



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

A Statement from the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education: Federal Government Funding Proposals

**Media release
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The Bishops Commission for Catholic Education, speaking on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, has expressed concern at some elements of the Federal Government's budget announcement regarding Catholic school funding.

As Bishops, we acknowledge the difficult financial situation currently faced by the Government and the nation. We are fully aware of the need for restraint and responsible stewardship of the nation's resources. We also acknowledge the Government's recognition, in its funding proposals, of its responsibility to facilitate parental choice in the matter of education. It is this principle that undergirds the now well-established practice of funding a Government education system and a Catholic education system, as well as hundreds of Independent schools.

We are encouraged that the Government has now announced that there will be a minimum funding indexation for all Australian schools in the medium to long term. The Government's proposed floating indexation rate had been creating uncertainty for schools, school systems and families.

However, that decision has not addressed all the concerns of Catholic education. Due to the Government's inability to provide schools and systems with its funding modelling, Catholic education leaders remain concerned about how the Government's proposed funding arrangements could adversely affect the 1,737 Catholic schools across the country. Parents are understandably anxious at the prospect of likely fee increases.

There is a particular and very serious concern about actual funding cuts to Catholic schools in the ACT – not just slower growth, as would be experienced for many Catholic school systems.

We also wish to express our concern at the decision to abandon the mechanism for calculating system funding. Called the Student-Weighted System Average SES (often called the System-Weighted Average), this method recognises the complexities of running a system as widespread and diverse as the Catholic system and the expertise that has enabled Catholic education authorities to redistribute funds to areas of particular need not covered by the funding formulae. The reduction in funding that will result from the abandonment of the System-Weighted Average will significantly compromise the ability of the Catholic education system to function effectively and efficiently and to make "on the ground" decisions in relation to particular projects and special needs, including the support of remote schools.

Detailed consultation prior to the announcement of the funding arrangements may have been able to avoid some of these uncertainties and the consequent distress that has been generated. We are calling on the Government to re-engage more deeply with the National Catholic Education Commission, to provide to the Commission the modelling on which the Government's decisions were made, and to listen to the concerns expressed by the Catholic education sector, especially about the importance of the System-Weighted Average.

In all this, we are not asking for any "special deals". Rather, we are asking for an approach to funding that acknowledges the importance of the Catholic sector as the largest non-government provider of education in this country, that ensures the viability and rightful autonomy of the Catholic sector and that does not disadvantage Catholic schools and the families who choose Catholic schools over the 10-year period of the Government's funding model.

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