



21 June 2017

To: The Catholic Education Community of the Diocese of Cairns

Subject: Federal Government Funding

It has been now about 6 weeks since the Federal Government announced its proposal for the funding of schools in Australia for the ten year period commencing January 2018.

Since the announcement you would have heard from or read in the media (including social media) a range of reports, sometimes conflicting and confusing, as to what the Government's proposed funding method, known as Gonski 2.0, will mean for schools, in particular Catholic schools.

Over the weekend just passed and in the lead-up to the current Senate debate, this discussion has intensified, particularly in relation to how much Catholic schools across Australia might stand to lose during the next ten years from the Government's proposed funding methodology.

I am writing today to provide you with information regarding the impact that the Government's proposed funding method will have on Catholic Education:

1. In the Diocese of Cairns; and,
2. Generally across Australia.

The Diocese of Cairns

The Diocese of Cairns operates under the Federal Government legislation as a "system" of 29 schools. As a system we are allowed to pool our Federal Government funding and then redistribute those funds according to needs at the local level to ensure that each school is able to operate with an optimal balance of Government funding and fees from Parents to provide an equitable allocation of funding for each school.

One example of the need for us to redistribute funding is in the area of students with disabilities – the Government funding received for students with disabilities is not sufficient to cover the costs incurred, therefore in order to adequately provide for our students we need to redistribute funding according to the needs of those students in each school. Redistribution also allows us to provide fee relief for financially struggling families through measures such as health care card discounts and remission of fees.

The Socio Educational Status (SES) of each school in the Diocese of Cairns is mostly in the bottom two quartiles of the SES range. Our lowest SES is 82 and our highest is 103. **Therefore in the Diocese of Cairns, Federal Government funding is projected to increase at reasonable levels each year over the next ten years which should see fee levels at our Catholic schools maintained with potentially only moderate increases in line with CPI during that period.**



Catholic Education generally across Australia

Across Australia there will be other areas like the Diocese of Cairns - regional, rural, remote, low SES urban areas, that will experience an increase in Federal Government funding. However in other parts of Australia, particularly in the inner urban areas of Capital cities, there are many Catholic Schools that have an SES in the top two quartiles of the SES range – and there are some with an SES in the top quartile.

A handful of these Catholic schools could be said to be attended by “wealthy” people, however many of those schools also provide scholarships, fee remissions and other assistance for financially disadvantaged families to enrol their children.

The majority of these Catholic schools however, are systemic Catholic Primary and Secondary schools and the Parents of Children enrolled at these schools are mostly hard working people (single and double income families or small business people) who, because of their location, either have high mortgages or pay high levels of rent and generally experience a high cost of living due to transport and other cost of living pressures. These parents make sacrifices to exercise their choice to send their children to Catholic schools. These Catholic Schools are already facing fee pressure because of diminishing Government assistance – some of these Primary schools have fee levels of around \$5000 per year already.

We should all have pause for thought for what these families are now facing. With little or no prior warning or consultation many of them are now facing the prospect of not being able to afford to continue to send their children to a Catholic school. While this is not the case for our Cairns schools we should all recognise and reflect on the anguish and uncertainty now facing these families. We should also reflect that any change that is detrimental to any part of the Catholic Education sector inevitably weakens us all. And, who knows if our schools will be the next victims of this non-consultative ‘take it or leave it’ approach.

National Catholic Education Commission campaign

It is important for Australian Society into the future that Catholic Schools (and non-Government schools generally) remain a viable choice for families. If it is easy now for a Government to decide to make the choice of a Catholic School unviable for a large section of our population (under the guise that those parents are perceived by a flawed measure to be “wealthy”), then it will be just as easy in the future for Governments to decide that all non-Government schools should receive decreasing amounts of Government assistance regardless of their Socio Educational Status.

That is why it is important that the National Catholic Education Commission campaigns strongly for fairness in the Federal Government’s proposed school funding method.

Yours sincerely



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

