Catholic community, Price (2008) explored the authentic Catholic school, noting that "there appears to be great divergence as to who the 'we' are. Who are the 'we' and 'our' when we speak about the community, the school, the school system and what 'we' want?" (p. 58). This is an important point as it goes to the concept of inclusivity, a concept which Price (2008) develops within Catholic schools as characterised in "a community of warmth, welcome, acceptance and care" (p. 58).

Catholic schools hold community as a core aspect of their mission. However, community as a central value to Catholic schools is "under attack by the ethic of possessive individualism, from market forces and from a customer culture reinforced by quick recourse to legal procedures" (Grace, 1995, p. 166). This reminder of the significant challenge faced by Catholic schools to be authentic to mission is highlighted further by Gaffney (2003): "In the balance between desire for personal fulfilment and happiness and to be in relationship with others the balance now seems to be precariously weighted in favour of self" (p. 83). Notwithstanding this trend, there is research to suggest that a strong sense of community in a Catholic school can enhance effectiveness and academic outcomes. "This sense of community in schools has a high correlation to the school's effectiveness. Schools embedded in functional communities, communities in which people interact regularly, produce students rich in social capital which fosters superior academic performance" (Price, 2008, p. 47).

A more traditional view of the role of community within the mission of Catholic schools justifiably depicts community within the Church as much more than

> one's neighbourhood, the coffee shop, the local men's group or a walking group … It is deeply theological and Eucharistic. It is communion at the deepest possible level …, the essence of Church, the foundation and source of its mission in the world. (Egberts, 2010, p. 93)

Furthermore, Egberts (2010) contends that "the greatest challenge in the third millennium for the broader Church [is that] the promotion of a spirituality of communion must be expressed within Catholic schools" (p. 93). It is evident that while the term *community* is widely used in educational literature, the concept possesses a deeper meaning when considered in light of the mission of the Catholic school.

Building upon this theme and explaining the individual spiritual formation which develops from authentic Catholic community, Sultmann and Brown (2011) state that: "It is through community, formed by and based on relationships, that people come to understand their fundamental identity; that is, in their relationship to God in and through self, others and the world" (p. 75). In a further paper, Catholic school identity is developed as involving three foundational themes: empowering the agency, equity and authenticity of experiences for learners in keeping with the mission of the school (Sultmann & Brown, 2019).

The third and final core aspect of an authentic mission for Catholic schools is a liberation from forms of oppression. This aspect clearly draws upon the liberation theology which emanated from Latin America soon after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). From the beginning, education was seen as a cornerstone of liberation theology. "The Council of Latin American Bishops meeting in Medellin, Columbia in 1968 took up ideas of a theology of liberation, ideas of conscientization and of a transfer of power to the poor through literacy and education" (Grace, 2003, pp. 38–39). This counter-cultural concept of a preferential option for the poor, central to liberation theology and indeed to the ministries of Jesus Christ and Edmund Rice, is a clear example of the profoundly foundational place of inclusivity in authentic Catholic schooling.

Service, solidarity, immersion and outreach programs are key components of McLaughlin's (2006) description of a liberating Catholic education, and again support the notion of Catholic school mission being inextricably linked with the mission of Jesus Christ. Matthew's gospel suggests that in fact, when a person serves the most marginalised and powerless, they in essence serves Jesus, again placing the poor and marginalised in the central place of honour in Catholic faith, and inherently, in Catholic schools. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

The 1997 United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, *Renewing the Vision*, challenged Catholic schools to maintain Jesus' ministry at the heart of their mission, and with particular reference to service asserted:

> The ministry of justice and service nurtures in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; empowers young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering; and infuses the concepts of justice, peace and human dignity into all ministry efforts. (Catholic Bishops of USA, 1997, p. 38)

The focus on the "other" as central to a Catholic school's mission contrasts the neo-liberal agenda of 21st century education where individual success and competition are strongly encouraged. In essence the mission of the Catholic school is distinctive and is argued to be countercultural. "Catholic

schools are profoundly counter-cultural, advocating values antithetical to those promoted and celebrated by contemporary media and society" (Egberts, 2010, p. 213). Finn (2013) and Sultmann (2011) both make similar statements:

> Catholic school identity is called to enable its followers to respond, not for self-service, but for justice for the transformative good of all humanity. (Finn, 2013, p. 37)

> This is the hallmark of a learning organization … A kingdom vision underpinning Catholic school identity endeavours to bring the Good News of Christ, proclaim liberty, minister to people and announce the fatherhood of God. It calls for a response to the challenge of Christ and seeks to be installed within and across the totality of Catholic school life. (Sultmann, 2011, pp. 127–128)

The embedding of mission across all facets of Catholic school life is a challenge for leaders. The interweaving of curriculum and Catholic identity, outside of traditional religious education, entail a growing area of research in Australian education, with some schools seeking to effectively enhance their curriculum by embedding themes of justice and peace across subject areas. The potential benefits for Catholic schools, their students, and the common good are already clear, but as more schools approach this area formally, more evidence serves to inform best practice. For example, in the United States, scholars have sought to express the benefits of a counter-approach to a neo-liberal view of curriculum. Au (2012) argues that "curricular thinkers" including Dewey (1901; 1916), Vygotsgy (1987), Freire (1970), Huebner (1999) and Bernstein (1996) all fundamentally "share an epistemological commitment to the idea that human consciousness arises from the dialectical interactions between humans and their social and physical environments" (Au, 2012, p. 55), and shares that commitment himself. While Au (2012) does not approach this area with an overtly Catholic world view, his perspective aligns with the description of an authentic Catholic school curriculum which honours the common good over individualistic agendas:

> What kinds of kids do we want in this world? What kinds of consciousness and action do we want to encourage in them and have them develop?" In answer to these questions, I personally want our children to be kind, caring, loving, strong, confident, courageous, global in vision while acting locally, stewards of community and the environment, culturally grounded in their own identities yet multiculturally aware of others, critical in their observations of human relations, activist in their actions, fighters for justice and equality, and empowered to make important and informed decisions about their lives and their communities. (p. 55–56)

Au (2012) recognises that his "social and curricular utopia is unlikely given the U.S. commitment to neo-liberalism and unbridled capitalism" (p. 57–58), but is hopeful nonetheless. One hindrance to students benefiting from the effective implementation of such a curriculum is the reality that

"socioeconomic conditions and policies impinging upon schools may be keeping students from gaining access to it" (Au, 2012, p. 57), thereby highlighting McLaughlin's (2006) descriptions of a liberating Catholic education as comprising an inclusive enrolment policy.

Inclusivity and its theological and philosophical underpinnings in a Catholic context will be examined more closely in the next section of this chapter, but with respect to liberation as a core aspect of an authentic Catholic school mission, it is helpful to briefly consider inclusive enrolment policies.

> One feature of Catholic school ethos that invites inspection is the notion of inclusivity. This is a vexed question which has invited discussion as to its meaning and the ramifications for schools… This issue is problematic when the topic of cost of accessing this education is discussed. If the Catholic school ethos is one of inclusivity what are the means for addressing the inclusion of the entire Catholic population especially the poor? (Tuite, 2007, p. 48)

Finn (2013) argues that "the preferential option for the poor and marginalised is a moral imperative for Catholic school identity" (p. 37), and the 2012 statement from the NCEC position is clear in maintaining that the Catholic school "should be open to all those who wish to receive a Catholic education" (NCEC, 2013, p. 11). The characteristics of an authentic Catholic school also apply to an authentic EREA school. However, EREA schools claim a distinctive identity which has its foundations in the charism of the Founder, Blessed Edmund Rice, and articulated in the EREA Charter for schools under its governance.

3.2.2.4 EREA Schools

Edmund Rice began his mission and ministry in Ireland in 1802, founding the Congregation of Christian Brothers and providing "primarily poor Irish boys with an education designed to meet both their educational and spiritual needs" (Tuite, 2007, p. 5). Since then, the Christian Brothers have expanded this mission into thirty countries, including their arrival in Australia in 1842. The Christian Brothers' primary concern was the authentic delivery of the Catholic Church's mission through the intellectual, moral and spiritual formation of students (Finn, 2013; Hayes, 2006; McLaughlin, 2007; Tuite, 2007).

The Congregation of Christian Brothers within Australia developed to become the largest male religious order in Australia (Angus, 1986; Finn, 2013). In their first 100 years, the order grew from four Brothers to 1,100 in 1968 working in over 140 institutions across Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. However, the numbers of Christian Brothers internationally and locally peaked in the 1960s and have been in rapid decline since the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). This decline "led to the employment of large numbers of lay teachers" (Finn, 2013, p. 4), and eventually to

the 2007 formation of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA), a separate canonical and civil entity "established to succeed, carry on and expand the education ministries conducted by the Congregation of Christian Brothers in Australia" (EREA, 2021).

The National Office of EREA is in Melbourne with associate Regional Offices in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, each supporting schools and entities in their regional contexts. EREA provides Catholic education to approximately 39,000 young people in fifty-five schools and entities across all states and territories in Australia. The governance model of EREA consists of the EREA Council, EREA Board, Executive Director and Executive Team, consisting of four National Directorates: Liberating Education, Stewardship, School Engagement, and Governance. Regional Directors are also members of a broader leadership team.

The Council is the governing body of EREA under canon law and is the body corporate known as the Trustees of Edmund Rice Education Australia under civil law. Members of the Council are appointed by the Congregational Leader of Christian Brothers. Members of the Board are appointed by the Council, and are responsible for strategic and financial oversight, and set the operational policy framework of EREA. The Executive Director provides leadership and management of the operation of all EREA educational entities (EREA, 2021). The Executive Director also assumes responsibility for the appointment of principals, deputy principals and business managers in EREA schools.

EREA schools are non-systemic Catholic, Religious Institute (RI) schools. As such, they are accountable also to the Catholic Church in Australia through the respective Archbishops or Bishops in their Archdiocese or Diocese. However, Catholic Education Offices, operating under the authority of the Archbishop or Bishop, do not have direct responsibility for the administration of EREA schools, though many schools do have close contact with their local Catholic Education Offices. Like independent and systemic Catholic schools in Australia, EREA mainstream schools access government funding and supplement this funding through charging school fees. Additionally, each EREA school pays an annual levy to EREA for the support and governance it provides to the entire organisation nationally.

In November 2019, EREA launched the *Strategic Directions 2020–2024* document, articulating this time as a period which "will see the culmination of many courageous, ground-breaking and defining steps towards excellence, leadership and inclusion" (EREA, 2019, p. 1). While EREA sets the strategic agenda for the organisation centrally, each school has autonomy to establish its own contextually specific strategic priorities and operational responses. For example, each EREA school is responsible for establishing its own enrolment policy in keeping with overall EREA mission and regulatory practices such as its "School Renewal Process". EREA schools are essentially assessed, affirmed and challenged according to their authenticity and adherence to EREA policy, identity and strategic directions. It is appropriate therefore to examine more closely the distinct identity of the EREA school.

Identity of an EREA School

The term *identity*, as opposed to *mission* or *purpose*, is being used in this context as it is a term used widely in EREA schools to describe the unique culture of an EREA school within Catholic education more broadly. Indeed, many EREA schools in Australia have an explicit senior leadership position responsible for Identity leadership. The identity of the authentic EREA school is most clearly articulated in the EREA Charter. As previously stated, the Charter (EREA, 2017) uses four touchstones to describe this distinct identity:

- liberating education;
- Gospel spirituality;
- justice and solidarity; and
- inclusive community.

These touchstones warrant closer examination in this review of relevant literature. The Charter touchstones provide an entry point into articulating the authentic identity of the EREA school. They also permit an opportunity to recognise and address any apparent lacuna in the research. In each section relating to the four touchstones, the study will firstly address the characteristics of Edmund Rice education (1802–1844) presented by McLaughlin (2007) and how they are evident in contemporary direction, and subsequently the more current analyses of the identity of the EREA school will be examined.

Liberating education describes the aspiration of the authentic EREA school to "open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences, so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all" (EREA, 2017, p. 5). In expressing this touchstone, an EREA school:

1. encourages all members of the school community to work to the best of their ability, to become the person that each is created to be and to strive for equity and excellence;
2. serves the individual needs of each person, providing teaching and learning experiences that are authentic, relevant, rigorous and creative;
3. is committed to enabling students to experience personal achievement within a safe, supportive and healthy environment;
4. provides an holistic education integrating faith with culture and learning, while instilling an appreciation of the need to strive for the greater good of all society;
5. challenges all to prophetic leadership within the school community and beyond;
6. gives priority in the allocation of resources to provide services for students with particular needs;

7. enables students to experience and value critical awareness of justice and peace issues through the curriculum, service and solidarity learning, environmental practices and the culture of the school;
8. promotes ongoing renewal by providing opportunities for reflective practice, formation and professional development. (EREA, 2017, p. 5)

From his research into Edmund Rice education provision in the period 1802 to 1844, McLaughlin (2007) generated particular characteristics and expressions of those characteristics of early Ricean education. These characteristics and their expressions can be aligned to the contemporary touchstones of the EREA Charter. In relation to the provision of a liberating education, Rice explicitly adopted a scholarly approach to education of the heart and mind, rejecting the advocacy of "blind faith" as a basis for establishing life and one's contribution to it. He ensured that religious education "was to be suited to the capacity of the children" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 390), encouragement which promoted relevant, quality and critical education. In relation to measuring outcomes associated with this philosophy, Rice "did not aspire to accepted benchmarks of excellence [as] such an education would not liberate his pupils" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 394).

With respect to the touchstone of *liberating education*, McLaughlin's analysis of a contemporary Ricean education is reminiscent of the early version in Ireland. From his synthesis of the relevant sources, McLaughlin (2007) contends that two of the characteristics of a modern, authentic Edmund Rice education are: "aspiring for excellence in education"; and "delivering a liberationary education generated from justice imperatives and expressed through critical pedagogies" (p. 396).

In his exploration of how Identity leaders in EREA schools perceive and institutionalise the Edmund Rice charism, Finn (2013) articulates the inherent risk of the increasing absence of Christian Brothers in schools and explains the significance of the Identity leader's role within the "gradual dilution of the Edmund Rice charism where EREA schools lose their special culture and their charism" (Finn, 2013, p. 78). As such, he contends that there "is a need for the identification and understanding of the Edmund Rice charism and its congruence with Edmund Rice culture, and a process for leaders in Edmund Rice schools to institutionalize this charism" (Finn, 2013, p. 79). This being the case, Finn's research is important in synthesising the current understandings and practices associated with the implementation of the four touchstones of the EREA Charter. In this regard his examination of Identity leaders' perceptions of the essential characteristics of the Edmund Rice charism, one of which was "education for liberation" (Finn, 2013, p. 108), he articulated the provision of a quality education and the promotion of personal, educational and social liberation as key themes of a contemporary Edmund Rice education (Finn, 2013).

Tuite (2007) conducted her research in Queensland EREA schools and examined principals' perceptions of realising the Edmund Rice ethos in their contexts. In her study, she sought to discover

participants' understandings of the essential characteristics of an authentic Edmund Rice education. Aligned to a liberating education, the characteristics she subsequently articulated were "excellence in teaching and learning" and "liberation" (Tuite, 2007, p. 232). Tuite (2007) noted that principals saw the provision of excellence across all facets of the school as very important but admitted that in many of the schools represented in her research, their popularity

> means that unlike Catholic Education Office schools, students with difficulties are not likely to find a place. … This has issues for the development of an ethos which is authentically Ricean and raises the following question, "Does elitism equate with excellence?" (p. 246)

In this context, the challenge in EREA schools becoming truly inclusive communities is clear.

In his study into the perceptions of the transmission of the Edmund Rice charism in the context of declining presence of Christian Brothers, Watson (2007) also examined the Ricean charism as it applies to schools. Rather than using the term *liberation*, Watson expressed a similar concept through the words, "enabling gift" and "empowerment" (p. 167). The three schools involved in the research "identified with the fact that the charism of Edmund Rice was linked to a student's potential and that students needed to be encouraged to reach this potential. … They identified charism as an enabling gift which would lead to empowerment through education" (Watson, 2007, pp. 167–168). Congruent with prophetic leadership, one of the expressions of the *liberating education* touchstone, Watson's study also concluded that "Vision" (p. 168) and "Inspiration" (p. 169) were characteristics of the authentic presence of the Rice charism in schools.

The literature available suggests that the Charter touchstone of *liberating education* is a lived reality, at least to varying degrees, in contemporary EREA schools, much like it was in early Ricean education.

The second touchstone to be examined is *Gospel spirituality*, calling for EREA schools to "invite people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace and living reality within our community" (EREA, 2017, p. 10). In doing so, an EREA school:

1. lives and grows as a faith-sharing community by fostering personal relationships with God through Jesus Christ;
2. celebrates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a Eucharistic community committed to the service of those in need;
3. nurtures and encourages the spiritual growth of each person through reflection, prayer, symbols, sacred stories, rituals and sacraments;
4. models the Gospel practices of forgiveness and reconciliation by the manner in which conflict is resolved;

5. provides religious education in line with Diocesan guidelines and faith formation experiences as fundamental components of a Catholic School curriculum;
6. continues the work of the Christian Brothers by calling its school community to play a prophetic role in the mission of the Catholic Church;
7. provides formation opportunities for its members in the mystery of God in all creation, the spirit of Jesus, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, the inspiration of the Christian Brothers, their own sacred story and their call to mission;
8. recognises and acts upon the central place of the Gospel commitment to the marginalised, through a preferential option for the poor;
9. is engaged in inter-faith dialogue and respects the spirituality authentically lived by those who come from other religious traditions. (EREA, 2017, p. 10)

According to McLaughlin (2007), the core sentiments of this contemporary touchstone were present in Rice's first schools. McLaughlin (2007) asserts that a key spiritual foundation underpinning early Ricean education was "presence leading to a respectful sense of the sacred" (p. 388). A "profound belief in the equal dignity of persons" and "nurturing a culture of faith" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 389) typified Rice's commitment to a gospel spirituality in his schools. A reflection of Jesus' compassion was also evident in these schools: "For Jesus, the quality of human life is dependent upon the nurturing of compassion. Compassion is the atmosphere that vitalizes and revitalizes Edmund Rice Education" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 390).

Recalling McLaughlin's (2007) analysis of a contemporary Edmund Rice school, there is evidence of a Gospel spirituality in the EREA Charter. McLaughlin (2007) found that a modern Edmund Rice education is characterised by "providing a holistic, integrated, relevant education where the divine presence is honoured in the human experience, and so the spirituality of each person is purposely cultivated" (p. 396).

In Finn's (2013) study of Identity Leaders in EREA schools, one of the two new understandings of the participants' perceptions of the essential characteristics of the Rice charism which emerged was "Mission of Jesus [characterized by]: leadership based on Jesus' mission; preferential engagement with the poor and marginalised; and practical spirituality" (p. 108). This is explained further:

> … Rice generated a distinctive insight into Jesus' mission that "compelled him to live the gospel in a certain way", and is reflected in the aspiration: "Live Jesus in our hearts, forever". The new understandings indicate that this aspiration aims to live the vision and values of Jesus, central to which is the Kingdom of God. This insight is "grounded in the gospel" and promotes particular assumptions, beliefs and values as a means to nurture "a culture of faith and build a strong set of Christian values". (Finn, 2013, p. 109)

Modern expressions of the Charter touchstone of *Gospel spirituality* also emerged in Tuite's (2007) research. Principals of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition, prior to the establishment of EREA, identified a "values-based education" (Tuite, 2007, p. 232) as an essential feature of the Edmund Rice ethos, and when discussing this further, the author explains, "These values are related initially to the Gospel stories, then to the educational philosophy of Edmund Rice, to the history and tradition of the Christian Brothers and finally to the context of each school" (Tuite, 2007, p. 233). The principals in Tuite's (2007) study also identified that for an Edmund Rice school to be considered "authentic", it must develop in its community members spirituality and a sense of the sacred, "though a number of participants admitted that this is an area of challenge for them" (p. 253).

While some of the key language that appeared in the above studies is not prevalent in Watson's (2007) research, the participants from the three schools "agreed that compassion, caring and respecting the inherent dignity of each person were essential values to ensure the transmission of the Edmund Rice charism" (p. 170). However, Watson (2007) does argue that Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition "must give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Gospel of hope and love for people of all ages. This is, in essence, the way of Edmund Rice" (p. 207).

Although the literature is less consistent in its key language use, with terms such as "mission of Jesus" (Finn, 2013), "divine presence" (McLaughlin, 2007), and "values-based education" (Tuite, 2007), the evidence emerging from the literature suggests that the Charter touchstone of *Gospel spirituality* is a lived reality in contemporary EREA schools.

The third Charter touchstone to be explored is *justice and solidarity*: "We are committed to justice and peace for all, grounded in a spirituality of action and reflection that calls us to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised and the earth itself" (EREA, 2017, p. 14). The touchstone is further expressed by describing that an EREA school:

1. develops a curriculum that integrates the themes of justice and peace, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching;
2. adopts prophetic stances in the light of Gospel practices and is involved in advocacy for just causes;
3. promotes participation in service and solidarity learning programs in partnership with those on the margins;
4. seeks to provide opportunities for involvement in immersion programs in which students and staff form relationships, work with and learn from those on the margins, leading to mutual transformation;
5. is committed to working with and walking alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, advocating justice and promoting reconciliation;

6. is actively involved in developing global partnerships through participation in Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders;
7. is committed to promoting an integral ecology through demonstrating a deep reverence for the earth as both God's work and our home, promoting eco-justice and working towards a sustainable and regenerative future for all creation;
8. recognises that its members are part of a global community and actively supports the development of all humanity;
9. nurtures a culture of critical reflection and prayerful discernment in justice and peace issues. (EREA, 2017, p. 14)

The early Edmund Rice schools in Ireland were characterised by "solidarity with the unimportant, the poor and neglected [and] the responsibility to serve, to give something back" (McLaughlin, 2007. p. 393). Rice's focus was on the poor, unimportant and neglected: "they lacked power and influence and were the object of manipulation and abuse" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 393). Rice's understanding of justice and solidarity extended beyond the notion that the poor were merely helpless victims to be saved. "Those who were served by Ricean education were taught that they had an obligation for them in turn to serve their neighbours and to respond to their needs" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 393). Further, McLaughlin (2007) points out that early Ricean education believed "service to the People of God is fundamentally an obligation of justice not charity" (p. 394).

McLaughlin's (2007) research into contemporary understandings of the central features of an authentic Edmund Rice education also found a focus on service, expressed as "cultivating a culture of service, with a priority given to the poor and marginalised" (p. 396).

Finn (2013) refers to this focus on service as a "practical spirituality" (p. 110), with Identity leader participants believing that "the Edmund Rice charism is a contextually-lived reality, not a suspiciously preserved historical relic or a pious ideal" (p. 111). Participants identified "service and solidarity" (Finn, 2013, p. 105) as essential characteristics of an authentic, contemporary Edmund Rice education.

A study relevant to this touchstone was done by Price (2008), who explored participant experience of a service-learning program in one EREA school. The existence of the formalised program in the school suggests an authentic presence of the *justice and solidarity* touchstone:

> Beginning with a "street retreat" program and slowly building to the more comprehensive program in place today, the staff involved with Campus Ministry, inspired by the Gospel of Jesus, sought to develop experiences that would bring the students into direct, respectful, reciprocal relationship with the poor and marginalised in the same way that Edmund Rice did. (Price, 2008, p. 5)

An effective Edmund Rice education and an authentic service-learning program though does not merely provide opportunities for community members to serve; it links the service experience to the perception of the identity and faith life of the respective school. “Many participants reflected that this practical reaching out to the poor was what Edmund Rice did” (Price, 2008, p. 203).

Service and “making a difference in society” were also identified by Watson’s (2007) research participants as an essential characteristic of an Edmund Rice education. Participants “agreed on an understanding of service, within a context of the meaning of the Catholic faith and the need to serve with an emphasis on the Catholic faith” (Watson, 2007, p. 168). Watson’s study in three Victorian Edmund Rice schools broadened the concept of service to include environmental stewardship, and asked participants to consider whether they perceived the issue as a characteristic of an authentic Edmund Rice education. In response, only one participant “considered it important in terms of the future transmission of the charism of Edmund Rice” (Watson, 2007, p. 171).

In contrast, the Charter expresses that an authentic EREA school is committed to “promoting ecojustice and working towards a sustainable and regenerative future for all creation” (EREA, 2017, p. 14). In highlighting this point further, although the words “stewardship” and “ecojustice” appeared explicitly in the 2011 version of EREA’s Charter, Finn’s 2013 research into Identity leaders’ perceptions of the Rice charism does not include one reference to either of these words.

Another key element expressed in the Charter with respect to the *justice and solidarity* touchstone is advocacy, and again it is a concept which does not feature prominently in previous explorations of Edmund Rice education characteristics. However, it is apparent that in more recent years, especially following the development of a student-led movement in Brisbane in 2013, Edmund Rice Advocacy (ERA) for Change, advocacy has emerged as a significant area of growth in EREA schools. “ERA for Change is a youth advocacy network that stands for equality, human rights and justice and solidarity with all people, and with the earth itself” (ERA for Change, 2021).

In summarising the touchstone of *justice and solidarity*, it is apparent that it is present in contemporary EREA school settings, albeit with a more limited understanding than expressed in the Charter.

The final touchstone to be examined, the one of most relevance to this study is *inclusive community*. “Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good” (EREA, 2017, p. 11). The Charter expresses this touchstone within an EREA school:

1. provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as uniquely reflecting the image of God;

2. demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
3. is sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families, designing school programs to empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
4. welcomes and values all members of the school community regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation;
5. promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
6. works in partnership with the local Catholic community Church in serving the broader mission of the whole Church;
7. acknowledges the services and contribution of the Christian Brothers and works in partnership with Edmund Rice Ministries in furthering the Charism;
8. acknowledges the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and welcomes them into its community;
9. looks beyond itself to contribute, according to its means, to the overall growth and development of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and to Edmund Rice ministries in Australia and overseas. (EREA, 2017, p. 11)

As outlined above, McLaughlin's (2007) research indicates that Ricean education originally set out to include the poor, neglected and unimportant. There is evidence also that Rice created a deep sense of community in his schools (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 390). This suggests that Rice understood that an authentically inclusive school community not only enrolled the poor and marginalised, but ensured they were welcome and accepted. Rice's schools were not merely *diverse*, but truly *inclusive*. McLaughlin (2007) asserts this "honouring of a caring family spirit" (p. 391) can be traced back to Rice's childhood, during which his family welcomed the poor into their home and fed, clothed and educated them. "It is not surprising then that Rice's schools were intimate institutions, where children were cared for in a wholesome family-like atmosphere" (McLaughlin, 2007, pp. 391–392).

In light of the Charter and reminiscent of Ricean education in Ireland, an authentic EREA school views itself as a member of a wider network of schools and ministries with an obligation to contribute to the common good of the network. McLaughlin (2007) describes this as "an interdependent system of education focusing on mission authenticity" (p. 395). Edmund Rice schools from 1802 to 1844 "were expected to think beyond their local boundaries and contribute to the mission elsewhere where the need was greater" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 395). This broad understanding of an *inclusive community* is evident in the EREA Charter, but less so in more recent explorations of the essential characteristics of an EREA school.

McLaughlin's (2007) synthesis of several attempts to describe an authentic contemporary Edmund Rice education does not refer specifically to an individual school's obligation to support other schools in the network, though the broad concepts of community and service are certainly highlighted. With respect to the touchstone of *inclusive community*, McLaughlin's focus is more squarely on individual Edmund Rice schools being compassionate communities and giving a priority to the poor and marginalised (McLaughlin, 2007).

Finn (2013) examined inclusivity in some detail in his study of Identity leaders in EREA schools. His participants perceived the essential characteristics of the Edmund Rice charism to include a "preferential engagement with the poor and marginalised [and] facilitating an inclusive community" (Finn, 2013, p. 108). This *inclusive community* requires "an 'authentic relationship with those who are marginalised in our society' in order to integrate the social classes and address the injustices that maintained social disadvantage" (Finn, 2013, pp. 112–113).

Notwithstanding the goal of being inclusive, the literature also recognises some difficulties for contemporary EREA schools to be authentically inclusive. Finn (2013) refers to a "work-orientated culture" defined by "a failure to integrate faith, life and culture; and exclusion of the poor and marginalised" (p. 181). He argues that the more affluent EREA schools "may promote inequality as they remain difficult to access for the poor and marginalised" (Finn, 2013, p. 188). Further complicating this issue for leaders in EREA schools is the lack of clearly articulated policy on inclusivity. "The new understandings indicate that Edmund Rice schools 'should include students from all socio-economic backgrounds'" (Finn, 2013, p. 193). A question emerges as to the appropriateness of aspirational language, as opposed to the existence of policy. There exists, at times, change for EREA on this topic when moving from aspiration to policy; from terms like *should* to *are required to*, though to date, no formal policy exists. In his closing address to the EREA Congress in 2012, then Executive Director Dr Wayne Tinsey commented:

> However, let us leave this gathering with a renewed commitment to continue to challenge our communities to embrace inclusion through local structures, fees, enrolment and affordability decisions. Our openness to inclusion and embracing responsibility for "the other" determines our capacity to be authentically Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. The time has come for us to agree upon and embrace targets and benchmarks around inclusion, affordability and identity in the same way that we have these benchmarks for other core dimensions of our mission. (Tinsey, 2012)

"Developing Community", "Diversity and Inclusivity" and "Found in Right Relationships" (p. 232) were also identified by the Edmund Rice principals in Tuite's (2007) study into the essential features of the Edmund Rice ethos. The principals articulated that "the need to provide an inclusive education

to a diverse group of young people was important to them" (Tuite, 2007, p. 239). This sentiment is reflected in Watson's (2007) research, in which each school community "related the charism of Edmund Rice to the education of the disadvantaged and the ability of education to address the poverty cycle" (p. 162). Addressing the reality for Edmund Rice schools, Tuite (2007) argues "that because tuition fees and associated charges are habitually more expensive than Queensland Catholic Education schools then some potential students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, would be excluded on financial grounds" (p. 239).

In summary, the literature suggests that inclusivity was and is a defining aim of an authentic Edmund Rice education. It was important to Rice in 1802, and it is important to EREA leaders today. However, a synthesis of the literature also suggests a clear disparity between aspiration and practice when it comes to authentic inclusivity in contemporary EREA schools. This disparity is the focus for the subsequent research.

3.3 Inclusivity and Educational Disadvantage

In light of the exploration above relating to the articulated mission and identity of Catholic and EREA schools, this section will examine the philosophical and theological foundations of inclusivity, as well as focus on groups identified as being at a distinct educational disadvantage in contemporary Australia.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission released a Staff Working Paper in 2013, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, in which they define disadvantage as "impoverished lives" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 31), as distinguished from poverty alone. "Disadvantage was traditionally understood as poverty, and poverty as inadequate resources or low income. But low income does not necessarily establish disadvantage" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 31).

The 2011 Gonski Review established that "there are five factors of disadvantage that have a significant impact on educational outcomes in Australia: socioeconomic status, Indigeneity, English language proficiency, disability and remoteness" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 111). The review goes further with respect to English language proficiency and asserts that of the students with a lack of proficiency, "by far the most disadvantaged group are refugee students who have been in an Australian school for more than one year" (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 118).

The National School Reform Agreement highlights *priority equity cohorts* and defines these groups as "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with a disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds" (COAG, 2019, p. 8). This followed the 2008 Melbourne Declaration which identified that students at risk of educational disadvantage are those from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, low

socioeconomic, refugee backgrounds, are homeless, have a disability or live in remote areas (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7).

Hence, for the purpose of this exploration, in a 21st century, Australian, Catholic, Edmund Rice educational context in which there is a clear focus on the poor and marginalised, this literature review and subsequent research will examine four groups of educationally disadvantaged young people:

- economically disadvantaged students;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- students from refugee backgrounds; and
- students with disabilities.

Before examining the groups specifically and individually, it is important to first explore the theological and philosophical foundations of inclusivity, so as to situate these educationally disadvantaged and marginalised groups in the context of Edmund Rice education.

3.3.1 Theological and Philosophical Foundations of Inclusivity

Inclusivity can be traced back to the Hebrew scriptures, and Jesus drew upon this in the development of his Holiness code (Geyser-Fouche & Fourie, 2017). Hence, this is reflected in the New Testament tradition, for example, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). Inclusivity as a theological concept can be found in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and is sometimes described as Jesus' hospitality to others, or as "table fellowship" (Grace, 2003; Illathuparampil, 2010; Jeffress, 2017; Parler, 2004; Rayan, 2010; Sahu, 2007; Wassen, 2016). Jesus' acts of hospitality and inclusivity, particularly in relation to meals, are noted by numerous Scripture scholars. In 1st century Palestine, the meal and table fellowship were "more than an opportunity for sustenance" (Sahu, 2007, p. 1). They were "complex social events, functioning as ceremony and mirrors of social systems" (Parler, 2004, p. 3). The cultural norm was that only people of similar status and class ate together.

Luke's Gospel in particular highlights table fellowship as central to the life and message of Jesus. "First, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal" (Illathuparampil, 2010, p. 427). Parler (2004) examines three particular passages from Luke and expresses that, "Luke seems to be telling us that, to understand Jesus, we must see the importance of his attitude of hospitality, which he practiced against the grain of the cultural and religious expectations of his own society" (p. 3). Jesus' table fellowship and hospitality were distinctly counter-cultural and considered "subversive because it undermines and challenges existing power structures and restores human dignity and respect" (Jeffress, 2017, p. 471).

With respect to inclusivity in an educational context, the Catholic Church has demonstrated an evolving understanding. The first papal document to focus on Catholic education was Pope Pius XI's

1929 *Divini Illius Magistri (On the education of youth)* which advanced that the essential goal of a Catholic education is the "salvation of souls" (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 65).

Pope Paul VI's Second Vatical Council proclamation, *Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education)* (1965), makes more explicit a focus on the poor, urging "Catholic schools [to] fulfill their function in a continually more perfect way, and especially in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world".

This view was broadened, specifically in light of Vatican II (1962–1965) in the document on *The Catholic School*:

> First and foremost, the Church offers its educational service to the poor, or those who are deprived of family help and affection, or those who are far from the faith. Since education is an important means of improving the social and economic condition of the individual and of peoples, if the Catholic school was to turn attention exclusively or predominantly to those from wealthier social classes it could be contributing towards maintaining their privileged position and could thereby continue to favour a society which is unjust. (CCE, 1977, pp. 44–45)

The position is reinforced by a former Congregational Leader of the Christian Brothers, Br Philip Pinto cfc, when describing an authentic Edmund Rice school:

> Our schools exist to challenge popular beliefs and dominant cultural values, to ask the difficult question, to look at life from the standpoint of the minority, the victim, the outcast, and the stranger. (Pinto, 2002)

These theological and ecclesial underpinnings provide an impetus to further explore the extent of authentic implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic and EREA schools. However, the literature suggests the goal for inclusivity in education is not only the focus for Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. In the broader Australian educational context, social inclusion is an aspect of the national political debate. In 2012, the Labor Federal Government released the second edition of the Australian Social Inclusion Board's *How Australia is faring* report. The Board was established in 2008 to provide the government with advice on a range of social issues. However, on 18 September 2013, the Social Inclusion Unit of the Federal Government was disbanded.

Disadvantage in education featured in both the 2008 Melbourne and 2019 Mparntwe Declarations, and was a central facet of both Gonski reports. The Melbourne Declaration, in stating its goal that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, was clear about the following:

> that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:
>
> - ensure that the learning outcomes of Indigenous students improve to match those of other students;

- ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes; and
- reduce the effect of other sources of disadvantage, such as disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)

The initial Gonski Review sought to establish a new funding model which would rectify the perceived and real inequities which exist in Australian schools:

> Achieving greater equity in Australia's schooling system is central to the panel's remit – to provide recommendations that are directed towards achieving a school funding system that is transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all Australian students. (Gonski et al., 2011, p. 105)

These theological and philosophical foundations underpin the concept of inclusivity explored in this research. The four identified areas of disadvantage in Australian education will now be examined more closely.

3.3.2 Economically Disadvantaged Students

After the election of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2007, social inclusion attracted more attention within the federal government, most clearly evident in the 2008 establishment of the Social Inclusion Board. This Board's 2012 publication, *Social Inclusion in Australia: how Australia is faring*, along with the Australian Government Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper of July 2013, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, provide what was then the most relevant and recent data about economic disadvantage in contemporary Australia. In 2018, the Productivity Commission released updated data in its research paper, *Rising Inequality: a stocktake of the evidence*.

Australia is justifiably seen as a prosperous country by international standards. Life expectancy is higher than almost every other nation; approximately 85% consider themselves in good health, 25% higher than the OECD average; incomes are growing; Australia boasted twenty-eight years of uninterrupted economic growth prior to the 2020 COVID19 global pandemic; and, almost 80% of Australians report they are satisfied (Productivity Commission, 2018). However, despite this relative prosperity, economic inequality and disadvantage continue to exist and indeed increase. Income inequality "has increased modestly since the late 1980s" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 37). Income inequality is measured internationally using the Gini coefficient for equivalised household disposable income and according to this measure, income inequality in Australia "is close to the OECD country average" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 37).

Further, of the OECD countries in 2012, Australia had the fourth highest proportion of children under fifteen years living in jobless families, approximately 14% (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012,

p. 3). The Social Inclusion Board measured proportions of people in households with low economic resources and high financial stress, and in 2009–2010 found that families with children (couples or single parents) represented the largest proportion of high financial stress households, with approximately 75%. More disturbingly, the trends indicate that not only is this proportion increasing, but so is the overall number of people living with low economic resources and high financial stress. The study found that in 2010, 7% of the population over fifteen years old fit this category, increasing from 6.1% in 2004 (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2012, p. 28). In 2018, the data indicated that "jobless households, particularly those with children, experience the highest poverty rates [and that] children and older people (65+ years) have been the most likely to experience both income and consumption poverty" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 107).

The 2013 Australian Government Productivity Commission Paper revealed the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on the educational outcomes of children and reported: "Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform more poorly at school, on average, than those from higher socioeconomic groups" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 17). It is clear that the weaker performance of these students, evident when they begin their schooling, continues throughout their school years, and in fact, the gap widens (McLachlan et al., 2013; OECD, 2018). Moreover, in 2018, the Productivity Commission reported that "youth deprivation was associated with exclusion from participation in normal activities and low levels of engagement in education, which suggests a dynamic relationship between material deprivation and social exclusion" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 132). The report stated that this deprivation was "also more concentrated among young people with disabilities and Indigenous young people, as well as young people who cared for a family member with illness or disability" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 131).

Because many economically disadvantaged children live in similar areas, schools in those neighbourhoods "are more likely to be dealing with economic and social problems that can inhibit learning" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 116). The OECD (2012) concluded that:

> Disadvantaged schools tend to reinforce students' socioeconomic inequalities…This represents a double handicap for disadvantaged students, since schools do not mitigate the negative impact of the students' disadvantaged background and on the contrary amplify its negative effect on their performance. (p. 107)

In summary, with respect to economically disadvantaged students in Australia, three clear points have emerged:

1. There is a relatively large and growing number of school-age children suffering from economic disadvantage.
2. This economic disadvantage is impacting negatively upon educational outcomes for these children, increasingly so as they move through school.

3. This educational disadvantage is amplified by the consequent development of disadvantaged schools in low socioeconomic areas.

There is therefore an inherent challenge for Catholic, and more specifically for EREA schools, in terms of their location, resourcing and enrolment policies.

3.3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

The literature pertaining to disadvantage for children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) backgrounds points to disparity in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The Productivity Commission has repeatedly classified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as a group likely to experience multiple forms of deeper disadvantage, deprivation and social exclusion (McLachlan et al., 2013; Productivity Commission, 2018).

In response to the prevalence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational disadvantage, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) presented an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan: 2010–2014*, committing and attempting to "assist education providers to accelerate improvements in the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 4). The plan, agreed upon by the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers, explicitly referred to the "gap" between outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and articulated six ambitious targets:

- close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five within a decade;
- ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years (by 2013);
- halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018);
- at least halve the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians within a decade (by 2018). (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 3)

In order to close the educational gap, the plan identified six priority domains to be addressed:

1. readiness for school;

2. engagement and connections;
3. attendance;
4. literacy and numeracy;
5. leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and
6. pathways to real post-school options. (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 5)

Some authors contend that to present the argument regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage through "gap talk" (Lingard et al., 2011) is counter-productive and originating from a deficit approach:

> … this new politics of recognition is set up to accept rather than contest structural inequalities in education systems … [and] can be viewed as contradictory and counterproductive, and furthermore, raises questions regarding the ideas, beliefs and motivations underpinning the education policy itself. In respect of Indigenous students in Australia, gap talk also serves to ignore past and present practices of (post) colonization. Of interest here is the apparent continuance of deficit thinking, resulting in a "student-as-problem" framing of education policy focused on "Indigenous education". (Lingard et al., 2011, p. 327)

In more recent times, the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers has become more prevalent in the national conversation. One issue which has been highlighted is the notion of *identity* in relation to addressing the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

> The nurturing of identity is acknowledged through the literature as being a critical factor in supporting Aboriginal young people to remain engaged in education in Australia. There are national policies that all aim at closing the educational gap, yet very limited emphasis within these policies considers how the cultural identities of Aboriginal young people are implicated with the Australian Government's agenda of achieving educational parity with non-Indigenous young people. (Shay and Wickes, 2017, p. 108)

There exists an absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in the determining of Indigenous policy, including in education with detrimental effects. "Blatant and overt racial discrimination in accessing education was a reality for Indigenous people living in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and there are still examples of this today)" (Shay and Wickes, 2017, p. 115).

However, more recently there are signs of change including the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, a statement arising from the 2017 National Constitutional Convention. The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is a call by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for real and practical change in Australia

through the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and a Makarrata Commission, to undertake processes of treaty-making and truth-telling. The statement calls for a "Makaratta Commission" (Uluru Statement From the Heart, 2020) to facilitate a process of agreement making between government and First Nations Peoples. Makarrata is a Yolngu Mata word from the Yolngu people in north-east Arnhem Land, and can be translated as meaning "coming together after a struggle" (Uluru Statement From the Heart, 2020). The statement refers specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and describes Makaratta as capturing "our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination" (Uluru Statement From the Heart, 2020).

While the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is an example of a shift in the national conversation regarding First Nations peoples and their future, and the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship is increasing, the literature paints a clear picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and the existence of a distinct educational gap. A feature of the literature regarding disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and therefore subsequent response by government and non-government schools and organisations, is the lack of longitudinal data on the topic. While it is clear that

> Indigenous disadvantage has many of its roots tied to experiences found within the context of early childhood … the historical lack of adequate research on the factors associated with positive development of Indigenous children, vis-à-vis other Australian children, constrain the ability of policy to achieve its staged goals. (Dodson et al., 2012, p. 69)

The issues of "gap talk" and lack of longitudinal data notwithstanding, the evidence contained in the literature is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage exists, and that federal, state and territory governments are making attempts to address this disadvantage. The Melbourne Declaration addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage by claiming "improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth" (MCEETYA, 2008) as one of its commitments to action. This aspiration was reiterated in the 2019 Mparntwe Declaration: "All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be empowered to achieve their full potential, shape their own futures, and embrace their cultures, languages and identities as Australia's First Nations peoples" (Education Council, 2019, p. 16). In addition, the initial Gonski Review highlighted the gap in NAPLAN results between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as a contributing factor to its funding recommendations for Australian education (Gonski et al., 2011).

It is important to note that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are educationally disadvantaged on a disturbing scale due to falling into a number of types of

inequality. For example, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child living in a very remote area of Australia with one or two unemployed parents, statistically has a bleak future:

> Almost 70% of those children did not meet the minimum literacy standards. That's bad enough, but the failure rate for Indigenous students in very remote communities in the Northern Territory was 86%. Another 10% just achieved the basic level. Studies conducted in individual communities have found 100% failure rates in those communities, indicating that the national test results are perhaps optimistic. (Buckingham et al., 2009, p. 8)

Choosing an effective approach to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage remains a significant challenge for education systems and individual schools. Significant financial resources have been spent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education with little apparent benefit (Buckingham et al., 2009; Gonski et al., 2011; Gonski et al., 2018; Lingard et al., 2011; Moodie et al., 2019; Vass et al., 2019). However, there is some evidence to suggest that some models have led to success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but few could be replicated on a broad, national level. That is, there is little data to conclude there is a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to address this inequality.

The challenge for Catholic and EREA schools is to recognise and commence an approach from their own context, and provide worthwhile opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in partnership with families and communities. Though a potentially controversial space, one such approach may be found in a study by Buckingham et al. (2009):

> So many resources have been wasted on "flash in the pan" initiatives that are supposed to be the next salvation of Indigenous education. None of them works except possibly the scholarship program, which places Indigenous students in high achieving boarding schools away from the temptations of alcohol and drugs. Government needs to take a long and hard look at the benefits it hands out to everyone, including Indigenous people. (p. 18)

In the case of schools not having boarding facilities, there are some Catholic schools facilitating a homestay program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities. The boarding and homestay models invite further discussion though, as the concept of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children moving away from their communities, homes and families is a potentially controversial and indeed detrimental one. Schools which genuinely include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need the ability to be flexible in the delivery of curriculum and appropriate pastoral care, and to "offer a program specially designed to accommodate their unique cultural needs [and] give these students a shot at success" (Marshall, 2013).

Ultimately, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have the right to choose the education they believe best for their children, and not succumb to "low – or rather no – expectations of Aboriginal people" (Sarra, 2014, p. 17). Chris Sarra (2014), Aboriginal educator and founder and chairman of the Stronger Smarter Institute, argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from remote communities are rendered incompetent and dysfunctional if families are not able to access quality, relevant education for a 21st century Australia:

> We owe it to the kids to give them the educational opportunities to enable them to be functional in Australian society and retain their cultural identity…Every human being should have the choice. If we don't give them the same skills as the rest of the community, we're effectively robbing them of that choice, and we have no right to do that. (p. 17)

In light of this challenge, the current Catholic context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is worth examining in some detail. In the 2016 census, 133,528 (2.5%) of all Catholics in Australia identified as coming from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, an increase of 102% since 1991. However, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic children attending Catholic schools raises questions about the inclusive nature of Catholic schools when it comes to enrolment. The data shows that the clear majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic primary and secondary students do not attend Catholic schools. While the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians identifying as Catholic is increasing, the representation of Indigenous students in Catholic schools is simultaneously decreasing (ACBC, 2012). In 2018, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students made up 2.4% of total mainstream EREA enrolments (EREA, 2018). The 2017 National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) Annual Report identified the total Indigenous enrolment for all Catholic schools as 2.9%. This is despite the fact that in the 2016 census, 16.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples indicated that they were Catholic (ACBC, 2019).

In summary, with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and disadvantage in Australia, three clear points have emerged:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are subject to significantly more educational disadvantage than non-Indigenous students.
2. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic children has increased significantly over the past twenty years.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are under-represented in Catholic primary and secondary schools, with fewer than one third of Indigenous Catholic children accessing a Catholic education.

There is therefore an inherent challenge for Catholic, and more specifically for EREA schools, in terms of their approach to addressing this existing disparity. Any method will need to originate from an inclusive, rather than deficit approach, in the spirit of *Makaratta* and in partnership with First Nations families and communities.

3.3.4 Students from Refugee Backgrounds

Educational disadvantage in refugee communities in Australia is a more complex research proposition than economic or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. This is on account of a relative lack of recent and relevant research and the dynamic political landscape with respect to refugees and asylum seekers. This is evident in the comparison between first and second editions of the Social Inclusion Board's report, *Social Inclusion in Australia: how Australia is faring*. In the first report, refugees were a group whose disadvantage was assessed as such: "Discrimination directly impacts on many groups that are already at particular risk of social exclusion, such as people from a refugee background and other vulnerable migrants" (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2010, p. 11). However, the second edition of the same report two years later fails to mention refugees once in the 106-page report. In that two-year period, the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments had come under intense political pressure to find a solution to the asylum seeker debate. In September 2013 on the first day of the new conservative Abbott government which came to power with the assistance of a central policy of 'stopping the boats', the Australian Social Inclusion Board ceased to exist.

