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## BUDGET LOCKS IN RAW DEAL FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

National Catholic Education Commission acting executive director Danielle Cronin says tonight's Federal Budget has confirmed that funding for Catholic school students will increase more slowly than their peers in other schools – and funding will decrease in ACT Catholic schools.

“It has been a difficult week for Catholic school leaders as they have grappled with a new funding package that could undermine the future of their schools and systems. They also supported concerned parents and explained how planned changes to school funding will disadvantage students, teachers and families who choose a Catholic school,” Ms Cronin said.

“Catholic school parents, teachers and principals will continue to fight for the educational needs of the 770,000 children in Catholic schools as the Budget shows government schools will continue to enjoy funding increases at much higher levels than Catholic and independent schools.

“Catholic school parents are rightly going to ask their local representatives why their children's education shouldn't receive the same funding support as other children at schools in their neighbourhood.”

The Budget tonight showed that funding for non-government schools will increase by 3 per cent in 2017-18 and by 6.8 per cent in government schools. In the period to 2020-21, government school funding will increase by 15.4 per cent, while non-government schools see an increase of 8.8 per cent over those years.

“Those significant variations in funding changes are likely to see parents in hundreds of Catholic schools across the country face fee hikes that will put them under additional financial pressure and see principals forced to make difficult spending decisions,” Ms Cronin said.

“In the ACT, Catholic school funding will actually decrease in coming years because of funding changes that will grossly overestimate the ability of Catholic school communities to pay fees.”

Ms Cronin said while there was major disappointment at the lack of detailed and open consultation between Catholic education leaders and the Turnbull Government and Minister Simon Birmingham around the “Quality Schools” policy announcement, the NCEC and others will remain committed to presenting the views of Catholic schools with the Government, the Opposition and other parliamentarians.

The Budget has confirmed the quantum of funding over the coming four years. But Ms Cronin said there remains a high degree of uncertainty about how individual schools and systems will be funded over the 10-year period the Government is considering.

“We are concerned that Catholic schools – indeed all schools – will face a funding cliff after the coming four years, with increases at risk of being inadequate for maintaining levels of educational opportunity for Australian students due to proposed floating indexation rates,” she explained.

“Catholic education urges the Government to provide greater certainty for school funding beyond 2021 and is hopeful the Government will respond to our calls for a minimum rate of indexation for Catholic, government and independent schools, mindful of the national benefit of a strong school education system.

“An affordable and accessible Catholic school system is crucial to the overall health of Australian schools. That affordability and accessibility must be supported by Government policy, not undermined by it.”