
SCHOOLS, STUDENTS NEED PROGRESS ON FUNDING, NOT REGRESSION

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox says Catholic school leaders and parents are becoming increasingly concerned about how schools will be funded from 2018 as an era of uncertainty looms closer.

Education ministers will meet in Adelaide tomorrow to discuss how Commonwealth funding for Australian schools is distributed after 2017. Mr Fox called for the ministers to take a constructive approach to the discussions.

“With just 15 months left until the current Commonwealth funding arrangements for Australian schools expire, there is not a lot of time for parents and schools to plan for the educational needs of students,” Mr Fox said.

“It is important that tomorrow’s meeting marks a step forward, rather than a step back, in the discussion about how needs-based and sector-blind funding can be delivered to support all Australian schools and students.

“The current funding arrangements moved all schools and school systems closer to funding that meets assessed need. Anything that undermines that progress will not be welcomed by any parents or school communities.

“Parents, principals and teachers look at education as a 13-year proposition for a student. They want – and need – certainty about how students and schools will be supported in the coming years.”

Mr Fox said Catholic education has long supported and implemented needs-based funding, which the Review of Funding for Schooling endorsed in its recommendations to the Gillard Government. The Review also called for funding to be sector-blind, meaning students’ needs were treated similarly regardless of which school they attend.

“All school sectors educate advantaged and disadvantaged students,” Mr Fox said.

“Catholic schools cater to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in every corner of Australia, including some of our most remote communities.

“The number of students with disability and the number of Indigenous students in Catholic schools has doubled over the past decade, along with other student groups. Where those students require extra support for their education, their choice of a non-government school must not negatively affect their funding.”

Mr Fox said Catholic education understands the current economic and budgetary context facing the Commonwealth Government, but that does not mean school sectors and jurisdictions should be forced into a zero-sum game when it comes to addressing students’ needs.

Mr Fox added that media reports suggesting that school funding has led or could lead to a situation whereby a systemic Catholic school in Victoria receives twice the funding of a similar systemic Catholic school in New South Wales “cannot be reconciled with Catholic education’s understanding of funding arrangements”.

“There will be disagreements and challenges during this process, and it obviously won’t be completed tomorrow. But a meeting that is more talk than action will mean the countdown to funding uncertainty rolls on and the clock will start ticking even louder for parents and schools,” Mr Fox said.