The Australian Government Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, refers to refugees on two occasions with one occasion being:

> Migrants and recently settled refugees … tend not to be well represented in surveys used to inform some measures of disadvantage. To help address this, a longitudinal survey of 1500 recently settled humanitarian families will be conducted annually by the AIFS between 2013 and 2018. (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 91)

With the exception of the government initiated Gonski Review (2011) and the Melbourne (2008) and Mparntwe (2019) Declarations, which clearly articulated refugee educational disadvantage, government bodies have in recent years appeared reluctant to gather and publish evidence of disadvantage, particularly educational disadvantage, for young people from refugee backgrounds. However, there is literature which contends that this disadvantage does exist. In 2003, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) conducted a review of settlement services "which concluded that settlement outcomes for refugees were generally poorer than for other groups of migrants due to their experiencing greater instability and disruption to their lives before migrating to Australia" (Sidhu & Taylor, 2008, p. 8), a finding supported by Francis (2007):

> Studies indicate that refugee young people are subject to experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared with other young people. These include the survival of torture and trauma, the experience of long periods of disrupted schooling, and resettlement within fragmented family units. These experiences impact on adolescent development and the transition to independence and require specialised responses from the community. (p. 51)

Compounding these challenges for young refugee students is the common factor of a lack of English language proficiency (Earnest et al., 2015; Gonski et al., 2011; Molla, 2020; Sidhu & Taylor, 2012). Refugee students often have extensive learning, social and emotional needs, and can be marginalised in an educational setting (Earnest et al., 2015; Molla, 2020; Sidhu & Taylor, 2008; Sidhu & Taylor, 2012; Ziaian et al., 2018). Effective resettlement which caters for the psychosocial wellbeing of young refugees is a difficult process and establishing an early sense of belonging is essential (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Earnest et al., 2015). Education is an important factor in developing this sense of belonging, and a study of newly arrived youth in Melbourne with refugee backgrounds found that "a supportive school environment plays a key role in determining wellbeing outcomes" (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 8).

Young people from refugee backgrounds resettling in Australia do not necessarily see themselves as "victims of their refugee past …, [rather that] they have high potential for making a good and successful life in Australia" (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 19). Reflecting a similar challenge as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it is important that educational systems and schools resist approaching disadvantage of refugee students from "a deficit model that focuses only on the disadvantages of entrants rather than their potential to contribute to Australia" (Sidhu & Taylor, 2008, p. 8). In this light, addressing educational disadvantage of students from refugee backgrounds requires a considered, inclusive approach at school and system level.

> If schools are to play a key role in the refugee settlement process, positive and welcoming attitudes to refugee students would appear to be essential. Such school-based change requires leadership, and ideally will be facilitated and supported by education authorities. (Sidhu & Taylor, 2012, p. 45)

Taylor and Sidhu (2012) studied the response models of four Australian schools, three of which were Catholic schools in Brisbane, with relatively large numbers of students from refugee backgrounds. Their case study resulted in the identification of several features associated with the successful support of refugee students. First, it found that education systems must take a strategic approach to the enrolment and support of refugee students, including orientation, cultural, learning, language, social, emotional, financial, primary to secondary transition, and family support. Second, with particular

relevance to this exploration, the authors contended that Catholic schools must authentically adhere to their mission of social justice, including "an acceptance of 'the other'" (Sidhu & Taylor, 2012, p. 53).

Next, the study highlighted the need for a holistic approach to education and welfare; schools must establish comprehensive support systems to address the learning, social and emotional needs of students. The authors suggested that schools should link to families and the wider refugee community networks and engage interpreters, teacher aides and liaison officers to assist with support. The study also examined the importance of leadership. Specifically, and in addition to effective system leadership, the authors argued that school principals must be strong advocates for refugee students and recognise that advocacy is a critical dimension of creating an inclusive community (Sidhu & Taylor, 2012).

The study also recognised the need for an inclusive approach in schools, contending that a flexible approach to teaching and learning is required, but refugee students must be able to access the mainstream curriculum. Staff should model behaviour which helps create an inclusive culture, including the knowledge and willingness to counter negative views of refugees. Where possible, learning support should occur in the mainstream classroom, rather than withdrawal, and Learning Support/ESL teachers would ideally have experience in working with refugee youth. Finally, the study highlighted the importance of working with other agencies; schools must partner with community organisations to ensure a holistic approach to supporting refugee students (Sidhu & Taylor, 2012).

In summary, with respect to the educational disadvantage of students from refugee backgrounds in Australia, three clear points have emerged:

1. Refugee students are educationally disadvantaged on numerous levels including traumatic background, marginalisation, financial hardship, and lack of language proficiency.
2. Their disadvantage is currently compounded due to the negative public policy debate on a national level.
3. Education systems and many schools are only at the beginning stages of effectively and strategically responding to the educational needs of refugee students.

Catholic and EREA schools, with their articulated aspiration to be inclusive of the poor and marginalised, clearly have an obligation to address the educational disadvantage of young people from refugee backgrounds. While some of these schools are leading the way in this area, for others, this will be a challenge as they seek to be pragmatic in their current context while maintaining integrity of mission.

3.3.5 Students With Disabilities

Disability is a broad term which reflects challenges with definition and the associated identification of exploring strategies in relation to disadvantage. Indeed, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises that "disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (United Nations, 2006, p.1). The definition of disability, according to the Australian *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Australian Government, 2018), was presented in the previous chapter. Authors of the literature reviewed in this exploration use various definitions of disability, with commonality emerging in the view that a disability is an impairment which hinders a person's capacity to effectively participate in society over the long term.

There is a clear link between disability and disadvantage, and moreover, between disability and social exclusion. The 2011 Productivity Commission Report on *Disability Care and Support* found that "people with disability and their families face many social and financial challenges and, as a group, are among the most disadvantaged in Australia" (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 112). Further, the 2013 Productivity Commission Paper on *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia* reported that "almost half of all Australians who have a long-term health condition or disability experienced some form of social exclusion, and about 13% experienced deep exclusion" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 139). The Productivity Commission's subsequent report, *Rising Inequality: a stocktake of the evidence*, further suggested that children and people with a disability are "most at risk of multiple deprivation" (Productivity Commission, 2018, p. 107).

Under Australian legislation, specifically the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, "students with disability must be able to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers" (NCCD, 2021). The literature contains an array of descriptions in respect to students with disabilities and the education these students can or cannot access. For the purpose of this section of the review, *inclusive education* will refer to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Terms including *special education*, *special schools* and *special needs* are also common in the literature.

Education is widely seen as important for any disadvantaged young person, including young people with disabilities. "Education is a foundation capability. It improves a person's employment prospects and earning capacity, and the evidence points to a relationship between education and better health and raised civic and social engagement" (McLachlan et al., 2013, p. 2). The notion of education improving employability is particularly relevant for people with disabilities. In 2009, 55% of Australian males and 46% of females with a disability aged between 15 and 64 were employed. Other than the benefit employment has on a person's social inclusion (Diemer et al., 2010; Evans, 2000; Stancliffe, 2012), employment provides income, and "as a result of poor employment outcomes, people with disabilities

are also among the most disadvantaged groups financially" (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 116). Therefore, schools which seek to be genuinely inclusive of marginalised youth, must provide access to a quality education for young people with disabilities.

The literature suggests that providing this quality inclusive education for students with disabilities is "a major challenge facing countries throughout the world" (Allan, 2003, p. 175). There are several models and approaches to inclusive education, and this review attempts to synthesise some emerging themes and commonalities arising from the literature. Three themes have been identified:

1. the mistake of making incorrect assumptions;
2. the importance of effective professional development; and
3. the need for a broadly inclusive school culture.

First the literature suggests that incorrect assumptions are often made about students with disabilities and what is required in the provision of a quality education. This is reminiscent of the previously mentioned danger of adopting a deficit model when developing methods of educating disadvantaged young people. Beginning the task of educating students with disabilities with the view that "children are deficient and schools fix them, … schools can be weighed down with discourses of deficit and disadvantage manifested in categories used to sort children" (Carrington et al., 2006, p. 323).

Illustrating the point that this is a common view, it appears rare that students with disabilities are themselves consulted about their own education. Slee & Allan (2011) argue that inclusive education is in need of "thinking otherwise … by supporting hitherto silenced or marginalised voices to enter or lead the conversation about educational exclusion and inclusion" (pp. 175–176). Pivic et al. (2002) made similar observations:

> However, what is lacking in the literature are empirically based studies examining the barriers to inclusion and full participation in general school settings, identified by those most impacted – students with disabilities. It is our assertion that students are fully capable of identifying and expressing accessibility concerns and should be allowed and encouraged to participate in evaluating inclusive environments. (p. 99)

The inclusion of parents and families of students with disabilities, and the wider community in the conversation regarding their education, is also important to genuine and effective inclusive education (Allan, 2003; Carrington et al., 2006; Pivic et al., 2002). In particular, it is argued that any assessment of the quality of inclusive education should "ascertain the experiences of the parents of children with disabilities" (Pivic et al., 2002, p. 98).

The second theme to emerge from the literature was the importance of professional development for staff working with students with disabilities (Allan, 2003; Carrington et al., 2006; Forlin et al., 2008). Forlin et al. (2008) researched the concerns of teachers in Australian mainstream schools catering for students with disabilities and found that the two most significant issues were the behaviour of the child and the teacher's perceived professional competency. The latter includes "teachers' suggestions that they have insufficient pre-service training to cater adequately for a child with an intellectual disability in their classroom, as reported by 93% of teachers" (Forlin et al., 2008, p. 255).

The third theme generated from the literature was the need for a broadly inclusive school culture. A study completed by Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu (2010) in the United States into the relationship between school culture and inclusion concluded that there were three components of a school culture which led to successful inclusion: "inclusive leadership, a broad vision of school community, and shared language and values" (p. 163). This broader view of an inclusive school culture is developed further by Allan (2003), Berlach & Chambers (2011) and Slee & Allan (2011), who contend that schools should seek to create a learning environment which is inclusive of all, rather than seek to integrate particular individuals or groups of students. Berlach et al. (2011) express this as an aspiration to "embrace the challenge of providing the best possible learning environment for *all* children…rather than bringing children with special needs into the mainstream classroom" (p. 530). Allan's (2003) study encourages system and school leaders "to understand the distinction between integration and inclusion" (p. 176), while Slee & Allan (2011) claim that "*special educational needs* is a euphemism for the failure of schooling to meet the needs of all children, a discursive tactic to de-politicise school failure" (p. 175).

In summary, with respect to the educational disadvantage of students with disabilities in Australia, four clear points have emerged:

1. Young people with disabilities experience various types of disadvantage in addition to their actual disability, including social exclusion, difficulty accessing mainstream curriculum, and obstacles moving into post-school employment.
2. Their disadvantage is currently compounded due to the common and often incorrect assumptions made, and the deficit approach taken by many schools.
3. It is imperative for schools to give students with disabilities and their parents a voice in their education.
4. Many teachers feel ill-equipped in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Catholic and EREA schools, with their articulated aspiration to be inclusive of the poor and marginalised, clearly have an obligation to address the educational disadvantage of young people with

disabilities. This presents a challenge, but Catholic mission integrity and authenticity to the identity of an EREA school invites an appropriate response.

This section has thus far examined the philosophical and theological foundations of inclusivity and the educational disadvantage of four groups in Australian society: economically disadvantaged students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from refugee backgrounds and students with disabilities. Impacting the specific educational response to the inclusion of these groups of learners there are practical and organisational challenges which EREA schools face in being authentically inclusive. It is to these challenges that the review now turns.

3.3.6 Challenges to Inclusivity

This study investigates the dissonance between the articulated identity of EREA schools through the EREA Charter touchstone of *inclusive community*, and the perceived inconsistencies in implementing this touchstone in many EREA schools. Clearly, there are challenges which can hinder an authentic EREA school's aspiration to be inclusive.

In 2011, EREA Executive Director Dr Wayne Tinsey wrote a letter to the EREA national community in part explaining the contrasting ideas of inclusivity in a society which has transitioned to see Catholic education differently to how it was seen in early Australian Catholic education. Tinsey acknowledged that there are competing agendas in contemporary Catholic education.

> In a letter that he sent in 1882 to the Town Clerk of Richmond in Victoria, Br Ambrose Treacy clearly articulated his vision for a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition … "The school is open to all who wish to avail themselves of it without distinction of creed, colour or nationality. No child can be refused admission on the score of religion or payment." … The charism of Edmund Rice is always focused on the marginalised. It gives priority to inclusion and an authentic preferential option for the poor. It contends we cannot fully claim the title Catholic without this emphasis on inclusion and outreach to those on the margins. (Tinsey, 2011)

Later in the letter, Tinsey (2011) referred to the agendas which compete against this "emphasis on inclusion and outreach to those on the margins":

> There is the possibility, however, that our schools have become comfortable and attractive to those who may primarily seek our "fruits but not our roots". In some cases we may have become schools of choice for those people who aspire to exclusive, private education. In a society that increasingly sees education as a commodity that can be bought, our schools risk being used as vehicles for socio-differentiation and elitism. (Tinsey, 2011)

Tinsey (2011) concludes by posing a series of "potentially hard questions related to our mission to and concern for the poor and those at the margins", including:

- Is there harmony or dissonance between the direction of our current endeavours and the greatest aspirations held for us?
- Is a true "option for the poor" our priority in mission and do our cultures and practices reflect this priority?
- Are we currently perceived in the community as inclusive or exclusive?
- Do our fee structures and enrolment policies really encourage inclusion or are we focused on priorities that exclude us as a possibility for those who are poor? (Tinsey, 2011)

This section will outline five key challenges to inclusivity, drawing on the relevant literature:

- an excessively competitive approach to education;
- the strain on schools' financial resources;
- parental expectation;
- attainment, retention and professional development of teachers; and
- ineffective leadership, particularly in a context of change.

The influence competition can have on schools and how they attempt to be inclusive was discussed in section 3.2.1 in view of the contrast between neo-liberal ideology and a Gospel values-based education. However, in exploring challenges to authentic inclusivity, competition deserves some further examination. EREA schools risk failing to be inclusive if they focus excessively on league tables, academic results and the elitist reputation which follows. The "apparent preoccupation with high examination results" (Finn, 2013, p. 194) in some EREA schools, while maintaining or enhancing public reputation, erodes mission integrity. Sidhu and Taylor (2008) provide a specific example of this tension: "Other teachers raised the effects of the large proportion of refugee students on OP outcomes in the educational market context. This was a particular issue for schools which previously had an academic reputation" (p. 9). The perceived importance of a strong academic reputation was noted by Finn (2013) in his study of Edmund Rice Identity leaders: "A certain number of our families come to school because it has a good name and they think it will help their careers" (p. 193).

League tables and their link to the concepts of competition and reputation, and education as commodity, were examined by Corbett (2010):

> The league tables do not differentiate between schools with very few pupils who have learning disabilities and those with substantial numbers requiring additional support. In the current political climate, where schools are set in competition with one another, there is little incentive for schools to promote their commitment to supporting less able learners if it means that the parents of the more able will select alternatives. The

> buzz-word is 'entitlement' and that is about the individual rights of both parents and students as consumers of education. (p. 59)

The issue of education as commodity is related to a second challenge, the strain on schools' financial resources. The literature suggests this is a significant hindrance to inclusivity in Catholic and EREA schools on a variety of levels. The fact that EREA schools charge fees, ranging from very modest to very expensive, by definition, excludes some families including Catholic families actively involved in the local parish (Canavan, 2009; Tuite, 2007). While several Catholic and EREA schools offer fee concessions to economically disadvantaged families, there is a reluctance by families to "come forward to request special consideration, preferring to enrol their children in government schools where no questions are asked and tuition fees are not charged" (Canavan, 2009, p. 178).

There is evidence that EREA schools are concerned about balancing the financial sustainability of implementing more inclusive practices and the need to allocate limited resources to current students and staff. Finn (2013) found that:

> … the preferential option for the poor and marginalised may impact on the financial sustainability of an Edmund Rice school: "That is something I struggle with when the preferential option for the poor means that the poor come for free. The original mission was that. The reality is that the school is not going to survive where no school fees are coming in." This may threaten the potential of an Edmund Rice school to promote the Edmund Rice charism, given either a limited allocation of dedicated resources or a lack of financial support. (pp. 193–194)

In other words, the irony is that a school cannot be inclusive if it has to shut its doors. Managing this delicate balance is the role of leadership, which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, but Tuite (2007) illustrates the relationship between leadership and the influence of finance:

> Determining what offerings are made to students and what constitutes a diverse range of students depends to a large extent on the emphasis of the principal as well as the school community's needs and financial ability. (p. 257)

Resources can be financial, physical or human. The enrolment of students with physical disabilities can necessitate physical alterations to a school such as elevators and ramps, often at significant cost. Additionally, "many of the students (with disabilities) require a personal assistant or teaching aide for such basic activities as getting dressed for recess, personal care, remedial education, or mobility within the school" (Pivic et al., 2002, p. 102). Moreover, the preparatory human resource cost is noted by Carrington and Robinson (2006) as significant: "Time and effort were frequently spent on the development of alternative resources and modified teaching programs that were often taught

away from the 'normal' teaching program" (p. 325). Each resource allocation decision has an impact upon the wider school community, including students, staff and parents.

Parental expectation also constitutes a challenge which can hinder inclusivity. The success of Catholic and Edmund Rice schools has meant they have become sought-after institutions (McLaughlin, 2006). "In some cases we may have become schools of choice for those people who aspire to exclusive, private education" (Tinsey, 2011). Finn (2013) highlighted this influence on inclusivity:

> At times, where poor and marginalised students are included, "some staff and parents would like to exclude (these) students based on race, monetary wealth, social and emotional basis" … Parents thought it was nice that the school was doing that, but wondered where did it leave their boy and was it going to lower the standards. (p. 190–191)

Staff concerns around inclusivity are manifested in the attainment, retention and professional development of teachers. Forlin et al. (2008) examined teacher concerns regarding inclusion. They found that teachers' major concerns in mainstream schools which had enrolled students with disabilities were related to the behaviour of the child. "Of most concern for 92% of teachers was that the child had a short attention span" (Forlin et al., 2008, p. 255). This study also found that effective and regular professional development of teachers was very important in assisting them to cope with meeting the needs of their students (Forlin et al., 2008).

The final challenge to inclusivity arises from leadership, particularly but not exclusively as it relates to change management. As *inclusivity* is such a broad term, it is entirely possible if not probable that school principals would interpret the challenge to be inclusive in different ways. Variable interpretations of inclusivity precipitate "a form of resistance … from those who adorn themselves with the epithet 'I'm already inclusive', without having much insight into what such a statement really denotes" (Berlach et al., 2011, p. 535). With regard the management of change in a school setting, Berlach et al. (2011) contend that a "final and more general drawback identified with operationalising inclusivity is the nature of change itself [and] how a change, if not effectively managed, can become counter-productive" (p. 537).

In summary, the aspiration of authentic inclusivity in EREA schools and the implementation of inclusivity in practical and effective forms are influenced by potential challenges such as competition, financial resources, parental expectation, challenges for staff, and ineffective leadership and change management. Responding to these barriers in the first instance will arise from EREA organisational leadership, in partnership with school principals and leadership teams in EREA schools. The next section of this chapter will explore the role of these leaders in Catholic and Edmund Rice educational contexts.

3.4 Leadership

This section explores leadership in Edmund Rice educational contexts. An analysis and synthesis of the relevant literature has led to the identification of three key aspects of authentic Edmund Rice educational leadership, particularly as it relates to inclusivity. The leadership discussed applies to both system (EREA) and school leadership. Within these two domains, three characteristics of leadership are examined:

1. Relational leadership (Presence)
2. Servant leadership (Compassion)
3. Prophetic leadership (Liberation)

Presence, compassion and liberation are the spiritual foundations underpinning Edmund Rice education (McLaughlin, 2007).

3.4.1 Relational Leadership – Presence

In an Edmund Rice education context, relational leadership is understood through the lens of "presence leading to a respectful sense of the sacred" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 388). McLaughlin (2007) argues that Rice saw presence as being in relationship with God and in turn loving what God loved, humanity.

> This presence becomes a radical humanizing process for the invitation is to be present to and examine our current humanity and decide what kind of human we might be. The reality is we are defined by the quality of our relationships. (p. 251)

EREA leaders are challenged to see their organisation or school as community in which right relationships are central. "This communal and relational essence of leadership 'leads logically to its transforming perspective'. Jesus' transformational leadership was characterised by an ability to create and communicate a vision and empower people to implement the vision" (Finn, 2013, p. 61). It follows then that the empowerment of members of a community to implement a vision inherently requires a mutually respectful relationship between leader and follower. "People who lead generate trust, openness and mutual affirmation that grow shared responsibility and mutual influence" (Watson, 2007, p. 76).

Tuite's (2007) study of Edmund Rice principals supports the importance of relationship and presence:

> The relational aspect of leadership was considered by principals to be at the core of an authentic Edmund Rice culture. The development of a community which cares for its members and the relationships that developed through student-centred leadership was affirmed as important. The leadership model was described as coming from the

> example of Edmund Rice and was essential for authenticity of Edmund Rice culture. (Tuite, 2007, p. 284)

Duignan (1998) argues that authenticity is not just a quality of a leader, but the product of the leader's relationships and interrelationships. Strong relationships, by influencing everything else within a community, also influence the quality of leadership. This places relationship and presence at the core of a community, rather than leadership at the *top* of an organisation and limited to a few. "Hierarchy and excessive bureaucracy are often regarded as the enemies of such liberating structures and processes" (Duignan, 1998, pp. 49–50).

The model of leadership essentially being advocated through relationship and presence is servant leadership.

3.4.2 Servant Leadership – Compassion

An Edmund Rice servant leadership model is understood through the lens of "compassion nurturing authentic community" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 388). The life and message of Jesus is again central to this understanding of leadership.

> For Jesus the quality of our human life is dependent upon our nurturing of compassion. … Compassion is the atmosphere that vitalises and revitalises Edmund Rice Education. The cultivation of an ethic of compassionate care is at the core of an Edmund Rice Education. (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 251)

The research of Coughlan (2009) into Catholic principals' understandings of authentic leadership states that "the primacy of the message of Jesus" (p. 215) is foundational, and that this leads to "the personal response to the message of Jesus through service and outreach, emphasising values such as peace and social justice in daily life" (p. 215). Sultmann and McLaughlin (2000) support this notion in contending that the spirit of Catholic leadership "is geared to the betterment of others" (p. 183) and "is underpinned by service [and] implies commitment" (p. 171).

Jesus as model servant leader is also evident in Finn's (2013) research involving Edmund Rice Identity leaders, in which he argues the importance of "personal humility, service of others, a sense of community and shared decision-making" (p. 61). This view is supported by Watson (2007): "Servant leadership emphasises increased service to others, an holistic approach to work, building a sense of community and the sharing of power in decision making" (p. 84). The involvement of others in a shared leadership model is also inherent in a prophetic, liberating education.

3.4.3 Prophetic Leadership – Liberation

The concept of a liberating education has been discussed previously in some detail. However, its relationship to authentic leadership deserves some closer examination. "Prophetic leadership" is a term used in the EREA Charter as one expression of the touchstone, *liberating education*, explicitly challenging Edmund Rice leaders to understand and implement this type of leadership.

McLaughlin's (2007) examination of early Ricean education led to a view that Rice understood prophetic leadership through the lens of "liberation underpinning the provision of education" (p. 388). Compassion demands action, and justice is its social manifestation. "It is about providing critical education and deliberately provoking conscious-raising in learning about the way systems control and limit authentic growth" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 251).

The challenge for leaders is to ensure that awareness and reflection bring about new, more just circumstances, "to help transform the good will, good intentions, good hearts and talents of organisational members into a vision, and energy field for future-oriented action" (Duignan et al., 1998, p. 95). This is prophetic leadership and is once more based on the centrality of Jesus: "Jesus' transformational leadership was characterised by an ability to create and communicate a vision, and empower people to implement the vision" (Finn, 2013, p. 61). Watson (2007) agrees, arguing:

> Leadership involves a communal articulation of the vision that builds into a covenant, an articulation that captures the imagination and enthusiasm of the members that encompasses their dreams and aspirations and bonds their collective beliefs into common agreement and celebrations. (p. 77)

Prophetic leadership is counter-cultural, and therefore challenging. It is undeniable that disadvantaged students bring challenges to a school community, but this experience does not automatically precipitate their exclusion. A response through prophetic leadership which explores and seeks the potential for liberation becomes important with the implication that: "one of the imperatives of prophetic leadership is to be counter-cultural and ensure that hard decisions that may be at odds with the school community, are made" (Tuite, 2007, p. 283).

While inclusivity brings challenges to EREA schools, authenticity demands its implementation.

3.5 Conclusion and Research Questions

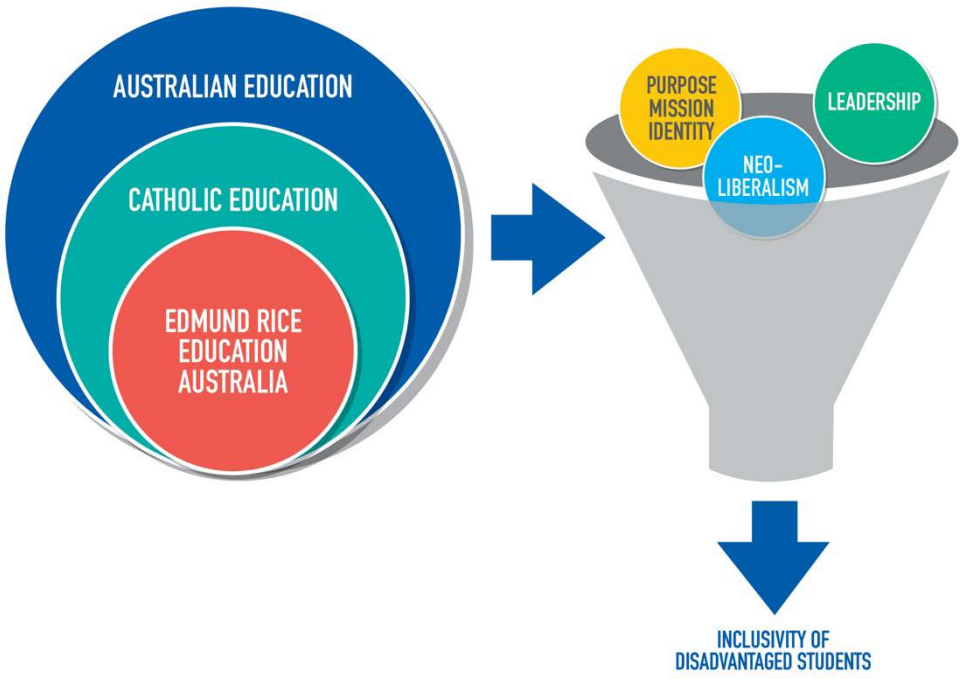
EREA schools are challenged to enact the four touchstones of the EREA Charter: *Gospel spirituality*, *liberating education*, *justice and solidarity*, and *inclusive community*. The fourth of these touchstones presents challenges for schools operating in a 21st century context of neo-liberalism, international and national competition, and the view that education is a commodity to be purchased in a market economy. There are young people in Australia who suffer educational disadvantage and

marginalisation because of their economic status, Indigeneity, refugee background and disability. Catholic, and more specifically EREA schools, articulate that core to their mission and identity is a preferential option for the poor and marginalised, and the provision of an authentically inclusive community for all students.

By definition, the mission imperatives of an authentic EREA school allow for the inclusion of students who are disadvantaged and marginalised due to their economic status, Indigeneity, refugee background and disability. There are challenges which hinder this inclusivity, including competition, implications for financial resources, parental expectation, challenges for teachers, and leadership. The situation is one of complexity, dynamic in the interplay of influences and yet distinctive in its focus on education informed by a Charter and underpinned by a theology and philosophy reflective of Church and the traditions of a Religious Institute. A review and synthesis of literature is displayed in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Framework of the Review of Literature



The diagram illustrates the three educational sectors relevant to this study: the Australian context, the Catholic context, and the EREA context. Each of these sectors operates in an environment of articulated purpose, mission or identity, and also in an environment influenced heavily by neo-liberal values. Leadership intersects with these competing agendas, and this, in turn, impacts the understandings and implementation of inclusivity of students and establishes the extent of their educational disadvantage. Arising from the review of literature on inclusivity, three research questions have emerged:

1. What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?
2. How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?
3. What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

Chapter 4: Design of the Research

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how inclusivity in understood and implemented in EREA. The following research questions, generated from the review of the literature, focus the conduct of this research:

1. What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?
2. How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?
3. What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the thesis' research design which is "the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study" (Yin, 2003, p. 19).

4.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework offers a philosophical foundation to justify and structure the adopted research design (Blumer, 1998; Crotty, 1998). It also offers an explanation for the choice of data-gathering strategies and how data are analysed (Creswell, 2008). The theoretical framework addresses epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and data-gathering strategies and their relationship with the research purpose (Crotty, 1998). These theoretical constructs explain how the adopted research design reflects in a specific manner "the nature of human beings, the nature of the environment, and the interaction between the two" (Munhall, 1989, p. 21). This research design adopts the following theoretical framework elements:

- the epistemology of constructionism using the lens of symbolic interactionism (Creswell, 2008);
- the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, (Charon, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2006); and
- case study as the methodology (Stake, 1995).

Table 4.1 presents a diagrammatic overview of the research's theoretical framework.

Table 4.1

Research Framework

Research element	Research method
Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism Symbolic interactionism
Research methodology	Case study
Data-gathering strategies	Open-ended Questionnaire Semi-structured interview Focus group interview Documentary analysis

An explanation and justification for this framework follows.

4.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge: "how knowledge is generated and accepted as valid" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 9). The focus of epistemology is to offer a justified explanation for how knowledge is legitimated and considered adequate (Crotty, 1998). The epistemology adopted for this research design is constructionism because it accepts the interpretive nature of meaning-making by human beings (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism accommodates historical, social and cultural perspectives that influence the processes of meaning construction (Creswell, 2008; Crotty, 1998; De Koster et al., 2004). Social interactions between persons generate complex narratives in which humans engage to construct personal and social meaning derived from the lived experiences of these interactions (Pring, 2000; De Koster et al., 2004). Hence, constructionism entertains a multi-faceted approach to human understanding because it recognises that an individual's construction of meaning is effected by personal beliefs and values as well as by professional values and influences inherent within the specific context. Thus, the leanings constructed by an individual are interpreted and negotiated in the context of multiple and often conflicting influences within a given reality (Charon, 2007; Creswell, 2008).

Constructionism is suitable to guide this study for two reasons. First, constructionism seeks to explore the ways in which the leaders in the participating schools constructed meaning about what constituted inclusivity and its implementation. Second, constructionism is applicable from the perspective of the researcher endeavouring to make purposeful meaning of the leaders' understandings and implementation of inclusivity.

4.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective provides the philosophical stance which underpins and informs the choice of the research methodology and data-gathering strategies. A theoretical perspective is a set of interrelated assumptions about the nature of society and of social behaviour (O'Donoghue, 2007). It offers a theoretical justification to structure the research design. For this study, a particularly appropriate theoretical perspective within the constructionist epistemology is interpretivism.

4.2.2.1 Interpretivism

The theoretical perspective adopted for this study is interpretivism, a research paradigm based on describing the unique ways humans construct understanding or interpretations of their world (Blumer, 1998; Crotty, 1998). A basic tenet of the interpretivist approach is that knowledge is embedded in human experience. Meaning is constructed by and through the interactive process which occurs when humans interact and communicate with others. An interpretive approach aims to generate a deeper, more extensive and systematic representation of reality from the point of view of the participants.

Research undertaken within the interpretivist perspective is ideographic (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002) in that its focus is a description of how individuals or small groups of people understand a particular phenomenon In other words, interpretivism enables "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain the social world" (Neuman, 2006, p. 88). In this research, interpretivism is able to provide guidance for the systematic exploration and analysis of the phenomenon of inclusivity from the perspective of participants, including EREA leaders. This understanding is generated through engagement with symbols such as language and behaviours (Geertz, 1973).

4.2.2.2 Symbolic Interactionism

There are three forms of interpretivism: hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism:

- Hermeneutics is an attempt to read human practices, human events, and human situations in ways that bring understanding (Crotty, 1998, p. 87).
- Phenomenology is in the search of objects of experience rather than being content with a description of the experiencing subject (Crotty, 1998, p. 83).
- Symbolic interactionism is where the investigator is directed to take, to the best of their ability, the standpoint of those being studied (Denzin, 1978, p. 99).

For the purpose of this study, symbolic interactionism is the more appropriate and effective interpretivist approach.

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the behaviours and understandings of human beings in their social worlds (Stake, 1995). Symbolic interactionism attempts to offer an understanding of perspective, inter-subjectivity, motive and reason as to how people negotiate reality, and how they act in relation to their perceptions. There are four fundamental principles of symbolic interactionism:

1. individuals act towards a phenomenon on the basis of the meanings that it has for them;
2. the meaning constructed from the phenomenon is derived from the social interaction with others;
3. social acts, whether individual or collective, are constructed through a process in which the individuals monitor, interpret and assess the particular situation; and
4. the complexities of interactions within organisations are not static affairs (Blumer, 1998).

Humans negotiate meaning through perceptions and interpretations of phenomena in which social interaction occurs (Charon, 2007; Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997). Leaders construct and reconstruct insights of their respective contexts through multiple social interactions. As such, this research seeks to better understand how inclusivity is understood and implemented by EREA leaders, rather than seeking to prove or disprove a current theory. Hence, symbolic interactionism is an appropriate lens for this research as it aids in developing an understanding of why leaders interpret inclusivity in a particular way. Authenticity is central to this approach which directs the researcher to take the standpoint of those studied and move beyond the bias of the observer (Denzin, 1989). Thus the theoretical perspective of interpretivism in the form of symbolic interactionism informs the choice of methodology.

4.3 Research Methodology

A research methodology is "a model, which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that offers guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 6). It offers a theoretical justification for the choice and orchestration of the selected data-gathering strategies. Case study is considered an appropriate methodology for use when adopting an interpretivist research approach (Creswell, 2008).

Case study is a procedure of inquiry (Merriam, 1998) and "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection" (Creswell, 2008, p. 476). A bounded context situates the case within a setting, bounded by time and place. Research occurs within that specific setting, in this case bound by the construct of EREA mainstream secondary schools. The phenomenon of inclusivity in EREA schools is understood within its context at a particular time (Gillham, 2004).

Due to the difficulty in defining the boundaries between phenomenon and social reality (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Gillham, 2004; Yin, 2003), case study is effective as it allows the use of multiple sources of evidence and data-gathering strategies. The continual state of flux in education justifies the use of case study methodology which allows flexibility in describing, exploring and explaining the context of characteristics of the phenomena (Yin, 2003). Specifically in this case, the phenomenon is how stakeholders understand and implement inclusivity in EREA schools.

Case study methodology is appropriate for the research because it allows the focus to be "the case in its idiosyncratic complexity, not on the whole population of cases" (Burns, 1994, p. 316). In particular, the case study illuminates and provides insight into the research questions which seek to address how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA.

Stake (1995) identifies three types of case study – intrinsic, instrumental and collective – and describes each of these in the following way:

> Intrinsic case study is undertaken when there is a desire to better understand a particular case. Instrumental case study is used to accomplish something other than understanding a particular situation. It provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory. Here, the case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. The case may or may not be seen as typical of other cases. Collective case study is where cases may be jointly studied in order to inquire into a phenomenon, population or general condition. (p. 16)

Given that the case which is the focus of this research is how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA, an instrumental case study was selected. As an instrumental case study, this research seeks to better understand the issue of inclusivity by gathering data from numerous participants in a number of sites. Instrumental case studies are classified by:

- the search for meaning and understanding;
- the researcher as the primary instrument of data-gathering;
- an inductive investigative strategy; and,
- a richly descriptive product (Merriam & Assoc., 2002).

However, it is acknowledged that a case study has limitations, but these limitations have been addressed in this research as follows:

First, volume and complex detail of data in case study may be overwhelming (Merriam, 1998), necessitating a strict focus on the research questions, within the parameters of the purposively selected participants (Punch, 1998). In this study, the research questions informed the open-ended

questionnaires, the responses from which subsequently informed the specific semi-structured interview questions for key stakeholders in EREA. For example, during each phase of the research, the central concepts of understanding, implementation, affordances and challenges with respect to inclusivity framed the study. In order to address the potential for an overwhelming volume of data, six out of a total of 31 EREA mainstream schools were selected for the research, limiting the quantity of data.

Second, there may be difficulty in maintaining the integrity of participants' perspectives (Gall & Borg, 1999), requiring the verbatim recording of participants' responses, and the ability for participants to review transcripts if desired. In this study, each semi-structured interview was digitally recorded and participants were offered to the opportunity to review transcripts and clarify any perspectives given.

Third, case study is criticised because findings may not be able to be generalised, as findings within positivist research design are generalised (Gall & Borg, 1999). The paradox of case study methodology, as evidenced in this study, is that "by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal" (Simons, 1996, p. 231). This research featured six purposively selected EREA schools, and relevant stakeholders within them, in an attempt to portray a representative cross-section of EREA schools. For example, schools were selected from numerous states of Australia, from capital and regional cities, with varying fee structures. While some of the data collected pertains to EREA generally and to all EREA mainstream schools, it is acknowledged that a portion of the findings relate only to the six purposively selected schools.

Finally, case study is open to criticism of researcher bias (Cherryholmes, 1993), meaning that the researcher finds what the researcher is looking for. To address this charge, the researcher is obliged to identify and articulate background context and perspectives and offer strategies to address possible bias. During the various phases of this research, the researcher provided background context to each invited participant via an information letter, and written and oral communication with each school before and during the research. This communication was complemented by communication to each participating school from the Executive Director of EREA regarding the study. Significant time and effort was also given to constructing specific questions which avoided perceived or actual bias throughout the research. One specific example relates to the four selected groups of educationally disadvantaged students which are the foci of the research. While the review of literature suggested these groups as appropriate for the research, case study participants were not provided this information by the researcher; rather, participants were asked to highlight their own perceptions of educationally disadvantaged groups.

Case study methodology aims to generate a detailed description and understanding of a particular phenomenon, inclusivity in this research. This study allows leaders in EREA schools to share

their experience and understandings as they respond to multiple influences from within and outside their respective educational settings. The case study seeks “not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Neuman, 2006, p. 158), and to do so authentically.

4.4 Research Participants

Purposeful selection of research participants enables the acquisition of knowledge and opinions which may provide meaningful insights to the specific research questions (Creswell, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Patton, 1990). Therefore, key stakeholders within EREA were invited to voluntarily participate in this research in order to provide the most relevant insights and data possible for the study.

In the first phase of the research, the open-ended questionnaire, there were two cohorts of participants:

- the 31 principals and 31 deputy principals from each EREA mainstream secondary school; and
- EREA organisational leadership, consisting of the EREA Council, EREA Board and EREA National Executive, and EREA Regional Directors.

Principals and deputy principals are the EREA appointed leaders of each EREA secondary school, and as such are charged with the duty of ensuring their school’s authenticity as a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition in accordance with the Charter. They were selected to participate in the study as their perspective and practice is central to the implementation of inclusivity in EREA schools.

Members of the three key categories of EREA organisational leadership were invited to participate because of their broad range of responsibilities in terms of strategic vision and oversight of EREA schools. The EREA Council, appointed by the Congregational Leader of the Christian Brothers, is responsible for the governance of the schools to ensure the continuance of the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice. The EREA Board, appointed by the EREA Council, has responsibility for the oversight of the administration of EREA schools and entities. The EREA National Executive and Leadership Team are responsible for the management of schools and entities, including the appointment of principals and deputy principals.

For the second phase of the research, six EREA schools were selected and invited to participate in the research. The six schools were selected to represent a cross section of EREA mainstream secondary schools. Factors used to select the six schools included:

- Enrolment numbers
    - At the time of visits, the schools ranged from 419 students to 1,974 students. Schools selected had enrolment numbers of 419, 685, 830, 1,341, 1,352 and 1,974.

- Location
    - The six schools selected are located in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.
    - Four of the six schools are located in capital cities.
- Gender
    - The vast majority of EREA schools cater for boys only, but one of the six schools selected is co-educational.
- Boarding
    - The vast majority of EREA schools do not provide boarding facilities, but one boarding school was selected.

At each of the six EREA schools selected, semi-structured interviews informed by the previously completed open-ended questionnaire, took place with three key members of each school's leadership:

- The principal
    - The principal was invited to participate as the open-ended questionnaire results indicated the importance of this role in terms of leadership vision and strategic priorities.
- The Identity leader
    - The Identity leader, along with the principal, has responsibility in each school for articulating, promoting and providing practical opportunities for expression of the four touchstones of the EREA Charter.
- The business manager
    - Responses to the open-ended questionnaire indicated that financial realities impacted upon a school's ability to be inclusive, hence the business manager in each school was invited to participate to provide further insight in this area.

Further, in each of the six schools, a group of student leaders was also invited to participate in a group interview. The group size ranged from three to eight, dependent upon the individual school's response to this request. Students were invited to participate subsequent to the initial open-ended questionnaire which suggested that students have particular insights regarding the perceived benefits and challenges of including a diverse range of students in a school population.

As part of the research conducted within the participant schools, a voluntary online questionnaire was also provided for teaching staff and parents. Again, this questionnaire was informed by the responses to the initial questionnaire which indicated that parental expectation and teacher employment, retention and professional development may be factors impacting upon a school's inclusivity. The invitations for these participants were managed by the individual schools, hence exact numbers of invited participants are unclear.

In one of the six participating schools, one principal opted not to allow distribution of questionnaires to teachers and parents. This principal indicated that the distribution of a survey regarding inclusivity could be problematic at the particular time of the research, citing the potential for unnecessary anxiety amongst parents and teachers.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 summarise the breakdown of participants who engaged in the research:

Table 4.2

A Breakdown of Participants in Phase 1 of the Research

Participant type	Invitations	Responses
EREA leadership (council, board, executive and leadership team)	20	18 (90%)
Principal	31	23 (74%)
Deputy principal	31	26 (84%)

Table 4.3

A Breakdown of Participants in Phase 2 of the Research

Participant type	Data-gathering strategy	Participants per school	Total
Principal	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Identity leader	Semi-structured interview	1 (2 in one school)	7
Business manager	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Student leader	Focus group interview	4, 4, 4, 7, 8, 10	37
Teacher	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 15, 15, 19, 15, 74	138
Parent	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 153, 24, 76, 62, 273	588

4.5 Data-Gathering Strategies

Case study methodology adopts data-gathering strategies which involve a broad variety of techniques, rather than a single technique (Patton, 1990). The four data-gathering strategies for this research are open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interview, focus group interview and documentary analysis.

4.5.1 Open-Ended Questionnaire

An initial open-ended questionnaire was adopted to generate insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Creswell, 2008). Given the number and spread of participants across an extended geographical area, the use of a questionnaire was an appropriate strategy to address this reality.

Members of the EREA Council, Board and leadership team, EREA mainstream secondary school principals and deputy principals were contacted firstly by the Executive Director of EREA informing them of the research. This communication was followed by an email from the researcher, containing an anonymous link to an online questionnaire. Of the 82 EREA leaders emailed, 67 completed the online open-ended questionnaire. This number represents an 82% response rate in the first phase of the research.

There are advantages and limitations to the use of the open-ended questionnaire (Coughlan, 2009). For example, while questionnaires can be distributed to participants relatively cheaply and easily by a single researcher, there is risk of a low response rate, and the researcher has limited subsequent control over the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed. These limitations can be somewhat negated by specific and effective communication with invited participants, and through the use of third party communication. For the purpose of this research, the Executive Director of EREA also contacted the recipients to encourage participation. Clear directions and effective communication throughout the invitation and participation process also contributes towards addressing the limitation of the researcher not being present to answer questions or concerns of participants while completing the questionnaire. Other advantages of the questionnaire include: limiting potential bias in the research, when compared to other forms of data collection which depend on the presence of the researcher; and the consistency and uniformity of the questionnaire. Finally, the use of the semi-structured interview as a complementary data collection strategy sought to address some of the limitations of the questionnaire.

4.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview allows participants "the opportunity to speak freely in an open but focussed conversation between themselves and the researcher" (Tuite, 2007, p. 104). It enables a conversation which develops and acquires direct quotations from leaders about their perceptions and experiences. This leads to the possibility of the researcher and others being able to enter into the participant's perspective (Patton, 1990). The interview also allows the researcher greater control over the information received, because the interviewer "can ask specific questions to elicit this information" (Creswell, 2008, p. 226).

However, the semi-structured interview also presents challenges for the researcher. One-on-one interviews, as were used in this research, are time-consuming and costly, particularly when travel is necessary. Further, interview data can be "deceptive and provide the perspective the interviewee wants the researcher to hear" (Creswell, 2008, p. 226). In this particular study, this risk was significant, hence effort was given to using ice-breakers and avoiding sharing personal opinion throughout each interview. Effective preparation was also critical to mitigating this risk and ensuring the best possible use of time and money.

The construction of the semi-structured interview was guided by data generated from the open-ended questionnaire, and occurred in Phase 2 of the research which incorporated visits to six EREA mainstream secondary schools. With the permission of participants, each interview was recorded digitally and transcribed. This was also the case for the focus group interview.

4.5.3 Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews are used in research to collect shared understandings from several individuals as well as to gain insights from specific people. Typically, the researcher will prepare and ask a small number of general questions, eliciting responses from all members of the group. Focus group interviews can be particularly effective when participants are more likely to be hesitant or nervous to provide information, for example as in this instance when the participants are students. "Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other" (Creswell, 2008, p. 226). Challenges of the focus group interview include managing the conversation to allow each participant to contribute, avoiding the emergence of dominant voices, as well as the transcription of the interview and the discernment of individual voices. The first challenge was addressed through considered preparation of interview structure, the purposeful selection of senior student leaders, and the simple circular design of the room to aid more equal participation. The second challenge was countered through the methodical transcribing of the recorded audio, and through the researcher clarifying participants' names throughout the interview.

4.5.4 Documentary Analysis

Data are generated through analysis of relevant policy documents and reports from both the system and school levels of EREA. "Documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (Yin, 2003, p. 85). For the purpose of the study, enrolment, scholarship and fee policy information, school prospectuses, vision and mission statements and relevant reports from EREA were analysed and interpreted. Much of the school-specific information was accessible online, while the broader summary information about EREA was provided by the National Executive Office of EREA and Northern Region Office in Brisbane.

4.6 Analysis of Data

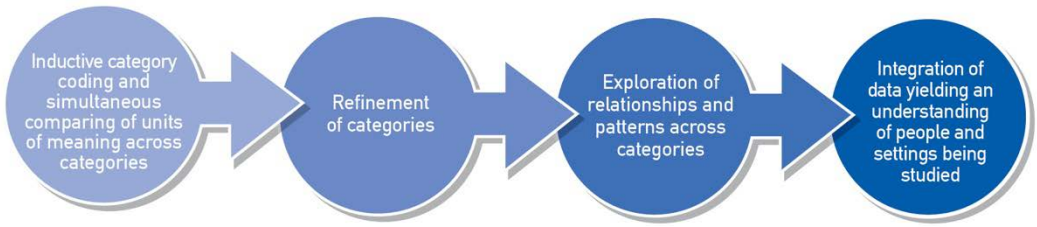
Data analysis is a "complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Interpretative data analysis is the process of constructing meaning from language (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is understood as a process which includes both simultaneous and iterative phases (Creswell, 2008). Throughout this research, the process of

moving back and forth between data and abstract concepts was constant. For example, the documentary analysis occurred throughout the questionnaire and semi-structured interview data-gathering strategies, and updated information was regularly sought, continually informing the research and necessitating new constructions of meaning throughout the process. The data analysis process is iterative because tentative interpretations are open to reinterpretation on the basis of new data from other participants or other data sources.

