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## SCHOOL FUNDING MODEL REFLECTS NEEDS

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox has challenged the notion that variations in how Australian schools are funded are a “corruption” of the funding model that emerged from the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling.

Mr Fox said with diverse needs being experienced in all schools and all sectors, the Australian Education Act sought to allocate funding that would meet the needs of students and schools.

“There are 9,500 schools across Australia, and no two schools are the same,” he explained.

“There are schools in all sectors – government, independent and Catholic – that serve the most remote and disadvantaged communities and also the wealthiest and most privileged communities. Current funding arrangements are able to direct government support to schools and students who need it most.

“The fact that 35 per cent of students are being educated in Catholic and independent schools shows how strongly Australian families support school choice,” Mr Fox said.

“Conversations about a ‘corruption’ of funding to government and non-government schools ignore the diversity of schooling in Australia across all sectors.

“Every Catholic school system in Australia is ‘underfunded’ based on the Schooling Resource Standard measure, but that hasn’t stopped attacks on their funding. And with two-thirds of Catholic schools being low-fee primary schools, those attacks can have one of several outcomes: Schools having to close, taking school choice away from parents or fees having to rise significantly.

“Radical changes to the model must not undermine the choice in education valued by parents and an aspiration for low fees.”

Catholic schools receive, on average, 83 per cent of the per-student government funding that is allocated to government schools. Mr Fox said that reality reflects the needs of students in those sectors and also the requirement for Catholic school parents to pay fees – more than \$4,100 annually on average, per student.

“Funding reflects the realities of individual schools and their enrolments. School and student needs don’t all show up on the My School website,” he said.

“The needs of schools and students are best supported by a funding model informed by educators and professionals in school systems and schools. Funding must respond to the needs of students rather than be determined by an abstract econometric model distant from the reality of school needs.”

Mr Fox said Catholic schools remain committed to the needs-based, sector-blind aspirations outlined in the Gonski Review.

“Catholic education is ready to enter into discussions about how Commonwealth funding will support all students in all Australian schools from 2018 and how schools that are making a transition to new funding levels can be supported,” he said. “Time is running short for a consultation process that accounts for the complexity and diversity of school needs.

“School funding should not be a source of division pitting sector against sector and school against school.”