
DESPITE CUTS, CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WANT TO KEEP FEES AFFORDABLE

Catholic education leaders are committed to maintaining an affordable and accessible Catholic school system and trying to keep fee increases to a minimum despite funding cuts to more than 600 schools across the country.

National Catholic Education Commission acting executive director Danielle Cronin says analysis of the Turnbull Government's school funding model has found that 617 Catholic schools will be allocated less Commonwealth funding in 2018 than they were allocated this year. In dozens of cases, that funding cut will be more than 50 per cent next year.

"And of those 617 schools that will have their Commonwealth funding allocation cut in 2018, 183 won't have reached their 2017 levels by the end of the Minister's unpopular 10-year plan," she said.

Ms Cronin said except for the ACT, where Catholic school funding will go backwards over the next 10 years, increasing funding in other jurisdictions gives Catholic systems some ability to conceal the Government's school funding cuts.

"But with the Minister cutting funding for some schools by more than 50 per cent, it's hard to paper over those cuts without increasing school fees," she said.

"Like our colleagues in Brisbane, Catholic school systems across Australia are trying to find ways to keep fees affordable in the face of cuts of that magnitude. The Government's new funding model puts that affordability under serious threat in some parts of the country because of cuts to school communities that can't easily be absorbed.

"Catholic system leaders are seeking to assure parents that we understand they are already facing fee pressures. Minister Birmingham's plan will increase that pressure in hundreds of school communities."

Ms Cronin said the Minister's response, that increased funding to state Catholic education systems allows for redistribution to hide his cuts to 617 schools, places many Catholic systems in an awkward position.

"The Minister is reducing the funding allocated to hundreds of schools, but saying that their fees shouldn't have to increase," she explained.

"To avoid those fee increases, funding increases to other Catholic schools will have to be used to offset those cuts.

"In the Northern Territory, the Minister is cutting funding to all Catholic schools in Darwin. Does he want them to raise their fees or does he want the increased funding to Catholic schools in remote parts of the Territory to be filtered back to those Darwin schools? Would he like to visit one of our remote Indigenous schools and tell them why his model requires them to share their funding increases?"

Ms Cronin said in other parts of the country, because the largest funding cuts are for school communities that are deemed – often falsely – to be wealthier, shortfalls of thousands of dollars in Commonwealth funding will have to be offset by either massive fee increases or by taking money from other school communities.

"Even when schools are beneficiaries of increased funding from the Government's model, they might be asked to help keep other Catholic schools in their state or territory affordable in a display of the solidarity and co-responsibility that are embedded in Catholic education," she said.

"But based on the Minister's questionable claims that he is implementing a needs-based school funding model, Catholic systems that direct funding from lower socioeconomic areas, which attract higher levels of Commonwealth funding, to higher socioeconomic areas will be in breach of his model.

"The Minister has left Catholic schools in an untenable position: Raise fees significantly or openly defy the Government's plan.

"We know that parents would rather we keep schools affordable than have us adhere to a flawed policy. Catholic education will do everything we can to ensure a Catholic school remains an option for all families who seek one for their children."