The Constant Comparative Method (CCM) is the strategy adopted to analyse the data gathered in this study. CCM is a process of identifying concepts and categories in the data and "constantly comparing indicators to indicators, codes to codes, and categories to categories" (Creswell, 2008, p. 443). CCM also provides a systematic way of managing large amounts of data. The researcher analyses data and compares tentative themes with new data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In this research, CCM was an effective means of managing data from large numbers of questionnaires across various stakeholder groups, over fifteen hours of recorded interview data, and substantial documentary anaylsis from individual schools and the broader EREA organisation. As the data was gathered, categories emerged, shifted, grew and diminished, depending upon the analysis and synthesis outcomes from CCM, including through inductive coding, refinement or categories and the exploration of the relationships between and across categories. This method is illustrated in Figure 4.1 (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Figure 4.1

Constant Comparative Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation



The analysis method CCM employs the use of codes to reduce and conceptualise the data. Coding, as a cyclical act, is "the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2008, p. 450). It entails continuous refinement during which "flexibility is required to accommodate fresh observations and new directions in the analysis" (Dey, 1993, p. 111). There are three stages in the coding process:

- open coding;
- axial coding; and
- selective coding.

4.6.1 Open Coding

Data is reduced for close examination and comparison of similarities and differences during the *open coding* (O'Donoghue, 2007) stage of the "code mapping" (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 32) process. Open coding involves the categorisation of single words or short phrases to produce an array of general codes relating to the research questions.

4.6.2 Axial Coding

Subsequent "axial coding" (Flick, 1998) allows for the synthesis of categories and thematic organisation. Similarly coded data are grouped and sorted into conceptual categories or themes. During this stage, "the code is sharpened to achieve its best fit" (Glaser, 1978, p. 62). A theme is an outcome of the coding process, and is a phrase "that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Saldana, 2009, p. 139). Themes are examined, refined and elaborated upon, and the researcher uses both inductive and deductive thinking to develop relational and test conflicting categories and themes (Flick, 1998).

4.6.3 Selective Coding

During the final process of "selective coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), theory building occurs due to the integration of categories generated and developed through open and axial coding. A general overview of the understandings and implementation of inclusivity within EREA emerges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

4.7 Verification

Verification of data quality is achieved through trustworthiness, and is related to the question of the rigour of the research undertaken. "Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain [and] refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17). This systematic checking of data supports the iterative rather than linear nature of qualitative research, essential in this particular study as it seeks to construct meaning of participants' understandings of inclusivity. To do so, data are gathered and systematically checked, and research focus is maintained throughout the process as the researcher "moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17).

The concept of trustworthiness confirms the focus of case study methodology as being legitimate and justifiable research methodology, and relies upon credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility refers to the reader's confidence in the authenticity and interpretation of data, and particularly relates to the legitimisation of the research results. Credibility is enhanced through the accurate representation of data (Creswell, 2008).

Transferability relates to its relevance in other situations, and is decided by individual readers engaging with the research, rather than the researcher (Barbour, 2005). The possibility of the reader finding the research relevant in other contexts is enhanced through clear and accurate representation of information.

Dependability of the research relies upon the researcher's capacity to account for the changing contexts in which the research occurs. Methods of ensuring dependability include establishing an audit process, involving a review of the data and supporting documents by an external reviewer, and debriefing with peers, both of which were utilised during this research.

Confirmability relies upon a checking process which provides confidence that the research is trustworthy, and is therefore dependent upon the degree to which results can be confirmed by others. In the study, results were confirmed with participants throughout the phases of the research.

4.8 Ethical Issues

Ethics in research safeguard the fundamental principle of the human rights of the participants and establish the principles of right and wrong for all groups involved. "First and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the informant(s)" (Creswell, 1994). The three core criteria of research ethics are respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons (Bassey, 1999).

Respect for democracy allows the researcher the right and ability to conduct research and gather data without fear of reprisal. The researcher is obliged to respect truth in collection and analysis of data, and presentation of findings. Research participants have the right to dignity and privacy, mandated in research ethics by respect for persons.

Certain safeguards are employed to ensure the protection of participants in the research (Creswell, 1994). These include:

1. research objectives are clearly explained to participants;
2. participants are aware of topic, type of data to be collected and how data is used;
3. protocols for identification or concealment of participants are outlined and agreed;
4. participants consent in writing before data collection process begins;
5. participants are consulted in any decision regarding the publication of data, results and conclusions;
6. interview transcripts are available to all participants; and

7. the final decision regarding anonymity remains with the participant.

Each of these ethical standards has been addressed in this research, predominantly through the initial information letter to participants (Appendices D, E, F and G).

4.9 Summary of Research Design

The purpose of the research is to explore how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA. The research design is consistent with the research purpose. First, constructionism and interpretivism are appropriate for the research which explores the perceptions, understandings and actions of leaders with respect to inclusivity. Further, symbolic interactionism is an appropriate lens for the research as it aids in developing an understanding of why leaders interpret inclusivity in a particular way. The research methodology of case study has been selected, given the idiosyncratic nature of education and more specifically education within EREA schools. Case study enables the researcher to explore the nature of the perceptions and implementation of inclusivity across EREA schools, and the organisation more broadly.

Table 4.4

Overview of the Research Design

Phase	Data collection techniques	Stages for data collection and analysis	Time frame
Phase 1: Exploratory phase	Open-ended questionnaire	*Stage 1: Data collection and reflection* • Questionnaires distributed to and collected from Edmund Rice leaders • Data is displayed, reflected on and coded	October 2017 November 2017
		Stage 2: Generation of themes • Data distillation • Analysis of data for themes and categories • Generation of questions for semi-structured interviews and Phase 2 questionnaires	December 2017 – January 2018
Phase 2: Clarification phase	School visits – semi-structured interviews; open-ended questionnaire; focus group interview; document analysis	*Stage 1: Data collection and reflection* • Acquisition of relevant documents from EREA and individual schools • School visits, including semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire distribution to parents and teachers • Data is displayed, reflected on and coded	January 2018 – March 2019 December 2017 – March 2018
		Stage 2: Generation of themes • Data distillation • Analysis of data from participant interviews	April 2018 – September 2018 September 2018 – December 2019
Phase 3: Story-writing phase: Report writing		*Stage 1: Generation of story* • Interpret and construct the analytical interpretation of data	April 2020
		Stage 2: Story interpretation • Write “Presentation of Findings” chapters • Distribute draft chapters for participant verification • Write “Discussion of Findings” chapter	May 2020 September 2020
		Stage 3: Development of conclusions • Write “Conclusions and Recommendations” chapter	December 2020

Chapter 5: Presentation of Findings – Research Question 1

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the following three chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) is to present the findings that emerged from the exploration of how inclusivity is understood and addressed in six participating Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) mainstream secondary schools. The findings are a synthesis of the data gathered from documentary analysis, an initial open-ended questionnaire to EREA leaders, followed by semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and further open-ended questionnaires. The research questions that focused this study, and will form the structure of Chapters 5, 6 and 7, are:

1. What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?
2. How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?
3. What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

As an outcome of the data analysis process, the following six themes emerged in relation to the understanding of inclusivity in the participating schools and how it was presumed to being addressed:

1. Vision and commitment of leadership
2. Idealism versus pragmatism
3. Strategic priorities
4. Local context
5. Perceived affordances
6. Perceived challenges

In presenting the findings of the research, these six themes will be explored across three chapters in the context of the three research questions, as summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Overview of Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Major sections	Subsections	Sub-subsections
5.1 Introduction		
5.2 Codes and pseudonyms		
5.3 Research Question 1: Understanding inclusivity	5.3.1 Vision and commitment of leadership	5.3.1.1 Leaders' perceptions of inclusivity
		5.3.1.2 The role and person of principal
	5.3.2 Idealism versus pragmatism	5.3.2.1 A disconnect in views
		5.3.2.2 The business of schools
5.4 Summary		
6.1 Introduction		
6.2 Research Question 2: Addressing inclusivity	6.2.1 Strategic priorities	6.2.1.1 An analysis of EREA priorities
		6.2.1.2 An analysis of school priorities
	6.2.2 Local context	6.2.2.1 The poor and marginalised
		6.2.2.2 Benchmarks
6.3 Summary		
7.1 Introduction		
7.2 Research Question 3: Affordances and challenges	7.2.1 Perceived affordances	7.2.1.1 Student perceptions
		7.2.1.2 Parent perceptions
	7.2.2 Perceived challenges	7.2.2.1 Financial challenges
		7.2.2.2 Impact on staff
		7.2.2.3 Neo-liberal agenda
		7.2.2.4 Parental views
7.3 Summary		
7.4 Conclusion		

5.2 Codes and Pseudonyms

Confidentiality of participating individuals and schools is ensured in the presentation and analysis of findings through the allocation of codes. The first phase of the research entailed an open-ended questionnaire which was completed by 18 members of the combined group of EREA Council, Board and Leadership Team groups. These respondents are referred to using the code "ER" and are allocated a number from 1 to 18, according to the order in which responses were received. Therefore, the respondent "ER1" refers to one member of either the EREA Council, EREA Board or EREA

Leadership Team and was the first person to return a completed questionnaire. When the EREA Council, Board and Leadership Team are being referred to collectively, they will be referred to as the "EREA organisational leaders".

In addition, 23 principals and 26 deputy principals responded to the same open-ended questionnaire. However, in this instance the nature of the questionnaire and subsequent data collection meant that it was not possible to ascertain whether a particular questionnaire response was from a principal or a deputy principal. Therefore, these 49 participants have been allocated the code "PDP" to represent the combination of their respective roles (principal or deputy principal), along with numbers from 1 to 49 according to the order in which responses were received. For example, the respondent PDP21 was either a principal or a deputy principal whose response was the 21st completed questionnaire to be received.

The second phase of the research entailed site visits to six EREA schools. These six schools were randomly allocated a number from 1 to 6 such that each school was simply allocated the code "S1" through to "S6" in accordance with the order in which they were visited. At each school, the principal, Identity leader and business manager were individually interviewed. For the purpose of this presentation and analysis of findings, these individuals have been allocated the respective codes of "P" (principal), "IL" (Identity leader), and "BM" (business manager). Therefore, the principal of the school "S1" is allocated the code "S1P"; the Identity leader at the same school is allocated the code "S1IL"; and the business manager is allocated the code "S1BM".

In the school visit phase of the research, a focus group interview with senior students also occurred at each school. These students are simply referred to as "student from S1" or "S1 student". Similarly, due to the large number of parent and teacher responses to the open-ended questionnaire during this phase of the research, these participants are referred to as "parent from S1", "S1 parent", "teacher from S1" or "S1 teacher". Finally, where a respondent identifies their school, the name is simply replaced with the phrase, "the school".

The number of participants in Phases 1 and 2 of the research are presented in Tables 5.2 and 5.3.

Table 5.2

A Breakdown of Participants in Phase 1 of the Research

Participant type	Invitations	Responses
EREA leadership (council, board, executive and leadership team)	20	18 (90%)
Principal	31	23 (74%)
Deputy principal	31	26 (84%)

Table 5.3

A Breakdown of Participants in Phase 2 of the Research

Participant type	Data-gathering strategy	Participants per school	Total
Principal	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Identity leader	Semi-structured interview	1 (2 in one school)	7
Business manager	Semi-structured interview	1	6
Student leader	Focus group interview	4, 4, 4, 7, 8, 10	37
Teacher	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 15, 15, 19, 15, 74	138
Parent	Open-ended questionnaire	0, 153, 24, 76, 62, 273	588

The high level of response rates as indicated in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 add validity to the findings of the research. In Phase 1 of the research, a total of 82 participants were invited to respond, with 67 responses, representing an 82% response rate. During Phase 2 of the research, 100% of school-based leaders who were invited to participate in the research did so. Teachers and parents from each participating school were also invited to respond to an open-ended questionnaire, with one school principal opting not to invite parents and teachers, citing the potential to cause unnecessary concern within those groups at the time of the research. However, with a total number of 782 respondents during Phase 2 of the research, the amount of data collected, analysed and synthesised allows a thorough presentation of findings in response to the research questions.

5.3 Research Question 1: Understanding Inclusivity

Research Question 1 is:

What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?

In addressing this research question, two themes have been synthesised and will be used to present the relevant findings. These two themes are:

1. vision and commitment of leadership; and
2. idealism versus pragmatism.

5.3.1 Vision and Commitment of Leadership

Leadership, specifically the responsibilities of executive leaders, are key to the focus of this study. The understandings and implementation of inclusivity in EREA schools are fundamentally the understandings held by personnel in key leadership roles, along with their practical responses. In EREA, there are three levels of leadership at the organisational level, these being: the Council; the Board; and the Leadership Team, which includes the National Executive. The Council is the governing body of EREA

under Canon Law. The Board, appointed by the Council, sets the strategic directions and operational policy framework for EREA. The Leadership Team implements the strategic directions and articulates the vision and mission of EREA. The National Executive, consisting of the Executive Director and four National Directors in the areas of School Engagement, Governance, Stewardship and Liberating Education, within this Leadership Team is responsible for the appointment of principals and deputy principals in all EREA schools.

Following Phases 1 and 2 of the research which included gaining insights from leaders mentioned above, two central insights relating to the vision and commitment of leadership emerged: (a) the leaders' perceptions of inclusivity and (b) the pivotal influence of the role and person of the principal.

5.3.1.1 Leaders' Perceptions of Inclusivity

A key piece of the documentary analysis phase of the research was the EREA Charter in which one of its four touchstones is *inclusive community*. Thus, this Charter provided a foundation for questions regarding inclusivity in an EREA context, particularly in Phase 1 of the research. The *inclusive community* page in the Charter document concludes with three reflective questions for the reader:

1. How does our school community open its doors, not only to welcome and support all who come, but also to go out and meet those who don't, constantly seeking ways of inviting everyone to the table?
2. What opportunities does our community have to ensure its mode of operation meets the diversity of needs of those it openly welcomes?
3. What challenges does our school community face in aiming to be "open to all"? (EREA, 2017, p. 11)

In addition, the Charter provides some initial explanations of inclusivity for leaders in an EREA context. Key phrases which informed the development of the open-ended questionnaire in Phase 1 of the research, include:

- "inviting everyone to the table";
- "open to all";
- "accepting and welcoming";
- "committed to the common good";
- "preferential option for the poor";
- "powerless and marginalised";
- "regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation";
- "diversity as beneficial"; and
- welcomes "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia" (EREA, 2017, p. 11).

The open-ended questionnaire provided to EREA organisational leaders along with school principals and deputy principals sought to explore the alignment between these ideals and the views held by the various levels of EREA leadership. To this end, it included questions designed to ascertain each leader's understandings and interpretations about inclusivity. The order of questioning also sought to minimise potential researcher bias or encourage pre-determined responses.

Following a series of multiple-choice demographic questions, respondents were asked to complete the sentence, "An inclusive Edmund Rice school seeks to …". Responses to this question provided insights into each leader's perceptions of inclusivity. Although the phrase *open to all*, which is used in the Charter document, did not appear in the questionnaire, the following responses from the EREA Council, Board and Leadership Team emerged:

- "be open to all in a supportive and inclusive manner" (ER1);
- "be diverse, engaging and welcoming to all" (ER2);
- "offer educational opportunities to all parents who wish their children educated in Christian Brothers schools" (ER4);
- "provide an education for all" (ER6);
- "make everyone feel welcome, no matter their background" (ER9);
- "admit to its student cohort a diverse representation of cultures and peoples with a strong and evident emphasis on the admission of students from families without the financial capacity to meet the full fee payment" (ER10);
- "make a place of honour for all who seek to be part of the community" (ER14); and
- "accept and welcome all persons, assist those who might otherwise be excluded, recognise diversity, build partnerships and promote social inclusion, stand in solidarity with the excluded" (ER17).

These responses indicate a consistent perception amongst EREA organisational leaders that inclusivity in EREA schools is characterised by an openness to all who wish to seek an Edmund Rice education. The concept of EREA schools being *open to all*, though not articulated in the questionnaire, was explicitly referred to in 44% of organisational leader responses, making it the most prevalent description of inclusivity by this group of participants.

Moreover, analysis of documentary evidence included a published statement to all EREA staff from the EREA Council on the occasion of the Feast Day of Blessed Edmund Rice on 5 May 2021. The statement included:

> Edmund's charism and mission is ours – ours to shape and to turn into a dynamic, contemporary force. Such a force is very much needed in our complex and fragile world where both its peoples and its environment need the protection of a courageous loving

> hand. What does this mean for EREA and for those of us privileged to belong to such an organisation? Three questions come to mind:
> 1. As an organisation how do we build community?
> 2. Are our schools inclusive of all and do all experience a strong sense of belonging?
> 3. In our world, our Global Village, how can we, as part of EREA, be good, responsible and caring neighbours? (EREA Council, 2021)

This statement again confirms the presence of an understanding at an organisational level of EREA that EREA schools should aspire to be *inclusive of all*.

Responses from principals and deputy principals to the same question concerning an inclusive Edmund Rice school present similar perceptions and suggest that there are various reasons for an EREA school to be open to all. Some respondents characterised the need for inclusion in terms of an adherence to the Jesus story and the Gospel, with one respondent stating that an inclusive Edmund Rice school seeks to "provide a place of belonging, modelled on the person of Jesus regardless of age, gender, sexual identity, power and affluence or lack thereof" (PDP29), and another commented that a school should "reflect Gospel values of justice and acceptance for all" (PDP36). Other comments from principals and deputy principals suggest that the charism of Edmund Rice drives inclusivity: "An inclusive Edmund Rice school seeks to welcome all who seek a Catholic education in the spirit of Edmund Rice" (PDP16). The third clear reason for inclusive practices articulated by principal and deputy principal respondents concerns a preferential option for the poor, with one participant stating that an inclusive Edmund Rice school seeks to "establish preferential treatment for the poor, embracing diversity through social inclusion and access to those who otherwise would not have the opportunity of a liberating education" (PDP5).

Overall, responses from principals and deputy principals indicate common perceptions of inclusivity with those of EREA organisational leaders, and that these perceptions align closely with the principles articulated within the EREA Charter. The respondents again focused heavily on the concept of inclusive EREA schools being *open to all*. Thus, Phase 1 research data suggest a clear alignment in leaders' perceptions of inclusivity in EREA that, regardless of background, all students are welcome.

Phase 2 of the research sought to explore this notion more deeply by asking members of six EREA school communities for further insights regarding the use of the term *open to all* when describing inclusivity. Questions for semi-structured interviews of principals, Identity leaders, business managers, as well as the focus group questions for student leaders and the open-ended questionnaires for teachers and parents, were informed by data collected in the first phase of this research.

All participants in this phase of the research were provided with an opportunity to describe their perceptions of inclusivity in light of the data suggesting that an inclusive EREA school is open to all regardless of background. Data gathered from this phase suggest that the initial understanding of

inclusivity provided in Phase 1 was too simplistic and did not take into the account some of the more complex facets of inclusivity. These complexities of financial realities, internal and external pressures, and local context will be explored further in the presentation of findings.

It is also noteworthy that participants' roles seemed to influence their respective insights. Though not uniform, there appeared to be response consistencies within the respective roles of principals, Identity leaders and business managers, as well as from student leaders. These consistencies are most notable in the responses from business managers regarding their particular EREA school's capacity to be *open to all*. Hence, the data presented in this section are structured by each group of respondents by role.

The principals in the six participating schools had varying insights with some commonalities regarding their respective understandings of whether the phrase *open to all* was an accurate description of inclusivity in EREA schools. While one principal responded that, "we need to be open to all" (S1P), contrary principal views included a simple, "No, I don't think it could be open to all" (S2P), while another elaborated by suggesting that *open to all* is not an appropriate description of inclusivity in EREA schools: "I think it's a clumsy phrase – open to all – we can't be open to all because if we're open to all and all don't want to pay, then the school doesn't operate" (S4P). The simple and consistent Phase 1 understandings of inclusivity, suggesting an unconditional openness to all, became less clear and concise during the more in-depth discussions of semi-structured interviews in Phase 2 of the research. Given the opportunity for deeper reflection and more time for considered comment, principals articulated more nuanced perceptions of inclusivity.

> So, are all welcome? Now, one would want to say in a philosophical sense absolutely, but are all welcome when you've got waiting lists that are massive? Then the empirical answer is no because many who apply are not going to get into the college. (S6P)
>
> I think there's an ideal that sits out there and then there's reality. I think it's simply a case of the real world. It doesn't allow us to open the door to everyone. (S2P)
>
> We're not open to all. We're open to all who want to buy into the vision that we have and what we need to. And similarly, I think all schools have a tipping point of what they can afford and what they can't afford. So it's theoretically true. In practice, we're not open to all. (S4P)

The Identity leaders had similar reservations about the phrase, *open to all*, and highlighted the aspirational nature of inclusivity. One Identity leader commented, "I think if a person walks through our door, we have to welcome and we have to be as welcoming as we can be" (S1IL), while another contended that a school can be more proactive than this:

> I think it's certainly an important aspiration to have in terms of being authentic to our charism and our mission. The difficulty, depending on the context, is how open to all it is given some of the realities of local context. … For me, it's about your intent to be inclusive and open to all. As a result of that intent, then you can look to be proactive and creative around building relationships. … You need to be committed to that in terms of being patient, in terms of how you look at your budgets. So, it can be overcome if you're able to go out and meet people. (S4IL)

Identity leaders also commented on the practical realities of inclusivity in some EREA schools when it comes to gender. "I think if you were looking for a simple definition, that ['open to all'] certainly covers it, but if you're looking for a definition that breaks it down a little bit – for example, girls obviously can't be educated here" (S5IL). S6IL agreed: "Well, this is a boys' school. That means that it is not open to half the human race. This school can't be open to all, unless it changed to a co-ed school."

These responses indicate the problematic nature of attempting to clearly define inclusivity. Business managers, however, were more direct in their comments regarding an EREA school being open to all.

> No, it's not. God. I mean, I just laugh – "open door". I mean, all you have to do is look at our schedule of fees and we immediately exclude, I don't know, 75% of the population. We're asking our parents to pay $13,300 or thereabouts. That's a lot of money. It's a lot of money. So, as I said, we're immediately excluding 75% of the population. So we're not open to all. We're definitely not open to all. (S4BM)

> I think our school would be slightly different in that manner. I think we obviously – our school is geared towards middle to higher income earners and I suppose the way we get around that a little bit is offering these scholarships, but that's a small portion of our total population. … Open to all – maybe that's a better fit for the organisation as a whole rather than as the individual school. (S6BM)

The EREA Charter provides numerous expressions of inclusivity founded upon the notion that an authentic Edmund Rice school is welcoming, accepting and open to all (EREA, 2017), but does not provide, nor seek to provide, a clear definition. This research examined EREA organisational and school leaders' perceptions of inclusivity, and the data indicate that while there is general consensus that being *open to all* is a shared aspirational understanding, this is an inadequate definition. The interviews suggested that the perception of inclusivity held by the principal, in particular, provided the greatest influence in each school. Hence, an examination of the role and person of the principal is important to this research.

5.3.1.2 The Role and Person of Principal

For the purpose of this section of the chapter, the data presented are from Phase 2 of the research, specifically data collected from interviews with Identity leaders, supplemented with teacher and parent open-ended questionnaire responses. This is necessary as Phase 2 of the research was designed to test Phase 1 research data from EREA leaders, principals and deputy principals. During that process, a theme emerged that the individual who fills the role of principal has a significant influence upon the understanding and addressing of inclusivity in the EREA school.

Identity leaders consistently indicated that the role and person of the principal was important in the articulation of a vision of inclusivity and the implications of this in practical actions.

> I think it's essential to the authenticity of the community. If they are not believing in it at a mission level, it doesn't happen at an institutional level. … So without that principal being that voice, being that heartbeat, being that touchstone, in those moments, I think it can slip really quickly to the reputation of the institution going over and above the authenticity of the mission. (S4IL)

> Absolutely. I think the decision-making, and the consistency, and the clarity, and the authenticity of the principal is absolutely vital in this process because at the end of the day … it is impossible to be authentically Edmund Rice if the principal is not that person. So a very clear expression and action of the idea of inclusivity is absolutely essential. (S1IL)

These reflections from Identity leaders are consistent with the nature of the relationship between principal and Identity leader in EREA schools. While principals are responsible for articulating a vision consistent with the Charter, often it is the Identity leader who holds responsibility for implementing this vision.

To complement the responses from school staff in Phase 2 of the research, parents were invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire. One of the six school principals opted not to send the questionnaire to parents or teachers of that school community citing that it was a complex time for the school and the questionnaire could have caused unnecessary stress and concern.

An analysis and synthesis of the parent responses from the other five schools did not present a consistent theme in relation to the role of principal. However, the parent voice does provide a unique perspective in this area, even if it lacks a consistent message. The researcher has selected a cross-section of parent responses to the question, "Please respond to the following statement: I believe that the principal and senior leaders at my school are committed to the inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged students." Parents were first asked to rate whether they strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree or were unsure, and then asked to explain their response

in an open-ended format. Table 5.4 illustrates parent agreement with the statement, and this is followed by a series of parent responses, presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.4

Parent Responses Regarding Principals' and Senior Leaders' Commitment to Inclusivity

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	20	18	82	N/A	15	20	31
Agree %	37	51	13	N/A	28	36	33
Somewhat agree %	18	14	4	N/A	22	21	16
Disagree %	7	4	0	N/A	1	8	4
Strongly disagree %	0	2	0	N/A	2	2	1
Unsure %	18	10	0	N/A	34	13	15

Note. N/A = not available.

Here it can be seen that 80% of parent respondents perceived to some extent that their principal and senior leaders are committed to inclusivity. The strongest endorsement was from S3 parents, where all parent participants were of the opinion that their school's principal and senior leaders are committed to inclusivity to the extent that 82% of them chose the *strongly agree* option. However, the following table provides a more nuanced understanding through its presentation of some explicit parental data associated with each participating school.

Table 5.5

A Sample of Parent Open-Ended Responses

School	Parent responses
S1	• No sign of this at all. • Our principal and senior staff lead by example. • The school does the best it can with the resources and staff it currently has.
S2	• I have heard the principal talk about it at various meetings and he is very passionate about it. I like that – it shows good character. • I know that a young boy with Asperger's syndrome was told our school was probably not the right fit for him. • The teachers are the ones who do the hard yards with little support from school leaders. • The principal and school leaders openly encourage and engage all students from all populations.
S3	• The school is populated by incredibly dedicated, genuine and caring staff who have two great leaders in the principal and Assistant Principal Students. • They accepted my daughter with open arms from day 1. • The principal is just a great bloke and an even better principal. • I can't think of another school in [this city] than can do what this school does. I'm such a great supporter of the principal, senior leaders and staff at this school. They truly believe in what they are doing and should be used as a model of "what shouldn't work, but does".

School	Parent responses
S4	NOT AVAILABLE
S5	• They walk the talk. • The school leadership has mentioned this in the past and has a very strong social justice program. However, I see little evidence in enrolments or the enrolment process. • Edmund Rice schools already include those inappropriately described as marginalised/disadvantaged students. By economic definition in Australia to be Indigenous or hold refugee status is by some considered a direct advantage that is not available to all Australians. • I have tried to approach the principal regarding us being an Aboriginal family but was directed to apply for a school scholarship along with others who are financially struggling. This was not exclusively for Aboriginal students which is disappointing as there is much research and discussion at a high level regarding educational outcomes for Aboriginal children in this country. Closing the gap has not worked in the ten years since it was introduced and many of the margins are wider than ever. • Stop giving out rugby scholarships and open up for refugees or housing commission children. • I understand our principal is committed. It doesn't mean I agree.
S6	• My limited understanding is that most marginalised students at the school tend to be those who have sporting ability, or strong academic results. • I think the school do not just pay lip service but actually work to include marginalised kids where it is possible. • They say they are but when you look at the cohort they are all a similar mould. • The school has a strong emphasis on social justice and inclusion. • I think they like the idea but are not willing to take the actions that will truly deliver inclusiveness. Academic records seem more important than social records. The principal has created a sanitised school environment focused on academic and to a lesser degree sporting results. • The school prioritises decoration over providing disabled access. • I think there is a reluctance.

Inconsistent parental perceptions both within and across schools is clearly highlighted by this data. For example, the data gathered from S1 parents confirms the existence of contrasting perspectives. While one parent saw "no sign at all" of the principal's and senior leaders' commitment to inclusivity, another described the school's principal and senior leaders as "welcoming of students regardless of background". Similarly, one S5 parent, identifying as Indigenous, expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which the school had addressed a specific issue of inclusivity, while another S5 parent perceives the school's principal and senior leaders as genuine in their commitment by stating, "They walk the talk". Another insight that emerged from two S5 parents relates to parental resistance to inclusivity, with one expressing the view that it can be an advantage rather than a disadvantage to be Indigenous or a refugee in Australia, and another stating that the school's principal is committed but, "It doesn't mean I agree". These data contrast with S3 parent responses which were more united in their view as encompassed in

the comment, “I’m such a great supporter of the principal, senior leaders and staff at this school. They truly believe in what they are doing”.

Across the participating schools, there was a lack of consistent commentary regarding parent perceptions of their respective principal and senior leaders’ commitment to inclusivity, suggesting that both within individual schools and across the six participating schools there is a corresponding lack of consistent and transparent communication from leaders relating to inclusivity.

However, the vast majority of comments imply a support of inclusivity. Parents seem to appreciate their principals’ and senior leaders’ commitment to inclusivity but are less positive when commenting about a lack of commitment. Additionally, parents conveyed a perception that social justice and service-learning activities are examples of a school’s inclusivity, hence broadening the already complex nature of a shared and consistent understanding about inclusivity.

In order to further ascertain a deeper insight into the understanding and implementation of inclusivity by EREA principals and school leaders, teachers in five of the six schools were also invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire. As previously noted, one principal opted not to invite the teachers in that particular school to participate. The teachers were asked the same question as that posed to parents: *“Please respond to the following statement: I believe that the principal and senior leaders at my school are committed to the inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged students.”* Table 5.6 illustrates teacher agreement with the statement, and this is followed by a cross-section of teacher responses from each school, presented in Table 5.7.

Table 5.6

Teacher Responses Regarding Principals’ and Senior Leaders’ Commitment to Inclusivity

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	41	47	79	N/A	8	35	42
Agree %	29	40	21	N/A	67	38	39
Somewhat agree %	18	13	0	N/A	17	26	15
Disagree %	6	0	0	N/A	8	0	3
Strongly disagree %	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0
Unsure %	6	0	0	N/A	0	1	1

Note. N/A = not available.

In this instance, 96% of teacher respondents agree to some extent that their principal and senior leaders are committed to inclusivity. Once again, S3 respondents provided the clearest endorsement, with 79% strongly agreeing and 100% either strongly agreeing or agreeing.

Table 5.7

A Sample of Teacher Open-Ended Responses

School	Teacher responses
S1	• The process of adding enrolments of marginalised groups is growing but I feel leadership still has to balance this with the financial viability of the College. • All the College Leadership Team believe that the authenticity of an EREA school is inextricably linked to an inclusive enrolment policy. • The leaders at my school are very committed to the EREA touchstones and often verbalise this. However, this is so much more complex than enrolling the students. • There are some leaders whom I can see are authentic in their efforts for an inclusive school. Others I don't get the same feeling, and see it more as a "need" or that it "looks good".
S2	• At least one third of our student population are Indigenous and Torres Strait Island students. We also have a large group of students who would be on the Autism Spectrum and have a level of disability with this. • The senior leaders are committed to maintaining numbers – sometimes at the neglect of the required balance. • The school has a solid history of including marginalised students. • The leaders go above and beyond in terms of support, resources and program initiatives.
S3	• I can personally vouch for the College Leadership Team's commitment to provide an educational opportunity for marginalised and disadvantaged students at the school. • The leaders' commitment is evident in the enrolment profile at the College. • Over half of our student leaders this year are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their election speaks strongly about the level of inclusivity at the school.
S4	NOT AVAILABLE
S5	• Some believe that at this school there is a push to raise academic standards through enrolment. • I believe that they have looked at these groups and are making strides in the right direction. • They're committed to it – whether they truly understand what's required to make it happen at a practical level – is another question. • Yes, but it is done to "tick a box" for EREA reviews and their own CVs.
S6	• Leadership promotes inclusion and social justice at every opportunity. • We have a compassionate and inclusive Senior Leadership Team. • Leadership within this college have integrated many students of both Indigenous and refugee backgrounds. • Yes, they are committed, up to a point. The good intent is there but implications of intent and context of how inclusion is occurring concerns me. • They are good people and always looking to help. • "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." • We don't have many such students and the resources available to them are not entirely adequate, so the commitment would appear to be less than desirable.

Note. EREA = Edmund Rice Education Australia; CV = curriculum vitae.

While sharing some similarities with the diverse range of parent comments, teacher comments regarding their principal's and school leaders' commitment to inclusivity were more affirmative.

Several teacher respondents indicated that they hear and see their principal and senior leaders discuss and implement inclusivity, with this view most prevalent in S3 responses. Another insight to emerge from the teacher data includes the issue of principals' and senior leaders' motivation to be inclusive. Teachers commented that principals and senior leaders are committed to inclusivity "to tick a box for EREA reviews and their own CVs" (S5 teacher) or because it "looks good" (S1 teacher). Others implied that while principals and leaders may have commitment "up to a point" (S6 teacher), there was resistance to commit more fully. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (S6 teacher), and "there is still a lot of work to be done" (S6 teacher). Some teacher respondents also referenced the dissonance between the ideal and the pragmatic: "There is commitment, but this needs to be balanced against realistic expectations, pedagogical frameworks and programs, understanding of the world views of these 'marginalised groups' and whether or not it is short or long term" (S5 teacher).

The most significant contrast between the parent and teacher data pertains to the number of respondents who indicate they are 'unsure' as to the commitment of school leaders toward inclusivity. Only 1% of teachers were unsure, whereas this figure was 15% for parents. While it is to be expected that teachers within a school would be more cognisant of a principal's values than the parent community may be, this finding may also indicate a lack of transparent communication from school leadership toward the parent community regarding inclusivity.

An insight to emerge from the teacher and parent data concerning principals' and senior leaders' commitment to inclusivity pertains to the messaging which comes from leaders. While teachers would inherently have a more consistent understanding of what is meant by inclusivity as a result of formation experiences and professional development regarding the Edmund Rice charism and the Charter, parents would conceivably understand their school's level of inclusivity through watching and listening to leaders and observing the school community in general.

The data indicate consistency across participating schools that inclusivity is perceived by parents and teachers as the enrolment of marginalised and disadvantaged students. This is reminiscent of the simple initial understanding that emerged whereby inclusivity can be equated to being *open to all*, a perception that is fundamentally inadequate when examining the data more closely. Here, the data subsequently gathered from teachers and parents broadened the initial perception to include social justice and service-learning programs. Moreover, the teachers, in particular, indicated a more complex understanding of the realities which impact upon inclusivity by proposing that pragmatic challenges exist which may hinder inclusivity, such as a lack of resourcing or professional development for teachers. In summary, within the teacher and parent perceptions there is an implied absence of any clear and transparent communication regarding inclusivity, the impetus for EREA's call to inclusivity, and the ways in which school leaders address this call.

In terms of the role and person of the principal there is strong evidence from the data to suggest that the individual who fills the role has a significant impact upon how a school community understands and implements inclusivity. A key question which arises from the data pertains to how a principal in an EREA school can seek to address the issue of inclusivity in practical ways. The data make clear that a key role of the principal in understanding and addressing inclusivity is to address the tension of aspiring to the ideal while managing the pragmatic.

5.3.2 Idealism Versus Pragmatism

A theme which emerged strongly through both phases of the research on inclusivity was the dichotomy among EREA leaders and school communities as to idealism versus pragmatism. An analysis of key documents at an EREA organisational level, and at an individual school level, indicates that EREA and its schools articulate an aspiration to be authentically inclusive. There is acknowledgement at all levels that an EREA school be inclusive of marginalised and disadvantaged students. However, data gathered from respondents in different roles and contexts suggest that this is primarily the ideal to which schools aspire and that the practical reality of addressing inclusivity is more complex. For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to establish that the data strongly indicate that this idealism versus pragmatism dichotomy exists, most notably in the disconnect in views which emerged in Phase 1 of the research.

5.3.2.1 A Disconnect in Views

As previously described, Phase 1 of the research incorporated an open-ended questionnaire completed by members of the EREA organisational leadership and the school principals and deputy principals. Data from these two sources were unambiguously consistent on questions of inclusivity. The point at which the sources' respective data diverged was on the issue of whether current proportions of disadvantaged and marginalised students in EREA schools was *justifiably fair*.

The phrase *justifiably fair* was selected for the open-ended questionnaire. The phrase was intended to allow respondents the opportunity to explain their initial rating from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* in an open-ended format. For example, a school may have none or very few students from refugee backgrounds enrolled, yet because the school is located in a rural area, which has low numbers of refugee families, a respondent may claim the proportion of refugee students enrolled is *justifiably fair*.

Participants were asked to comment on the proportions of the four key groups of students at an educational disadvantage in Australia, as addressed in Chapter 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and economically disadvantaged students. Principal and deputy principal respondents were more positive in their appraisal than the EREA organisational leaders' groups.

Indicative of this is the finding that 15% of EREA organisational leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 61% of principals and deputy principals agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. Further, 23% of EREA organisational leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of students with disabilities attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 76% of principals and deputy principals agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. 8% of EREA organisational leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of students from refugee backgrounds attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 48% of principals and deputy principals agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. Finally, 23% of EREA organisational leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of economically disadvantaged students attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 81% of principals and deputy principals agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.

These views are further represented in Figures 5.1 to 5.4.

Figure 5.1

Responses Regarding Indigenous Students

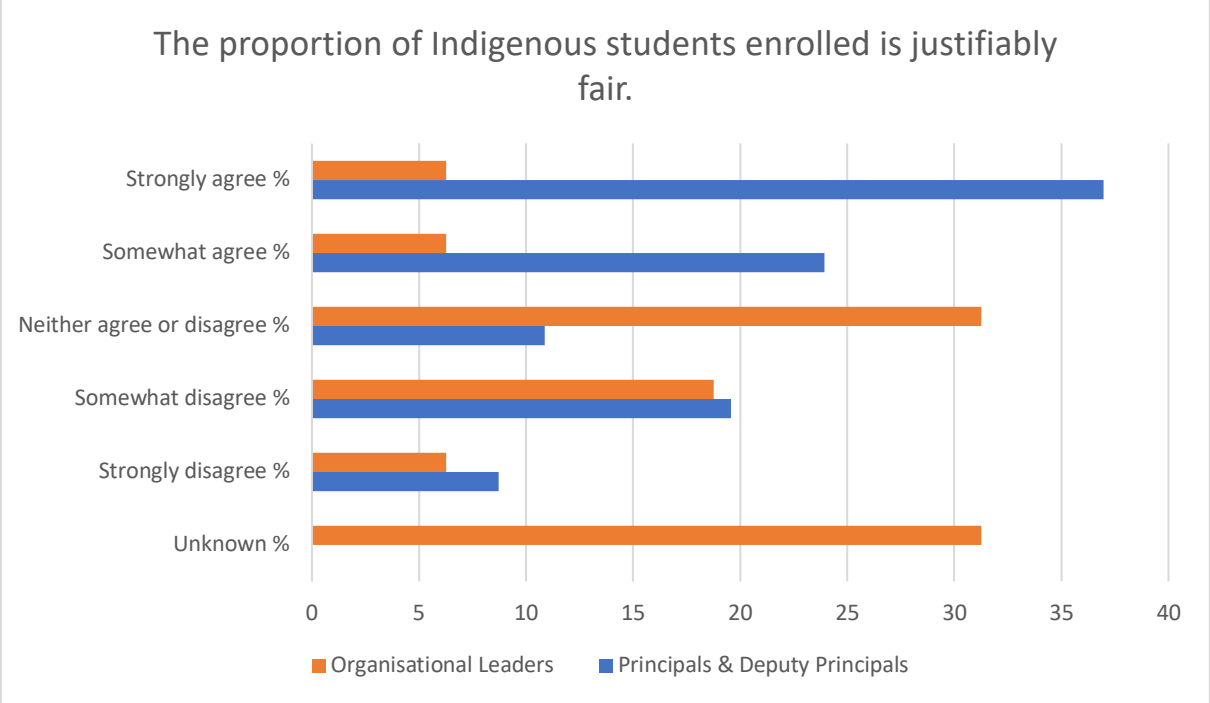


Figure 5.2

Responses Regarding Students With Disabilities

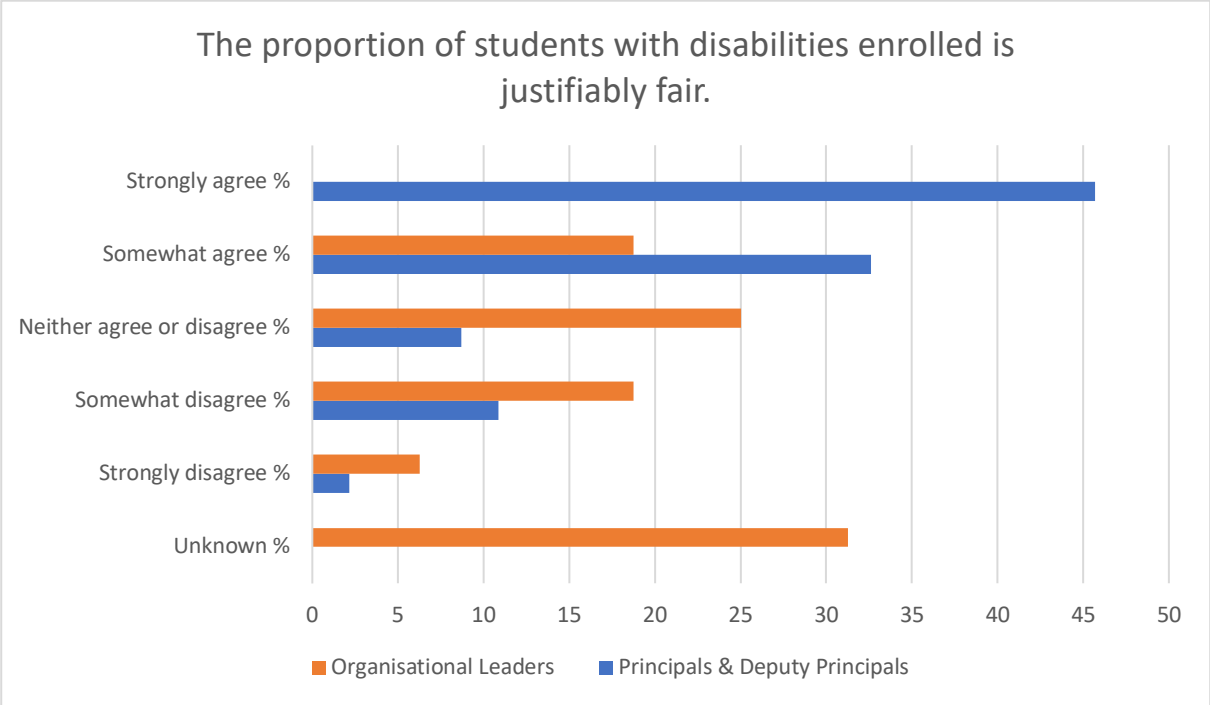


Figure 5.3

Responses Regarding Students From Refugee Backgrounds

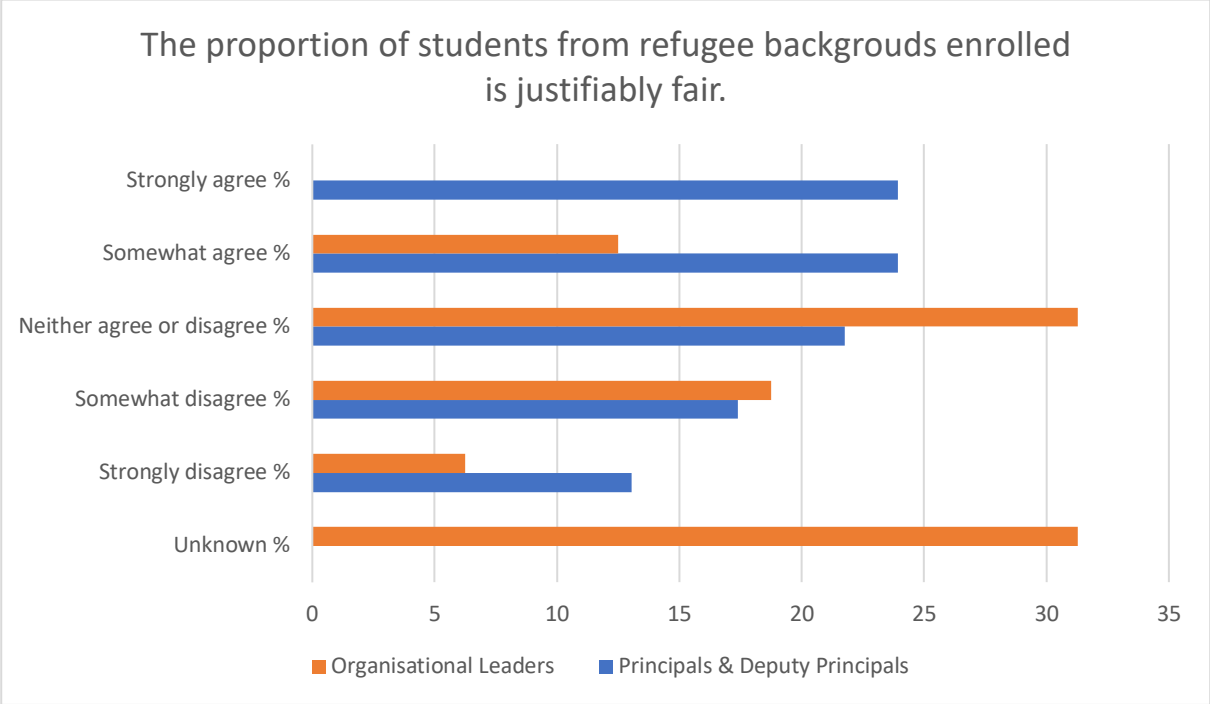
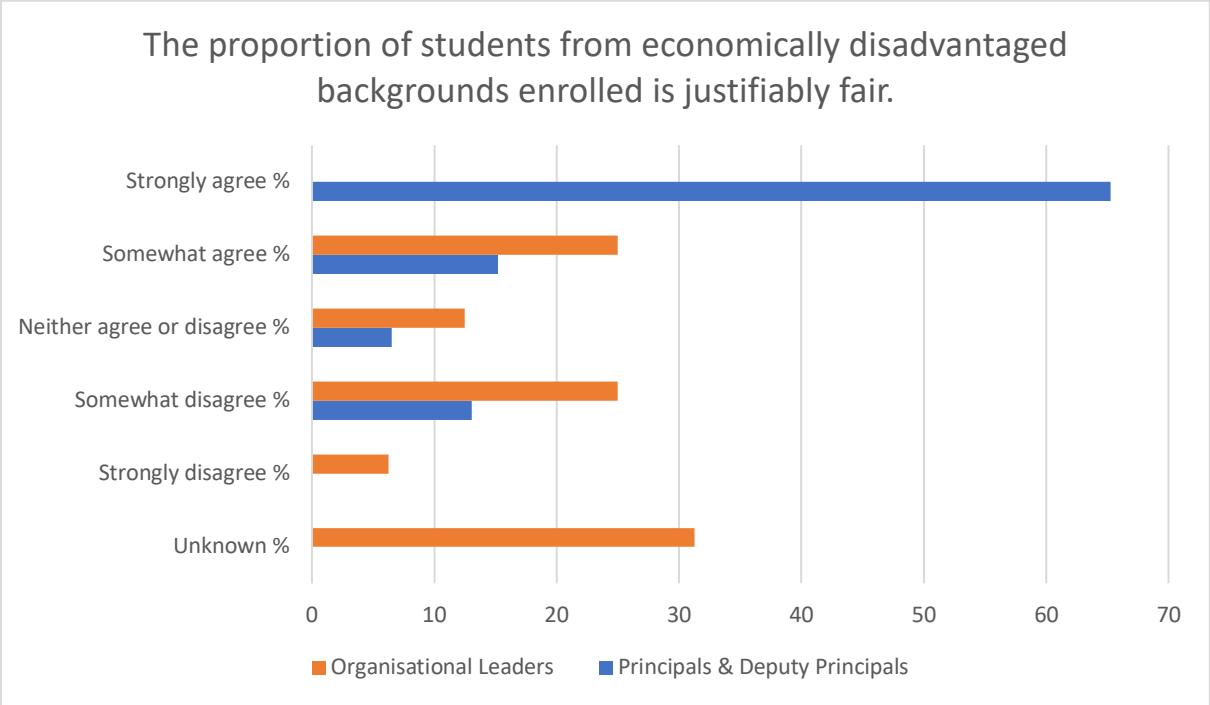


Figure 5.4

Responses Regarding Students From Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds



As Figures 5.1 to 5.4 illustrate, there is a clear disconnect in views between EREA organisational leaders and principals and deputy principals with the latter group indicating a significantly more positive view of the respective fairness of the enrolment of disadvantaged and marginalised students. One insight to emerge was that the group of students perceived as most underrepresented by both cohorts of participants was students from refugee backgrounds, while the group perceived as most well represented was students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, marginally ahead of students with disabilities.

These perceptions of fairness are relevant to the research regarding understandings of inclusivity which exist in EREA, as they illustrate leaders' appraisals of the appropriateness of current enrolment practices. As such, EREA organisational leader responses implied that they believed schools should enrol larger numbers of disadvantaged students, while principals and deputy principals were more satisfied with current levels of enrolment.

During the visit to each of the six participating EREA schools in Phase 2 of the research, this disconnect was explored more thoroughly in semi-structured interviews with the principal. It was during this phase that principal respondents labelled the disconnect as a dichotomy between the ideal and the pragmatic. When presented with the data illustrated in Figures 5.1 to 5.4, principals responded with the following statements:

> I think people in leadership like Council and Executive, they work in ideals, like what's the ideal circumstance? We deal with the pragmatics of running the school. So, justifiably is the key word. Would I love to double the number of marginalised kids in this school? Of course I would, but I couldn't run the school if I did. (S1P)
>
> I think probably there's a difference between – for want of a better term – an idealistic viewpoint and a practical viewpoint. Principals and deputies have the practical task of putting square pegs into round holes day in day out. So they see the realities and how easy or hard it is to do that on a daily basis. … So there's a difference between the lived reality and the overarching sort of philosophy and that's why there will always be that dichotomy. (S3P)
>
> You can live in a utopia and you can live in a real world. To me, it's that division at the moment and principals having to live out where it is. (S4P)
>
> I guess it's the lived experience as contrasted to the philosophical or some might even label it in the ideal world scenario, in contrast to – this is our lived experience and there's some tension between the two. (S6P)

This Phase 2 data further illustrate the disconnect between the views held by EREA leaders and those held by principals in EREA schools. Principals, while agreeing that genuine inclusivity is the ideal, justify the current enrolments of disadvantaged students in their schools by contending that reality prevents greater inclusivity. In relation to the dichotomy of idealism versus pragmatism, it is useful to understand another critical component of this issue, the notion that schools are not merely places of education, but also places of business.

5.3.2.2 The Business of Schools

The inaugural Executive Director of EREA, Dr Wayne Tinsey, contrasted ideas about inclusivity in a contemporary society as distinct from the foundation years of Australian Catholic education. The communication is described in the review of literature section of this study, but in essence, Tinsey acknowledged the competing agendas at play in contemporary Catholic education.

Tinsey concluded the letter by posing a series of "potentially hard questions related to our mission to and concern for the poor and those at the margins", the last question being: "Do our fee structures and enrolment policies really encourage inclusion or are we focused on priorities that exclude us as a possibility for those who are poor?" (Tinsey, 2011)

It is precisely this question that relates to the aspect of the dichotomy between idealism and pragmatism that is presented in this section – the business of schools.

The data gathered during this research suggest that a simple answer to this question is that many, if not most, EREA school fee structures and enrolment policies discourage inclusion. However, to answer the second part of the question regarding priorities, is a more complex task, which will be examined in section 6.2.1 in the subsequent chapter. The research clearly demonstrates that principals, deputy principals, business managers, Identity leaders, as well as EREA Council, Board and Leadership Team members are aware that fee structures and enrolment policies in many EREA schools exclude the poor and those on the margins, as displayed in the statements in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

A Cross-Section of Respondent Statements Regarding Fees and Enrolment Policies

Respondent position	Statements
EREA leader (council, board, leadership team)	• Schools find inclusion financially challenging because of financial commitments they have for building projects and staffing costs. (ER4) • Full inclusion will change the culture of EREA schools. At present many EREA schools cater primarily for the more advantaged members of society, some of whom may be quite uncomfortable with an incursion of "undesirables". (ER3) • It is costly and difficult to cater for all needs so that everyone feels safe and included. (ER5)
Principal/ deputy principal	• If EREA is to survive in the current and future economic climate we have to synthesise business acumen/stewardship with co-responsibility. That we are obligated to the poor is without question – how we do so in a way which allows us to grow into the future is the challenge. (PDP22) • Schools need to be careful not to be too lenient. The school is still a business and needs to meet financial targets. Provisions are important for those that hit hard times. (PDP34) • We could be doing more – hard to update resources in schools that are over 100 years old – therefore always economic pressures at play. (PDP15) • No student would ever be refused entry to the school simply because of a family's incapacity to pay. The fact of the matter, though, is that few economically disadvantaged, Indigenous, or refugee families seek enrolment in the first place because of (1) a perception that they cannot afford it and (2) a perception that they would not be welcomed. (PDP34)
Identity leader	• There's the ideal but I have to have these many fee-paying families so we can do this. And the principal has written in the newsletter numerous times that those parents who pay fees are helping to support those who can't, and that's what we do as a community. (S1IL) • I think sometimes the context of different schools prevents them from being what I would call truly inclusive because there are a number of hurdles that those who are marginalised and oppressed would have to try to jump through in order to gain a a place at the table. (S3IL) • We've been really proactive to go beyond the local context. We've been really proactive in developing relationship, telling the story of what we're about. (S4IL) • Our fantastic facilities have got to be paid for. (S5IL) • I suppose there's an issue in a school like this – what it costs. It's very expensive. (S6IL)

Respondent position	Statements
	• The number of boys on – there's a very large percentage of the school on some sort of supported place. I'm not sure of the figure, but it's quite large. The number of families in the school here who pay the fees easily is low. (S6IL)
Business manager	• Balancing fees and enrolments was hard to start because the concept of the Brothers was free education at the time. The school had very little resources in terms of financial capacities. It almost closed. (S1BM) • There's a budget for fee concessions but there's no limit on it if we have enough demand. (S2BM) • We get pretty good funding because of our Indigenous numbers, there's no doubt about that. So take them out of the equation and things don't look quite so good really. (S2BM) • If it was up to me, I would be putting our fee up by close to two grand because those that can pay would pay happily. We are strongly supported by the parents of the special needs kids, which are the ones that are the most financial. We have a boy with Down syndrome here and his brother goes to one of the mainstream EREA schools. (S3BM) • So, the general consensus is that once your concessions, discounts and bursaries – that is your non-fee-paying becomes a percentage that's greater than 11, 11 and a half, 12% of your gross revenue, you start to move into dangerous territory. (S4BM) • Generally speaking, when it comes to setting aside a budget for assistance, we would have a commitment in the current year to a number of families that will have boys in various stages of their academic journey. … As fees increase, the budget for fee concessions increases. (S5BM) • We could fill this school five times over if I had the capacity, and that's part of always thinking around collection of fees – we have so many people who want to send their boys to this school. (S6BM) • Yeah, there is pressure from EREA around affordability, but there's also pressure from my board around that same criteria. And I think on a whole, we should be doing better with that [inclusivity], but it's difficult. (S6BM)

This selection of respondent statements from open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews highlights the pragmatic influence of fees on the ideal articulated outcome of inclusivity. This sentiment is consistent across schools and across roles. More specifically, a number of respondents expressed the simple reality that the level of fees in some EREA schools were prohibitive to many families. One respondent from the principal and deputy principal group stated that the "fact of the matter … is that few economically disadvantaged, Indigenous or refugee families seek enrolment in the first place because of (1) a perception that they cannot afford it and (2) a perception that they would not be welcomed" (PDP34). This was supported by another member of that group, who commented, "we are open to all, but our fees still no doubt present an issue for those that do not ask to come" (PDP4).

One EREA organisational leader also commented on schools' exclusivity: "Full inclusion will change the culture of EREA schools. At present many EREA schools cater primarily for the more advantaged members of society, some of whom may be quite uncomfortable [with] an incursion of 'undesirables'" (ER3). This comment suggests that in fact some EREA schools are in reality the precise opposite of the ideal articulated by the Charter. Indeed, this author notes that the very use of the term "undesirable" is inappropriate in terms of mission and social acceptability, and wishes to clarify that no credence to the use of the term is being given through its inclusion here. The broader statement poses a question of priorities for leaders. As one respondent stated, a school "can't be everything to everyone" (PDP22). Therefore, leaders are called to make difficult, strategic and practical decisions as to where their priorities and focus will be with regard to including marginalised students.

A final insight to emerge from the data regarding fees and enrolment priorities relates to transparency of school communication with families. For example, two Identity leader respondents commented on their respective principals' practice of informing the parent and school community about the schools' inclusive policies. "And the principal has written in the newsletter numerous times that those parents who pay fees are helping to support those who can't, and that's what we do as a community" (S1IL). Likewise, in S4, "… the principal has been able to say, 'Look, this (being inclusive) is a non-negotiable'" (S4IL). This approach of transparent communication was perceived by some respondents as a successful means of developing a shared understanding of inclusivity through individual school communities.

5.4 Summary

In addressing the first research question regarding understandings of inclusivity, this chapter has begun with two themes which emerged from the data: vision and commitment of leadership; and idealism versus pragmatism. In exploring these themes, data regarding perceptions of inclusivity, the role and person of principal, a disconnect in views and the business of schools, have been presented.

In summary, Chapter 5 has presented the findings relating to Research Question 1: What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA? An analysis and synthesis of the data indicates that no single, clear understanding of inclusivity exists in EREA. While the Charter provides some initial descriptions of an aspirational *inclusive community*, the research suggests that the concept of inclusivity is more complex. The following understandings regarding inclusivity in EREA emerged from the research:

- Participants understand the call to inclusivity in EREA to be founded upon the life and message of Jesus as presented in the Gospel, and the story and charism of Edmund Rice. As such, there is agreement that inclusivity at its most basic level of understanding means being *open to all*.

- There is a shared understanding that inclusivity in EREA entails giving preference to young people who are marginalised and at an educational disadvantage in Australia.
- There is agreement that the four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage in Australia, though not confined to these, are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- There is a perception that inclusivity is more complex than simply being *open to all*, and that a deeper understanding must take into account the contemporary contexts of international and Australian education, particularly the increased influence of a neo-liberal agenda.
- There is a dissonance between the understandings of inclusivity articulated by EREA organisational leaders and principals. Principals are more resolute than organisational leaders in their belief that current levels of inclusion of marginalised young people are justifiably fair, considering the extent to which the ideal of inclusivity is impacted upon by pragmatic realities.
- There is evidence that indicates that some EREA schools are currently more exclusive than inclusive.
- The data suggest a common understanding that not just the role of principal is highly significant in relation to inclusivity, but also the individual person who fulfils the role of principal brings to the application of inclusivity personal beliefs, values and experience.
- Transparent communication within school communities regarding inclusivity can assist in developing a shared understanding.

These understandings are inextricably linked with how EREA organisational and school leaders seek to address the call to inclusivity, the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Presentation of Findings – Research Question 2

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings relating to the second research question as to the implementation of inclusivity. The findings emerged from the exploration of how inclusivity is understood and addressed in six participating Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) mainstream secondary schools and are a synthesis of the data gathered from documentary analysis, an initial open-ended questionnaire to EREA leaders, followed by semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and further open-ended questionnaires.

6.2 Research Question 2: Addressing Inclusivity

Research Question 2:

How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?

In addressing Research Question 2, two themes were synthesised and will be used to present the data. These two themes are:

1. strategic priorities; and
2. local context.

The analysis of the data in Chapter 5 demonstrated that EREA organisational and school leaders share a common belief that an authentic EREA school should be open to all. However, in practice, this is the ideal and not necessarily the reality. The shift from the ideal to the reality is only possible through strategic planning processes which discern, articulate, promote and implement organisational priorities. Leaders at an organisational and school level are responsible for the manifestation of this shift. This chapter establishes the stated and enacted strategic priorities of EREA and EREA mainstream schools in relation to inclusivity. As opposed to analysing mission or vision statements which articulate aspirations, this chapter seeks to analyse EREA's and EREA schools' strategic priorities regarding inclusivity as evidenced in the data.

6.2.1 Strategic Priorities

Throughout this study, the strategic priorities relating to inclusivity in the six participating schools, were observed in:

1. EREA statements, reports and budget documents; and
2. school enrolment policies, practices and tuition fees.

6.2.1.1 An Analysis of EREA Priorities

The EREA *Strategic Directions for 2015–2019* document the articulated strategic priorities for EREA during the period of the research. They "set the strategic agenda for the EREA Board and Executive for 2015–2019 and complement their ongoing governance and leadership responsibilities" (EREA, 2014, p. 3). This document established four specific EREA strategic priorities and articulated these through seventeen goals. Importantly, inclusivity featured in all four priorities and in six of the seventeen goals.

Within the first strategic priority, "Growing our national identity for mission", one goal stated was to "advocate for those who are poor and marginalised" (EREA, 2014, p. 4), while in the second priority of "Educating for mission", two goals included to "work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for reconciliation and liberation", and to "provide options for those who are marginalised as a core commitment for an Edmund Rice education" (EREA, 2014, p. 5). The third strategic priority was "Governing for mission", and included the goal to "acknowledge and develop the leadership contribution and wisdom of women" (EREA, 2014, p. 6). Finally, the fourth strategic priority of "Sustaining the mission" included the goal to "offer affordable education opportunities for lower and middle income families" as well as articulating the aspiration that "educating those who are made poor is a commitment that is sustainable" (EREA, 2014, p. 7).

These data illustrate the importance placed by the EREA Board upon inclusivity in its strategic priorities and goals. Further, during the term of these strategic directions, 2014–2019, EREA established an Affordability Committee tasked with examining trends of affordability and finding ways to assist schools in maintaining fee structures which were deemed to be as affordable as possible. A perception by principals as to the operation of this committee entailed an understanding that fee structures are of significance in pursuing inclusivity. Two principals (S5P and S6P) referred to "pressure" from EREA to keep fees affordable.

Another key document relevant to an analysis of the EREA strategic priorities is the *Community Profile Report*. This study was informed by the 2018 version of this report. The stated strategic objective of this report, referencing the EREA *Strategic Directions* Priorities 3 and 4 – Governing for the Mission and Sustaining the Mission – is: "Monitoring student and staff numbers is an important governance responsibility and supports EREA in ensuring that schools are operating sustainably and reflecting diversity" (EREA, 2018).

This report contains detailed data on student enrolment, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment, Catholic enrolment, and students funded for a disability. In August 2018, the total enrolment for EREA mainstream schools was 35,921. Data relevant to this study firstly includes that in 2018, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students made up 2.7% of mainstream EREA school enrolments, compared to 2.9% in all Australian Catholic schools. This EREA figure increased from 2.02%

in 2012. Next, 68.1% of EREA school students in 2018 identified as Catholic, with six schools having Catholic enrolments of over 85% and seven schools having Catholic enrolments of 50% or less. This compared to 67% Catholic enrolment in all Australian Catholic schools. Third, 7% of total EREA mainstream enrolments were funded for a disability, compared to 4.8% for all Australian Catholic schools. Finally, in 2018, 279 female students (0.8%) were enrolled in EREA mainstream schools (EREA, 2018).

An analysis of these data suggest that when compared with Catholic schools in Australia more broadly, EREA mainstream schools do not appear distinctly more inclusive, if at all, even though the aspiration for EREA schools to be *inclusive communities*, is a touchstone or "fundamental or quintessential feature" (EREA, 2017, p. 2).

Also, an analysis of EREA budget documents provides further enrolment data, with fee and fee concession data of most relevance to this study. A more detailed examination of the six selected schools will be presented in a subsequent section of this chapter, but broader EREA data of note include:

- The tuition fee, with compulsory levies and charges, of the least expensive EREA mainstream school in 2018 was $4,051 per student.
- The tuition fee, with compulsory levies and charges, of the most expensive EREA mainstream school in 2018 was $20,682 per student.
- The average tuition fee, with compulsory levies and charges, for EREA mainstream schools in 2018 was $9,145 per student.
- The average fee concession amount across EREA mainstream schools in 2018 was $937 per student. This figure equates to a 10.2% fee concession per student.
- Therefore, the average net tuition fee income across EREA mainstream schools in 2018 was $8208 per student.

These data support a previously mentioned finding that policies and practices, especially those regarding tuition fees, in some EREA schools fundamentally exclude a large proportion of society. Hence, although the articulated strategic directions of EREA have a clear focus on inclusivity, evidence suggests that in reality, genuine inclusivity in relation to marginalised and educationally disadvantaged young people may not actually be the strategic priority that is espoused.

6.2.1.2 An Analysis of School Priorities

Documentary analysis relating to the ways in which each of the participating schools prioritised the call to inclusivity centred around two items:

1. school enrolment policies; and
2. EREA reports and budget documents.

These documents were selected and analysed as they provide evidence of strategic priorities, potentially more so than school mission or vision statements.

Five of the six schools visited in Phase 2 of the research had enrolment policies publicly accessible on their school websites. One school (S3) did not. When the researcher contacted a member of that school's leadership team to enquire about obtaining a copy of the enrolment policy, the researcher was informed that the school did not have, nor required, a formal enrolment policy because "we take all-comers" (S3PDP).

An examination of enrolment policies indicated similarities and differences across the participating schools. One similarity concerned the relevance of religious background and family connections to a student's enrolment. For example, four of the five schools prioritise the enrolment of Catholic students using the terms: "practicing Catholic students" (S1); "The applicant is Catholic" (S4); "Members of the Catholic community" (S5); and "Baptised Catholics continuing in the practice of their faith" (S6). Also, four of the five schools referenced siblings and/or family members in their enrolment priorities: "Siblings of current students/Sons of Old Boys" (S1); "The applicant had brothers enrolled/The applicant's father and/or family member is an ex-student" (S4); "Sons of Old Boys of the College/Brothers of those who are attending or who have graduated from the College" (S5); "Brothers of current of past students and sons of Old Collegians and other direct family links (eg. uncles)" (S6).

In addition to S3, which did not provide a published enrolment policy, one school's (S2) policy does differ considerably in its omission of the above stated priorities and in its explicit reference and adherence to EREA's articulated vision regarding inclusivity. The enrolment policy of S2 contains a section titled, *Policy Principles,* which states in its entirety:

> Enrolment procedures at [S2] will accord with the following principles:
>
> 1. Catholic schools are called to contribute to the evangelising mission of the Church. "In the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all, Christians and non-Christians alike." (The Catholic School, Rome, 1977 #85)
> 2. All people are valued for their uniqueness and their dignity as children of God.
> 3. Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) schools are called to be inclusive, forming communities that are accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good. (EREA Charter 2012)
> 4. Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition:
>   - demonstrate a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised;
>   - encourage active participation and engagement with Indigenous people within the school community;

- are responsive to the economic situation of each of its families and provide school programs which empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
- promote social inclusion and view diversity as beneficial to a liberating education; and
- ensure students with special needs occupy a valued place in the community. (S2 policy)

The language contained in each enrolment policy implies each school's priorities regarding inclusivity. Table 6.1 presents statements relating to the issue of inclusivity from the five collected enrolment policies.

Table 6.1

Enrolment Policy Statements Relating to Inclusivity

School	Statements
S1	• We do not seek to exclude students, however for the student's sake, the family and school must be seen to be partners in the process of education. On accepting a position at [S1], the student undertakes to participate fully in the life of the Catholic school. • The College accepts students with a range of academic ability. Parents should keep in mind that the College does not have the facilities nor teaching staff to provide more than limited support for students with learning difficulties.
S2	• Policy Principles listed above.
S3	No formal enrolment policy.
S4	• [S4] is committed to the provision of high quality, inclusive and accessible Catholic education. • The College invites enrolments from all who profess to the ethos, spirit and values of Edmund Rice Education. • [The school] is open to all those who share the values of Edmund Rice Education. This enrolment process ensures that consideration is given to the poor and marginalised, and that the school community will reflect a diversity within the student population. • Special consideration may be given to the enrolment of students who have extenuating circumstances and these circumstances would need to be clearly explained in writing at the point of enrolment.
S5	• All students whose parents are prepared to support the religious principles and ideals of the school are eligible for enrolment.
S6	• It needs to be noted that even though all criteria for enrolment may be met, that usually there are many more applicants than places available. • [The school] aims to be a welcoming and hospitable community that will provide strong witness to Gospel values. • The Headmaster needs to be satisfied on the basis of advice, collected information and the Headmaster's judgement that there is reasonable expectation that an

School	Statements
	applicant is ready to benefit from the educational programs and structures of the College. • The College reserves the right to take into account the College's ability to serve the educational needs of each child. • At the interview the nature of the College will be detailed and the financial requirements for attendance and the conditions of enrolment will be explained. Please note that the ability and commitment to the payment of fees is presumed of all parents who sign the "Acceptance of a Position" form. A rigorously objective self-appraisal by parents of their capacity to pay in full over the enrolment period is essential. Honesty at acceptance will spare all parties any future embarrassment. • As a school in the tradition of Edmund Rice who devoted his life and riches to the education of the poor, some enrolment and continuance at the College may be given to those less able to meet the full obligation of fees. The implementation and operation of this school fee assistance shall be at the absolute discretion of the Headmaster subject to an annual review by the College Board.

While similarities exist, the six participating schools adopt markedly different language and convey varying priorities regarding inclusivity in enrolment policy and practice. While each espouses the Charter touchstone of *inclusive community*, the complex nature of inclusivity is evident in the enrolment policies of the participating schools.

There are varying levels of explicit language applied to inclusivity, with the majority of the schools utilising a capacity for discretion in the enrolment procedure to avoid the challenging and contestable concept that they are *open to all*. The use of caveats in the policies is evident in statements such as, "We do not seek to exclude students, however for the student's sake, the family and school must be seen to be partners in the process of education" (S1 policy); and "The College reserves the right to take into account the College's ability to serve the educational needs of each child" (S6 policy). These data suggest the existence of a *qualified inclusivity* in some EREA schools, with language choices that not only avoid promising inclusivity but also, in some cases, the explicit use of exclusive language as evident in statements such as:

> At the interview the nature of the College will be detailed and the financial requirements for attendance and the conditions of enrolment will be explained. Please note that the ability and commitment to the payment of fees is presumed of all parents who sign the 'Acceptance of a Position' form. A rigorously objective self-appraisal by parents of their capacity to pay in full over the enrolment period is essential. Honesty at acceptance will spare all parties any future embarrassment. (S6 policy)

A disconnect again emerges between the ideal, as articulated in the *open to all* language of the Charter, and the contrasting statements of some of the participating EREA schools' public enrolment policies.

Arguably, a more candid example of this disconnect between the ideal of inclusivity and an EREA school's enrolment policy is reflected in its fee concession data given that these concessions can be used to address economic disadvantage. Hence, an analysis of EREA-provided financial summary documents further indicates some key differences in individual school approaches to fee concessions. Table 6.2 illustrates the fees and fee concessions of the six participating schools in 2018, including concessions represented as a percentage of tuition income, as well as net tuition fee income per student.

Table 6.2

2018 Tuition Fee and Concession Data

School	2018 tuition fee per student (including compulsory levies and charges)	2018 average fee concession per student (% of tuition fees)	2018 net tuition fee per student
S1	$7,938	$446 (5.6%)	$7,492
S2	$5,880	$595 (10.1%)	$5,285
S3	$6,900	$3,101 (44.9%)	$3,799
S4	$12,915	$1,354 (10.5%)	$11,561
S5	$14,954	$713 (4.8%)	$14,241
S6	$20,682	$1,708 (8.3%)	$18,974

As indicated above, five of the six schools have an average concession range of 4.8% to 10.1%, while S3 has an average concession rate of 44.9% of tuition fees per student. This substantial contrast relating to S3, suggesting a comparatively strong focus on catering for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, will be further explored later in this section.

EREA collects data from schools on total enrolment numbers, as well as numbers of Catholic students, students who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and students funded for a disability. At the time of research, EREA did not collect data relating to students from refugee backgrounds. An analysis of enrolment data by category supplied by EREA further indicates how individual schools address inclusivity. The subsequent section in this chapter concerns local context, which Phase 2 research data suggest impacts significantly upon enrolment levels in various categories.

With religious background and catholic upbringing featuring heavily in the enrolment policies examined in this research, it is worth noting that the EREA *2018 Community Profile Report* indicates

that while the percentage of Catholic students enrolled across all EREA mainstream schools was 68%, the six participating schools from this study enrolled from 32% to 88% Catholic students. The report further shows that the total percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students was 2.7% in 2018; the range in the six schools was from 0.2% to 18.4%. In terms of students funded for a disability, the overall percentage for EREA mainstream schools was 7%, with a range from 0% to 27% in the six participating schools. More detailed data are presented in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3

2018 Student Profile of Six Participating Schools

School	Enrolments August 2018	Catholic student %	ATSI student %	Funded disabilities %
S1	826	75%	1.6%	1%
S2	614	38%	18.4%	11%
S3	410	32%	6.8%	27%
S4	1,018	62%	4.3%	8%
S5	1,435	63%	1.2%	0%
S6	2,065	88%	0.2%	3%

Note. ATSI = Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. From EREA, 2018.

The data display a broad range of enrolment information across the six participating EREA schools. While the data indicate a lack of consistency in inclusive enrolment outcomes across the schools, it is, when synthesised and cross-referenced with formal enrolment policies and tuition fee data, that the research indicates a lack of consistency in strategic priorities relating to inclusivity. In light of the data presented in Table 6.3, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- S2's enrolment policy explicitly states inclusivity as a key strategic priority;
- S3 provides on average a 44.9% fee concession per student, has no formal enrolment policy and one leadership team member expressed that the school takes "all-comers" (S3PDP); and
- S6 has a large waiting list of prospective families and uses language in its enrolment policy which explicitly states that the payment of fees is an important priority. Its fees are the most expensive of the participating schools.

These contrasts illustrate that while a consistent and explicit aspiration regarding the call to inclusivity is articulated by the organisational level of EREA, as evidenced in the first and second Executive Directors' communications with school communities, and confirmed in the Board's strategic directions, and through the Charter, individual schools develop and publicise enrolment policies which display varying levels of adherence to these aspirations.

Notwithstanding the disconnection between policy and practice, the data displayed in Table 6.3 cannot be taken on face value alone because the local context can reflect inconsistency in the prevalence of disadvantaged students. For example, there might be very few Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families living in a school's local community, typically serving a metropolitan community or in locality where refugee settlement is not the focus. Thus, the next section explores the potential impact that the local community had upon each of the participating school's commitment to inclusivity.

6.2.2 Local Context

The relevance of a school's local context was a theme which emerged strongly from the research. This theme centres around two key concepts:

1. perceptions in school communities regarding the local *poor and marginalised*; and
2. the location and character of the area in which a school exists.

6.2.2.1 The Poor and Marginalised

In the open-ended questionnaire of Phase 1 of the research, EREA organisational leaders, principals and deputy principals were asked to respond to the question: *In terms of contemporary Australian schooling, who are "the poor and marginalised"?* Prior to the questionnaire, participants had not been informed that the review of literature had indicated four groups of young people experience educational disadvantage in Australia – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from refugee backgrounds, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students with disabilities. Thus, it was important to determine whether or not the participants shared a commensurate understanding of student disadvantage to that posited in the literature. An analysis of the responses indicated general agreement with these key groups. Of the 67 participants:

- 45 participants (67%) referenced economic disadvantage;
- 25 participants (37%) referenced refugee and/or asylum seeker background;
- 22 participants (32%) referenced Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background;
- 18 participants (27%) referenced disabilities.

Other forms of educational disadvantage also emerged:

- 10 participants (15%) referenced family dysfunction and domestic violence;
- 9 participants (13%) referenced youth mental health issues;
- 7 participants (10%) referenced a lack of spirituality or religious belief;
- 6 participants (9%) referenced gender diversity and/or sexuality;
- 4 participants (6%) referenced homelessness;
- 4 participants (6%) referenced being from remote/regional areas;

- 2 participants (3%) referenced having English as an additional language;
- 2 participants (3%) referenced victims of bullying;
- 1 participant (1%) referenced being female.

Therefore, this research supports and builds upon the understanding that the four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage in Australia, in essence the *poor and marginalised* of 21st century Australia, are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As previously noted, this assertion does not imply that every young person represented by these labelled groups is at an educational disadvantage, nor that disadvantage does not occur outside of these groups. Rather, the literature, along with this research, identifies these groups as the most prevalent at this particular time and place.

History indicates that when poor and marginalised young people are recognised and provided with quality education, those young people can and will be raised up from their circumstances. Specifically, the stories of Edmund Rice, Ambrose Treacy and the Christian Brothers in Australia, and the successful shift in fortune for poor Irish boys, support this contention. It follows then that a similar approach to educating the poor and marginalised in contemporary Australian society may yield similar success for those groups.

However, it is also acknowledged that the complex history, geography and socio-politics of Australia have given rise to specific local population contexts within different areas of the country. For example, after the first Europeans arrived and conflict ensued, the number of Aboriginal people was drastically reduced, particularly in the southern parts of the continent. Further, federal government policy has influenced the number of refugee families settling in various parts of the country. Hence, as the participating schools represent a diverse cross-section of geographic locations, the nature and population of disadvantage and marginalisation in each location is unique.

Hence, in Phase 2 of the research, incorporating semi-structured interviews with principals, Identity leaders and business managers, focus group interviews with senior student leaders, and open-ended questionnaires completed by teachers and parents, the issue of the nature and population of local disadvantage and marginalisation, particularly in relation to education, though not confined to it, was raised. Respondents were given an opportunity to express which groups, if any, in their local community may be seen as being at a disadvantage, educational or otherwise, due to their person and/or background.

Socio-economic status (SES) was a concept identified by respondents. The contemporary measures of this status are referred to as the "Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas" (SEIFA). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides information regarding the levels of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage for all Australian suburbs. There are four indexes which make up the

SEIFA. One of these indexes is the "Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage" (IRSAD). The average score is 1,000, meaning that a score below 1,000 is below average in terms of socio-economic advantage. In the 2016 census, the highest IRSAD score of 1,121 belonged Ku-ring-gai in New South Wales, while the lowest score of 404 was Cherbourg in Queensland. The 2016 IRSAD scores for the local government areas in which the six participating schools are located are presented in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4

Participating Schools' Local IRSAD Scores

School	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
IRSAD	1,047	974	1,039	1,043	1,080	1,120

Note. IRSAD = Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage.

The data indicate that S2 is situated in a somewhat disadvantaged suburb while each of the other schools are situated in slightly advantaged suburbs with S6 being in the most advantaged suburb relative to the other participating schools, and in relation the rest of the nation.

An example of the potential influence of the IRSAD score upon a school can be gained from the data gathered from S1, which is situated in a non-capital city. Here, one semi-structured interview respondent commented: "This is not a bad area socioeconomically. … You couldn't give away a house here thirty years ago; now they're a million dollars. And what that's done to us of course, is our SES has gone through the roof" (S1P). Another S1 respondent, in explaining low numbers of students from refugee backgrounds in the school, expressed that when they wrote to the government to offer places to refugee students settling in the area, they did not receive a reply. "I mean, property values close by are pretty expensive in [this town] … We haven't picked up many refugees" (S1IL). Students from S1 commented that "Aboriginal people", "heavy drug users" and "the homeless" would be the most prevalent groups of marginalised people in the area. S1 teacher and parent insights regarding local marginalisation are presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5

Teacher and Parent Responses – S1 Local Marginalised Groups

Marginalised group	Teacher references (*n*= 19)	Parent references (*n* = 76)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	13	40
People with disabilities	7	9
Refugee backgrounds	1	16
Economically disadvantaged	3	20
Homeless	1	3
Spiritually poor	2	0
Gender/sexual diversity – LGBTIQ	1	2
Mental health issues	4	7
Family dysfunction and domestic violence	3	6
Non-English-speaking background	0	2

Note. LGBTIQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersex, queer.

Responses from S1 teacher and parent participants indicated that the most prevalent groups of people who are disadvantaged are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, those suffering from economic disadvantage, refugees, people with disabilities and people suffering from mental health issues. Again, the naming of these groups is consistent with the literature and the research.

An exploration of the perceived influence of the characteristics of the local context upon the perceptions of, and responses to, disadvantage by each participating school community is informative. For example, research in S2, another school situated in a non-capital city but with a significantly lower IRSAD score, indicated a prevalence of one group in particular, as articulated by the principal:

> This is the EREA school which caters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, and that would be around what the leadership team of EREA would see us as the beacon to be bringing 112 Indigenous kids into the school. … A significant proportion comes from what you would see on the TV as the most remote communities, living in the shack kind of thing, very dysfunctional communities, ice, substance abuse and their families will send them here to get them away, most of the time. (S2P)

However, other groups of disadvantaged students were named by respondents, with one commenting that, “if a student with a disability applies to come to [this school], you can’t knock them back on that basis” (S2BM). Once again, teachers and parents were asked for their insights on the issue in an open-ended questionnaire. Fifteen teachers and 62 parents completed the questionnaire. Table 6.6 illustrates the number of S2 respondents who made reference to a particular group.

Table 6.6

Teacher and Parent Responses – S2 Local Marginalised Groups

Marginalised young people group	Teacher references (*n* = 15)	Parent references (*n* = 62)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	13	20
People with disabilities	4	2
Refugee backgrounds	0	0
Economically disadvantaged	4	22
Homeless	0	1
Mental health issues	1	0
Family dysfunction and domestic violence	4	4
Remote/regional area	1	2
Islamic faith	1	0

S2 teacher and parent respondents indicated that the most prevalent groups of disadvantaged people in their local area are the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and those suffering from economic disadvantage.

S3 is a school in a capital city and has no formal public enrolment policy and therefore it is open to accepting comparatively large numbers of young people identified as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. When asked who among the local people could be described as *poor and marginalised*, the S3 principal commented:

> Certainly the Aboriginal population, and again, not all of that. Obviously the asylum seeker and some aspects of the refugee kids. … I think kids where there's a single parent situation and the parent hasn't got a job. … There are kids who come from multi-child families with a single parent, particularly a lot of the kids we have from Africa – there's five, six, seven kids in the family and only one parent around. Then you've got the kids who are marginalised because of their learning differences – most of our schools can deal with some of them, not all of them. There are circumstances where the disability is so substantial that we just don't have the resources to be able to do it. But that's not to say that the school won't make an effort to do something – it's the reason why brothers and sisters go to one school and the parents choose to send their other kid who's got a disability to this school. (S3P)

At S3, 15 teachers and 24 parents completed the open-ended questionnaire; Table 6.7 illustrates the number of respondents who made reference to a particular group.

Table 6.7

Teacher and Parent Responses – S3 Local Marginalised Groups

Marginalised young people group	Teacher references (*n* = 15)	Parent references (*n* = 24)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	5	5
People with disabilities	6	13
Refugee backgrounds	11	11
Economically disadvantaged	8	9
Homeless	0	1
Female	0	1
Gender/sexual diversity – LGBTIQ	3	2
Mental health issues	2	3
Family dysfunction and domestic violence	1	2
Non-English-speaking background	3	3
Islamic faith	1	0

Note. LGBTIQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersex, queer.

The number of responses naming the four respective key groups were more evenly spread by S3 participants, with refugees, people with disabilities, those suffering from economic disadvantage and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples again being most commonly identified.

The principal of S4, a school located in a capital city, chose not to invite teachers and parents to participate in the open-ended questionnaire, but semi-structured interviews did occur with the principal, Identity leader, business manager and a group of senior students. The principal expressed the view that the *poor and marginalised* in his city included the "financially poor" (S4P), but clarified that this description does not merely mean an inability to pay private Catholic school fees, noting that every child has access to an education through the Government public education system. The principal expanded his definition to include "people who have experienced learning difficulties and challenges, either through learning capacity, social, emotional", "people who don't have one or both of their parents", and "refugees" (S4P).

When referring to the nominated four key groups of marginalised young people in Australia, the principal also noted that his school has "specifically targeted two groups" for inclusion in the school community, but has "incidentally captured" another group and "there's one group that we are just slowly starting to tap into" (S4P). He explained:

> So we have a definite plan and a focus around trying to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. … The kids in terms of disability, I think we've got a really good philosophy and approach to that. … The one that we incidentally capture is probably around the financial hardship. … I don't believe we can put on our front billboard and

> say, “Looking for financially disadvantaged kids to go to our school”. If we advertise too hard – well, that we can’t take everyone. … The one that we’re aware of that hasn’t been a focus at the moment has probably been refugees. (S4P)

The S4 student leaders articulated similar views in their focus group interview noting the “decent [sizeable] Indigenous community” and the “really good learning support program” for those with disabilities. These students made a point of adding “the LGBTIQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersex, queer] community” to the discussion around marginalised groups of young people in their local community.

The S4 Identity leader introduced a broader view of inclusivity in relation to the Edmund Rice story of educating the *poor and marginalised*:

> Yes, he [Edmund Rice] did educate the poor and marginalised. But a really important part of his mission was also to have the middle class or rich. So, in terms of his schools, my understanding is that, yes, the aspiration was to be inclusive, but he also had people from middle class and upper class. He also had people from different faith backgrounds, in terms of Catholics and Protestants at that time. So, that notion of inclusivity is not to the exclusion of the other in terms of faith or different classes. (S4IL)

The next school, S5, is a school located in what is considered by respondents to be an affluent part of their capital city. The principal and student leaders had similar views on the nature of local marginalised groups, referring to “people from an Indigenous background” (S5P), “people from low socio-economic backgrounds” (S5 student), “refugees” (S5P) and “disabled kids” as prevalent groups of marginalised young people in the local area (S5 student).

Further to these comments, 15 teachers and 153 parents from S5 completed the open-ended questionnaire. Table 6.8 illustrates the number of respondents who made reference to a particular group.

Table 6.8

Teacher and Parent Responses – S5 Local Marginalised Groups

Marginalised young people group	Teacher references (*n* = 15)	Parent references (*n* = 153)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	6	57
People with disabilities	2	21
Refugee backgrounds	2	12
Economically disadvantaged	3	59
Homeless	2	4
Female	0	1
Gender/sexual diversity – LGBTIQ	1	4
Mental health issues	1	7
Family dysfunction and domestic violence	2	13
Non-English speaking background	1	10
Islamic faith	0	5
Non-Catholic	0	1

Note. LGBTIQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersex, queer.

The four key groups of disadvantage featured in responses from S5 parent and teacher participants, but for the first time, two other groups were commented upon in similar numbers: people suffering as a result of family dysfunction and/or domestic violence, and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Some respondents from S5 referred to the financial impact of split families due to the expensive real estate costs in the area.

The final school, S6, is also located in what is considered as “a very wealthy area” (S6BM) of its capital city, where “many of the boys are privileged and come from privileged suburbs” (S6 parent). Hence the school has looked further in terms of including marginalised students. A Sudanese program “which we began more than a decade ago … has graduated close on forty young men” (S6P). Also, a partnership with a local Indigenous transition school has enabled boys from remote Northern Territory communities to attend the school. “They’re a tiny percentage here, but as clichéd as it is, we hit the point with that – if you don’t start doing little things, you’re at risk of doing nothing. So that’s our way of moving into that space.” (S6P)

At S6, 74 teachers and 273 parents completed the open-ended questionnaire. Table 6.9 illustrates the number of respondents who made reference to a particular group.

Table 6.9

Teacher and Parent Responses – S6 Local Marginalised Groups

Marginalised young people group	Teacher references (*n* = 74)	Parent references (*n* = 273)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	31	75
People with disabilities	11	32
Refugee backgrounds	43	87
Economically disadvantaged	26	102
Homeless	4	13
Female	1	1
Gender/sexual diversity – LGBTIQ	4	8
Mental health issues	2	17
Family dysfunction and domestic violence	8	22
Non-English-speaking background and migrants	4	35
Islamic faith	3	6
Remote/regional area	0	3
Victims of bullying	0	1

Note. LGBTIQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, intersex, queer.

Several respondents from S6 commented that in their particular local area they were unaware of groups who would be considered disadvantaged or marginalised and broadened their comments to include the city in which the school is located and, in some instances, the state or country. However, respondents did reference some groups, the most prevalent being refugees, people suffering from economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disabilities and once again added, though to slightly lesser extent, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and migrants, and people suffering from family dysfunction and/or domestic violence.

The data indicate that the call to inclusivity is understood by leaders in schools and is influenced by their local context. While the four key groups were the most prevalent groups to emerge from the research, not only did understandings of disadvantage extend beyond those nominated groups, there were also differences in focus within those groups for each site, dependent upon local context. For example, there was a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in S2 responses, while S3 responses highlighted students from refugee backgrounds as the most prevalent in terms of educational disadvantage. Hence, the complex nature of inclusivity, and any attempt to find a consistent organisational response, is problematic. This finding further complicates one articulated potential measure to address inclusivity, the use of benchmarks.

6.2.2.2 Benchmarks

As noted in Chapter 3, EREA Executive Director Wayne Tinsey specifically addressed the notion of benchmarks in his closing address to the 2012 EREA Congress:

> However, let us leave this gathering with a renewed commitment to continue to challenge our communities to embrace inclusion through local structures, fees, enrolment and affordability decisions. Our openness to inclusion and embracing responsibility for 'the other' determines our capacity to be authentically Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. The time has come for us to agree upon and embrace targets and benchmarks around inclusion, affordability and identity in the same way that we have these benchmarks for other core dimensions of our mission. (Tinsey, 2012)

The topic of benchmarks was raised with principals during semi-structured interviews, and it was in response to this that the issue of being cognisant of local school contexts was expressed most frequently from respondents.

> Any time we come up with benchmarks that don't take into account the local context, it's going to be political correctness rather than dealing with people on a relational basis. And so much of this has got to be relational. (S6P)

> I think change takes time but I think benchmarks are good. … So I probably think there's room for tightening that up a little bit but I think there still needs to be I guess some flexibility in your own context. The schools are – even the ones in [this state] where I'm working, there's quite a range of schools and context that I think some guiding parameters would be a good thing. (S5P)

> I think you have a tough job to put inclusive across a net of such broad array of schools, and it's a really difficult job to do that. … It's very easy to make judgment of their ivory towers of the [other EREA school] or the whatever, because they have a market in which they're working. (S2P)

The principal at S4 commented that his school had in fact discerned and implemented its own benchmark:

> We've looked at benchmarks in some areas. … Depending on what stats you see, three to three and a half percent of our Australian population identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. So, I set an aspirational benchmark that we discussed and agreed upon that we'll try to have our community representative of the Australian community. … We've certainly tried to look at a reason or a justification or target that

> seems to work for us, and that's what we work towards. We're currently, I think, 4.2%. (S4P)

One principal, who requested not to be identified even by code in relation to this statement, indicated that EREA as an organisation could take stronger leadership in the area:

> I think at some point in time, EREA will probably have to take a deep breath and decide which schools are EREA schools and which aren't, and with some they need to go standalone and I'm sure in the head office at times with this funding arrangements that they've had those conversations. … Ultimately, they've [EREA] probably also got to figure out is there is a line in the sand for some of those schools, and I put a challenge to them, is there a line in the sand where they have to put their hand on their heart say they are true to the Charter or not? That's a bit scary for EREA to lose a flagship [school]. But maybe at some point in time, you've got to go, "This is real, or it's not." EREA have to decide whether you step out or not.

Another principal agreed that EREA could make schools more accountable in the area of inclusivity:

> Well, we have this renewal process and we get accredited as a Catholic school, and I don't understand why – I don't own [this school]. I believe I've a got a Charter to live out in our school and I don't understand why some schools for example say, "We'll do two and a half of the touchstones and not all four." I just believe schools need to be challenged harder. And what is the evidence that there's change occurring at schools? I just feel, we hold up flexi-schools and say we're inclusive. Unless we can say, "This is what we're doing in our school," we're not. I know it's hard and it's not overnight, but what is the evidence, every five years, that says, "This school is now more inclusive after five years than they were at their last renewal," because I just don't see it in some of our schools. I see some of our schools actually becoming more exclusive, not the other. (S4P)

The data on benchmarks reveals the inconsistency of views across EREA schools. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that individual schools and school principals, though receiving guidance from EREA, have relative autonomy in choosing whether or not to practically address inclusivity according to their respective understandings, priorities and local contexts. There is evidence also to suggest that an openness to the use of benchmarks exists within the EREA principals' group, as they provide clearer direction on this complex issue.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has explored the second research question: *How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?* The following findings emerged from the research:

- Each school and its leaders have relative autonomy to develop and implement their own response to the call to be inclusive. This is evident by the contrasts in articulated priorities and explicit language which exist in individual school enrolment policies. Each school's individual response is also apparent in the data concerning tuition fees and concessions.
- The local context of each school influences its response to the call to inclusivity. Factors include changing population demographics, varying scores in the IRSAD, and historical influences.
- While displaying subtle differences in focus, each of the six schools recognises the four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage to be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Though EREA Executive Leadership have raised the issue of benchmarks regarding inclusivity, and some school leaders are open to the concept, the significance of the individual nature and context of schools suggests that uniform benchmarks imposed from the organisational level of EREA require further consideration.

The call to inclusivity in EREA schools is addressed in various, contrasting ways, as evident in the data presented. While some of the challenges and benefits of inclusivity in EREA have been highlighted briefly, particularly those perceived by EREA organisational and school leaders, the following chapter will examine these more closely.

Chapter 7: Presentation of Findings – Research Question 3

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings relating to the third research question on the implementation of inclusivity. The findings emerged from the exploration of how inclusivity is understood and addressed in six participating Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) mainstream secondary schools and are a synthesis of the data gathered from documentary analysis, an initial open-ended questionnaire to EREA leaders, followed by semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and further open-ended questionnaires.

7.2 Research Question 3: Affordances and Challenges

Research Question 3:

What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

In addressing this research question, the two themes of affordances and challenges have been synthesised and will be used to present the relevant findings. The key affordances presented in the data relate to an inclusive school's ability to effectively prepare a student for life after school, while also fostering values of compassion, tolerance and acceptance. The data indicated that challenges of inclusivity include impacts on finances and staff, the neo-liberal agenda and parental views.

7.2.1 Perceived Affordances

The second research phase included opportunities to gather data about the perceived benefits of inclusivity from participants in the six participating EREA schools through open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews. Leaders' perceptions of inclusivity, including perceptions regarding affordances, were presented in Chapter 5. This section highlights the perceptions held by both the students and the parents who not only are impacted by the school's inclusive practices but also can influence the way schools respond to the call to inclusivity.

Parents from five of the six participating EREA mainstream schools completed an open-ended questionnaire, and a small group of student leaders participated in a focus group interview in each of the six schools. The perceptions of these two groups offer insights to broaden and complement the understandings of inclusivity in EREA schools reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.2.1.1 Student Perceptions

A group of senior student leaders between four and eight, participated in a focus group interview in each of the six schools in Phase 2 of the research. Four key perceived affordances of inclusivity emerged from the data provided by these student leader focus group interviews:

1. a genuinely inclusive school provides opportunities for deep learning;
2. a genuinely inclusive school effectively prepares young people for their future;
3. a genuinely inclusive school looks outside itself to meet people and respond to their needs; and,
4. inclusivity fosters acceptance, tolerance, and a sense of belonging.

First, data indicate that a genuinely inclusive school provides opportunities for deep learning. Students reported that their experiences of sharing classes with students from a variety of backgrounds provided new and varied perspectives on the content being taught. This was particularly the case when a student from a particular cultural background could provide personal insight into that same culture being studied. For example, students from S2 expressed gratitude for the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with whom they had shared lessons:

> And you'll learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander beliefs and stuff like that – where they're coming from, their background and some pretty hard backgrounds – like their ceremonies and rituals. How I see something, they will see differently, so you learn a lot.
>
> Me, personally, I found now I have a fascination with their culture because the Indigenous dances are something I always really look forward to because they're just so cool.
>
> We learned about the religious practices of Torres Strait Islanders, so with Indigenous boys in class, you start learning a lot more about Indigenous cultures. We are glad that we are going to school with a high Indigenous population.
>
> Actually talking to them, you actually learn from their experiences. (S2 students)

At another school (S3), in which the focus group consisted of eight students, six of whom had been born overseas, students commented about the benefits of meeting and learning with young people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

> I like attending this school, just learning about different people's nationalities and their religions and just learning things that you've never learned before. It gives a lot of opportunities as well. (S3 students)

Two principals shared similar insights:

> I think there's an earthiness. I think there's an understanding of privilege. The kids value what they've got more when they see others who haven't. … It breaks down prejudices. I keep thinking the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dilemma is all based around ignorance and if kids can learn that – the Sudanese kid, the Aboriginal kid – they're all just the same – there's no difference. It's how we view them and the values we put on them that makes them different. They're not different inherently. We've got a fellow, [name given], in Year 11 who's got Down Syndrome. [He] brings more to our school than we ever give to him. (S4P)

> We have kids that would have come from fairly traditionally prejudiced western families coming in, but within a few weeks, they've got a big Torres Strait Islander boy with their arm around them chatting to each other in the dining room. … I talk to the boys all the time about the fact that this is a brilliant example of what really should happen – that the kids don't see colour. I keep saying I'd love the prime minister to come out and have a meal here, because to be honest in a lot of ways, the answer is here, to solving some of these problems. (S2P)

The principal comments support the insight that learning is potentially deepened by the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds.

Secondly, the student leaders' focus group interviews indicated that a genuinely inclusive school effectively prepares young people for their future. When asked about the knowledge gained about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during their time at school, one student from S2 commented: "Just like any experience, it will stay with me until I go on to the future" (S2 student). This sentiment was supported by a student from S3:

> I reckon one of the positives are you're more – when you go into the world – you're accepting and you can fit into other situations. But I reckon a school like [another mainstream EREA school], you'd be surrounded by people who are exactly like you and it would be difficult to go into a workforce that is diverse. (S3 student)

At the same school, a student described her personal context and the direct positive impact of her school's inclusive practices:

> I come from a poor economic background family. I live basically on my own with my sister. So, it's real hard and this school is trying to put me there – to help me get education, which really defines the four touchstones – one of the four touchstones saying that liberating education which is why I am here, and I'm going to graduate in Grade 12. (S3 student)

The data indicate that the futures of students, irrespective of backgrounds, benefit from inclusive practices. Students from marginalised backgrounds perceive a direct benefit from the opportunities and "liberating education" provided, while others perceive a future benefit from having worked and learned alongside people from a variety of backgrounds.

The third insight to emerge from the focus groups was that a genuinely inclusive school looks outside itself to meet people and respond to their needs. Though service-learning, social justice and advocacy programs were not the central focus of the discussions, each group of student leaders commented upon their school's respective programs in these areas as a way of highlighting their perceptions of their school's inclusivity. Two examples were:

> I think you feel an immense satisfaction when you realise you've helped people. When you're tutoring a child of an immigrant or if they go home and won't be able to receive English help from their parents, when you can actually see that you've helped them with the English homework or with their math homework and you can see they've actually learnt something because of what you've done, it makes you feel proud that you're doing that. (S6 student)

> So my House, I work with a special school across the road – we fundraise and set up a whole ball and it is for the intellectually disabled community. We get told every year and they're so excited for that – it's the best night of the year. So it's just opening up the boys' eyes to those people next door to us and around our community. (S5 student)

These responses suggest a perception amongst students that a key principle of inclusivity is looking beyond the school community for those with needs to be addressed. Students perceive this as having mutual benefit for the students involved, and those whom they meet. This insight further broadens the understandings of inclusivity that exist in EREA; an understanding that invites proactivity aligned with school purpose.

The final insight that emerged from the student leader focus group interviews was that inclusivity fosters acceptance, tolerance, and a sense of belonging. Two of the focus groups included students from Indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds. These students' comments provide the clearest examples of the perceived advantages of inclusivity:

> We don't care about who they are or their background, like their race, culture, or their families, and all that. The only thing we care about is, "Are they getting education and are they fulfilling their basic needs?" And we work towards fulfilling that. That's what it means to be an inclusive community. (S3 student)

> Our basketball team is really accepting. We have kids from everywhere who just come and play in the afternoons. Even from other schools, they come and play. So, that's

really inclusive. And we had a kid with autism who would train with us every afternoon, so yeah. (S3 student)

When I come to this school, I feel safe because it's really inclusive. You see people from different nationalities and hear their stories – and you can relate to your own story as well. And it makes you feel that you are in a place where you can kind of feel like a family. When you come to school, it's actually like you're coming to your second home. You're seeing your family members and you're safe in that place and you don't have to worry about anything. (S3 student)

When I first came, I was shocked, and then I was like, "This is actually really cool. I love it." (S3 student)

You realise it's not important, nationality. (S3 student)

My favourite thing about this school is practising my culture. I just love doing it. Every now and then, we practise our dancing in front of other people. I love to see their faces. (S2 student)

We come as strangers and leave as brothers. (S2 student)

The EREA Charter, while not defining inclusivity, describes an aspirational *inclusive community* as "accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good" (EREA, 2017, p. 11). The participating students' articulated perceptions of the affordances of inclusivity and indicated that this aspiration is achievable. Their comments illustrate that inclusivity fosters acceptance, tolerance, and a sense of belonging.

7.2.1.2 Parent Perceptions

During Phase 2 of the research, parents from five of the six participating schools were invited to complete an online open-ended questionnaire. One principal opted not to invite parents to participate. One aspect of the questionnaire sought parents' opinion on whether they liked the idea of their child/children attending an inclusive school, and to give a reason for their answer.

The precise question posed was: *Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I like the idea of my child attending a school with a diverse student population, including students from educationally disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds*. Parents were asked to rate their response with anchors of *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Of the 782 parents who completed the questionnaire, 97% either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. Table 7.1 indicates the more breakdown of responses across participant school communities.

Table 7.1

Parent Responses Regarding Including Marginalised Students

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree (%)	32	31	83	N/A	36	33	43
Agree (%)	37	43	17	N/A	44	47	38
Somewhat agree (%)	23	24	0	N/A	13	18	16
Disagree (%)	5	0	0	N/A	5	2	2
Strongly disagree (%)	3	2	0	N/A	2	1	1

Note. N/A = not available.

These data demonstrate consistency in parent views regarding the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds, including those from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds. One school's (S3) parent respondents were particularly positive regarding the sentiment, with 100% of parents agreeing, 83% of whom strongly agreed. This school is regarded as particularly inclusive of marginalised students, indicating that the parent group with most exposure to inclusivity is also the most positive about inclusive practices. The research however did not address whether these views were previously held, hence those parents making a decision to send their children to that particular school, or whether their experience of inclusivity at the school had impacted upon their positive perceptions.

Parent responses were also pursued in an open-ended questionnaire format. Three key insights emerged from these responses. First, the data indicate that parents hope that their children become compassionate and empathetic people, and that they believe that an inclusive school community fosters this compassion and empathy more so than an exclusive school. Comments included:

> It is important for children to learn to mingle with those in marginalised groups to learn to be more accepting. If they are exposed to these groups, they are more accepting and comfortable around them. (S1 parent)
>
> I want my child to understand the cultural diversity in the world and gain empathy for all humanity. (S2 parent)
>
> Including marginalised kids allows for empathy and real-world experiences. (S3 parent)
>
> Our school is a mirror to the broader society in which we live. It helps my son to understand and be an active, empathetic and compassionate participant in the real world, understanding that not all people enjoy the privileges he has been lucky enough to enjoy. (S3 parent)
>
> I want a kid with compassion, empathy and understanding and inclusive environments breed those things. (S5 parent)

It helps them understand diversity in cultures and to support those in need. (S6 parent)

Diversity encourages growth, resilience and appreciation. (S6 parent)

The second insight to emerge from parent responses was the desire to avoid their children growing up in a "bubble" of privilege, lacking awareness of others' situations. Parents expressed a wish for their children to become well-rounded people and believed that an inclusive school environment assists in achieving this aspiration, as illustrated in the following statements:

We live in a diverse community. Understanding that people come from different backgrounds with different beliefs and different abilities to contribute leads to a more compassionate people. (S1 parent)

Inclusivity develops a well-rounded character. (S2 parent)

Privileged students can learn a lot from disadvantaged students. (S2 parent)

Marginalised backgrounds expose my child to different values, disciplines, cultures and challenges in life that I believe would not normally be offered. (S3 parent)

The world is full of such people and sending your children to an elitist private school that breeds elitism and disempowers kids' awareness of how the less fortunate live is ignorant and only fuels the cycle. (S3 parent)

We live in an area that is already becoming exclusive, arrogant and close-minded with people thinking they are superior because of their income. We need our children to be taught to be more inclusive, understanding and helpful. (S5 parent)

Life is full of people from all walks of life, which is important for everyone to know and embrace. I don't want my child to live in a bubble, least of all a bubble of privilege. (S5 parent)

I don't want my son raised in an all-white, affluent school. To learn empathy he needs to be around others whose lives are not as blessed as his. The more my son can be open to this when he is younger the better a person he will be when he's an adult. (S5 parent)

Life is a pot pourri of people mixing from all backgrounds and in my view the last thing a private school education should present as normal is a group of privileged students congregating from the same suburbs without any exposure to life beyond. (S6 parent)

I don't want my kids to grow up in a rich, white bubble. (S6 parent)

This selection of a larger number of similar comments illustrate a clear parental concern about the potentially insular nature of a homogenous student population within a school, regardless of the

school's religious denomination or focus. These data were consistent across schools. The data indicate that parents overwhelmingly wish for their children to be exposed to students from a diverse range of backgrounds, including those from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds.

The third key insight which emerged from the parent responses echoed the perception of students that an inclusive school community helps prepare young people for their future in the 'real world' outside of school.

> It would make for a more rounded school experience reflecting the world outside school. (S1 parent)
>
> Our life experiences can only be enriched by diversity. (S1 parent)
>
> In the wider world we all have to interact with many diverse people – it's a good start for our kids. (S2 parent)
>
> How are we to grow a generation of adults who are understanding, tolerant and inclusive in every aspect of their lives once they leave high school, if we don't have them in these 'real world' environments now? (S2 parent)
>
> When my son leaves the school community after Year 12, he will be immersed in a community where different people live, work and interact with each other. Being in a school of homogenised students will not enable him to do this. (S3 parent)
>
> The outside world is made up of people from varied backgrounds, religions, sexual orientation etc. It makes no sense to me to make a school very exclusive and include students from the same backgrounds. They need to be able to relate to people from all walks of life and backgrounds. (S6 parent)

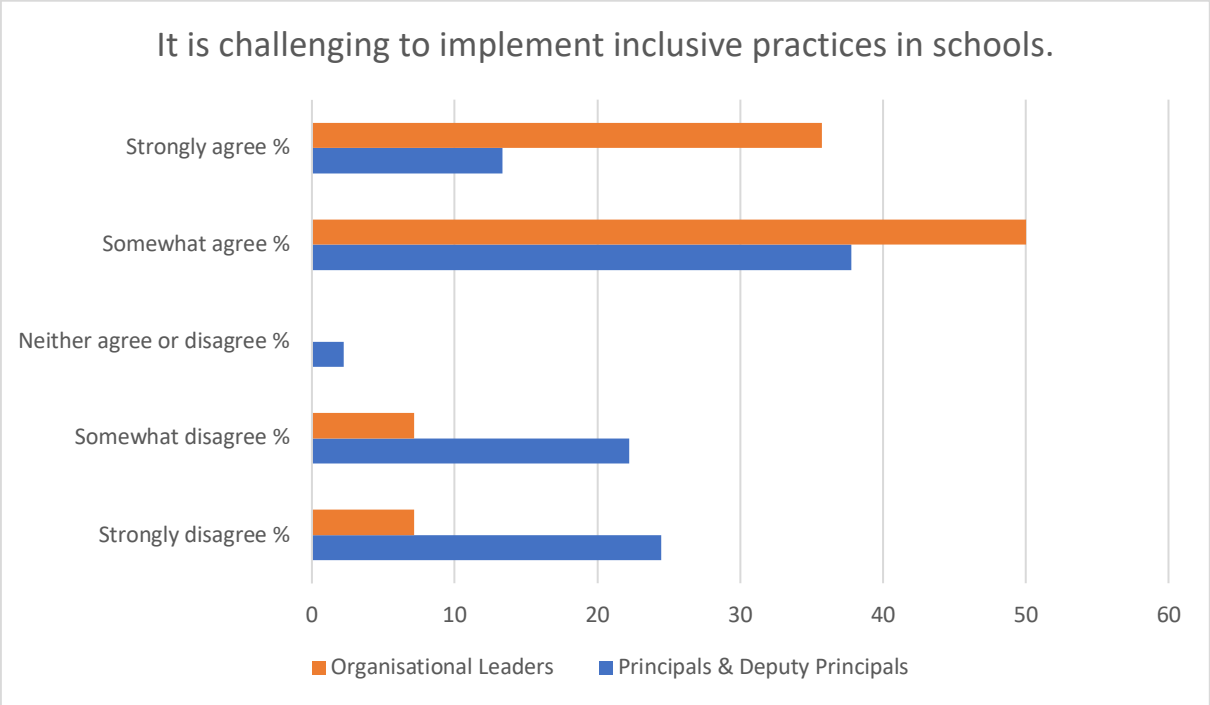
Parent and student respondents shared similar perceptions on the affordances of inclusivity. One shared perception was that an inclusive school environment helps prepare young people for life after school, and that an exclusive school in effect does the opposite. The data indicate that parents and students across school communities also agree that inclusivity fosters compassion, tolerance, and acceptance, and both groups perceive these as positive values for young people to learn. However, though the research indicates several clear affordances in the participating EREA schools, challenges also exist as schools attempt to respond to the call to inclusivity.

7.2.2 Perceived Challenges

In Phase 1 of the research, EREA organisational leaders and EREA school principals and deputy principals were asked whether implementing inclusivity was challenging. Figure 7.1 illustrates a comparison of responses from EREA organisational leaders and those from EREA school principals and deputy principals.

Figure 7.1

Leaders' Views on Challenge of Inclusivity



The data presented in Figure 7.1 further indicate the differences of views between EREA organisational leaders and EREA school principals and deputy principals. While EREA organisational leaders overwhelmingly agree that the implementation of inclusive practices in schools is difficult, principals and deputy principals are seemingly more optimistic. This contrast aligns with that highlighted in Chapter 5 regarding the justifiable fairness of current enrolments of marginalised students in EREA schools. Hence, there is a suggestion from the data that EREA organisational leaders perceive the need for greater inclusivity but are cognisant of the existence of challenges; while school-based leaders are more comfortable with current enrolments and do not perceive the challenges to be as significant. This is consistent with the previously presented view that EREA organisational leaders operate more in the 'ideal' and principals more in the pragmatic.

Also, these two groups of respondents were asked to provide greater detail as to the specific nature of the challenges. Given ten options, they were asked to rate the challenges in order of their significance. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 provide the challenges in their order of significance as rated by EREA organisational leaders, and EREA school principals and deputy principals respectively.

Table 7.2

The Challenges to Inclusivity – EREA Organisational Leaders

Order of significance (most – least)	Challenge
1	Provision of resources to meet the physical needs of disabled students eg. lifts, ramps, bathrooms etc
2	Professional development of teaching staff to cater for diverse needs of students
3	Parental views regarding the allocation of human and physical resources to meet their child's/children's educational needs
4	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the academic needs of all students
5	Financial cost of enrolling non- or reduced fee-paying students
6	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the pastoral needs of all students
7	Parental/community views regarding the academic reputation of the school
8	Parental views regarding the school's reputation in the local/wider community
9	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the sporting needs of all students
10	Parental/community views regarding the sporting reputation of the school

Table 7.3

The Challenges to Inclusivity – Principals and Deputy Principals

Order of significance (most – least)	Challenge
1	Professional development of teaching staff to cater for diverse needs of students
2	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the academic needs of all students
3	Provision of resources to meet the physical needs of disabled students eg. lifts, ramps, bathrooms etc
4	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the pastoral needs of all students
5	Financial cost of enrolling non- or reduced fee-paying students
6	Parental/community views regarding the academic reputation of the school
7	Parental views regarding the allocation of human and physical resources to meet their child's/children's educational needs
8	Parental views regarding the school's reputation in the local/wider community
9	Provision of resources (human and physical) to meet the sporting needs of all students
10	Parental/community views regarding the sporting reputation of the school

The data illustrate more commonalities than contrasts in the two groups' respective views on the nature of challenges that exist. Parental/community views regarding the sporting reputation of the school feature as least significant in both lists, while the professional development of teachers and provision of resources is seen as significant by both groups.

During Phase 2 of the research, incorporating semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires with key stakeholders across six EREA schools, these challenges were examined in more detail and new challenges emerged. One key challenge to emerge was a symptom of the previously discussed neo-liberal agenda in contemporary education, most specifically the existence of league tables following standardised testing and Year 12 results.

Further to the notion of local context impacting upon schools addressing inclusivity, the data gathered during both phases of this research indicate the existence of several influences on schools that can be challenges to authentic inclusivity. For this section, these challenges will be divided into four key areas:

1. financial challenges;
2. impact on staff;
3. the neo-liberal agenda; and,
4. parental views.

7.2.2.1 Financial Challenges

An analysis and synthesis of the research data shows that including students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds has a financial impact on schools. Inclusivity necessitates more complex decision-making processes for principals and senior leaders around allocation of resources, both human and physical. Respondents referred to a "tipping point" (S1BM, S4IL, S4P) in relation to how many marginalised students a school could enrol before the impact on finances and on staff became too great.

> We're conscious of a tipping point in terms of a critical mass of students, whether it be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or students with educational needs, what is our capacity to be able to be effective in being inclusive? We're mindful of the tension between how much is the tipping point, given our resources, given perceptions of what we do and how we do it, given the capacities of staff, given the capacities of families, what can we hold in all that? (S4IL)

As displayed in Tables 7.2 and 7.3, balancing inclusive practices with the provision and allocation of resources was of concern for the school principal, deputy principal and EREA organisational leadership respondents.

During Phase 2 of the research, teachers in five of the six schools were invited to respond with a rating between *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree* to the question, *Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am concerned about the impact that enrolling marginalised students could and/or does have on the allocation of physical and human resources at my school.* Table 7.4 represents the responses.

Table 7.4

Teacher Concern About Allocation of Resources

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	0	7	21	N/A	0	6	7
Agree %	24	47	57	N/A	8	14	30
Somewhat agree %	24	6	0	N/A	17	31	16
Disagree %	29	20	22	N/A	67	29	33
Strongly disagree %	23	20	0	N/A	8	20	14

Note. N/A = not available.

Just over half of teacher respondents (53%) expressed concern over the allocation of resources in their schools because of enrolling marginalised students. In one school, S3, that figure was 78%. Statistically, S3 includes a greater proportion of marginalised students than any of the other participating schools.

While teachers across the five participating schools commented that allocation of resources was of concern, there was also a clear determination that authentic inclusive practices will necessitate finding an appropriate balance between resource provision and mission. Teacher comments included:

> If we enrol these students, we must ensure the resources are there to do a good job, (S1 teacher)
>
> Enrolling numbers for the sake of enrolment levels without the necessary resources is setting up for failure. Start small – resource it properly – develop it over time. (S2 teacher)
>
> Obviously enrolling these students comes at a financial cost. [This school] struggles to adequately resource the marginalised students it has. This leads to teacher burnout and severe budgetary restraint. The result is a compromised version of the education these students deserve, certainly compared with that received by students in more well-resourced schools. (S3 teacher)
>
> Many of our students pay reduced or no fees and this is a spectacular feature of our school. However, this necessitates a need to be aware of the balance between

> enrolment and resources. To take a position that is anything but concerned about the impact of our enrolment policy risks the sustainability of the school as a whole. (S3 teacher)

These responses indicate teachers' support for inclusivity, but support which is tempered by the concern regarding fair and equitable allocation of resources.

Another specific financial challenge in finding the balance of inclusivity and finance was the potential impact of inclusive practices on school fees. There was a view amongst principals and business managers that enrolling families without capacity to pay fees means that full fee-paying families would be subsidising other students' tuition. One principal commented that, "by having more Indigenous kids in your school, especially the ones who can't afford the fees, then the amenity of other parents suffers to the extent that they've got to supplement the fees" (S1P). A business manager also alluded to the delicate balance in terms of fees: "It becomes an issue of equity. Remembering that you're asking 89% of the parent population to fund this 11% of students who come into the College on full or partially subsidised tuition fee" (S4BM).

Respondents also noted that an important factor in managing the financial challenges was the issue of government funding. At the time of the research, respondents consistently referenced a lack of clarity around changing government funding models as a barrier to planning for inclusivity. Many factors were reported as impacting upon this: school location, student and parent demographic, and different Catholic authorities' and EREA's management of group funding.

> So, funding is the one probably big issue for [this school] at the moment. We lost a million dollars in funding last year. If that continued down that path, we would start to struggle with the affordability question. We have no idea about the future in that space, to be honest. It probably depends a bit on the next election, depends a bit on what the [local Catholic education authority] decide to do with our funding. So, that's probably our biggest challenge at the moment, I would say, financially because it's a significant amount of money. (S6BM)

There were clear differences in explanations of the impact of future funding arrangements across the six participating schools, with various perceptions emerging about the benefits and problems of new funding models. For example, the principal of S6 noted that if a school is receiving "75% or 80% of your operational cost through government funding, you're only putting at risk, in a straight book-keeping sense, 20% of your income if a parent isn't able to pay the fees", as opposed "to only getting 25% from the government [meaning that] each boy that doesn't pay the fees at [this school] would cost [this school] a whole lot more" (S6P). The new funding model appears to be more positive for at least one EREA school: "We have been reliant upon EREA to continue to be viable, but going forward, it does appear with the new funding regime and the fact that however it was weighted

at the EREA level in accordance with the ability for EREA as the receiver of the funds to redistribute as they see fit within the guidelines, it is possible for us to be viable" (S3BM).

This example of a school being "reliant upon EREA to continue to be viable" references EREA's articulated policy of *co-responsibility*, the practice of some schools supporting other schools financially, administered centrally through EREA. Tinsey addressed the issue of co-responsibility, referring to the practice as the "stuff of family" (Tinsey, 2011):

> Edmund Rice Education in this land can model a family of schools, representative of all facets of our society, where those who can look after those who can't; where co-responsibility becomes the norm; where the strong accept responsibility for those on the margins. If we are going to be authentic in our adherence to a mission to the poor and marginalised we must embrace this value of co-responsibility as creatively as we can. All must contribute to the broader Edmund Rice Education family that embraces outreach to the materially poor and marginalised. Co-responsibility means much more than just well off schools supporting those who struggle; giving money–as important as this is. Co-responsibility is a win-win situation - there aren't donors and receivers; we all give and we all receive. We contribute according to our possibilities and we receive according to our need. We are all liberated through our participation in the liberation of the weakest. The poor enrich us and complete our humanity. In this family, resources from all schools are used to provide quality education to those most marginalised in our society. (Tinsey, 2011)

The issue of co-responsibility is therefore significant within EREA on both a macro and a micro level. It exists across the organisation wherein schools with greater financial resources support less affluent schools and also, school leaders are encouraged to embrace the concept within their schools, encouraging more affluent parents to subsidise the fees of the more economically disadvantaged families. The data indicate that some school leaders appear more comfortable with co-responsibility on a macro and micro level than others.

The research indicates that financial challenges exist for schools in responding to the call to inclusivity. Specifically, these challenges include: the issue of allocating limited resources when marginalised students potentially require more investment than non-marginalised students; the issue of some families paying greater tuition fees to subsidise the tuition of non-fee-paying families – co-responsibility; and the current lack of clarity regarding government funding to EREA schools.

7.2.2.2 Impact on Staff

There was consistent acknowledgement amongst respondents that the inclusion of marginalised students, particularly those with diverse learning needs, has an impact on teachers and consequently

necessitates specific formation and professional development. Students with disabilities and students specific learning difficulties require extra support and resources, as do students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The use of the term "tipping point" was again raised in relation to numbers of students with diverse learning needs.

> So, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities or educational needs, we're really conscious in growing our culture not to put too much on our staff. … We always ask a lot of our staff, but how much is too much? And when you're asking them to have five, seven, ten extra students who have significant educational needs … we recognise staff are really stretched. … Is there a clear tipping point? No, but it's always the tension and the balance. (S4IL)

Teachers and school leaders indicated the need for targeted support and professional development:

> Higher needs cohorts definitely put more of a strain on staff and resources, especially time. To be inclusive we do need to be supported, or the difference in what's required comes out of teachers and teacher aides' personal lives/budgets/efforts. (S3 teacher)

> There is greater need for resources and time, and if there is limited resources, particularly teacher allocation, then the stress increases. (S1 teacher)

> I believe staff should be properly trained before enrolling marginalised students to ensure they are best prepared to support these students. (S5 teacher)

> Ensuring teachers remain current in their practice in relation to students with disabilities is an area of ongoing need. (PDP5)

> The biggest issue for our school is supporting/professionally developing staff to best support a wide range of students. (PDP7)

Additionally, staff suggest they also require formation about the charism of Edmund Rice and mission of the Catholic school, according to some participants.

> If the person at the coalface, whether it be a teacher, middle manager or senior manager, if they do not believe and understand that mission according to our charism and our Charter, if they don't understand it and believe it, it just does not happen in an authentic way. And my fear over time is there are less and less of those people. (S4IL)

There is evidence to suggest that staff who do understand the charism enjoy their work with marginalised students and remain in the school, perhaps most evident in S3. "A lot of people have been here for a long time. I think they're happy here. They love the work they do, they understand it,

they get it, they get the story of the place" (S3P). The Identity leader added, "We don't have a high staff turnover and I do believe that people get here and they love it" (S3IL).

During Phase 2 of the research, teachers across five participating schools were asked to respond to questions regarding the length of time they had worked in EREA, the formation they had undergone, their views on enrolling marginalised students and the necessary professional development they require, and whether they believed their school was inclusive. The data to emerge included:

- 138 teachers completed the open-ended questionnaire;
- 73 (53%) were male; 65 (47%) were female;
    - NB. This is a fairly accurate representation of gender balance across EREA in 2018, with 57% of teachers in EREA mainstream schools being male and 43% female;
- Years working in EREA –
    - 27% of teachers had worked in EREA for under 5 years;
    - 33% of teachers had worked in EREA for between 5 and 10 years;
    - 25% of teachers had worked in EREA for between 11 and 20 years;
    - 10% of teachers had worked in EREA for between 21 and 30 years;
    - 5% of teachers had worked in EREA for over 30 years;
- 80% of teachers had participated in a formal EREA-provided staff formation program;
- 98% of teachers support the enrolment of marginalised students;
- Professional development –
    - 90% of teachers believed they required more professional development to cater for the needs of Indigenous students;
    - 92% of teachers believed they required more professional development to cater for the needs of students with disabilities;
    - 93% of teachers believed they required more professional development to cater for the needs of students from refugee backgrounds;
    - 64% of teachers believed they required more professional development to cater for the needs of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
- 98% of teachers either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed that their school was inclusive.

This data regarding the impact of inclusivity on teachers indicates that professional development is a significant area of concern. Teacher respondents from the participating schools, 80% of whom had received formation in the Edmund Rice charism, overwhelmingly supported the inclusion of marginalised students (98%), but the vast majority believed they require more professional development to adequately cater for these students' needs. Herein lies a continuing challenge for EREA

schools as they respond to the call of inclusivity. The call is not only to initial formation, but also to formation on a continuing basis as needs dictate and personnel change.

The research indicates that there are also factors that arise outside of internal financial challenges and teacher impact which can hinder the implementation of inclusive practices. Two external challenges to emerge from the data were the existence of a neo-liberal agenda in contemporary Australian education, and parental views, which though inherently linked to the symptoms of a neo-liberal agenda, will be examined separately here.

There was a view from principals, in particular, that there are competing pressures at play in relation to the inclusion of marginalised students. Firstly, EREA articulates a clear aspiration toward the enrolment of marginalised students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, economically disadvantaged students and students with diverse learning needs. Secondly, and posing an opposite challenge, is the pressure arising from a competitive educational market which tends to highlight academic results as a key point of difference between schools and their relative success or desirability within the community. Principals indicated a need to find a balance between these competing pressures.

7.2.2.3 Neo-Liberal Agenda

The neo-liberal agenda emerged as an external pressure during both phases of the research where it was articulated predominantly by principals through references to competition for enrolments and the publication of *league tables* in the media. In his 2011 letter to the EREA community, Executive Director Wayne Tinsey addressed these competing agendas specifically:

> Many of our schools belong to external sporting associations and historically this has been encouraged as a way of promoting healthy competition and moving the school's standing forward. This is appropriate and we have fine traditions in this area. However, we must always remember that belonging to external associations is what we do, not who we are! Only our core business and deepest sense of mission should define us, nothing else. We are not PSA, GPS or APS schools, we are all Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition with all that that implies! Let's ask ourselves some potentially hard questions related to our mission to and concern for the poor and those at the margins. Questions such as:
>
> - With whom do we align ourselves?
> - With whom do we compete?
> - Do our external associations drive us towards agendas and goals that distract us from that core sense of serving the poor and marginalised?

- When only our deepest values should say who we are, who or what do we let define us? League tables, parental expectations, sporting associations or the priorities of the Gospel? (Tinsey, 2011)

"PSA" refers to the Public Schools Association of seven independent boys' schools in Perth; two EREA schools are members of the association. "GPS" refers to the Greater Public Schools Association of Queensland which consists of nine schools from south-east Queensland, including two EREA schools. Finally, "APS" refers to the Associated Public Schools of Victoria which comprises of eleven schools, including one EREA school.

These associations are predominantly based on sporting competitions and are widely regarded as associations of elite, popular private schools. By way of illustration, a 2018 study, commissioned by EREA to examine why parents chose an Edmund Rice school, found that 27.9% of parents considered "Strong sporting opportunities and associations" a key driver for their choice of school, as opposed to 7.1% naming "An Edmund Rice (Christian Brothers' school)" as a key driver. 27% of parents named "A school that caters for a variety of abilities" as a key driver for their choice (Elphick and Associates, 2018, p. 9). This contrast between belonging to particular sporting associations and being an Edmund Rice school, as drivers to school choice, implies a challenge for EREA regarding transparent and authentic inclusivity. Also, from the report is that while only 7.1% of parent respondents referenced Edmund Rice, 36% of parents identified "a Catholic education" as a key driver for their choice of schools (Elphick and Associates, 2018, p. 9). This suggests that the unique identity of an Edmund Rice school, including the four touchstones of the Charter, is not particularly significant for parents. This could further imply that the overt aspirational reference to inclusivity by EREA is not well known by potential parents, whereas the more publicly accessible and highlighted aspects of schools, including academic performance, are more prevalent in parental perceptions.

League tables are an international phenomenon which measure school performance data. Results of standardised testing including PISA and NAPLAN, or tertiary entrance scores such as the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank ATAR are used to classify schools in a particular country, state, city, or school system. These rank orders are regularly published in mainstream media and are perceived to indicate how well or how poorly a school is performing. Principals acknowledged that league tables do have an impact on their strategic priorities due to the competitive nature of education and the assumption that parents take league table results into consideration when choosing a school for their child. One principal commented:

> Certainly one of the big ones [challenges] for us at the moment is our academic record and [this state] system … you seem to be under much more pressure with the media publishing exactly where your school sits and ranks them from number one down to 500. … So I guess when you're bringing in students that are potentially disadvantaged,

> this would be a harsh generalisation but it would probably be true in most cases, that they're coming in with more educational needs, more learning support needs. So there is definitely pressure that I distinctly feel on every enrolment … (S5P)

League tables are perceived to impact upon enrolments in that parents view them to assess a school's academic performance, an insight supported by the 2018 study of EREA parents, which found that 39.3% of parents see "academic success" as a key driver in their choice of school for their children (Elphick and Associates, 2018, p. 9).

These league tables, in conjunction with the previously presented research concerning the business of schools and education as a commodity, are factors of an increasingly influential neo-liberal agenda in Australian education. This agenda, when viewed through the prism of enrolment numbers, applies pressure on principals and school leaders who are required to maintain viable school communities. The research indicates that this pressure creates a challenge to inclusivity in these EREA schools. Inherently linked to the neo-liberal agenda and the pressure on enrolments it creates, are the views of parents who make the decisions on enrolling their children in particular schools.

7.2.2.4 Parental Views

During Phase 2 of the research, parents were invited in five of the six participating schools to complete an online open-ended questionnaire. The invitation to parents to participate was in response to the literature and the Phase 1 research data which suggested that some school leaders resist implementing more inclusive practices due to a concern regarding parental expectation and public reputation. The data collected through the open-ended questionnaire is supplemented by the EREA-commissioned report, *Choosing a School – 2018* (Elphick and Associates, 2018).

A total of 588 parents completed the questionnaire. Table 7.5 provides a more detailed breakdown of parent respondents.

Table 7.5

Parent Respondents – Open-Ended Questionnaire

School	No. of respondents	Male		Female	
		No.	%	No.	%
S1	76	16	21%	60	79%
S2	62	11	18%	51	82%
S3	24	5	21%	19	79%
S4		NOT AVAILABLE			
S5	153	35	23%	118	77%
S6	273	70	26%	203	74%
Total	588	137	23%	451	77%

This section of the chapter examines the views of parents as indicated by the data collected during Phase 2 of the research. The findings are presented in the following structure:

1. the reasons given by parents for their selection of an EREA school;
2. parents' broader reflections on inclusivity;
3. a summary of parents' articulated concerns regarding the impact of inclusivity on fees, resources and reputation;
4. insights emerging from parent data on the impact of inclusivity on enrolments; and
5. schools' transparency of messages regarding inclusivity.

First, parents articulate a variety of factors influencing school choice. The 2018 report commissioned by EREA, *Choosing a School*, utilised a survey which "evolved from a standard stakeholder satisfaction survey to a more substantial study of the drivers behind school choice" (Elphick and Associates, 2019, p. 1). In total, 8,304 parents participated in the survey. The most relevant insights to emerge regarding this study of inclusivity are those relating to key drivers behind school choice, and affordability. Table 7.6 represents the rank order of key drivers behind school choice, based on the number of parent respondents who selected a particular driver in their top five choices.

Table 7.6

Key Drivers of School Choice for Parents – EREA-Commissioned Report 2018

Rank order	Key driver	No. of responses	%
1	High standards of student conduct	3,444	44.4%
2	A school with a strong sense of community	3,322	42.8%
3	Academic success	3,047	39.3%
4	A strong pastoral care and student wellbeing focus	2,964	38.2%
5	Quality of the teaching staff	2,808	36.2%
6	A Catholic education	2,794	36.0%
7	A school with a broad and diverse curriculum	2,606	33.6%
8	A financially affordable school	2,277	29.3%
9	Strong sporting opportunities and associations	2,169	27.9%
10	The local reputation of students and ex-students	2,157	27.8%
11	A school that caters for a variety of abilities	2,099	27.0%
12	A convenient location	1,849	23.8%
13	Gender reasons (a single sex or coed school)	1,691	21.8%
14	Recommendations of others	1,581	20.4%
15	Family history and connections	1,321	17.0%
16	A strong music, drama and cultural program	561	7.2%
17	An Edmund Rice (Christian Brothers' school)	549	7.1%
18	Other	340	4.4%

Note. From Elphick and Associates, 2019.

Complementing this data, this particular study surveyed 588 parents from five different EREA schools. These parents were asked the open-ended question, *Why did you choose an EREA school for your children?* Responses illustrated very similar perceptions to those indicated by the survey commissioned by EREA. Parents were asked in this research to rank in order of importance a list of purposes of an Edmund Rice school. Table 7.7 presents a rank order of importance based on parent responses across the five schools.

Table 7.7

Parent Views on the Most Important Purpose of an Edmund Rice School

Rank order	Purpose
1	Provision of an education for all students, regardless of ability and background
2	Ensuring strong academic outcomes
3	Provision of social justice and service-learning programs
4	Provision of cultural programs
5	Provision of sporting programs
6	Other
7	Faith formation

An analysis of the two most important purposes as perceived by responding parents further indicates the challenge facing EREA leaders in finding the balance between implementing inclusive practices and maintaining strong academic outcomes. Of particular note is that parents perceive that the "provision of an education for all" is critical in an Edmund Rice school. This once again highlights the dissonance between the ideal and the pragmatic, the authentic Catholic mission and the neo-liberal agenda. Therefore, broad parental views on inclusivity were sought through the research. Three questions in the open-ended questionnaire particularly explored these views.

First, parents were asked whether an inclusive EREA school *should* enrol Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Respondents were given the options of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *somewhat agree*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*, and *not feasible*. The last option was provided to allow parents to comment that while a school perhaps *should* enrol marginalised students, the school's local context may mean it is not feasible for it do so. 95% of parent respondents from the five schools either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with the contention that an inclusive EREA school should enrol those groups of students. An average of 4% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 1% of respondents found that enrolling one or more of these groups was not feasible at their respective school.

Complementing and adding weight to the data with respect to views on whether a school *should* enrol these groups of students, parents were asked whether they *supported* the enrolment of the same groups of students. Across the five schools, 97.4% of parents supported the enrolment of Indigenous students; 97.4% supported the enrolment of students with disabilities; 92.8% supported the enrolment of students from refugee backgrounds; and 96.8% supported the enrolment of students from economically disadvantaged families and backgrounds. These data complement the previously presented data which indicated that 96% of parent respondents "like the idea of their child attending a school with a diverse student population".

Additionally, parents were asked to reflect upon their school's current level of inclusivity: *Please respond to the following statement: I think my child's/children's EREA school is an inclusive school.* Responses indicated the following, as represented in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8

Parent Responses Regarding Inclusivity at Their Child's School

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	15	21	91	N/A	12	17	31.2
Agree %	43	53	9	N/A	29	38	34.4
Somewhat agree %	29	14	0	N/A	39	33	23.0
Disagree %	5	4	0	N/A	4	7	4.0
Strongly disagree %	3	0	0	N/A	2	2	1.4
Unsure %	5	8	0	N/A	14	3	6.0

Note. N/A = not available.

Table 7.8 illustrates broad consistency across schools; however, S3 respondents again indicated a distinct positive perception regarding their school's inclusivity, with 91% strongly agreeing with the statement that their school is inclusive. In highlighting the contrast, the second highest proportion of parents to strongly agree with the statement was 21% of S2 parents. These data are consistent with the enrolments of marginalised students in those schools and indicate that parents have an awareness of the levels of inclusion of marginalised students in their respective schools.

While parent responses suggest that they support their child's school enrolling marginalised students, and that they generally see their child's school as inclusive, with some differing detail across the five schools as shown in Table 7.8, the notion that parents are concerned about inclusivity also required more specific examination. This examination was pursued in the open-ended questionnaire with the following responses received:

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: *As a parent, I am concerned about the impact that the inclusion of larger numbers of marginalised students would have on school fees.*
- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: *I would consider paying higher school fees to allow more marginalised students to attend my child's school.*
- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: *I am concerned about the impact that enrolling marginalised students could and/or does have on the allocation of physical and human resources for my child/children.*

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: *I am concerned about the impact that enrolling marginalised students could and/or does have on the academic reputation and public image of the school.*

Table 7.9 illustrates parental responses to the question regarding fees.

Table 7.9

Parent Concerns Regarding School Fees

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	11	22	4	N/A	14	10	12.2
Agree %	23	20	4	N/A	17	22	17.2
Somewhat agree %	40	35	18	N/A	32	28	30.6
Disagree %	23	21	48	N/A	30	30	30.4
Strongly disagree %	3	2	26	N/A	7	10	9.6

Note. N/A = not available.

The data indicate that 60% of parents have some concern about the impact that enrolling more marginalised students may have on fees. Significantly, the one school which is the most inclusive of marginalised students, S3, has only 26% of parent respondents indicating any concern. The school with the most significant level of parental concern about fees is S2, with 77% of parents expressing concern. Of the six schools included in the research, S2 charges the lowest tuition fee and is located in a regional town which is classified as the most socio-economically disadvantaged area of the selection of schools, according to its IRSAD score of 974. These findings suggest that the local context of schools also impacts upon parental perceptions.

Parental responses to the question regarding their willingness to pay higher school fees to subsidise the cost for marginalised students are indicated in Table 7.10.

Table 7.10

Parent Willingness to Pay Higher School Fees to Support Inclusivity

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	2	2	4	N/A	6	10	4.8
Agree %	8	4	35	N/A	15	18	16.0
Somewhat agree %	30	20	31	N/A	35	32	29.6
Disagree %	35	41	22	N/A	25	23	29.2
Strongly disagree %	23	31	4	N/A	15	14	17.4
Unsure %	2	2	4	N/A	4	3	3.0

Note. N/A = not available.

Across the five schools, 50.4% of parent respondents would consider paying higher school fees to allow the enrolment of more marginalised students. 70% of parent respondents from S3, the most inclusive participating school according to the data, would consider paying higher school fees, supporting the reflections which emerged about the value that particular community places upon inclusivity. The second highest parental response rate came from S6, the participating school situated in the most affluent local government area according to its IRSAD score of 1120, with 60% of parents agreeing that they would consider paying higher school fees to support the enrolment of a larger number of marginalised students. This is despite this school being the most expensive of the six participating schools in terms of tuition fees. These findings illustrate a measured openness to the practice co-responsibility at the micro level within individual schools.

Parents were also asked about their concerns relating to the impact of inclusive practices on the allocation of resources within the school. Their responses are presented in Table 7.11.

Table 7.11

Parent Concerns Regarding Allocation of Physical and Human Resources for Their Child/Children

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	7%	6%	4%	N/A	11%	4%	6.4%
Agree %	22%	22%	9%	N/A	15%	15%	16.6%
Somewhat agree %	35%	33%	17%	N/A	28%	27%	28.0%
Disagree %	26%	33%	48%	N/A	36%	38%	36.2%
Strongly disagree %	10%	6%	22%	N/A	10%	16%	12.8%

Note. N/A = not available.

These data indicate that just over half of parent respondents (51%) have some concern over the allocation of resources as a result of inclusive practices. However, the school with the highest proportion of marginalised students has the least level of parental concern regarding the negative impacts of inclusivity. Only 30% of S3 parents share the concern over allocation of resources.

Another concern which emerged throughout the research was the potentially negative impact of inclusive practices on the academic reputation and public image of the school. Inherently, this concern is manifested through parental school choice and consequently, enrolment numbers. At one participating school, comprising a very large proportion of students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, school leaders articulated a concern that local non-Indigenous families were choosing not to send their children to the school because of the number of Indigenous students. The term they used to describe this phenomenon was “white flight” (S2P, S2IL, S2BM). They had no specific data or evidence to support this hypothesis, nor were they overly confident of its accuracy. However, respondents expressed it as a concern and a possible reason for struggling to attract more local non-Indigenous families. “We have this suspicion that families aren’t sending their kids; we can never know because they don’t come here. It’s pre-enrolment. But we have a suspicion that the families aren’t sending their kids here because there are too many black kids here” (S2P). However, each of the school leaders interviewed commented that in their knowledge, no family had withdrawn a child from the school for this reason once the child had begun at the school: “Not that many I’m aware of. I don’t think the kids have much of a problem with it frankly” (S2BM). As previously presented, students from S2 in fact spoke very positively about their experience attending school with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: “Yeah, there’s some racism in those small towns out west, but not at school. None of that comes back here. We really get to know each other. You respect everyone’s culture” (S2 student).

Parents’ responses regarding the impact of inclusivity on the academic reputation and public image of the school are presented in Table 7.12.

Table 7.12

Parent Concerns Regarding Academic Reputation and Public Image of the School

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Strongly agree %	10%	10%	0%	N/A	6%	3%	5.8%
Agree %	10%	12%	4%	N/A	4%	7%	7.4%
Somewhat agree %	15%	37%	26%	N/A	22%	20%	24.0%
Disagree %	47%	37%	39%	N/A	51%	47%	44.2%
Strongly disagree %	18%	4%	31%	N/A	17%	23%	18.6%

Note. N/A = not available.

The data clearly indicate that of the three anticipated parental concerns – fees, allocation of resources and reputation – that the impact of inclusivity on the academic reputation and public image of the school is of least concern to parents, with 62.8% of parents indicating a lack of concern. Of note though are the data from S2, the school whose leaders articulated a concern of "white flight". Of the participating schools, S2 was the only school with a majority of parent respondents (59%) who expressed concern over the enrolment of marginalised students and the subsequent impact upon the academic reputation and public image of the school.

In summary, the key insights to emerge from the data collected from parents are:

1. Parents believe that the key purpose of an EREA school is the provision of an education for all students, regardless of ability and background.
2. The vast majority of parents believe that EREA schools should enrol Indigenous students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. Further, an overwhelming majority of parent respondents (96%) support the enrolment of these four groups respectively, and "like the idea" of their child attending a school with a diverse student population.
4. 60% of parents have some concern about the impact that enrolling more marginalised students may have on fees, but 50.4% of parent respondents would consider paying higher school fees to allow the enrolment of more marginalised students.
5. 51% of parent respondents have some concern over the allocation of human and physical resources as a result of inclusive practices.
6. 37.2% of parent respondents are concerned about the impact of inclusivity on the academic reputation and public image of the school.

A further insight to emerge from this phase of the research was the importance of transparency in relation to a school's articulated mission and practice regarding inclusivity and co-responsibility. Interviewees commented on the need for being open and honest with the parent and wider community regarding the issue and using clear and consistent language about inclusivity. "A very clear expression and action of the idea of inclusivity is absolutely essential. … We're very overt and it is the language of the school" (S1IL). The S1 principal supported this notion: "I try to be explicit about the touchstones all the time, because they do have practical application to school activity, inclusivity being one of them. That's a word I frequently use" (S1P). Another principal expressed that, "It's simply about community engagement and education. If there is a parent concern, we try and have a conversation together so we can better understand where each other is coming from and we understand that we're

all actually on the same wavelength" (S4P). The Identity leader at the same school explained a more proactive form of conveying a transparent message regarding inclusivity:

> We've been really conscious to go out to beyond the gates and develop good relationships, develop good understanding of our mission and our intent, and build a sense of trust in what we're doing. (S4IL)

The issue of transparency in relation to parents' understanding of inclusivity in schools was examined in the open-ended questionnaire, and parent responses are presented in Table 7.13.

Table 7.13

Parent Awareness of Inclusivity at Enrolment

Response	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	Total
Yes %	60%	81%	100%	N/A	56%	54%	70.2%
No %	40%	19%	0%	N/A	44%	46%	29.8%

Note. N/A = not available.

Demographically, the school with the largest proportion of marginalised students, S3, is highly transparent in its messaging to prospective parents regarding inclusivity, whereas the school in the most affluent location of the participating schools, S6, is least clear with the message of inclusivity. The most positive parent responses relating to inclusivity came from the school (S3) with the most transparent message regarding inclusivity. These data suggest that the aspiration articulated by Tinsey is being implemented to differing levels in some EREA schools:

> However, let's make this a known consequence of what a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition does as essential to who we are and what we believe: a springboard to evangelisation of our communities into a deeper sense of what the Gospel demands of us. I am delighted to report that this level of transparency with parents has already begun and I thank our school leaders for their efforts. The response from our communities has been inspirational! (Tinsey, 2011)

The research involving parents indicates that respondents are generally highly supportive of inclusive practices in their children's schools and are aware of the benefits which exist. Parents conveyed practical concerns regarding fees and resources but implied openness to making allowances to enable inclusive practices. There is evidence to suggest that a transparent message from school leaders regarding inclusivity has a positive impact upon parental support of the inclusion of marginalised students.

7.3 Summary

This chapter has responded to the third research question: *What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?* The following findings have emerged from the research:

- Respondents perceive numerous benefits of inclusivity, including a fostering of tolerance, acceptance and sense of belonging in inclusive school communities.
- Parent and student respondents also believe that an inclusive, rather than exclusive, school community more effectively prepares young people for life in the real world after school, due to their exposure to a diverse range of people.
- There are challenges which hinder authentic inclusivity, including financial challenges, impact on teaching staff, and the symptoms of a neo-liberal agenda in contemporary Australian education.
- While challenges exist, as expressed by leaders, teachers and parents, there is evidence to suggest that the challenges are potentially not as great as some leaders perceive, and that some of the challenges are not insurmountable.
- Transparency of communication has emerged as a potential remedy to assist leaders in responding to the call of inclusivity.

7.4 Conclusion

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 presented the findings generated from the data collected through document analysis, open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews in two phases of research. The first phase of the research consisted of an open-ended questionnaire completed by members of EREA's organisational leadership groups – the Council, Board and Leadership Team – as well as EREA principals and deputy principals. The second phase of the research involved site visits to six EREA schools nationally, during which principals, Identity leaders and business managers participated in semi-structured interviews; groups of senior student leaders participated in focus group interviews; and teachers and parents in five of the six schools completed an open-ended questionnaire.

The research explored understandings and practices of inclusivity in EREA, through addressing the research questions.

Research Question 1: What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?

The research indicates that organisational and school-based leaders within EREA share a common understanding that inclusivity denotes a clear aspiration to be open to all, with a preference given toward the marginalised. This perception comes from respondents' understanding of the Gospel and the Ricean charism. The marginalised in educational terms, includes but is not restricted to:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, analysis and synthesis of the data indicates that in reality, authentic inclusivity is more complex, and is impacted upon by numerous factors, internal and external to a school. These factors impact upon the practical ways in which schools respond to the call to inclusivity.

Research Question 2: How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?

The research indicates that there are a number of disconnections at play in the implementation of inclusivity in EREA schools:

- Idealism versus pragmatism: many EREA leaders would like their schools to be open to all, but believe it is not possible.
- The mission versus the neo-liberal agenda: EREA leaders generally understand and believe in the mission and charism of Edmund Rice education but perceive it to be in constant conflict with the contemporary, neo-liberal educational context. The local context of schools is also significant.
- Rhetoric versus the reality: EREA as an institution and many EREA leaders espouse the importance of authentic inclusivity, but there is an apparent lack of standardised accountability, and articulated aspirations are often not complemented by practical strategies. Enrolment policies are evidence of this contention. Benchmarks are seen as a potential aid in enhancing inclusivity, but also as problematic in their imposition and implementation.
- EREA as a whole versus individual EREA schools: There is a perception amongst some EREA leaders that it is not necessary nor realistic for each and every EREA school to be inclusive, providing EREA as an entire organisation can claim to be inclusive. Schools have relative autonomy to respond to the call to inclusivity in individual ways. The role and person of the individual principal is significant.

The call to inclusivity is being addressed individually and uniquely by the participating schools, which is consistent with the complexity of the issue and the understandings presented in response to Research Question 1.

Research Question 3: What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

The research indicates that the affordances of inclusive policies and practices in EREA schools are significant and include the development and growth of tolerant, accepting young people with a sense of belonging to their school community. These benefits are perceived to inherently lead to greater benefit to society. There is also evidence of direct benefit to marginalised students given an

opportunity to enrol at the participating EREA schools. The data suggest that the challenges to the implementation of inclusivity are real, if exaggerated by some leaders, but not insurmountable. Internal challenges include financial constraints, allocation of resources, and teacher professional development. External challenges include a competitive educational market, emblematic of a neo-liberal agenda, and parental concerns.

The findings that have been generated from the research questions require further synthesis. As a result of the complexity of responses, the next chapter will use these findings to develop a conceptual framework to further explicate the issues surrounding how inclusivity is understood and addressed in Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Chapter 8: Discussion of Findings

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA. The aim of this chapter is to further develop the findings identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. These findings are presented in Table 8.1 along with their relationship to the respective research questions. In addition, this table presents the four key characteristics of foundations, institutional integrity, authentic school leadership and transparency which are used as a framework to discuss these findings.

Table 8.1

Characteristics for the Discussion of Findings

Themes	Findings (and related research questions)	Characteristics for discussion
Vision and commitment of leadership Strategic priorities Idealism versus pragmatism	• EREA leaders are well formed in the mission of Catholic education, the life and message of Jesus and the Edmund Rice charism. (RQ1) • All groups of respondents recognise the four key groups of educationally disadvantaged young people in Australia as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. (RQ1) • Leaders agree with the aspirational notion of an EREA school being "open to all", with a preference given to the marginalised. (RQ1)	Foundational influences on inclusivity
Vision and commitment of leadership Strategic priorities Idealism versus pragmatism Local context	• EREA organisational and school-based leaders espouse the value of inclusivity, but there is a perceived lack of accountability, and the rhetoric can differ from the reality. (RQ2) • There is a belief amongst some respondents that it is acceptable for EREA as an institution to be inclusive, but not necessary for each school to be inclusive. (RQ2) • Benchmarks are seen as worthwhile but problematic. (RQ2) • There are clearly articulated aspirations through the EREA Charter, but a lack of clarity from EREA regarding practical implementation of inclusive practices. (RQ1,2&3) • The selection of Principals in EREA is perceived as important to the genuine implementation of inclusive practices. (RQ1&2)	Institutional integrity

Themes	Findings (and related research questions)	Characteristics for discussion
	• Many EREA leaders would like schools to be inclusive but perceive this aspiration as unattainable. (RQ1&2)	
Vision and commitment of leadership Strategic priorities	• The individual role and person of Principal is perceived as critical. (RQ1&2) • Leadership formation is key to authentic inclusivity. (RQ2) • An absence of authentic leadership risks a dissonance between rhetoric and reality. (RQ2&3)	Authentic school leadership
Vision and commitment of leadership Local context Perceived affordances Perceived benefits	• There are several significant benefits to students, schools, staff, families and communities, as a result of genuine inclusivity. (RQ3) • There are challenges arising from inclusivity that impact upon key stakeholders. (RQ3) • Communication with key stakeholders is perceived as critical in attempts to address the barriers to inclusivity. (RQ2&3) • There is risk of a prevailing neo-liberal agenda without courageous and transparent leadership. (RQ2&3)	Transparency

Note. EREA = Edmund Rice Education Australia; RQ = research question.

In light of the above characteristics, Table 8.2 displays the overview for Chapter 8.

Table 8.2

Overview of Chapter 8

Major sections	Subsections
8.1 Introduction	
8.2 Foundational influences on inclusivity in EREA schools	8.2.1 The life and message of Jesus 8.2.2 The Ricean charism 8.2.3 Australian educational context 8.2.4 Disadvantage and liberation
8.3 Institutional integrity	8.3.1 Clarity of direction 8.3.2 Accountability 8.3.3 Risk one: Unattained aspiration
8.4 Authentic school leadership	8.4.1 Deep understanding 8.4.2 Genuine commitment 8.4.3 Risk two: Rhetoric over reality
8.5 Transparency	8.5.1 Enrolment policies and procedures 8.5.2 Staff formation, support and development 8.5.3 Parent formation, education and communication 8.5.4 Student formation and pastoral care 8.5.5 Risk three: The influence of neo-liberalism
8.6 Conclusion	

8.2 Foundational Influences on Inclusivity in EREA Schools

The first characteristic to invite discussion is the foundations of the call to inclusivity in EREA. The relevant literature, supported by this research, indicates that the life and message of Jesus, as expressed in the Gospel, and the Ricean charism, as expressed through the work and legacy of the Christian Brothers and the EREA Charter, are the key foundations of the call to inclusivity in EREA. Many participants in the research articulated their perceptions of inclusivity in the context of their understandings of the Gospel and charism of Edmund Rice.

For example, one respondent stated that an inclusive Edmund Rice school seeks to "provide a place of belonging, modelled on the person of Jesus regardless of age, gender, sexual identity, power and affluence or lack thereof" (PDP29), and another commented that a school should "reflect Gospel values of justice and acceptance for all" (PDP36). The focus on the Ricean charism emerged through statements such as, "[An inclusive Edmund Rice school] seeks to welcome all who seek a Catholic education in the spirit of Edmund Rice" (PDP16).

The articulation by leaders of the life and message of Jesus, and the Ricean charism as foundations to inclusivity supports the literature, which highlights Jesus' hospitality and "table

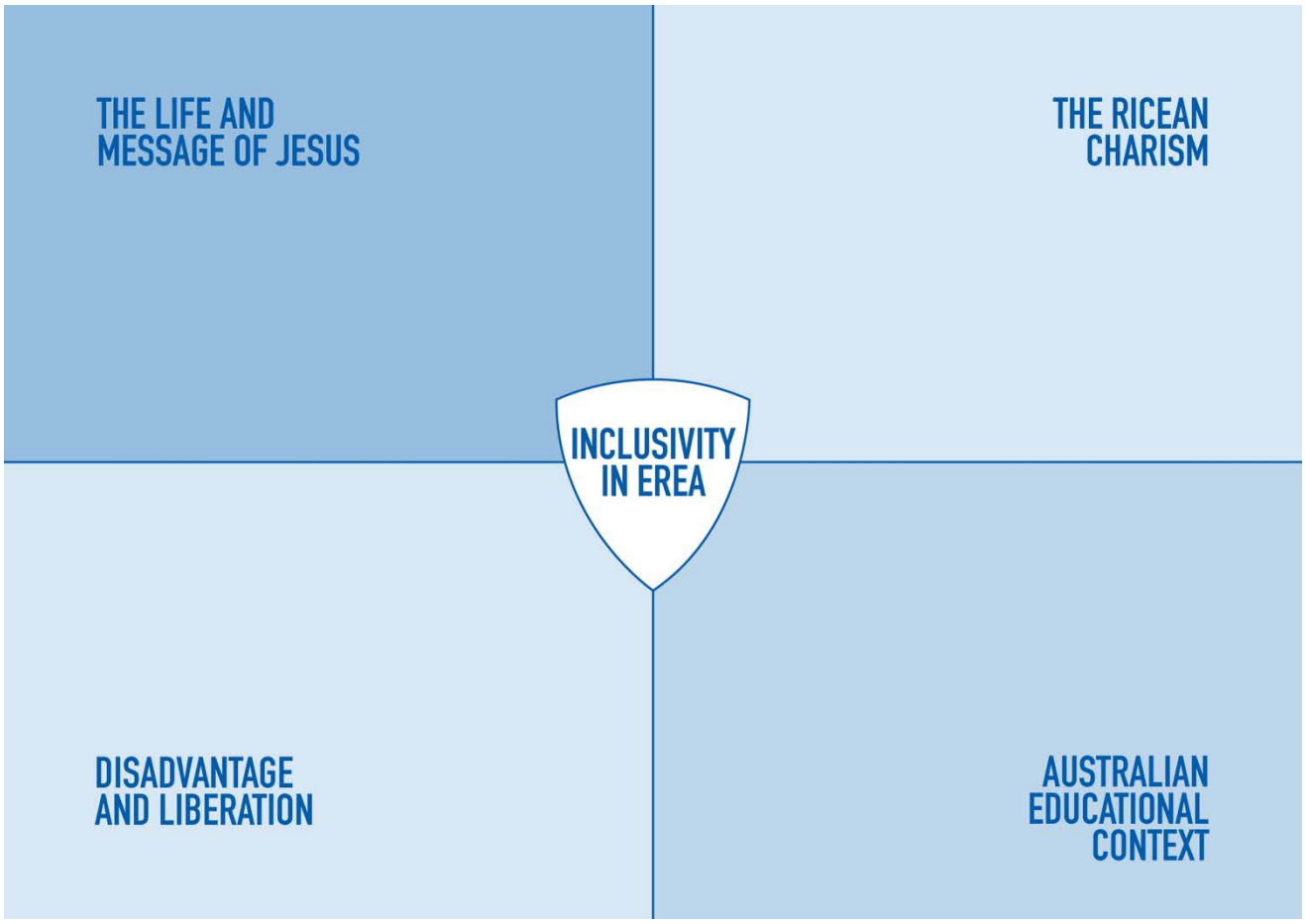
fellowship" (Grace, 2003; Illathuparampil, 2010; Parler, 2004; Rayan, 2010; Sahu, 2007; Wassen, 2016) as a significant theological underpinning. However, balancing these theologically based foundations are the foundational issues relating to the contemporary educational context. First, EREA exists within an Australian and a broader international educational context. These contexts encourage competition (Ball, 2010; Clarke, 2012; Gleeson, 2020) and highlight the growing importance of the relationship between the economy and education (Clarke, 2012; Gleeson, 2020; Savage, 2013). This focus can be characterised by the emergence of a neo-liberal, market-based agenda that highlights the importance of competing internationally in a global economy.

The neo-liberal agenda is fundamentally at odds with the nationally and internationally articulated aim that education should be accessible to all, regardless of background. As such, there is an inherent conflict between the focus on individual success within a neo-liberal approach, and the aspiration toward the common good. Relevant to this discussion is the clear understanding within both the literature and this research that educational disadvantage exists in Australia, with the four groups most at disadvantage being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In light of the above, the four foundational issues to be discussed in this section are the life and message of Jesus, the Ricean charism, the contemporary context of Australian education, and the existence of educational disadvantage and the consequential need for liberationary education. These foundational issues form the basis of a developing conceptual framework of the research, as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1

Conceptual Framework 1 – Foundational Influences



8.2.1 The Life and Message of Jesus

The aspiration held and articulated by leaders within EREA for their schools to be *open to all* has its foundations in the life and message of Jesus Christ. "In its simplest form the mission of the Catholic school imitates exactly the mission of Jesus" (Coughlan, 2009, p. 65). The essence of the mission is summarised in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it the full." The Gospel of Matthew elaborates this vision as bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth, and the potential beneficiaries:

> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and

> invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:34–40)

The Kingdom of God described by Jesus is a world in which the poor, the hungry and the stranger are given preference, and given opportunity to have life to the full. The time and place in which Jesus espoused this Kingdom of God was one which was defined by a very different kind of Kingdom – the Roman Empire. In Jesus' time, the power held by the Romans was such that Julius Caesar had been hailed as a deity following his death, and his adopted son Octavius had taken the name Augustus, meaning worthy of worship and veneration. "It was not merely a name that gave Augustus this divine status, but also the fact that his father Julius had been divinized after his death. This meant that Augustus would now have ground for claiming the title of 'son of god'" (Willems, 2017).

The Roman Empire maintained power and control through violent force and heavy taxation. "Many in various territories (especially outside of Rome) were frustrated by their situation, not least many of the Jews" (Willems, 2017). Jesus' message to the Jews about the Kingdom of God, in stark contrast to the status quo of the Roman Empire, was subversive and distinctly counter-cultural.

> God's Kingdom is the central message of Jesus of Nazareth, who deliberately chose the term to illustrate what it would be like if God's values were honoured systemically. This "political" term is a call to action based on principles of justice, the obligation to right wrongs, and then to challenge those who succeed with the maintenance of the status quo, to liberate them from self-centred thinking. (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 247)

Jesus' counter-cultural preference for the poor and marginalised was perceived as foundational to EREA's call to inclusivity by some leaders, one of whom stated that an EREA school should "accept and welcome all persons, assist those who might otherwise be excluded, recognise diversity, build partnerships and promote social inclusion, stand in solidarity with the excluded" (ER17). There is recognition in the literature and this research that Jesus' inclusion of the poor and marginalised was radical, and that to follow this example in contemporary society, is also profoundly counter-cultural:

> This vision asks of us as followers of Jesus, almost against all rational thinking, to devote ourselves to the teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread … the preparation of welcome for those who will be coming. … We, as followers of Jesus, are called to create an alternative vision in the middle of it all. We, as followers of Jesus, are called to create hospitality in this time of unwelcome, and we have always been called to do this work. When we do this work we are the church. (Jeffress, 2017, p. 472)

The EREA Charter is explicit as to its foundation residing in the Gospel. The Charter begins "Our Context" with the words:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18–19)

The touchstone of *Gospel spirituality* further underlines the significance of the life and message of Jesus as fundamental: "We invite people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community" (EREA, 2017, p. 10). Within the section on this touchstone, an authentic EREA school is described as a school that "recognises and acts upon the central place of the Gospel commitment to the marginalised, through a preferential option for the poor" (EREA, 2017, p. 10).

Edmund Rice "found in the story of Jesus the call to liberation that is at the heart of what Jesus preached" (EREA, 2017, p. 4). EREA schools and leaders are encouraged to view the life and message of Jesus through the prism of the Edmund Rice, or Ricean, charism.

8.2.2 The Ricean Charism

While there are very few primary sources attributable to Edmund Rice, there is sufficient evidence to build an understanding of how Rice perceived the Kingdom of God as it applied to his context in Ireland at the turn of the nineteenth century. Having been a wealthy businessman, Rice experienced his own metanoia, colloquially defined as a change of heart, due to the sudden death of his wife. Subsequently, there is evidence to suggest that he came to view wealth and his previous business ambition as being "to the detriment of others" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 216) and so shifted the focus of his life's purpose. A key piece of evidence is the entry of eleven scripture references in the flyleaf of Rice's personal bible. All eleven are concerned with sharing wealth or alleviation of poverty in some way. Two examples of Rice's Gospel references include:

> Matthew 5:42 – Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow; and
>
> Luke 6:35 – But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. (McLaughlin, 2007, pp. 217–218)

Following Jesus, Rice sought the Kingdom of God on earth and viewed the Kingdom through the lens of his Ireland, "a predominately rural population suffering substantial poverty" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 110). Rice fundamentally saw the Kingdom of God as the liberation of people from poverty and oppression, echoing Jesus' counter-cultural ideals.

> Rice viewed justice as the social dynamic of compassion, a means, in his own words, for "extending the kingdom of Christ". … While Rice's compassion for the poor is evident, his focus is primarily on the personal and social liberation of the poor, lifting up the poor, and, ironically, the wealthy, by sensitising them to the inhumanity of indifference, in other words liberating them to presence. He was challenging the thinking underpinning the legitimacy of the status quo. (McLaughlin, 2007, pp. 246–248)

The charism of Edmund Rice can be perceived as "a commitment to the Gospel for the common good" (Finn, 2013, p. 49). McLaughlin (2007) contends that the values of presence, compassion and liberation are the foundation upon which the Edmund Rice charism is engendered. This is evident in the contemporary expression of the mission of the Christian Brothers:

> Today, living out of a new consciousness of the interconnection of all life, groups of people inspired by the story of Edmund's life form small communities that journey and converse together, stepping outside their comfort zones in respectful service. We seek to make a difference to the lives of marginalised people through compassionate presence. We are committed to living simply as a way of remaining in touch with the reality of the world. For us being drawn by mystery involves a real crossing of bridges, new beginnings, fresh hope and letting go "the chains with which you would bind me". (CCB, 2019)

Presence, compassion and liberation, the defining characteristics of the Ricean charism, are innately connected to a preferential option for the poor and the concept of authentic inclusivity in EREA schools. Edmund Rice began his mission and ministry educating "primarily poor Irish boys" (Tuite, 2007, p. 5) with Finn (2013) arguing that a "preferential option for the poor and marginalised is a moral imperative" (Finn, 2013, p. 37). As indicated previously in Chapter 3, EREA as an institution is explicit in this contention, as articulated by the immediate past Executive Director, Dr Wayne Tinsey:

> The charism of Edmund Rice is always focussed on the marginalised. It gives priority to inclusion and an authentic preferential option for the poor. It contends that we cannot fully claim the title Catholic without this emphasis on inclusion and outreach to those on the margins. (Tinsey, 2011)

Also articulated in Chapter 3 but worth highlighting again, this explicit focus on the inclusion of the marginalised was reiterated in the first Welcome Address delivered by Dr Craig Wattam, the second Executive Director of EREA:

> I commit to the values and work of the Catholic church, and the family that constitutes EREA across Australia and beyond, to ensure that we offer an excellent education for

> all – in short, to ensure we provide an education that liberates, because this is our core business. To do this, we need strong and authentic leaders, and we need all of us to be workers. Our inspiration is the person and message of Jesus. Our call is to love one another, and our challenge is to find ways to bring those who are outside, the other, inside, and to make them, us. (Wattam, 2021)

These views were echoed by some research participants. One participant expounded that an inclusive EREA school seeks to "establish preferential treatment for the poor, embracing diversity through social inclusion and access to those who otherwise would not have the opportunity of a liberating education" (PDP5). Such a position was consistent with a Ricean view that saw the Kingdom of God as liberation from poverty and oppression and sought to bring about the Kingdom, primarily through providing access to quality education to poor, Catholic boys in Ireland.

The carriage of this vision into the colonies of Australia commenced when Patrick Ambrose Treacy arrived in Melbourne in 1868 with three other Christian Brothers – Dominic Fursey Bodkin, John Barnabas Lynch, and Patrick Joseph Nolan. Historians recount the orientation as: "he immediately accepted the challenge of providing a quality Catholic education" (Hickey, 2012, p. 47) in a context in which free, secular and compulsory education was being introduced. Though Melbourne was a place of some considerable wealth due in part to its proximity to the gold rushes of the 1850s, there was still significant poverty. Further, when the Christian Brothers arrived, the Catholic population was "a large but isolated minority and many politicians felt that their requests, when convenient, could be safely ignored" (Hickey, 2012, p. 43). Treacy wrote of the situation in a letter to his Superior General in Ireland in 1872 in which he described the existence of a "bitter tone of the press towards everything Catholic and Irish" (Treacy in Hickey, 2012, p. 46). It was apparent that Treacy and the first Christian Brothers in Australia perceived the need to further Rice's initial goal of bringing about the Kingdom of God through the liberation and lifting up of the poor Catholic population through education.

The life and message of Jesus, initially witnessed by Edmund Rice and then in Australia by Ambrose Treacy and the Christian Brothers, illustrates the foundational nature of bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth as being at the heart of the Ricean charism, and therefore Edmund Rice education. Specifically, the focus on the liberation and lifting up of the poor and marginalised is a key foundation of the call for EREA schools to be inclusive. This call to bring about the Kingdom of God and to be authentically inclusive exists, however, within the broader context of 21st century Australian education, and warrants continuing interpretation.

8.2.3 Australian Educational Context

Understandings of inclusivity in EREA exist within the context of contemporary Australian education. Further, the ways in which leaders address the call to inclusivity are influenced by factors

within that context. The review of literature in Chapter 3 examined the three educational sectors within Australia – government schools, independent schools and Catholic schools. A summary of student numbers across sectors is illustrated in Table 3.2.

While these sectors have various levels and mechanisms of governance and oversight, they all operate within a national educational and political context that influences both funding and curriculum. Broadly, the current articulated goals of Australian education can still be traced back to the Melbourne Declaration of 2008, which stated that:

> In the 21st century Australia's capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation. Education equips young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges of this era with confidence. (MCEETYA, 2008)

The Melbourne Declaration set out two explicit goals:

1. Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and
2. All young Australians become:
    - successful learners
    - confident and creative individuals
    - active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008).

It is the challenge of promoting both equity and excellence that is highlighted in this research, and, within an EREA context, this challenge is arguably more complex. Moreover, if EREA schools wish to give witness to a commitment to the common good, to solidarity and community, and to the service of the poor, an understanding that equity in education and social mobility are inherently linked, is essential. The 2018 OECD report, *PISA: Can Equity in Education Foster Social Mobility?*, described "that narrowing the differences related to socio-economic status in what students…can do with what they have learned could offer more opportunities for children and young people born into disadvantaged families to move up the socio-economic ladder" (OECD, 2018, p. 2). The same PISA report explained that while equity is seen internationally as a guiding principle of educational policy and practice, it is "not necessarily actualised in schools and education systems" (OECD, 2018, p. 2).

Australian political leaders at state and federal levels highlight PISA and NAPLAN test scores as indicators of success in education. PISA test scores are used to represent the standard of Australian schools internationally, and NAPLAN test scores are used to highlight and compare the standards of states and territories within Australia. It is in this context of constant comparison and competition that EREA schools understand and address the call to inclusivity.

In March 2018, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australia* was released. It was colloquially referred to in Australia as *Gonski 2.0*, named after Mr David Gonski AC, Chair of the Review Panel, which also consisted of representatives from each educational sector. It followed the 2011 Gonski report, *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report*, which was commissioned by Prime Minister Julia Gillard and called for a "dramatic increase in school funding" (Bartlett & Clemens, 2018, p. 45). *Gonski 2.0* was commissioned by the national government "to provide advice on how to improve student achievement and school performance" (Gonski et al., 2018, p. vii). The review found that, in relation to PISA and NAPLAN scores, improvement was required, as was specifically articulated in Chapter 3. The articulated focus on the economy, and the presumed necessity for a competitive approach to improve educational outcomes, are symptomatic of the broader neo-liberal agenda at play. Bartlett and Clemens (2018) contend that:

> [Gonski 2.0] is yet another iteration that draws its impetus and orientation from the demands of the economy and in so doing suppresses the fact that this economy is itself a product of a decided and deliberative pedagogical form of which this same pronounced discourse is the outcome. (p. 45)

EREA leaders are called to be inclusive in parallel yet contrasting contexts – one which is market-driven and espouses neo-liberal ideals, and another which is mission-based and inspired by the Gospel. This research suggests that this stark juxtaposition is manifested as pressure for leaders in their decision-making regarding inclusivity.

> Because these tables are being published, you're getting matched against the local CEO school down the road and the one a couple of suburbs over as well. That's real pressure I believe. (S5P)

However, the relationship between the market and religion is perceived by some not so much as a contrast but more a shift in understanding and definition:

> Today we have what's called a "knowledge economy" or, less guarded because more assured, a "cognitive capitalism", both of which are sad yet pretentious synonyms for the greatest pedagogy of our time, "neo-liberalism". Ostensibly, the market takes the place of and subverts God in the structural framework: it is known to be unknowable. Walter Benjamin once wrote that capitalism was a cult dedicated to universal despair; commenting on this remark, Giorgio Agamben adds that "God didn't die, He just turned into money". (Bartlett & Clemens, 2018, p. 46)

The literature and this research contend that a neo-liberal agenda exists in Australian education, and that this prevailing agenda influences understandings of inclusivity, along with ways in which EREA leaders address the call to inclusivity. The factors which lead to, and the risks which ensue from an

increasing influence of this neo-liberal agenda, will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The view that a role of education is to benefit the economy exists in parallel and seemingly in contrast with the view that education should benefit the community. EREA, with its foundations in the Gospel and the Ricean charism, articulates that education should liberate and include, with a preference given to the poor and marginalised.

8.2.4 Disadvantage and Liberation

The literature and the research confirm that there are disadvantaged and marginalised youth in Australia, and that indeed disadvantage is represented in all parts of the country (McLachlan et al., 2013). There is consensus that there exist four key groups of educationally disadvantaged young people in contemporary Australian society: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, student from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While it is evident that educational disadvantage exists outside of these four groups, the literature and research indicate that these groups are the most prevalent in terms of deep and persistent disadvantage.

Disadvantage, in its many forms, impacts significantly upon educational outcomes for young people (McLachlan et al., 2013; OECD, 2018; Productivity Commission, 2018; Ryan, 2017).

> There are a number of costs associated with growing up with disadvantage. … Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds: obtain less education than other children; obtain lower quality education where they do complete the same level of education, since their achievement levels are lower than other children; they may develop fewer desirable non-cognitive skills such as persistence or general "character" than other children; they not only enrol less in non-compulsory or high status courses (like university), they also drop out more often. Then, there are costs from any activity that education has a positive impact on in terms of lost benefits – for example, on health behaviours, political attitudes, and engagement and volunteering. (Ryan, 2017, p. 340)

The responses from participants in this research demonstrate a common understanding that disadvantage exists, and that a quality education can and does help to address the costs of disadvantage. Further, the call to be inclusive of disadvantaged and marginalised young people is perceived as being at the heart of an authentic Edmund Rice education. One EREA organisational leader commented that the role of an EREA school is to "accept and welcome all persons, assist those who might otherwise be excluded, recognise diversity, build partnerships and promote social inclusion, stand in solidarity with the excluded" (ER17). This sentiment was supported by a school-based leader

who highlighted that EREA schools are called to "establish preferential treatment for the poor, embracing diversity through social inclusion and access to those who otherwise would not have the opportunity of a liberating education" (PDP5). This view is consistent with the original purpose of Ricean education: "Edmund Rice's education not only cultivated an ethic of care in its schools, but also robustly sought to challenge and transform those conditions determining oppression" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 394).

Complementing this data are the insights from teachers, parents and students regarding the existence of disadvantage, the role of education, and more specifically the potential benefits of authentic inclusivity in EREA schools. Teacher responses indicated wide-spread support for inclusivity, with 98% of teacher respondents indicating their support for the enrolment of marginalised students. This sentiment was highlighted in the comment: "Every student enrolled should be given as many opportunities as possible to achieve. … I believe this is appropriate given our charism and missionary call as a Catholic school" (S2 teacher). Similarly, parents indicated their agreement that disadvantage exists and that they support their children's EREA schools in enrolling marginalised students. 95% of parent respondents believed that an EREA school should enrol marginalised students, and 96% that they like the idea of their children attending a school with a diverse student population.

Significantly, the responses from students who identified themselves as being part of an educationally disadvantaged group, confirmed not only the existence of disadvantage and its costs, but also the personal and practical impact of having been included in an EREA school.

Clearly, there is evidence to demonstrate that liberation is an achievable aspiration for 21st century educationally disadvantaged young people in Australia and that this liberation relies on the practice of inclusion of disadvantaged young people.

Notwithstanding the advantages of inclusion for specific groups, the literature and this research also suggest that forms of liberation emerge for other students, teachers, parents and the wider community as a consequence of authentic inclusivity. The EREA Charter articulates an aspiration to "open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences, so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all" (EREA, 2017). This aspiration has its roots in early Ricean education which was characterised by "liberation underpinning the provision of education" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 388). Rice did not exclude the wealthy and privileged from his schools. All were included, and hence all were liberated. Rice understood that one person's liberation is inherently bound up with another's, a sentiment echoed by Aunty Lilla Watson, Aboriginal elder, activist and educator from Queensland, who said: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Student responses indicate an innate understanding of liberation as tied to the concept of community and shared enterprise. By way of illustration, one student commented:

> We've got a lot of people from different backgrounds, so that we can learn a lot of things, like the world they're from, different people, and when we attend school, we can see how people care for each other. And then, that's a beautiful thing. (S3 student)

The literature and research findings do not support the notion that inclusion of the poor and marginalised should come at the expense of enrolling other students, nor that the inclusion of the wealthy should come at the expense of the disadvantaged. One respondent noted that Edmund Rice education has a history of including the wealthy as well as the poor:

> Yes, he [Edmund Rice] did educate the poor and marginalised. But a really important part of his mission was also to have the middle class or rich. So, in terms of his schools, my understanding is that, yes, the aspiration was to be inclusive, but he also had people from middle class and upper class. He also had people from different faith backgrounds, in terms of Catholics and Protestants at that time. So, that notion of inclusivity is not to the exclusion of the other in terms of faith or different classes. (S4IL)

A challenge in some EREA schools is that not only is preference not given to the poor, but that, in fact, preference is given to the wealthy. Inaugural EREA Executive Director, Dr Wayne Tinsey, raised this concern:

> There is the possibility, however, that our schools have become comfortable and attractive to those who may primarily seek our "fruits but not our roots". In some cases we may have become schools of choice for those people who aspire to exclusive, private education. In a society that increasingly sees education as a commodity that can be bought, our schools risk being used as vehicles for socio-differentiation and elitism. (Tinsey, 2011)

Some respondents commented on the reality of what Tinsey referred to as a "possibility". Some EREA organisational leaders indicated their concern, with one commenting that, "occasional poor decisions have been made, and some students or families have felt excluded" (ER3), and another stating that, "Whilst inclusivity is a touchstone I feel a number of our schools could do better" (ER6). There were also data to suggest that the existence and rise in enrolments in flexible learning centres provided EREA at an organisational level to claim inclusivity, without the necessity for individual mainstream schools to be inclusive. "I am only able to answer this question in this way (agree that EREA schools are inclusive) because of the expansion of flexible learning centres. If I was to exclude them I would have strongly disagreed" (ER8). This raises a significant issue regarding the perceptions of inclusivity which exist in EREA. That is, whether or not it is justifiably fair for an individual EREA

mainstream school to be more exclusive than inclusive of marginalised students, if EREA as an organisation ensures the inclusion of these groups of students somewhere within the EREA school network. This network currently includes 22 flexible learning centres, and two schools which belong to Edmund Rice Special Education Services (ERSES).

In response to this issue, the literature and the data collected indicate that leaders at organisational and school-based levels of EREA perceive authentic inclusivity to entail practical responses in each school. The Charter is clear in its simple expression that, "A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment" (EREA, 2017, p. 11). It is clear that inclusivity must be recognised as central to mission at a school level, not just an organisational level where commitment exists with policy, or at an applied level in educational environments declared specifically to address this mission.

Some parent responses further indicate the position that some EREA schools have become exclusive, with four parents in one school making the following comments:

> I don't believe they are, as I have seen no real evidence of inclusion of students with disability.
>
> I think they like the idea but are not willing to take the actions that will truly deliver inclusiveness. Academic records seem more important than social records. [There is] no visible representation [of inclusivity]. The principal has created a sanitised school environment focussed on academic and to a lesser degree, sporting results. [There is] not enough investment in the diversity of the school community.
>
> There is no evidence of this [inclusivity]. The school prioritises decoration over providing disabled access.
>
> I think there is a reluctance. (S6 parents)

Additionally, one parent from S1 commented that there was "no sign of [inclusivity] at all" (S1 parent) in that school, while an S5 parent urged the leaders in that school to: "Stop giving out rugby scholarships and open up for refugees or housing commission children" (S5 parent).

This section has presented a discussion of the foundational issues relating to inclusivity in EREA. EREA as an organisation, and many EREA leaders, espouse its philosophical and theological underpinnings as emerging from the life and message of Jesus, and the charism of Edmund Rice. The literature and research indicate that the contemporary educational context, characterised by a prevailing neo-liberal agenda, operates as a priority in contrast to these foundations. This dissonance exists in the context of the presence in Australian society of significant numbers of educationally disadvantaged young people, most notably Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students

with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The literature and the data from the current research indicate that although there is a commonly held perception that an authentic EREA school addresses the call to include the poor and the marginalised that, in reality, there is a prevalence of exclusive practices in some EREA schools.

While the practice of inclusivity in EREA schools is inconsistent, there exists an understanding of the foundational aspiration of bringing about the Kingdom of God, liberating the poor and including the marginalised through education. Jesus perceived the Kingdom of God in his own context and was counter-cultural in his radical inclusion of traditionally ostracised people in the Jewish tradition at the height of the Roman Empire. At the turn of the nineteenth century in Ireland, Edmund Rice, inspired by the life and message of Jesus, perceived the Kingdom of God through the prism of his context, defined by poverty and oppression. He addressed the call to bring about the Kingdom primarily through education. Ambrose Treacy followed the lead of Edmund Rice and sought to provide a quality Catholic education in an Australian society in which Catholics were the minority with few resources and very little social standing. Therefore, if a contemporary Edmund Rice education seeks to be authentic to its foundations, it presents a challenge of coming to an understanding of what the Kingdom of God in modern day Australia actually is, and further raises the question of how to bring about that Kingdom.

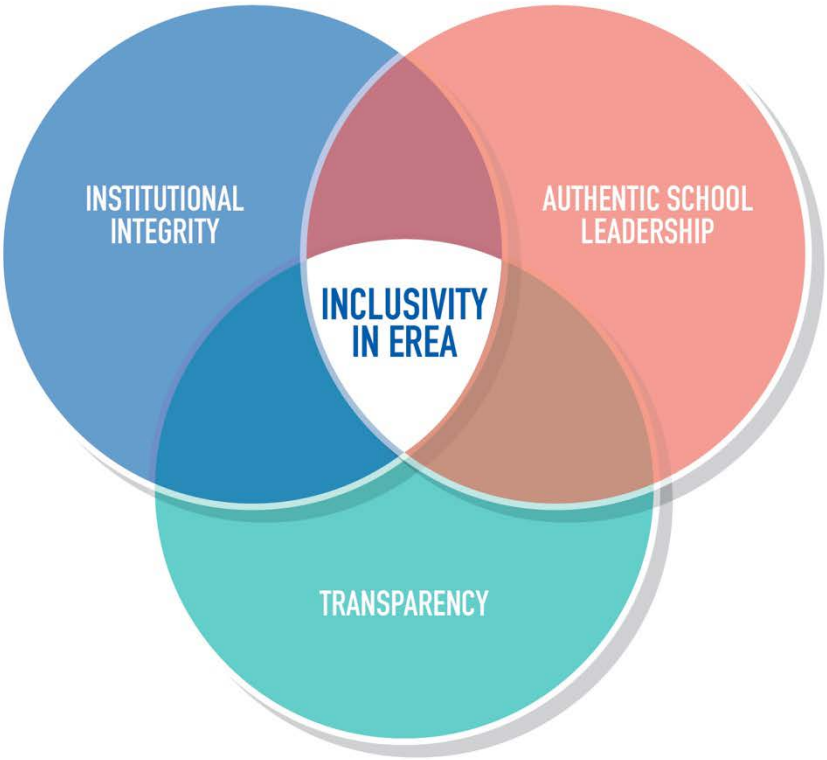
By seeking what the Kingdom of God may look like through the prism of contemporary education in Australia, it is worth noting that EREA defines itself as an organisation which "offers a Liberating Education, based on a Gospel Spirituality, within an Inclusive Community committed to Justice and Solidarity" (EREA, 2017, pp. 7–8). The discussion that follows explores the key characteristics which enhance inclusivity, as well as the risks which emerge in the absence of these characteristics.

As illustrated in Figure 8.2, an analysis and synthesis of the research data, in conjunction with a review of the relevant literature, suggests the importance of the following three additional characteristics that influence the nature of inclusivity in EREA schools:

1. institutional integrity;
2. authentic school leadership; and
3. transparency.

Figure 8.2

Conceptual Framework 2 – Three Essential Characteristics of Inclusivity



The research further contends that, in the absence of these characteristics, the following risks are likely to emerge and lead to a failure in achieving inclusivity:

1. unattained aspiration;
2. rhetoric over reality; and
3. the influence of neo-liberalism.

8.3 Institutional Integrity

EREA was officially formed on 1 October 2007 and, on 1 May 2013, was recognised as a Public Juridic Person (PJP) following "the granting of canonical and civil status to EREA as a Church and legal body in its own right" (EREA, 2013).

> As a result of this recognition, and because of the forward thinking of the Christian Brothers, EREA now has full stewardship and governance for the majority of its schools and educational facilities across Australia under the name of the Trustees of Edmund Rice Education Australia. (EREA, 2013)

When EREA was established, the Congregation of Christian Brothers entrusted their mission in education to a new body. This new body was to "administer the schools; ensure their faithfulness to

their mission; and maintain relationships with Church and government authorities" (EREA, 2019). At this time, EREA inherited a Charter which had been compiled under the leadership of the Christian Brothers in 2004. This Charter articulated eleven "cultural characteristics at the heart of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition" (Tuite, 2007, p. 61). Of the eleven cultural characteristics outlined, only one explicitly referenced inclusion of the marginalised: "At the margins: Edmund Rice, following Jesus, sought out the marginalised" (CCB, 2004). When, in 2011, a new Charter was proclaimed, the eleven cultural characteristics had been reduced to four touchstones, one of which was *inclusive community*. When this Charter was revised and released in 2017, the four touchstones remained as the means for offering clarity of direction for each and every EREA school. Why this is so is the focus of discussion in the next section.

8.3.1 Clarity of Direction

The Charter "describes our distinct, although not unique, identity as Edmund Rice Education Australia" and the four touchstones "describe the culture of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition which is striving for authenticity" (EREA, 2017, p. 2). In other words, the Charter is an expression of aspiration for each EREA school. It describes an authentic EREA school. While there exist apparent variations in how EREA school leaders understand the purpose of the Charter, the research suggests that the document is commonly perceived as aspirational and not directive.

As previously presented, variation emerged from the research regarding the perceptions held by EREA organisational leaders and school-based leaders in relation to whether current levels of inclusion of marginalised students were *justifiably fair*. While the majority of principals and deputy principals were of the view that their respective schools' enrolments of marginalised students were fair, organisational leaders were less positive. Leaders at the organisational level of EREA would like schools to be more inclusive of marginalised and disadvantaged students, while leaders in schools indicate a level of contentment with the status quo. Further, the majority of principal and deputy principal respondents in the first phase of this research indicate their belief that they are already meeting the articulated aspirational call to inclusivity, while EREA organisational leader respondents commonly believe that more could be done, with one respondent implying a risk to the autonomy given to school leaders to implement inclusive practices: "Indigenous students remain underrepresented in mainstream EREA schools, but I dare say there would be arguments to justify this..." (ER12).

There are also data to suggest there is a level of justification at an institutional level for a lack of inclusivity in schools, with one EREA organisational leader commenting, "Because of our success, and the areas that our schools exist on the whole, we have become the upper middle class. Not necessarily a fault of the school, just changing demographics and population shifts" (ER1).

The research indicates that EREA allows significant autonomy and flexibility in how principals address the aspirational call to inclusivity as expressed in the Charter. However, this flexibility also produces a view that there is a lack of certainty and specificity within the expectations of the EREA organisational leaders thereby enabling the establishment of difference between organisational and school-based leaders in their perceptions of current levels of inclusivity. Additionally, there are data to suggest that the existence of flexible learning centres, and their significant proportion of enrolled students who are identified as educationally disadvantaged, allows EREA as an institution to claim universal inclusivity without the necessity for some individual mainstream schools to more substantially address the call. Hence, the issue of accountability from an institutional level becomes critical in aspiring to authentic inclusivity at a school level.

8.3.2 Accountability

Every five years, EREA conducts an accountability process in each school as a way of reviewing the school's accordance with the Charter document. This process is called *Renewal*. The Renewal process is the means by which a school's authenticity as an Edmund Rice entity is assessed. The ways in which a school addresses each of the four touchstones are examined, and commendations and recommendations are presented to the school's Advisory Council and Leadership Team upon completion. "The objective of renewal is positive change for the school community" (EREA, 2019). However, the research suggests that the Renewal process is perceived as lacking substantial accountability measures. As previously indicated, one principal commented:

> Well, we have this renewal process and we almost get accredited as a Catholic school, and I don't understand why … I don't own [this school]. I believe I've got a Charter to live out in our school and I don't understand why some schools say, "We'll do two and a half of the touchstones and not all four." I just believe schools need to be challenged harder. And what is the evidence that there's change occurring at the schools? We hold up flexi-schools and say we're inclusive. "Look what we're doing in the flexi space." Unless we can say, "This is what we're doing in our school," we're not inclusive. What is the evidence, every five years, that says, "This school is now more inclusive after five years than they were at their last renewal?" because I just don't see it in some of our schools. I see some of our schools actually becoming more exclusive, not the other. (S4P)

Another principal, who requested not to be identified even by code, raised the possibility of EREA holding schools to account to the extent that if they could not and would not adhere to the touchstones of the Charter, then that status as an EREA school should be brought into question:

> I think at some point in time, EREA will probably have to take a deep breath and decide which schools are EREA schools and which aren't. … Ultimately, they've probably also got to figure out is there is a line in the sand for some of those schools, and I put a challenge to them, is there a line in the sand where they have to put their hand on their heart and say they are true to the Charter or not? EREA have to decide whether you step out or not.

On the issue of integrity, one organisational leader within EREA simply stated, "You cannot talk about an inclusive community if you deliberately exclude people" (ER2). However, there are data which suggest that the Renewal process has been successful in assisting some schools to more adequately address the call to inclusivity. Through providing practical recommendations aligned to the touchstones of the Charter, the process caused one school's leadership team to reflect upon and address a key challenge highlighted in their Renewal report:

> So an example for us would be our last renewal. One of the things that was mentioned was about Indigenous students. We didn't have a very large Indigenous enrolment at all, including a few kids who didn't identify as Indigenous at all. So we sat down and we thought about it, and thought, "Well, what do we do?" and there is a significant Aboriginal community around [our area] but they won't apply. So we went on a charm offensive. The guy who was in charge of Indigenous at that time made contact with the local elders. It started with a barbecue on the beach so they didn't have to come in the school, and then bit by bit, they started coming to the school. (S1IL)

There was evidence throughout the research that suggested that many leaders within EREA schools are open to and indeed expect to be challenged on their school's respective authenticity to the Charter, including the call to be inclusive. However, no evidence emerged to suggest that principals perceive themselves to be personally accountable to EREA in this area. Consequently, the desire to be financially sustainable and, in some cases, financially well-off, seems to take precedence over the desire to be authentically inclusive in some schools. The absence of clear direction and strong accountability at an organisational level poses risks to authenticity, leading to a situation in which articulated aspiration is not attained.

8.3.3 Risk One: Unattained Aspiration

EREA as an organisation aspires for its schools to be inclusive. This research suggests that there is a commonly held perception amongst Edmund Rice leaders that, to claim inclusivity, schools should enrol marginalised and disadvantaged students. The four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage in contemporary Australia are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds. While the research indicates that perceptions of inclusivity are broader and more nuanced than merely the enrolment of disadvantaged young people, this explicit preference to the poor and marginalised is central to inclusivity.

The research has shown, however, that there is a wide range of responses from EREA schools to the call to inclusivity. Indeed, some respondents explicitly acknowledged the exclusivity of some EREA schools. Executive Director Wayne Tinsey wrote in 2011 that "materially poorer Catholic families are almost certainly underrepresented in our schools [and] that low-income Catholic families are twice as likely to be enrolled in a government school as a Catholic school" (Tinsey, 2011). Tinsey further commented on the shift in context for Christian Brothers' and Edmund Rice schools from the early days in Australia to the contemporary context, highlighting that with a change in context had potentially come a change in focus, not in line with the original mission:

> Some would argue that, in the main, EREA is made up of schools that serve the middle class of Australian society. Historically, our mandate and that of all Catholic schools in Australia was to take poor Irish and migrant people and to raise them to this position in society. We have been fundamentally successful in this endeavour. There is the possibility, however, that our schools have become comfortable ad attractive to those who primarily seek our 'fruits but not our roots'. In some cases we may have become schools of choice for those people who aspire to exclusive, private education. (Tinsey, 2011)

This is the conundrum at the heart of the challenge to be inclusive for EREA schools. Edmund Rice schools began in Australia with the same purpose as they did in Ireland – to educate, liberate and raise up the poor. Many Irish Catholics and migrants, the poor and marginalised people of nineteenth and twentieth century Australia, benefitted in this regard from a Christian Brothers' education, to the point that they did rise out of poverty. However, Christian Brothers' schools soon became primarily middle class. Importantly though, education of the middle class is not incongruent with an authentic Edmund Rice education. In fact, McLaughlin (2007) contends that:

> Rice wanted to educate not only the poor, but also the middle-class. He believed that those with more should also have an education but should share their "more" with those who had less. Ideally, all children would be educated together on the same premises, irrespective of class, defying the social bigotry of the time. Such a strategy not only provided education for a wider group but it attacked "systemic injustice". This is a unique Ricean initiative. (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 222)

So, while it is true that Rice sought to educate the middle class as well as the poor, the inclusion of the middle class was a means by which he challenged the cultural norms of his day by providing an educational environment where students were included together, regardless of background. It

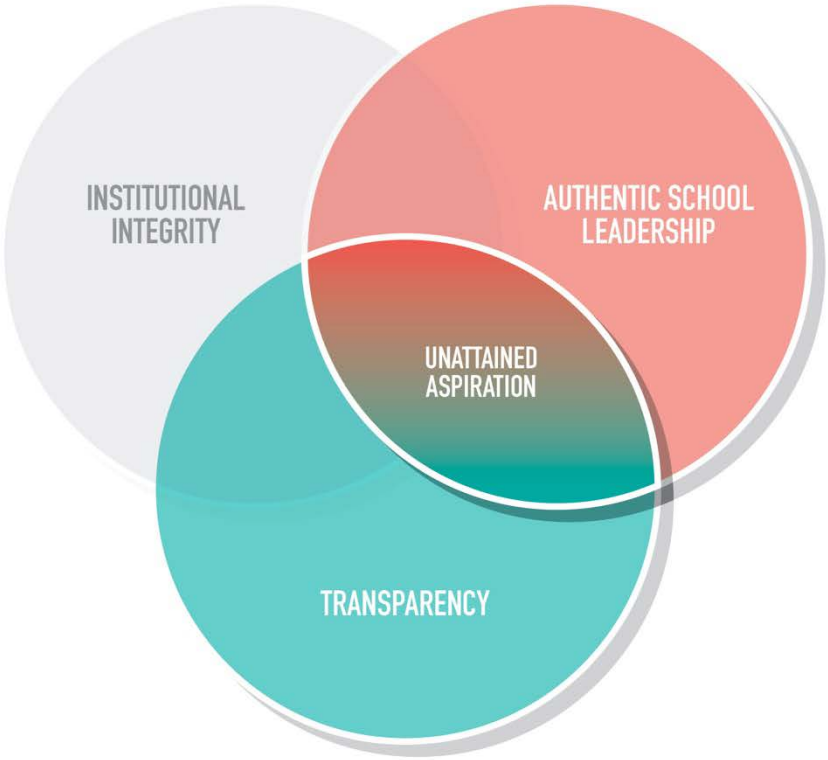
appears that while Rice made a conscious choice to include the middle class, the challenge for contemporary Ricean educators is to make a conscious choice to include the poor. In this way, though the context has changed, the mission to liberate the poor, and the "unique Ricean initiative" (McLaughlin, 2007, p. 222) to attack systemic injustice, would remain.

The aspiration to be more inclusive of the poor and marginalised is clear. It is apparent that this inclusion must entail the enrolment of educationally disadvantaged groups, and that this enrolment, while being responsive to local contexts and local family needs, should be in significant enough numbers to create a sense of tolerance and belonging in school communities.

This research contends that in the absence of institutional integrity, including clarity of direction, genuine accountability and strategic leadership succession, the risk of unattained aspiration emerges. The potential for the emergence of this risk is illustrated in Figure 8.3.

Figure 8.3

Conceptual Framework 3 – The Risk of Unattained Aspiration



EREA has a clearly articulated aspiration in its Charter, but there is an apparent lack of clear direction in practical terms allowing principals and school leadership teams to exercise relative autonomy to perceive and implement inclusivity as they see fit. When this principal autonomy is complemented by a perceived lack of genuine accountability measures from EREA, schools are free to create, publish and implement individual enrolment policies which not only neglect inclusive values, but explicitly espouse exclusivity. Because of the apparent lack of clear direction and accountability

from an organisational level, the final aspect of institutional integrity which has impacted and will continue to impact upon inclusivity in EREA schools, is the issue of authentic school leadership. In other words, if principals are able to perceive inclusivity in vastly different ways, and also able to choose to implement inclusive practices as sincerely or insincerely as they wish, then the selection of principals who hold a genuine desire and ability to lead inclusive schools that offer a liberating education, becomes a critical responsibility for EREA.

8.4 Authentic School Leadership

This research sought responses in two different phases from four key leadership positions in EREA schools. In the first phase of research, all EREA mainstream principals and deputy principals were invited to respond. In the second phase of research in six EREA schools, principals, Identity leaders and business managers were interviewed.

The research findings indicate that the role and person of principal is highly significant in the perception and implementation of inclusive practices in EREA schools. It follows then that the ways in which EREA strategically plan, appoint and monitor principals will impact and indeed decide the future of inclusivity in EREA schools.

However, like inclusivity itself, leadership is complex and contextual. As this research has found, there are not only competing agendas at play in the national context, but there are also competing agendas at play within specific local areas and within schools. The desire of parents, the needs of students, and sources and levels of funding are just some of the issues which have influence in school communities. Therefore, the selection and management of the principal is influenced by these and other factors.

A principal within EREA is generally appointed to an initial five year contract, with a further extension of five years following a successful review. In some cases, principals are given further extensions of between one and three years following their second five year term. Therefore, a principal can be in the position for a period of up to thirteen years in an individual school. Such an outcome has occurred on several occasions in recent years. Notably, since many EREA schools have appointed lay principals, following the withdrawal of the Christian Brothers from this role, the average terms of principalships have significantly increased.

The selection process for EREA principals includes a written application, followed by an interview with a panel of between four and six people, and finally a subsequent interview with a smaller panel, often consisting of the Executive Director. An examination of recent EREA principal application processes indicates the existence of commonly used selection criteria, regardless of location or context. The most common criteria present as:

- Be an active member of the Catholic Church with a strong commitment to promoting the teachings of the Church;
- Be able to demonstrate an understanding of the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice as articulated in the Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition;
- Have a minimum of five years teaching experience in a Catholic school;
- Have relevant teaching qualifications and post-graduate qualifications in education, leadership, religious education or theology;
- Be able to demonstrate a high level of competency in the domains of leadership – identity leadership, educational leadership, community leadership, administrative leadership;
- Have successful experience in a leadership position at senior level in more than one educational setting;
- Have a proven ability to work in a collaborative environment as the leader of a senior team;
- Have experience in strategic and financial leadership in a school setting; and
- Have experience in working with school boards.

The absence of any specific reference to the Charter touchstones within the selection criteria for an EREA principal negates the opportunity to assess potential applicants on their understandings of those touchstones. At present, principal applicants are not explicitly required to articulate their understandings of, or experience in implementing inclusive practices in their leadership, during the initial written phase of their application. There is hence an opportunity for enhanced leadership succession practices with respect to authentic inclusivity in EREA.

Further, the review of literature previously presented identified three key aspects of authentic Edmund Rice educational leadership: relational leadership, servant leadership, and prophetic leadership. These will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but it seems appropriate to apply the lens of these aspects of leadership to the above selection criteria for the appointment of principals in EREA. Significantly, the only time leadership is referred to within the Charter is in the expression of the touchstone of *liberating education*, which describes that an authentic EREA school "challenges all to prophetic leadership within the school community and beyond" (EREA, 2017, p. 5). However, there is no obvious or explicit reference to this aspect of leadership in the selection criteria for principals. Certainly, a Charter is an expression of values and is different to an application document, but the absence of explicit language relating to servant leadership or prophetic leadership is noteworthy.

Authentic school leadership is critical if EREA schools are to respond meaningfully and practically to the call to inclusivity. The literature and research suggest that an authentic Edmund Rice leader is a relational leader, a servant leader and a prophetic leader. Further, the role of principal and the person who fills the position is key to a school's inclusivity. While the principal is of most importance, other

leaders in schools share significant influence, not only because of their current roles, but because of the possibility of their place in leadership succession in EREA.

This research has indicated that, if inclusivity is to be meaningfully addressed in schools, leaders must have a deep understanding of, and genuine commitment to, inclusivity. These two issues, which have implications not just for selection processes but also formation, support and accountability, form the focus of the following section of this chapter.

8.4.1 Deep Understanding

The research has found that while the Charter offers an expression of an *inclusive community*, various perceptions and understandings of inclusivity currently exist. These understandings are influenced by local contexts, personal beliefs, life experiences, and a multitude of other factors, many of which are personal to the individual and the community in which leadership is expressed. This research does not suggest that a single definition of inclusivity is required, nor that one is even possible. Rather, there is a need for deeper understanding of inclusivity by leaders in EREA. The findings of this research demonstrate that this understanding is premised on strategic formation, access to relevant literature and critical reflection.

While the majority of principals and other school-based leaders who participated in this research have undertaken various EREA-provided formation programs, the broad range of perceptions and responses to the call to inclusivity suggests either a lack of depth of understanding of the foundations of inclusivity, or a lack of genuine commitment to inclusivity. Hence, formation programs which strategically address the historical foundations of inclusivity, the current Australian educational context, and honestly contend with the numerous practical challenges to inclusivity present as important.

8.4.2 Genuine Commitment

Complementing this deeper and more cohesive understanding of inclusivity is a commonly held genuine commitment to inclusivity by principals and other school-based leaders across EREA. In this regard there is evidence to suggest a current lack of genuine commitment in some EREA schools. For example, some enrolment policies are explicitly exclusive, some tuition fees inherently allow only the wealthy to attend, and the very low to non-existent presence of key groups of disadvantaged young people in some schools indicate this lack of commitment by some school leaders.

Significant to this issue is that the foundation stories to this discussion highlight the courageous, counter-cultural and often radical leadership and commitment shown by Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and message in turn inspired Edmund Rice and Ambrose Treacy. Each was inclusive in his own way in his own context, but each was genuinely committed to inclusivity and willing to challenge the status

quo. While it is manifestly inappropriate and unfair to hold a contemporary principal in an Australian school to the same standards as Rice or Treacy, let alone Jesus of Nazareth, the importance of courageous leadership remains.

Authentic Edmund Rice leaders are called to be relational, service-focussed and prophetic. In the context of inclusivity, this suggests that an authentic Edmund Rice leader should form relationships with the marginalised, serve the poor and communicate a transformational vision. It is the latter, prophetic leadership, that is most relevant to the issue of genuine commitment. Authentic Edmund Rice leaders are called to conscientise, "to help transform the good will, good intentions, good hearts and talents of organisational members into a vision, and energy field for future-oriented action" (Duignan et al., 1998, p. 95). Transformation and change inevitably create resistance, but authentic leadership requires challenging the status quo: "… one of the imperatives of prophetic leadership is to be counter-cultural and ensure that hard decisions that may be at odds with the school community, are made" (Tuite, 2007, p. 283). This research contends that the challenge of addressing the call to inclusivity in its fullest form, demands prophetic leadership, along with relational and servant leadership. Support and guidance from the organisational leaders of EREA is imperative for school-based leaders to be empowered to be courageous and counter-cultural.

8.4.3 Risk Two: Rhetoric Over Reality

Throughout this research, a theme has emerged regarding the contrast between rhetoric and reality in relation to the implementation of inclusive practices. It is apparent that at an organisational level and in individual schools, inclusivity is often espoused but less commonly lived. A key example is the prevalence of language regarding EREA schools being *open to all*, when the evidence suggests this is manifestly inaccurate. With this as a starting point, it is virtually impossible for the reality in EREA schools to match the rhetoric, suggesting a hopeful aspiration brought down by a lack of practical action.

Consequently, EREA leaves itself open to accusations of lacking integrity as an organisation, as do individual EREA schools. Jesus, followed by Edmund Rice and Ambrose Treacy, responded to the needs of their time and context. Treacy wrote in a letter in 1882: "The school is open to all who wish to avail themselves of it without distinction or creed, colour or nationality. No child can be refused admission on the score of religion or of payment" (Treacy, 1882, cited in Hickey, 2012, p. 325). Many participants in this research were explicit that Treacy's reality was very different to the current reality for EREA schools. One business manager commented:

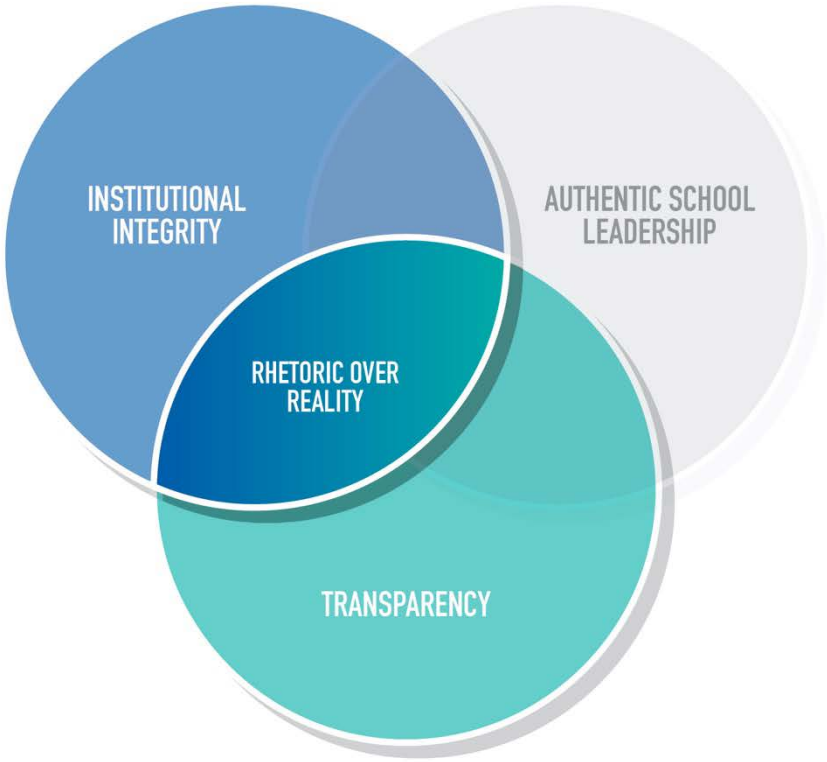
> No it's not [possible to be open to all]. God. I mean, I just laugh – "open door"? I mean, all you have to do is look at our schedule of fees and we immediately exclude, I don't know, 75% of the population. We're asking our parents to pay $13,300 or thereabouts.

> That's a lot of money. It's a lot of money. So, as I said, we're immediately excluding 75% of the population. So we're not open to all. We're definitely not open to all. (S4BM)

It is simplistic and inappropriate to use Treacy's approach to inclusivity in the current context. However, there is evidence to suggest that although the aspiration of being *open to all* is unrealistic, the aspiration to be inclusive is not. It requires school-based leaders, particularly principals, to develop and hold a deep understanding and genuine commitment to inclusivity. In the absence of this authentic school leadership, the aspirational rhetoric will remain unachievable, and there is a genuine risk that the reality will see EREA schools become more exclusive, not more inclusive. This risk is illustrated in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4

Conceptual Framework 4 – The Risk of Rhetoric Over Reality



8.5 Transparency

A key theme to emerge from this research concerns the significant impact of clear and transparent communication on the depth of understanding in school communities regarding inclusivity, and the subsequent practical implementation of inclusive practices. Transparency is inherently linked to organisational integrity and authentic school leadership, previously discussed in this chapter but deserving of closer examination. That is, there is evidence to suggest that the use of honest and transparent communication regarding the reasons, the challenges and the approaches to

inclusivity in schools significantly aids leaders' ability to develop shared understandings and to overcome some of the perceived challenges to implementing inclusive practices. This communication comes in many forms and involves public policies along with communicating with the key stakeholders of staff, parents and students.

8.5.1 Enrolment Policies and Procedures

The most significant public policy for a school in relation to inclusivity is its enrolment policy. The policies of the six participating schools were examined in Chapter 6. The purpose of this section is to discuss the importance of the enrolment policy in terms of transparent communication. The enrolment policy will often be one of the earliest formal introductions to a school for a parent. It explicitly describes enrolment priorities, and in a competitive educational market, is an important document for both schools and parents to appreciate.

The enrolment policies examined in this research differed significantly. One school (S3) did not have a formal enrolment policy, with a leadership team member explaining the reason for this being the school "accepts all-comers" (S3PDP). Another school (S2) focussed heavily on inclusion, stating that they "demonstrate a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised". A third school (S6) applied a policy to explain the potential exclusion of students:

> At the interview the nature of the College will be detailed and the financial requirements for attendance and the conditions of enrolment will be explained. Please note that the ability and commitment to the payment of fees is presumed of all parents who sign the "Acceptance of a Position" form. A rigorously objective self-appraisal by parents of their capacity to pay in full over the enrolment period is essential. Honesty at acceptance will spare all parties any future embarrassment. (S6 Enrolment Policy, as per S6 website)

While inconsistent with each other, this research contends that each policy be ideally transparent. There is evidence to suggest that in each of these schools, the student population reflects the respective policy statements. This brings into question the previously discussed issue of organisational integrity and, more specifically, accountability and clarity of direction from the organisational level of EREA. This research does not suggest the need for uniform enrolment policies across EREA, nor does it contend that this would aid in enhancing inclusivity in EREA schools. However, issues regarding transparency arise when one message does not match another message. For example, if a parent reads the EREA Charter on a school's website before subsequently reading that school's enrolment policy, it is potentially problematic if they differ significantly in message and philosophy.

The review of literature has demonstrated the existence of challenges to inclusivity, including parent concerns, staff retention and formation, challenges regarding finances and allocation of resources, and potential negative impact on student outcomes. The research data gathered in six EREA schools, along with open-ended questionnaires completed by the majority of principals and deputy principals, indicated that many of these factors are perceived as hindering inclusivity, but some leaders have found that communicating transparently with key stakeholders has assisted in implementing inclusive strategies in schools. These stakeholders include staff, parents and students.

8.5.2 Staff Formation, Support and Development

The literature and research indicate that inclusive practices impact teachers in various ways. Catering for a diverse range of abilities and backgrounds presents added difficulties for teachers. The inclusion of students with more complex learning needs, students with disabilities and students from non-English speaking backgrounds, creates the need for teachers to be professionally equipped with skills which allow these students to access the curriculum. Several teacher respondents indicated the need for more professional development to help cater for a diverse range of learning needs. However, the research also indicated that when teachers were explicitly made aware of the school's position on including educationally disadvantaged students, and its relation to the foundations of an Edmund Rice education, their understanding of inclusivity was enhanced:

> Every student enrolled should be given as many opportunities as possible to achieve. However sometimes this would require more resources allocated to a student from a marginalised background. I believe this is appropriate given our charism and missionary call as a Catholic school. (S2 teacher)

There was also evidence to suggest that if teachers are made aware at the time of their employment that the school is inclusive of a diverse range of students, this assisted in the retention of staff. One principal commented that, "A lot of people have been here for a long time. I think they're happy here. They love the work they do, they understand it, they get it, they get the story of the place" (S3P). The Identity leader of the same school which enrols high proportions of educationally disadvantaged students added, "We don't have a high staff turnover and I do believe that people get here and they love it" (S3IL). In this school, 100% of teacher respondents indicated they had been made aware before they commenced working that the school was open to all and enrolled a number of marginalised students.

While practical professional development designed to help teachers meet the needs of students with a wide range of learning needs is perceived as essential in inclusive schools, so too is the need for teachers to be formed in the foundational issues relating to inclusivity, most notably the implications of the life and message of Jesus and the charism of Edmund Rice. The research suggests that this

formation needs to be regular and rigorous, and that teachers need guidance, time and opportunity to reflect upon the relevance of these foundational concepts to their contemporary EREA setting. The research indicates that transparent communication prior to appointment, and professional development and adequate formation regularly during a teacher's employment in an EREA school, significantly assists the teacher to effectively cater for student learning needs and, consequently, assists schools to become more authentically inclusive.

8.5.3 Parent Formation, Education and Communication

The practice of inclusivity in EREA schools is also influenced by relevant formation and education, and transparent communication with parents. It is apparent that parents choose EREA schools for myriad reasons, and a school's identity as an Edmund Rice school is not necessarily a high priority in parent choice. It is also evident that many parents are not aware that the inclusion of marginalised students is a central characteristic of an Edmund Rice education when they enrol their children in an EREA school. This underlines the need for more open, honest and transparent communication from schools with their wider community, so that parents can make informed decisions, and principals can confidently implement inclusive practices with the knowledge that parents have made choices regarding their children's schooling based on this imperative.

The majority of parents who participated in this research were overwhelmingly positive about the concept of inclusivity and its potential benefits for their children, including opportunities to learn and experience tolerance, compassion, empathy, and what they perceived as an education which prepares young people for the real world. Several parents commented on their desire for their children to not be educated in a *bubble of white privilege*. However, some school leaders do hold a concern that the inclusion of disadvantaged students may lead to parent dissatisfaction. For example, leaders in one school referred to the anecdotal phenomenon of non-Indigenous families choosing not to send their children to the school which enrols a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as *white flight*.

The research suggests that, similarly to teachers, parents require education and formation regarding the foundational concepts relating to inclusivity, including basic transparent communication prior to and during the enrolment process, and throughout their child's enrolment at the school.

8.5.4 Student Formation and Pastoral Care

It is worth noting that of all the research participants, including EREA Council, Board and Executive, principals and deputy principals, Identity leaders and business managers, teachers, parents and students, it was the six student focus groups that provided the most succinct and positive endorsement of authentic inclusivity. Students were overwhelmingly supportive of the

implementation of inclusive practices and were able to articulate the benefits of inclusivity for both marginalised and traditionally advantaged students. Amongst the student participants were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged students. These students were joined in focus group interviews by students who would generally be considered as coming from traditional, middle-class, mainstream families.

As was presented previously, students from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds articulated the impact of a quality and authentic Edmund Rice education, with one student explaining:

> I come from a poor economic background family. I live basically on my own with my sister. So, it's real hard and this school is trying to put me there – to help me get education, which really defines the four touchstones – one of the four touchstones saying that liberating education which is why I am here, and I'm going to graduate in Grade 12. (S3 student)

One young person who identified himself as Aboriginal articulated his pride in sharing his culture with non-Indigenous peers:

> My favourite thing about this school is practising my culture. I just love doing it. Every now and then, we practise our dancing in front of other people. I love to see their faces. (S2 student)

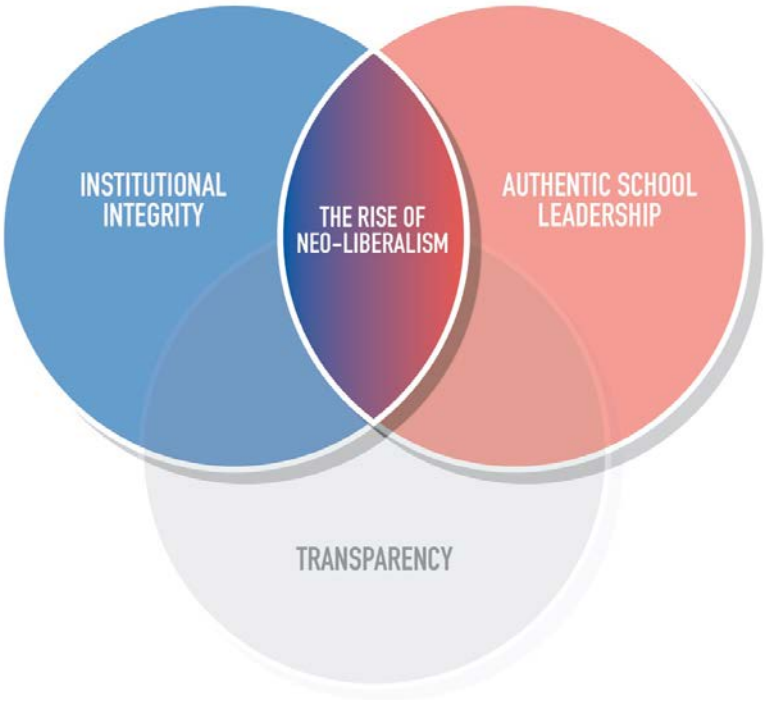
Student comments demonstrated that they require adequate formation and pastoral care to assist them in successfully navigating a diverse and complex school environment with large numbers of marginalised students. However, the research suggests that students are not only well equipped to work, learn and form relationships in a diverse and inclusive environment, but that in fact they thrive in it. Further, it appears that students could indeed not only benefit from receiving formation and transparent communication from adults within the school and home, but that adults may benefit if students are given opportunities to communicate their experience of inclusivity.

8.5.5 Risk Three: The Influence of Neo-Liberalism

The purpose of this section is to discuss the risk of neo-liberalism subverting inclusivity in the provision of an authentic Edmund Rice education. This research contends that in the absence of transparent communication, neo-liberalism is more likely to become the dominant paradigm in EREA schools, as opposed to Gospel values and the Ricean charism, as illustrated in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5

Conceptual Framework 5 – The Risk of the Rise of Neo-Liberalism



The literature and data clearly place the Gospel and Ricean charism in direct conflict with the market-based agenda at the heart of neo-liberalism. The life and message of Jesus, in turn inspiring the actions of Edmund Rice in Ireland and Ambrose Treacy in Australia, highlight the centrality of inclusivity, welcoming those on the margins into the centre, and a desire for the common good. This is in direct contrast with neo-liberalism priorities of individual triumph, competition and economic gain as indicators of success. The challenge is made more difficult due to neo-liberalism being the prevailing paradigm in Australian and many western international educational systems. Competition, and not the common good, is the dominant value in contemporary schooling, and EREA schools and leaders face the predicament of highlighting a preference for the poor and the marginalised in a climate which rewards individual excellence as defined by objective and narrowly defined indicators.

Notwithstanding what first presents as a conflict situation, this research contends that authentic inclusivity can co-exist with a neo-liberal agenda, and that it is not a case of one triumphing over the other. Indeed, if this were the case, the future of inclusivity in education would be grim. While neo-liberalism does dominate contemporary educational discourse, it is possible and necessary for a discourse of Gospel values, Kingdom thinking, and a preferential option for the poor to have a central place in Edmund Rice education. It is possible through transparent communication, authentic school leadership and institutional integrity, each based on the foundations of the life and message of Jesus and the charism of Edmund Rice, to co-exist with a philosophy that speaks of measuring outcomes in keeping with espoused aims.

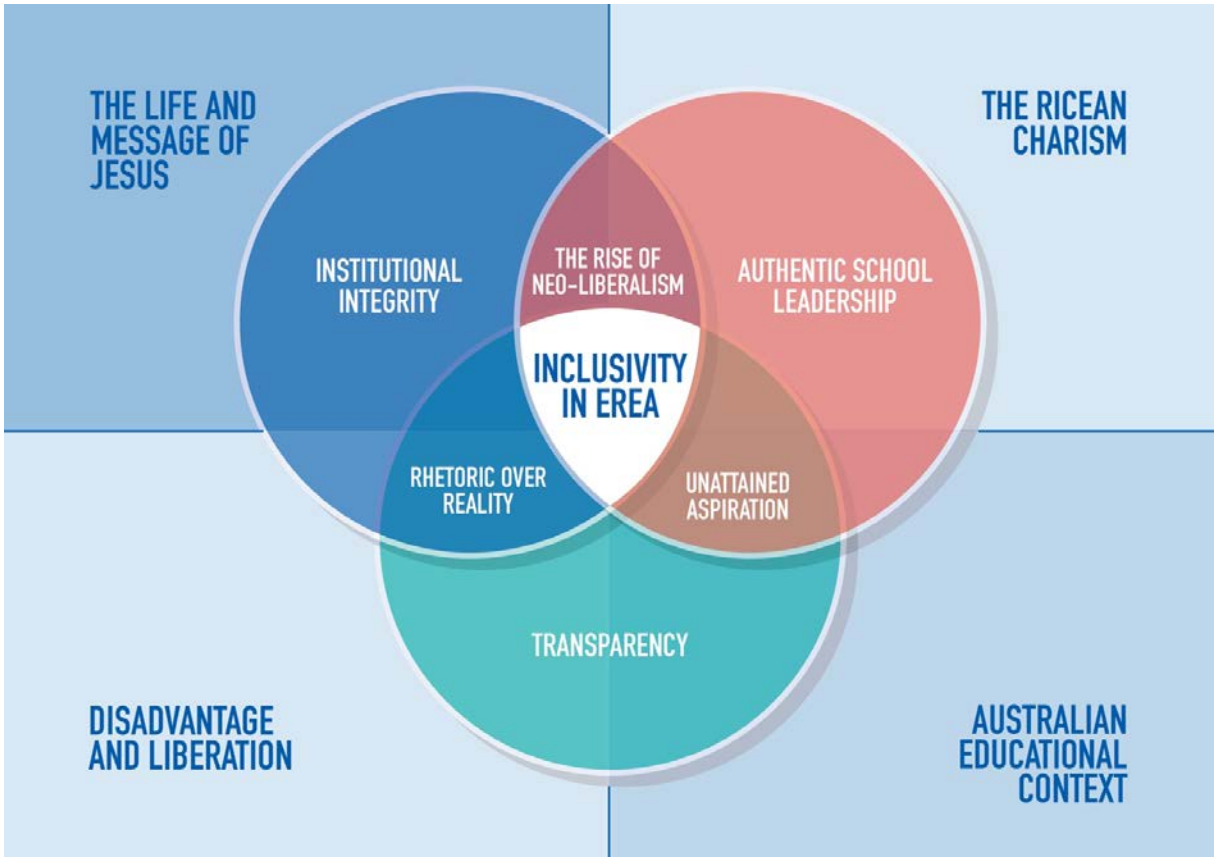
8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored research findings on inclusivity in EREA schools. It highlighted the basic tenets of inclusivity arising from the life and message of Jesus, the Ricean charism, the contemporary educational context, and the current realities of educational disadvantage in Australia. Each of these foundational issues impact upon inclusivity in EREA. The chapter presented three essential characteristics underpinning inclusivity in EREA schools: institutional integrity, including clarity of direction, accountability and strategic leadership succession; authentic school leadership, including the need for leaders to have a deep understanding of and genuine commitment to inclusivity; and transparency, regarding enrolment policies and communication with staff, parents and students. This chapter also highlighted the risks in the absence of these three characteristics: the first being unattained aspiration; the second, rhetoric over reality; and the third, the influence of neo-liberalism.

The discussion has led to the development of a conceptual framework to display the findings from the research (see Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6

A Conceptual Framework of Findings From the Research



This conceptual framework illustrates the interrelationships at play in the understanding and implementation of the central tenet of this study, inclusivity in EREA. The headings in the outer section

of the framework represent the foundations from which each EREA school operates, bound by certain realities:

1. EREA schools are Catholic schools called to be authentic followers of the life and story of Jesus.
2. EREA schools are defined by the specific charism of Edmund Rice in the interpretation of this story.
3. The contemporary Australian educational context impacts how EREA schools address the call to inclusivity.
4. Within contemporary Australia, disadvantaged young people who are marginalised can be liberated through education within an authentic EREA school.

The three overlapping circles represent the three essential characteristics of an inclusive EREA school:

1. institutional integrity;
2. authentic school leadership; and
3. transparency.

The sections in which only two of the three circles overlap represent the risk which result from the absence of the third essential characteristic. That is, when institutional integrity is lacking, authentic school leaders may have the will to implement inclusivity and be courageous in their transparency to the wider school community, but without a level of accountability and support from the organisational level of EREA, the risk is that the realities will create barriers that hinder the ideal of inclusivity, hence leading to unattained aspiration.

When school leadership lacks a genuine understanding and desire to be inclusive, there is risk of conflict resulting from a school's rhetoric not matching its reality. A school leader may communicate an inclusive message, but the institution will be called upon to hold that school to account due to a lack of authentically inclusive strategies. There is hence a triumph of rhetoric over reality.

When transparency is lacking, school leaders may have a genuine desire to be inclusive and have organisational support, but risk creating tension with the wider school community including students, parents, teachers and the public through a lack of transparent communication regarding the inclusion of marginalised students. This means that the dominant message heard by the community will be that defined by league tables and academic results, confirming the influence of a neo-liberal agenda. It is when all three essential characteristics intersect that authentic inclusivity can exist.

Finally, a key finding of this research concerns the inadequate description of inclusivity as meaning *open to all*. The study has found that perceptions and understandings of inclusivity are in fact far broader and more complex. However, this study focussed on one core aspect of inclusivity, the

inclusion or otherwise of young people at an educational disadvantage in Australia. While inclusivity is not restricted to this core aspect, this research has re-confirmed that genuine inclusivity is impossible without addressing the needs of these students. In contemporary Australia, the four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Hence, any claim of inclusivity in an Edmund Rice context, without a genuine attempt to address the needs of these young people, is baseless and inappropriate. The existence of quality service-learning, social justice, advocacy and immersion programs, while commendable and beneficial, cannot be seen to make up for not addressing this core aspect of inclusivity. Nor does the existence of flexible learning centres, special education schools or a small number of mainstream EREA schools who cater for significant numbers of marginalised students, allow other mainstream schools to claim inclusivity by simply being labelled an EREA school. Each EREA school is called to be inclusive, and therefore each EREA school is called to give preference to young people at an educational disadvantage.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how inclusivity is understood and implemented in EREA. This chapter presents an overview of the thesis, including the research design and the limitations of the research, before addressing the research questions and contributions made by the research to knowledge and practice. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations that are based on a synthesis of the literature and findings from this research.

In light of the above characteristics for discussion, Table 9.1 illustrates the structure for Chapter 9.

Table 9.1

Overview of Chapter 9

Major sections	Subsections
9.1 Introduction	
9.2 The research design	
9.3 Limitations of the research	
9.4 Research questions addressed	9.4.1 Research Question 1 9.4.2 Research Question 2 9.4.3 Research Question 3
9.5 Conclusions of the research	9.5.1 Contributions to new knowledge 9.5.2 Contributions to practice
9.6 Recommendations	
9.7 Conclusion	

9.2 The Research Design

The research design was focused by the following three research questions:

1. What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?
2. How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?
3. What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

Essentially, these questions sought personal, subjective responses from participants. Participants were invited to provide their own individual understandings and interpretations regarding the concept

of inclusivity and how it is best achieved. Thus, this study was guided by the following research design characteristics:

- the epistemology of constructionism;
- the theoretical perspective of interpretivism (Charon, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2006) through the lens of symbolic interactionism (Creswell, 2008); and
- case study as the methodology (Stake, 1995).

The epistemology adopted for this research design was constructionism because it accepts the interpretive nature of meaning-making by human beings (Crotty, 1998). Social interactions between persons generate complex narratives in which humans engage to construct personal and social meaning derived from the lived experiences of these interactions (De Koster et al., 2004; Pring, 2000). Hence, constructionism entertains a multi-faceted approach to human understanding because it recognises that an individual's construction of meaning is affected by personal beliefs and values as well as by professional values and influences inherent within the specific context. Constructionism was suitable to guide this study for two reasons. First, constructionism seeks to explore the ways in which the research participants constructed meaning about what constituted inclusivity and its implementation. Second, constructionism is applicable from the perspective of the researcher endeavouring to make purposeful meaning of the participants' understandings and implementation of inclusivity.

The theoretical perspective adopted for this study was interpretivism, a research paradigm based on describing the unique ways humans construct understanding or interpretations of their world (Blumer, 1998; Crotty, 1998). A basic tenet of the interpretivist approach is that knowledge is embedded in human experience. Meaning is constructed by and through the interactive process which occurs when humans interact and communicate with others. An interpretive approach aims to generate a deeper, more extensive and systematic representation of reality from the point of view of the participants. In this research, interpretivism was able to provide guidance for the systematic exploration and analysis of the phenomenon of inclusivity from the perspective of participants, including EREA leaders. This understanding was generated through engagement with symbols such as language and behaviours (Geertz, 1973).

In this study, symbolic interactionism was the lens through which interpretivism was viewed to construct meaning of participants' social interactions. Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the behaviours and understandings of human beings in their social worlds (Stake, 1995). Symbolic interactionism attempts to offer an understanding of perspective, motive and reason as to how people negotiate reality, and how they act in relation to their perceptions. For example, EREA leaders construct and reconstruct insights of their respective contexts through multiple social interactions. As

such, this research sought to better understand how inclusivity is understood and implemented by EREA leaders, rather than seeking to prove or disprove a current theory.

The theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and symbolic interactionism informed the choice of methodology for this research, case study. Case study methodology was appropriate for the research because it allows the focus to be "the case in its idiosyncratic complexity, not on the whole population of cases" (Burns, 1994, p. 316). In particular, the case study illuminated and provided insight into the research questions which sought to address how inclusivity is understood and implemented within EREA.

As case study methodology adopts data-gathering strategies which involve a broad variety of techniques, rather than a single technique (Patton, 1990), four data-gathering strategies for this research were adopted: open-ended questionnaire; semi-structured interview; focus group interview; and documentary analysis. An open-ended questionnaire was adopted to generate insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Creswell, 2008). The semi-structured interview enabled conversations which developed and acquired direct quotations from leaders about their perceptions and experiences. The focus group interview with student leaders provided an environment that yielded rich supplementary data for the research. Analysis of documentary data including enrolment and fee policies provided complementary evidence and the potential for triangulation of data in the analysis and synthesis phases of the research.

9.3 Limitations of the Research

Case study methodology limitations can include an overwhelming volume of complex data, difficulty in maintaining the integrity of the participants' perspectives, the potential inability for generalised findings, and the possibility of researcher bias. Each of these potential limitations has been addressed in this study through a strict focus on research questions, purposively selected participants, digital verbatim recording of responses, and clear and honest communication with participants regarding background context and perspectives, along with appropriate interview techniques.

9.4 Research Questions Addressed

9.4.1 Research Question 1

What understandings of the term *inclusivity* exist in EREA?

The research identified a number of findings with respect to how inclusivity is understood in EREA. First, EREA organisational and school leaders are well formed in the mission, vision and charism of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. However, while there is evidence of a shared

understanding that the EREA Charter clearly articulates aspirations, there exists a lack of clarity from EREA at an organisational level regarding practical implementation of inclusive practices.

Although the description of inclusivity by leaders still commonly includes the language, *open to all*, there is a growing perception that inclusivity is in fact far more complex, and that a deeper understanding must take into account the contemporary contexts of international and Australian education, particularly the increased influence of a neo-liberal agenda. To that end, there is a disconnect between the understandings of inclusivity articulated by EREA organisational leaders and those described by principals. Specifically, principals are more resolute than organisational leaders in their belief that current levels of inclusion of marginalised young people are justifiably fair, considering the extent to which the ideal of inclusivity is impacted upon by pragmatic realities.

Next, the research supported the synthesis of relevant literature that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, economically disadvantaged students, students from refugee backgrounds, and students with disabilities, represent the most marginalised young people in contemporary Australia. However, there is evidence that indicates that some EREA schools are currently more exclusive than inclusive, with specific regard to these groups of marginalised young people.

With regard to the significance of leadership, the research indicated a shared understanding amongst students, parents, teachers, school and organisational leaders that the role and person of principal is critical in relation to authentic implementation of inclusivity. Further, transparent communication by leaders regarding inclusivity was highlighted as a key means to assist in developing a shared understanding within school communities.

9.4.2 Research Question 2

How is the call to inclusivity being addressed in EREA mainstream schools?

The research identifies the following findings regarding how inclusivity is implemented in the participating schools. First, each school and its leaders have relative autonomy to develop and implement their own response to the call to be inclusive. This is evident by the contrasts in articulated priorities and explicit language which exist in individual school enrolment policies. Each school's individual response is also apparent in the data concerning tuition fees and concessions. In fact, it is evident that enrolment policies and tuition fees in some EREA schools actively discourage inclusivity and actually promote, or indeed ensure, exclusivity.

The research indicates that the local context of each school impacts upon its response to the call to inclusivity. Factors include changing population demographics, varying scores in the IRSAD, government policy, and historical influences. These contextual differences notwithstanding, there is a recognition within each of the six participating schools that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are four key groups of young people at an educational disadvantage in contemporary Australia.

Next, though EREA organisational leaders have raised the issue of benchmarks regarding inclusivity, and some school leaders are open to the concept or have already begun setting their own benchmarks, the perceived significance of the individual context of schools suggests that an external imposition of uniform benchmarks by the organisational level of EREA requires further consideration. Such consideration would need to take into account the school's location, demographic, strategic plan, history, business continuity and financial circumstances, amongst other factors.

Finally, there is a dangerous and misplaced belief amongst some respondents that, providing EREA as an organisation is inclusive, for example through the growth of flexible learning centres, it is not incumbent upon each school to individually address the call to be inclusive. This is a topic that urgently requires a clear and unambiguous statement of intent by EREA at an organisational level to ensure principals and key school leaders are aware of philosophy and expectation.

9.4.3 Research Question 3

What affordances and challenges exist when addressing the call to inclusivity in participating schools?

The research identifies several findings in relation to the affordances and challenges in addressing inclusivity in EREA schools. First, it is evident that respondents perceive numerous benefits of inclusivity, including a fostering of tolerance, acceptance and sense of belonging in inclusive school communities. Specifically, in contrast to the initially perceived concerns by EREA school leaders regarding parental expectations, parent and student respondents overwhelmingly believe that an inclusive rather than exclusive school community more effectively prepares young people for life in the real world after school, due to their exposure to a diverse range of people.

Second, the research confirms the existence of factors which hinder authentic inclusivity, including financial challenges, impact on teaching staff, and the symptoms of a neo-liberal agenda in contemporary Australian education, including a competitive educational market. While challenges do exist, there is evidence to suggest that the challenges are potentially not as great as some leaders perceive, and that the perceived challenges are not insurmountable. Indeed ironically, there is evidence to suggest that well-articulated, transparent communication, and a genuinely implemented inclusive school community which welcomes and caters appropriately for marginalised young people, will actually attract families, rather than discourage them from enrolling.

The transparent communication required must come from leaders, specifically the principal. To that end, the research suggests that an absence of relational, compassionate and prophetic leadership in EREA schools risks a triumph of rhetoric and reality, and in turn, exclusivity rather than inclusivity.

9.5 Conclusions of the Research

9.5.1 Contributions to New Knowledge

Three areas of new knowledge emerge from the research:

1. a contemporary and contextual understanding of the *poor and marginalised*;
2. current perceptions about inclusivity in EREA; and
3. the contrast between EREA and neo-liberal values, and its impact on EREA school leaders.

First, the research has distilled four key groups of young people at a distinct educational disadvantage in contemporary Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The research does not contend that these groups represent the only young people who experience disadvantage, nor does it argue that every young person who identifies with one or more of these groups does experience disadvantage. A synthesis of the literature, supported by this new research, indicates that these four groups are the most prevalent in terms of educational disadvantage, and can therefore be described as the contemporary embodiment of the 'poor and marginalised' in the context of Australian education.

Second, some clear perceptions about inclusivity have emerged from the research. Perhaps of most significance is the overwhelmingly positive perception of the impact genuine inclusivity can and does have on school communities, including marginalised young people themselves, along with other students, teachers and families. Another perception which emerged from the research that any description of inclusivity that suggests that a school is or should be *open to all* is inadequate and simplistic, and that a deeper contextual understanding is required, especially by leaders. It is acknowledged that the differing understandings of inclusivity, coupled with a lack of clear organisational policy has resulted in some EREA schools in fact becoming more exclusive than inclusive.

Third, the clear contrast between espoused EREA values and neo-liberal values emerged from the research. A review of the literature indicated that the contrast exists, and the research supports this contention. This places leaders in EREA schools in the difficult position of balancing competing values in the contemporary Australian educational context, and this tension risks the increased influence of neo-liberalism in EREA schools, and necessitates shifts in practice in EREA if the call to inclusivity is to remain authentic.

9.5.2 Contributions to Practice

The research generates three conclusions that contribute to practice. These conclusions relate to:

1. authentic school leadership;
2. institutional integrity; and
3. transparency.

First, it is evident that the extent or absence of an EREA school's practices regarding inclusivity rely heavily upon leadership within the school, most significantly the role and person of principal. While it is clear that leaders feel well formed in the mission of Catholic education and the Ricean charism, the inconsistencies that exist across EREA mainstream schools in relation to inclusive practices continue to suggest differing understandings and priorities amongst principals and other school leaders. In terms of practice, this finding has ramifications for leadership formation, recruitment and appraisal.

Following authentic school leadership, the need for clearer institutional integrity emerged from the research. While it is acknowledged that since the formation of EREA on 1 October 2007, the concept of inclusivity has been central to the articulated vision and mission of the organisation, it is also evident that exclusive practices within EREA schools necessitate greater critical reflection at an organisational level. While EREA has seemed reticent to implement and enforce inclusive enrolment policies and practices upon schools, the research indicates that school leaders are indeed open to clearer policy guidelines regarding inclusive practices.

Third, the importance of transparency emerged as a key aspect of practice regarding inclusivity. Clear and transparent communication with parents, students, staff and local communities about the concept of inclusivity is critical to avoiding a prevailing neo-liberal agenda in EREA schools.

9.6 Recommendations

This research offers a number of recommendations in relation to inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia:

1. **At the time of the next review of the EREA Charter, due in 2022, it is recommended that critical reflection regarding the language which expresses inclusivity is given priority.**

While the phrase *open to all* does not appear in the expressions of an *inclusive community*, it is central to the reflective questions which appear in the relevant section of the Charter document, designed for schools to reflect upon their authenticity as EREA schools. In light of this research, this potentially causes confusion and establishes unrealistic aspirations for many schools.

2. **It is recommended that EREA reviews current formation programs with a view to enhance the depth of understanding amongst staff, especially current and potential leaders, of inclusivity and its theological and philosophical foundations.**

This research has discovered a lack of a deep and common understanding of inclusivity amongst EREA leaders, staff and parents. Moreover, there is clear evidence that when leaders have and can transparently communicate a depth of understanding regarding inclusivity, the implementation of inclusive practices becomes less challenging and more realistically achievable. Through formation programs and gatherings of key leaders, EREA could also more explicitly address the contrast at play between the contemporary neo-liberal agenda and a more Gospel-based educational vision.

3. **Through reviewing the Renewal process, it is recommended that EREA critically reflects on the issue of accountability and consider the use of individual and nuanced benchmarks for schools and principals in addressing inclusivity.**

This research found that several principals are not only open to the concept of benchmarks but would welcome them as a way of gaining a clear understanding of expectations and setting clear goals to which to aspire. It is apparent that these benchmarks could not realistically be uniform, and that many contextual factors would need to be considered. While it is acknowledged that each school has a varying capacity and opportunity to enrol marginalised students, these factors could be identified and addressed through school inclusivity audits.

4. **It is recommended that EREA designs an *inclusivity audit* and tasks each school with completing it in order to provide feedback to EREA as the first stage in the development of a clear plan to achieve essential inclusivity goals in a defined timeframe.**

The inclusivity audit would need to consider, amongst other factors, an examination of: current enrolment policies; current enrolment numbers, including (though not exclusively) the four identified groups of educationally disadvantaged young people in this research; curriculum and pedagogy, including how themes of social justice and inclusion are embedded; service-learning programs and how they address inclusive values; and relative level of financial expenditure which could be defined as promoting inclusivity.

5. **It is recommended that EREA reviews the recruitment processes for selection of principals, deputy principals and business managers, and explores ways of explicitly highlighting the need for those appointed to such leadership positions to have a deep understanding of, and genuine commitment to, inclusivity.**

In light of this research which indicates the importance of the role of principal and the necessity for that person to understand and actively seek to promote inclusivity, recruitment and selection processes should examine potential candidates' capacity in this regard. In a neo-liberal dominated

educational context, evidence suggests that without principals who authentically understand and address inclusivity, EREA schools will drift further toward exclusivity and elitism.

6. **Finally, it is recommended that consideration be given to providing opportunities for the amplification of student voice in relation to inclusivity.**

The research findings presented clearly indicate that students see and feel the profound benefit of experiencing their education alongside a diverse cohort of their peers, including traditionally marginalised young people. Listening to the voices of young people from both disadvantaged and more privileged backgrounds may assist adults in EREA come to a deeper, more contemporary and relevant understanding of inclusivity.

9.7 Conclusion

In Australia in 2021, there are young people who suffer deep and persistent educational disadvantage and marginalisation. Four key groups of young people who find themselves on the margins today are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Edmund Rice Education Australia is an organisation which encompasses 55 schools, educating in excess of 39,000 students, or approximately 1% of the national student population. EREA espouses a core value of inclusivity and an explicit ambition to include young people on the margins. One of the four guiding touchstones within the EREA Charter is *inclusive community*.

Inclusivity is at the heart of authentic Catholic and Edmund Rice education, as it is central to the life and message of Jesus Christ, who inspired Edmund Rice. Jesus was radical in the way he welcomed the most marginalised in society to his table. Edmund Rice was similarly counter-cultural in how he responded to his context in early nineteenth century Ireland. The Christian Brothers in Australia, led initially by Ambrose Treacy, began their educational mission with inclusion as a central tenet. Today, EREA is called to respond as an organisation, as individual schools, and as individual leaders within school communities.

There are positive indicators that in some corners of EREA, inclusivity is a lived reality. There are relational leaders with vision, compassion, empathy, and the courage to be counter-cultural in a contemporary context that is defined by a contrasting, dominant neo-liberal paradigm. In some schools, there are students from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds in classrooms, playgrounds, libraries and tuckshop lines, walking alongside peers from more privileged backgrounds, forming friendships, bridging societal divides and learning with and from each other.

Equally, it is clear that in other parts of EREA, exclusivity is the prevailing reality, with authentic inclusivity proving too challenging, or worse, not a genuine aspiration. There are marginalised and

disadvantaged young people who remain outside the gates of some EREA schools. While this may or may not be to their detriment, it is apparent that their exclusion is indeed to the detriment of those within the gates.

Authentic inclusivity requires courageous, potentially radical, leadership. This is clearly a great challenge. However, exclusion of young people on the margins is, quite simply, mission failure in a contemporary authentic Edmund Rice community.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

ACU Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Email

From: Pratigya Pozniak <Pratigya.Pozniak@acu.edu.au> on behalf of Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
Sent: Friday, 12 February 2016 3:30 PM
To: Jim Gleeson <Jim.Gleeson@acu.edu.au>; Christopher Branson <Christopher.Branson@acu.edu.au>; Matthew Hawkins <matthew.hawkins@myacu.edu.au>
Cc: Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
Subject: 2015-299E Ethics application approved!

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: Dr Jim Gleeson
Co-Investigator: Prof Chris Branson
Student Researcher: Matthew Hawkins (HDR Student)
Ethics Register Number: 2015-299E
Project Title: A Study of How Leaders in Edmund Rice Schools Understand and Implement Inclusivity
Risk Level: Low Risk
Date Approved: 12/02/2016
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2017

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

The data collection of your project has received ethical clearance but the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process and approval is subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that outstanding permission letters are obtained, interview/survey questions, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur. Failure to provide outstanding documents to the ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. Further, this approval is only valid as long as approved procedures are followed.

If your project is a Clinical Trial, you are required to register it in a publicly accessible trials registry prior to enrolment of the first participant (e.g. Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry http://www.anzctr.org.au/) as a condition of ethics approval.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Researchers who fail to submit a progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed a progress/final report form must be submitted. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the HREC by submitting a Modification/Change to Protocol Form prior to the research commencing or continuing. http://research.acu.edu.au/researcher-support/integrity-and-ethics/
3. Progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. http://research.acu.edu.au/researcher-support/integrity-and-ethics/
4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.
5. Protocols can be extended for a maximum of five (5) years after which a new application must be submitted. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL

Appendix B:

Letter from Br Peter Clinch, Oceania Province Leader of the Christian Brothers

PRESENCE COMPASSION LIBERATION

Christian Brothers
Oceania Province

Our Ref: O HO 0002

11 November 2015

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am aware of the following study to occur in EREA schools in 2016:

PROJECT TITLE: A Study of How Edmund Rice Leaders Understand and Implement Inclusivity
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Jim Gleeson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins
STUDENT'S DEGREE: EdD

I have been informed of the study by Matthew, and am supportive of the research. I am aware that Edmund Rice Education Australia will be supporting the research by providing Matthew with the work email addresses of potential participants from the EREA Office and relevant EREA schools, and I will support the study by providing Matthew with the email address of the present and immediate past members of the Oceania Province Leadership Teams of the Christian Brothers.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Br Peter Clinch
Oceania Province Leader
Congregation of Christian Brothers

Edmund Rice
Oceania Province Centre
131 Queens Road
Nudgee QLD 4014 Australia
Correspondence to:
PO Box 596
Virginia BC Qld 4014
Ph: +61 (0)7 3621 3600
Fax: +61 (0)7 3621 3688
www.edmundrice.org

Appendix C:

Letter from Dr Wayne Tinsey, Executive Director of EREA

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

... educating for liberation and possibility

10 November 2015

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059

To whom it may concern

I am aware of the following study to occur in EREA schools in 2016:

PROJECT TITLE: A Study of How Edmund Rice Leaders Understand and Implement Inclusivity
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Jim Gleeson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins
STUDENT'S DEGREE: EdD

I have discussed the study with Matthew, and am supportive of the research. Edmund Rice Education Australia will be supporting the research by providing Matthew with the work email addresses of potential participants from the EREA Office and relevant EREA schools.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Dr Wayne Tinsey
Executive Director
Edmund Rice Education Australia

Melbourne
PO Box 91
Richmond Vic 3121
+61 3 9426 3200

ABN 96 372 268 340
www.erea.edu.au

Melbourne Adelaide Brisbane Perth Sydney

Appendix D:

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Study of Inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Professor Jim Gleeson

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins

I ..... (*the parent/guardian*) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this one hour focus group discussion at his/her school, and I am aware that the discussion will be digitally recorded, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time . I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN: .....

SIGNATURE .....…… DATE:.....

NAME OF CHILD .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER (if applicable): .....

DATE: ……

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I …… (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in this one hour focus group discussion at my school, and I am aware that the discussion will be digitally recorded, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: .....

SIGNATURE: .....DATE: .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR):.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER (if applicable)]: .....

DATE: .....

Appendix E:

Participant Information Letter – Teachers

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
Teachers

PROJECT TITLE: A Study of Inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Schools
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Jim Gleeson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins
STUDENT'S DEGREE: EdD
HREC Register No.: 2015-299E

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates the understandings and implementations of inclusivity in EREA schools. The study aims to highlight the foundations of inclusivity in a Catholic and Edmund Rice context, along with the current Australian education context particularly as it applies to educationally disadvantaged students. It is hoped that an outcome of the research is a clearer contextual understanding of inclusivity and enhanced implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic and Edmund Rice schools in Australia.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Matthew Hawkins and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Jim Gleeson and Professor Chris Branson.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
One possible risk is that research data will make participants identifiable. Your responses to the questionnaire may make you identifiable. This risk will be mitigated by the removal of identifiable information including names of people and schools during and after the data collection process. Further, all data will be kept on a password protected computer and any hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to participate in the research, you will be invited to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes to complete, and have a mixture of closed and open ended questions.

Appendix F:

Participant Information Letter – EREA Leaders

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
EREA Council, EREA Board, EREA Leadership Team, Principals, Deputy Principals

PROJECT TITLE: A Study of Inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Schools
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Jim Gleeson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins
STUDENT'S DEGREE: EdD
HREC Register No.: 2015-299E

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates the understandings and implementations of inclusivity in EREA schools. The study aims to highlight the foundations of inclusivity in a Catholic and Edmund Rice context, along with the current Australian education context particularly as it applies to educationally disadvantaged students. It is hoped that an outcome of the research is a clearer contextual understanding of inclusivity and enhanced implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic and Edmund Rice schools in Australia.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Matthew Hawkins and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Jim Gleeson and Professor Chris Branson.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
One possible risk is that research data will make participants identifiable. Your responses to the questionnaire may make you identifiable. This risk will be mitigated by the removal of identifiable information including names of people and schools during and after the data collection process. Further, all data will be kept on a password protected computer and any hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to participate in the research, the first invitation you will receive will be to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes to complete, and have a mixture of closed and open ended questions. Following the collation of survey data, a small number of

Appendix G:

Participant Information Letter – Parents and Students

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER
Parents and Student Leaders

PROJECT TITLE: A Study of Inclusivity in Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Schools
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Jim Gleeson
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Matthew Hawkins
STUDENT'S DEGREE: EdD
HREC Register No.: 2015-299E

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates how leaders in Australian Edmund Rice secondary schools understand and implement inclusivity. The study aims to highlight the foundations of inclusivity in a Catholic and Edmund Rice context, along with the current Australian education context particularly as it applies to educationally disadvantaged students. It is hoped that an outcome of the research is a clearer contextual understanding of inclusivity and enhanced implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic and Edmund Rice schools in Australia.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Matthew Hawkins and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Jim Gleeson.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
One possible risk is that research data will make participants identifiable. Therefore, it will not be compulsory for respondents to answer all questions in an identifiable way throughout the questionnaire. In relation to the questionnaire for parents, and the focus group discussion with student leaders, this risk will be mitigated by the removal of identifiable information including names of people and schools during and after the data collection process. Further, all data will be kept on a password protected computer and any hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to participate in the research, parents will be invited to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately twenty minutes to complete, and have a mixture of closed and open ended questions. Student leaders will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion with the

Appendix H:

Teacher Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this survey regarding inclusivity in EREA schools.

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female

What is your current role? (eg classroom teacher, Head of Department, Year Level Co-ordinator, House Dean etc)

_____
_____

How many years have you worked in EREA?

▼ ... >30

Indicate which, if any, of the following Edmund Rice charism formation programs you havecompleted:

- ○ Galilee
- ○ Into the Deep
- ○ Break Every Yolk
- ○ Mt Sinai
- ○ New Street Revisited
- ○ Mt Sion Revisited
- ○ Regional Formation Program/s (please specify)

_____

- ○ Other (please specify)

- ○ None

In your opinion, how important are the following purposes of an Edmund Rice school?

a) Faith formation	
b) Ensuring strong academic outcomes	
c) Provision of sporting programs	
d) Provision of cultural programs	
e) Provision of social justice and service learning programs	
f) Provision of an education for all students,regardless of ability and background	
g) Other	
h) Other:	

Based on your response above, please use the letters (a-h) to identify your three most importantpurposes of an Edmund Rice school.

- ○ Most important _____
- ○ Second most important

_____

- ○ Third most important _____

How well do you think your school is achieving in the following areas?

Faith Formation	
Academic Outcomes	
Sporting Programs	
Cultural Programs	
Social Justice and Service Learning Programs	
Providing education for a diverse range ofyoung people, regardless of ability or background	

When I began working at the school, it was made aware to me that the school was "open to all"and may enrol a number of marginalized children.

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Edmund Rice and Christian Brothers schools were originally established to educate "the poor and the marginalized". In 2017 in your town, which groups of young people would you considerto be marginalized?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

To what extent do you think that these groups that you have identified are currently representedin your school community?

- ○ Extremely well represented
- ○ Very well represented
- ○ Moderately represented
- ○ Slightly represented
- ○ Not represented at all

Across the country, four key groups of young people have been identified as at an "educational disadvantage" or "marginalized". In some places and communities, these groupshave larger representations in society than in others. Consequently, you may feel that it is simply "not feasible" to enrol certain groups of young people in certain schools. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. For my school to be considered inclusive, it should enrol:</p>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not feasible
Indigenous students	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students fromrefugee backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students from economically disadvantaged families/backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please explain the reasons for your choices above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The following students are represented at my school:</p>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
Indigenous students	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students fromrefugee backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students from economically disadvantaged families/backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I support theenrolment of the following students at my school.</p>

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Indigenous students	○	○	○	○	○
Students with disabilities	○	○	○	○	○
Students fromrefugee backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○
Students from economically disadvantaged families/backgrounds	○	○	○	○	○

Please explain the reasons for your responses to the last question.

The following questions pertain to four key groups of educationally disadvantaged young peoplein 21st century Australia: Indigenous students, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, and students from economically disadvantaged families and backgrounds. For the purpose of the following questions, these groups will be described as "marginalized students".

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am concerned about the impact that enrolling marginalized students could and/or does have on theallocation of physical and human resources at my school.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Please explain the reasons for your choice above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am concerned about the impact that enrolling marginalized students could and/or does have on theschool's ability to cater for the academic and pastoral needs of students

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Please explain the reasons for your choice above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

In order for me to cater for the needs of Indigenous students, Irequire more adequate professional development.

- ○ Yes
- ○ Possibly
- ○ No

In order for me to cater for the needs of students with disabilities, Irequire more adequate professional development.

- ○ Yes
- ○ Possibly
- ○ No

In order for me to cater for the needs of students from refugee backgrounds, I require more adequate professional development.

- ○ Yes
- ○ Possibly
- ○ No

In order for me to cater for the needs of students from economically disadvantagedfamilies and backgrounds, I require more adequate professional development.

- ○ Yes
- ○ Possibly
- ○ No

Page Break

Please respond to the following statement: I believe that the SeniorLeaders at my school are committed to the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged students.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Unsure

Please explain your response above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please respond to the following statement: I think my school is inclusive.

- ○ Strongly agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Somewhat agree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly disagree

Please explain your response above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix I:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Principal

1. Introduction – name, summary of study, what's happened up to now, explain case studies, confidentiality, recording for transcription
2. Clear outcome of literature and confirmed by online surveys of EREA leaders, Principals and DPs
    a. Inclusivity is an "essential characteristic" of Edmund Rice Education
    b. There is broad agreement around the concept of "all welcome"
    c. There is broad agreement about the need for a focus on marginalized young people
3. What are your thoughts on this concept of "all welcome" or "open to all" as stated in the EREA Charter?
4. What thoughts come to mind when you try to define the concept of "inclusivity"? (just enrolments? Marginalized? Programs? Catering for needs?)
5. Is "open to all" a realistic aspiration for CBC Fremantle?
6. Who are "the marginalized" in terms of young people in the Fremantle area?
7. Link to the literature finding about the four key groups at an educational disadvantage – are these groups relevant in the CBC Fremantle context?
8. How would you describe the representation of those key groups at CBC Fremantle?
9. The word "should" came up quite a bit through the surveys, implying there may be some aspiration, goal, or even obligation to enrol marginalized young people – what are your thoughts on this concept of obligation around being inclusive?
10. Does CBC Fremantle have any explicit goals around enrolment of marginalized students? Enrolment policies? Discussed at meetings? Strategic Plan?
11. There was a great deal of agreement evident in the data coming from EREA Leadership surveys and Principals/Deputy Principal surveys. However, an interesting contrast was the difference in views around whether current enrolments are "justifiably fair".

Principals and Deputy Principals are significantly more positive in this assessment.

- **a. 15% of EREA Leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of Indigenous students attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 61% of Ps and DPs agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.**
- **b. 23% of EREA Leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of students with disabilities attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 76% of Ps and DPs agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.**
- **c. 8% of EREA Leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of students from refugee backgrounds attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 48% of Ps and DPs agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.**

d. **23% of EREA Leadership respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of economically disadvantaged students attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while 81% of Ps and DPs agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.**

EREA Senior Leadership perceive the challenge of implementing inclusivity to be more significant that Principals and Deputy Principals.

e. **85% of EREA Leadership respondents agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 15% disagree.**
f. **50% of Principals and Deputy Principals agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 48% disagree.**

Why do you think this disconnect exists?

12. As Principal, what do you see as the challenges in being inclusive of marginalized students? The surveys indicate that the key challenges are adequate professional development of teachers, provision and allocation of human and physical resources, possible impact on fee increases, and parental views and public image concerns. Do you agree?
13. Are there discussions and/or solutions to any of these challenges?
14. Is there anything you haven't had an opportunity to say that you would like to?
15. Thank you – reminder of confidentiality. Transcript will be provided to check.

Appendix J:

Themes and Codes Emerging From Phase 1 of Research

	Key statements	Initial code	Subcodes
1	Inclusivity is very clearly an essential characteristic of an EREA school. a. It is part central to the mission of the Catholic school b. It is an articulated strategic priority (Charter touchstone) of EREA	Essential Characteristic	Essential Characteristic: Mission Essential Characteristic: Charter
2	Inclusive Edmund Rice schools seek to **welcome all**.	Welcome all	
3	The poor and marginalized in contemporary Australian schooling are: a. Indigenous students b. Refugee/Asylum Seeker students c. Students with disabilities d. Materially poor students e. LGBTI students f. Students suffering from mental health issues g. Students who come from significantly dysfunctional families	Marginalized	Marginalized: Indigenous Marginalized: Refugee Marginalized: Disability Marginalized: Poor Marginalized: LGBTI Marginalized: Mental Health Marginalized: Family dysfunction
4	EREA schools **should** enrol Indigenous students, Refugee students, students with disabilities, materially poor students, because "an authentic EREA school values diversity greatly and caters for a wide range of educational needs."	Enrolment goal	Enrolment Goal: Indigenous Enrolment Goal: Refugee Enrolment Goal: Disability Enrolment Goal: Poor

5	There is a disconnect between EREA Senior Leadership views and Principal/Deputy Principal views regarding the current enrolments of marginalized groups being justifiably fair. Principals and Deputy Principals are significantly more positive in this assessment. a. **15% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **Indigenous students** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **61% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. b. **23% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **students with disabilities** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **76% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. c. **8% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **students from refugee backgrounds** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **48% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair. d. **23% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **economically disadvantaged students** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **81% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at	Leadership Perceptions	Leadership Perceptions: System Leadership Leadership Perceptions: School Leadership

	their school was justifiably fair. EREA Senior Leadership perceive the challenge of implementing inclusivity to be more significant that Principals and Deputy Principals. e. 85% of EREA Leadership respondents agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 15% disagree. f. 50% of Principals and Deputy Principals agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 48% disagree. There is resounding agreement that EREA schools are currently inclusive. g. 92.31% of EREA Leadership agree or strongly agree that EREA schools are inclusive. h. 90.91% of Principals and Deputy Principals agree or strongly agree that their school is inclusive. i. This appears to be incongruent with finding 5 above regarding the proportion of marginalized students enrolled.		
6	There is general agreement amongst respondents that the key challenges to inclusivity are: a. Professional Development of Teachers b. Provision of physical and human resources to cater for diverse needs c. Financial cost of waiving/reducing fees d. Parental views regarding allocation of resources and academic reputation of the school	Challenges	Challenges: PD Challenges: Resources Challenges: Fees Challenges: Parental Views

Emerging themes:

1. Inclusivity is very clearly an essential characteristic of an EREA school.

a. It is part central to the mission of the Catholic school
b. It is an articulated strategic priority (Charter touchstone) of EREA

2. Inclusive Edmund Rice schools seek to **welcome all.**
3. The poor and marginalized in contemporary Australian schooling are:
    a. Indigenous students
    b. Refugee/Asylum Seeker students
    c. Students with disabilities
    d. Materially poor students
    e. LGBTI students
    f. Students suffering from mental health issues
    g. Students who come from significantly dysfunctional families
4. EREA schools **should** enrol Indigenous students, Refugee students, students with disabilities, materially poor students, because "an authentic EREA school values diversity greatly and caters for a wide range of educational needs."
5. There is a disconnect between EREA Senior Leadership views and Principal/Deputy Principal views regarding the current enrolments of marginalized groups being justifiably fair. Principals and Deputy Principals are significantly more positive in this assessment.
    a. **15% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **Indigenous students** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **61% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.
    b. **23% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **students with disabilities** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **76% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.
    c. **8% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **students from refugee backgrounds** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **48% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.
    d. **23% of EREA Leadership** respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion of **economically disadvantaged students** attending EREA schools is justifiably fair, while **81% of Ps and DPs** agreed or strongly agreed that the proportion at their school was justifiably fair.
6. EREA Senior Leadership perceive the challenge of implementing inclusivity to be more significant that Principals and Deputy Principals.
    a. 85% of EREA Leadership respondents agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 15% disagree.
    b. 50% of Principals and Deputy Principals agree that it is challenging to implement inclusive practices and 48% disagree.
7. There is general agreement amongst respondents that the key challenges to inclusivity are:
    a. Professional Development of Teachers
    b. Provision of physical and human resources to cater for diverse needs
    c. Financial cost of waiving/reducing fees

    d. Parental views regarding allocation of resources and academic reputation of the school
8. There is resounding agreement that EREA schools are currently inclusive.
    a. 92.31% of EREA Leadership agree or strongly agree that EREA schools are inclusive.
    b. 90.91% of Principals and Deputy Principals agree or strongly agree that their school is inclusive.
    c. This appears to be incongruent with finding 5 above regarding the proportion of marginalized students enrolled.

Appendix K:

The Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

CHARTER FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE

Edmund Rice Tradition

Our Touchstones

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our schools and offices are placed. We are inspired and nurtured by the wisdoms, spiritualities and experiences of our First Nations Peoples.

Together we work actively for reconciliation, justice, equity and healing.

Our Context

> *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*
> *because he has anointed me*
> *to bring good news to the poor.*
> *He has sent me to proclaim release to*
> *the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,*
> *to let the oppressed go free,*
> *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*
>
> LUKE 4:18-19

1

Two hundred and fifteen years since Edmund Rice commenced his first school for boys in Waterford, Ireland, one hundred and forty-nine years since Brother Ambrose Treacy stepped onto the dock at Station Pier in Melbourne and ten years since the commencement of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA), a third edition of the Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition has been prepared. This revised Charter deepens our understanding of the Touchstones and confirms our sense of the call of the Holy Spirit into the future.

This Charter is intended to assist schools to offer a liberating education, based on a Gospel spirituality, within an inclusive community committed to justice and solidarity. In this way, schools will share in the prophetic mission of the Catholic Church to continue the work of Jesus and bring good news to the poor.

These schools reflect the diversity of the Australian community – early learning, primary and secondary, all-boys and co-education, alternative education, boarding schools, education for those with disabilities, for refugees, inner-city, urban, rural and remote schools. They operate within an increasingly challenging national and global context whereby the Church has less authority than in the past and while the demand for Catholic education is only increasing, the reasons for this are not always faith related.

Within the global concept of solidarity, our schools are called to live out the radical message of love and inclusion which Jesus lived and preached, particularly in regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, refugees, people of other faiths, races, sexual orientation and gender. This hope for transformation calls EREA communities into critical reflection, ensuring that the charism of Edmund Rice (his unique gift of service for the people of God) is lived out faithfully within the agenda of this world. This charism of liberation, compassion and presence drives us and draws us into closer relationship with Christ, with each other and with the earth itself.

The Charter, together with the three documents on Foundations, Formation, and Renewal, describes our distinct, although not unique, identity as Edmund Rice Education Australia. The Charter provides a practical expression of this identity and so is crucial for use in decision-making, planning and review.

Now, a renewed Charter is being proclaimed. In the light of reflection and wide consultation, the Charter continues to use four touchstones* to describe the culture of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition which is striving for authenticity.

These touchstones give us ideals authentically linked with the charism which underpins the ministry in our schools and educational endeavours. They help us set our direction and define our goals as, following Blessed Edmund's vision, we continue to reflect and seek to make the Gospel a living reality in our communities.

The Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia proclaims this Charter and invites its implementation by all in Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Edmund Rice Education Australia Council
September 2017

*A touchstone is a fundamental or quintessential feature. In earlier times a touchstone was used to judge the purity of precious metals. A streak left on the touchstone was compared with a streak made by the pure metal. In this way authenticity was verified.

Our Story

God

God is beyond all words. But the words that come closest are love and truth. From the beginning of time, humans have built their lives around beliefs that were beyond full understanding. We have known that life is mysterious and also wonderful. The Bible tells a great story of the encounter between God and the human family. God's love is creative and liberating, healing and invigorating. The Bible constantly challenges us to laugh at our pretensions, and our needy and incomplete selves, but also calls us to find peace and purpose as children of God. Psalm 62 says 'my soul is thirsting for you, my flesh is longing for you.' The Edmund Rice family is a community that thirsts to know God and longs to work with God in caring for creation and building God's kingdom. We are people who make a daily leap of faith.

Jesus

Jesus shows us the unbounded love of God. The most common title given to Jesus in the New Testament is 'rabbi', which means 'teacher.' Jesus was a teacher who asked his followers to be teachers also, by both word and deed. Throughout his life Jesus taught all he came across to act with justice and compassion and to challenge unjust structures that diminished people's humanity. These lessons also call us to express God's love and compassion, how ever painful that reality may be. Christ calls us to help carry the cross of all those in the world who suffer through injustice of any kind. The cross tells us that the Gospel is never convenient. The raising of Jesus to new life gives us hope: that God's love is true and real.

Church

The Church exists to continue the historical work of Jesus. The Christian community has a history of many colours. It has been a vehicle for great creativity, discovery and wisdom. It has fostered the life of the mind and imagination, and called and challenged people to reach out beyond themselves to make a difference in the world. But there have been many times when the Church has added to the burdens of humanity. At the start of this millennium, St John Paul II asked forgiveness for all the wrongs of the Church. As time goes by, we become only more aware of our need for humility and honesty. At the same time, we know that our home, the Church, is the heritage we hold for our young people. We invite them into a community and a tradition in the hope that it will energise them to mend the world. The Eucharist is the extraordinary table God shares with very ordinary people. There we offer our simple gifts to God and find Jesus present again among us.

Edmund Rice

Born in Callan, Ireland, in 1762, Edmund came to the bustling city port of Waterford as a young man. He was talented and energetic and soon became very wealthy, selling produce to ships that transported emigrants. He married in 1789 and the couple had a daughter, Mary. The tragic death of Edmund's wife led him into a time of mourning during which his relationship with God deepened. In his own sorrow, he was moved with compassion to recognise the needs of those around him. Edmund Rice left little in writing but some of the passages he marked in his Bible show where his imagination took fire. The

Ireland of Edmund's day was an unjust place where many lived in poverty and social structures deeply oppressed the majority of the population. He found in the story of Jesus the call to liberation that is at the heart of what Jesus preached. In 1802 he set up a free school for boys living in poverty. He wanted to help them have the life God meant them to have. He arranged for them to have food and clothing and a place to sleep. They were taught about God and about the Catholic faith. They learnt how to read and write and use numbers. All this enabled them to rise from a demeaning poverty and sense of hopelessness in which they would otherwise have been trapped.

Christian Brothers

Other men were drawn to Edmund and his work of justice for those made poor. They lived together in community and, in 1808, were professed as Brothers, along with Edmund. By 1825 Edmund Rice and his 30 Brothers were educating, free of charge, over 5,500 boys in 12 different towns and cities. Many boys were also being clothed and fed. The year 1825 also saw the expansion of the Brothers beyond Ireland. In 1868, Brother Ambrose Treacy and three companions arrived on the Donald Mackay at Station Pier in Melbourne, unable even to pay the landing tax but still ready to begin their Australian adventure. They shared their historical moment with Mary Mackillop, St Mary of the Cross, who started her first school in 1866. In that one decade, Australia was forever changed. The Brothers were eventually to open over 120 schools here. They began with little but their faith and vision. They have acknowledged painful shortcomings in their own history but are thankful for what God has achieved through them.

Edmund Rice Education Australia

The formation of Edmund Rice Education Australia by the Christian Brothers in 2007 continues this creative work of education. EREA, as part of the mission of the Catholic Church, is charged with the responsibility for the governance of over 50 schools throughout Australia, serving more than 38,000 students. Each school has a separate character and history but all draw life from the same charism of Edmund Rice and from the Gospel. We have been joined by a number of Associate Schools and we are reaching out to the world through Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders.

Liberating Education

We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences, so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. encourages all members of the school community to work to the best of their ability, to become the person that each is created to be and to strive for equity and excellence;
2. serves the individual needs of each person, providing teaching and learning experiences that are authentic, relevant, rigorous and creative;
3. is committed to enabling students to experience personal achievement within a safe, supportive and healthy environment;
4. provides an holistic education integrating faith with culture and learning, while instilling an appreciation of the need to strive for the greater good of all society;
5. challenges all to prophetic leadership within the school community and beyond;
6. gives priority in the allocation of resources to provide services for students with particular needs;
7. enables students to experience and value critical awareness of justice and peace issues through the curriculum, service and solidarity learning, environmental practices and the culture of the school;
8. promotes ongoing renewal by providing opportunities for reflective practice, formation and professional development.

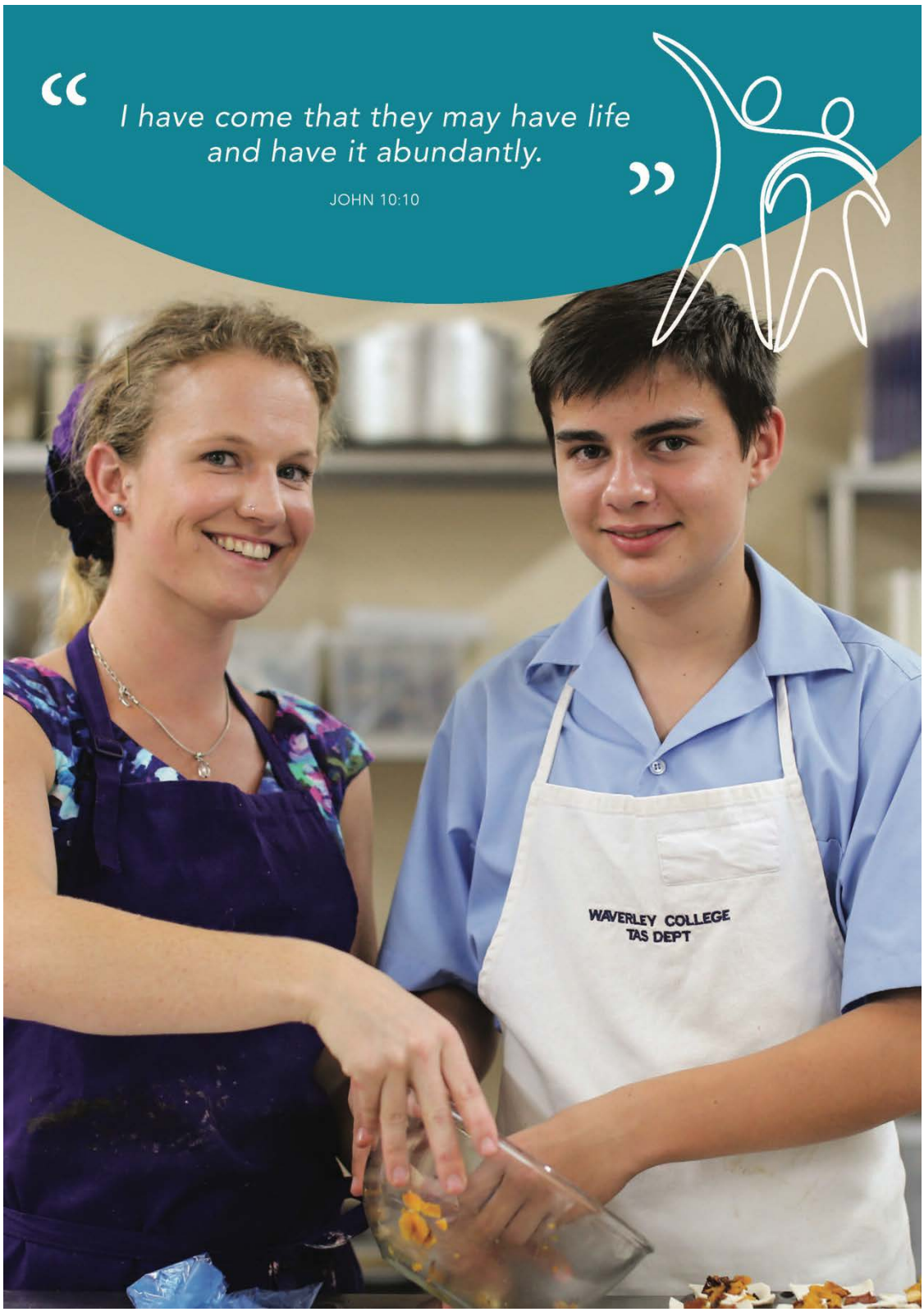
Reflective Questions

How are the vision and hope for a better world for all expressed and celebrated in our school community?

What experiences most awaken our young people to the need for liberation in their own lives?

What knowledge and skills do we equip our young people with so that they are able to discern the liberation needs of others?

Who amplifies the voices of those most in need of liberation within our school community? How is that voice received?


I have come that they may have life
and have it abundantly.
JOHN 10:10
WAVERLEY COLLEGE
TAS DEPT


Liberating
Education
We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences, so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all.
EREA offers a Liberatir
based on a Gospel Spir
an Inclusive Communit
to Justice and So
Gospel
Spirituality
We invite all people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community.


Inclusive Community
Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good.
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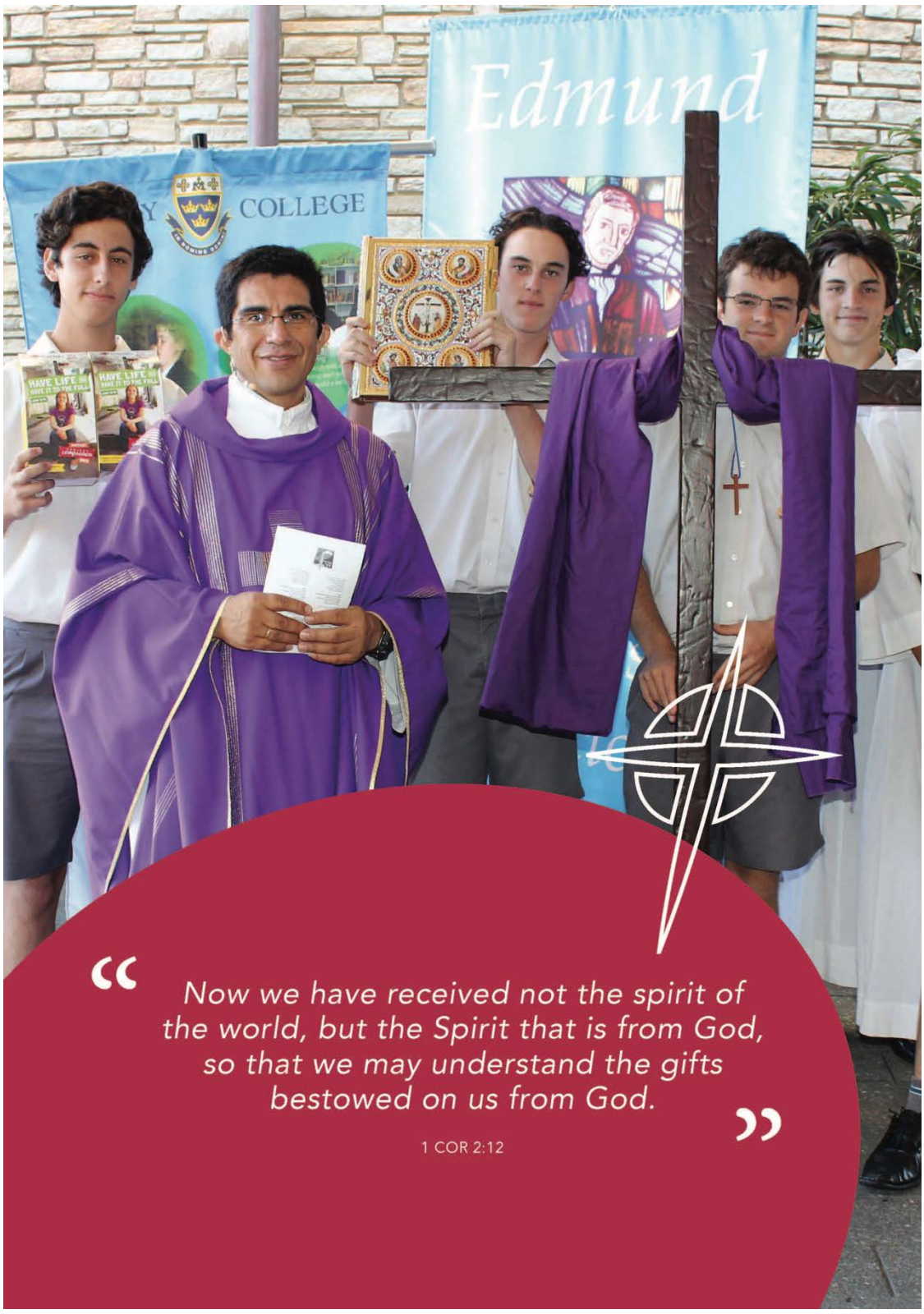
Justice and Solidarity
We are committed to justice and peace for all, grounded in a spirituality of action and reflection that calls us to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised and the earth itself.


Edmund
COLLEGE
HAVE LIFE
Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us from God.
1 COR 2:12

Gospel Spirituality

We invite people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. lives and grows as a faith-sharing community by fostering personal relationships with God through Jesus Christ;
2. celebrates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a Eucharistic community committed to the service of those in need;
3. nurtures and encourages the spiritual growth of each person through reflection, prayer, symbols, sacred stories, rituals and sacraments;
4. models the Gospel practices of forgiveness and reconciliation by the manner in which conflict is resolved;
5. provides religious education in line with Diocesan guidelines and faith formation experiences as fundamental components of a Catholic School curriculum;
6. continues the work of the Christian Brothers by calling its school community to play a prophetic role in the mission of the Catholic Church;
7. provides formation opportunities for its members in the mystery of God in all creation, the spirit of Jesus, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, the inspiration of the Christian Brothers, their own sacred story and their call to mission;
8. recognises and acts upon the central place of the Gospel commitment to the marginalised, through a preferential option for the poor;
9. is engaged in inter-faith dialogue and respects the spirituality authentically lived by those who come from other religious traditions.

Reflective Questions

In what ways do newcomers or visitors to our school community tangibly recognise our relationships and actions as being Gospel inspired?

What opportunities exist in our school community for people to explore more deeply their understanding of and commitment to a Gospel spirituality?

In what ways does our school community utilise its gifts to witness to the Gospel practices of inclusivity, forgiveness and compassion?

Inclusive Community

Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

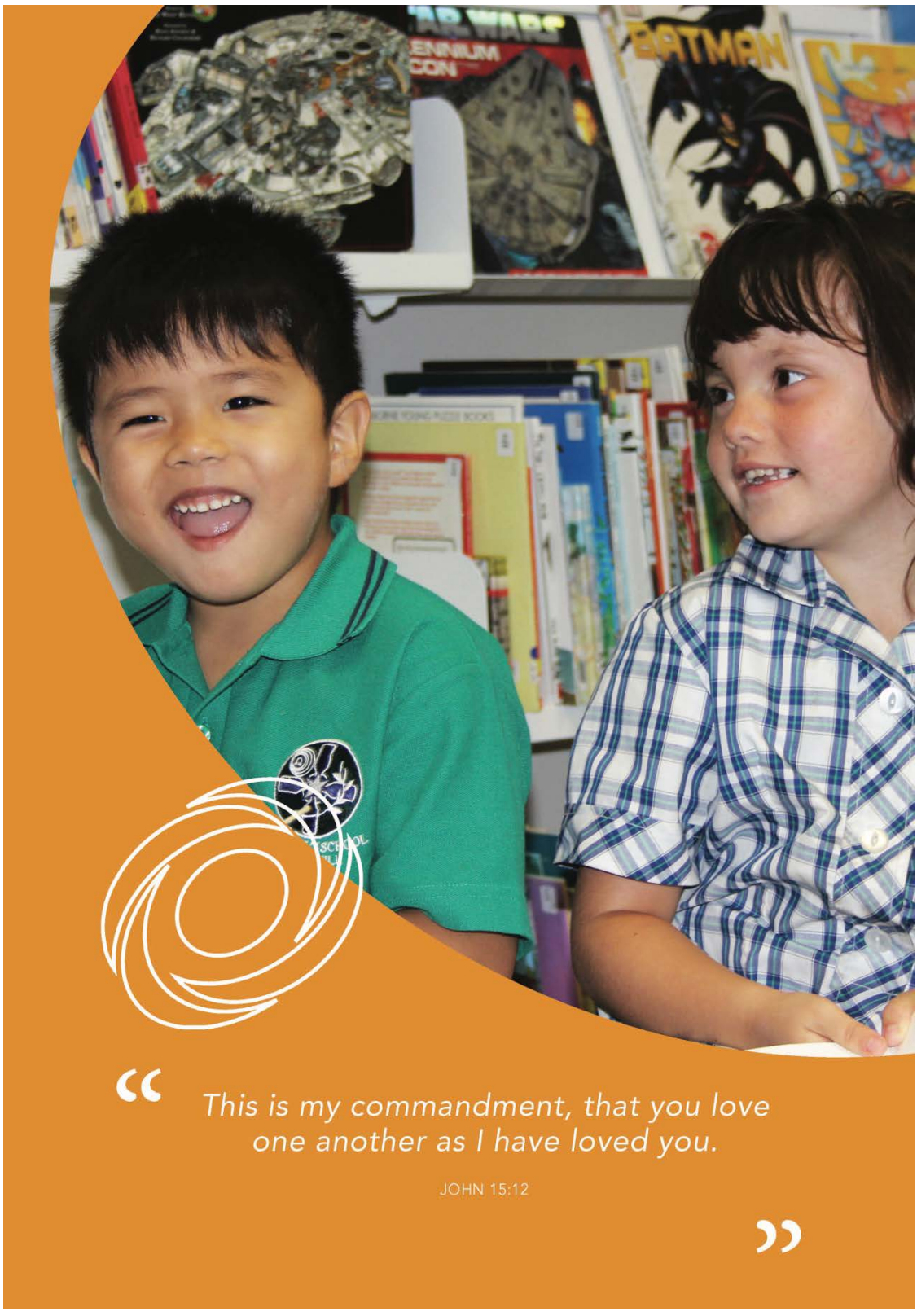
1. provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as uniquely reflecting the image of God;
2. demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
3. is sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families, designing school programs to empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
4. welcomes and values all members of the school community regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation;
5. promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
6. works in partnership with the local Catholic community and Church in serving the broader mission of the whole Church;
7. acknowledges the services and contribution of the Christian Brothers and works in partnership with Edmund Rice Ministries in furthering the Charism;
8. acknowledges the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and welcomes them into its community;
9. looks beyond itself to contribute, according to its means, to the overall growth and development of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and to Edmund Rice ministries in Australia and overseas.

Reflective Questions

How does our school community open its doors, not only to welcome and support all who come, but also to go out and meet those who don't, constantly seeking ways of inviting everyone to the table?

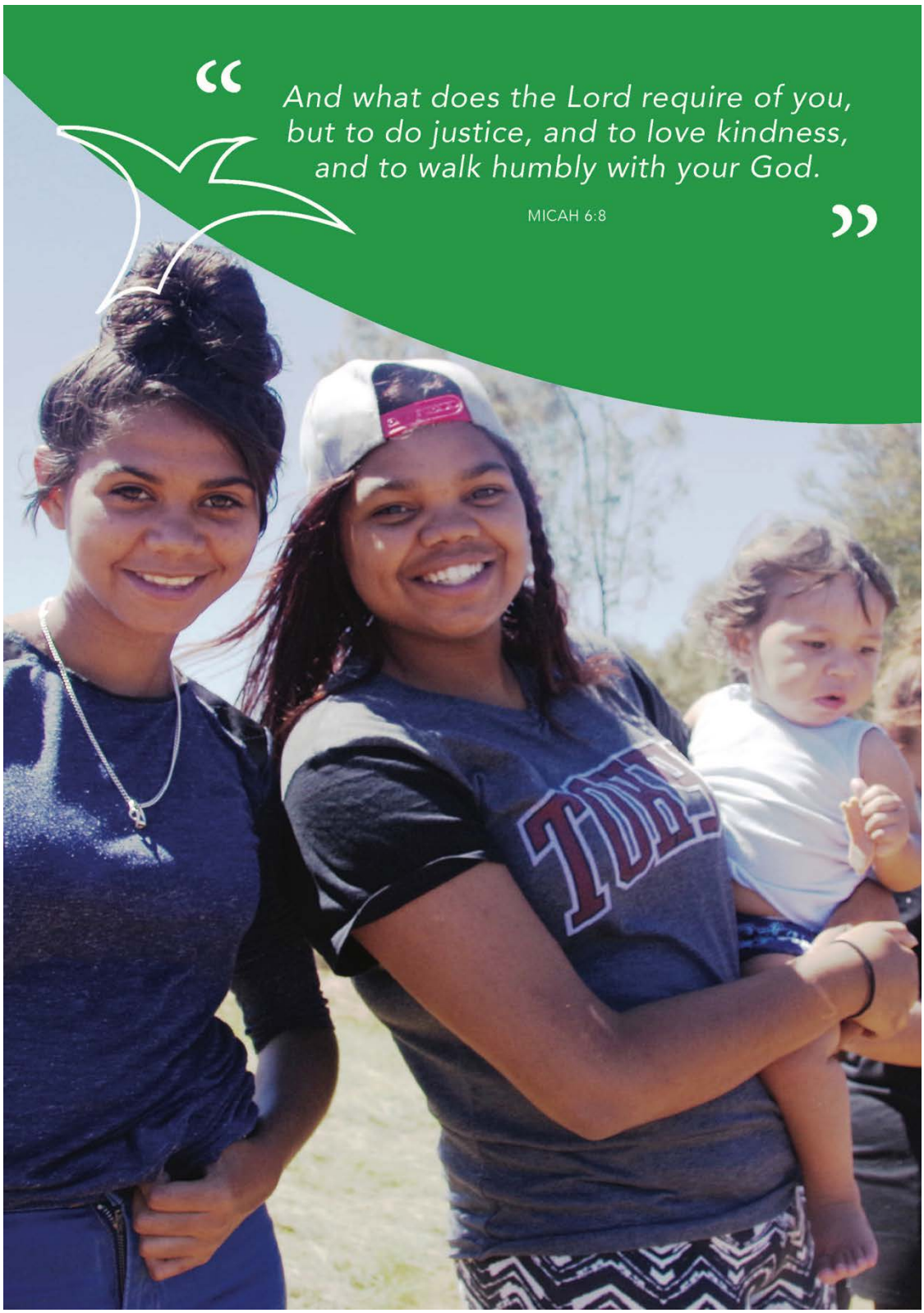
What opportunities does our community have to ensure its mode of operation meets the diversity of needs of those it openly welcomes?

What challenges does our school community face in aiming to be 'open to all'?



This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

JOHN 15:12


“And what does the Lord require of you,
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God.”
MICAH 6:8

Justice and Solidarity

We are committed to justice and peace for all, grounded in a spirituality of action and reflection that calls us to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised and the earth itself.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. develops a curriculum that integrates themes of justice and peace, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching;
2. adopts prophetic stances in the light of Gospel practices and is involved in advocacy for just causes;
3. promotes participation in service and solidarity learning programs in partnership with those on the margins;
4. seeks to provide opportunities for involvement in immersion programs in which students and staff form relationships, work with and learn from those on the margins, leading to mutual transformation;
5. is committed to working with and walking alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, advocating justice and promoting reconciliation;
6. is actively involved in developing global partnerships through participation in Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders;
7. is committed to promoting an integral ecology through demonstrating a deep reverence for the earth as both God's work and our home, promoting eco-justice and working towards a sustainable and regenerative future for all creation;
8. recognises that its members are part of a global community and actively supports the development of all humanity;
9. nurtures a culture of critical reflection and prayerful discernment in justice and peace issues.

Reflective Questions

What are the benefits and challenges of committing to justice and peace for all?

How do we develop our educational mission through a spirituality that reflects upon needs and actions?

In what ways are we asked to stand with those who are afflicted and marginalised?

How are we asked to defend our wounded planet?

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love, be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace.

POPE FRANCIS, 2013

The Charter will guide schools in the quest towards greater authenticity as Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. Each school is challenged to be faithful to the four touchstones and to reflect regularly on their embodiment in all aspects of the school. The Charter will be a foundation document in all planning, policy and practice; it will be a focus for formation and reflection.

The School Renewal process will complement and validate the reflection of schools. Through School Renewal the governing body of Edmund Rice Education Australia will accredit each school as an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

As a living document, this Charter will continue to evolve. It will be reviewed in 2022.

"Live Jesus in Our Hearts – Forever"

Resources to support the implementation of The Charter can be found at www.erea.edu.au

Scripture translations: New Revised Standard Version