
GOVERNMENT PURSUES SPEED OVER SUBSTANCE ON SCHOOL FUNDING

The Turnbull Government seems more intent on rushing through its school funding plan than devising a genuinely needs-based model to support students in all Australian schools, the National Catholic Education Commission has said.

In a report into the Government's planned amendments to the Australian Education Act tabled in the Senate this afternoon, Turnbull Government Senators effectively ignored the views of 1,737 Catholic schools and the systems that operate those schools.

"The Government has basically thrown up its hands and suggested some of the fundamental aspects of its plan, including the Schooling Resource Standard and the Socio-Economic Status methodology, are too hard to fix," NCEC executive director Christian Zahra said.

"Education commentators from a range of perspectives, including the Centre for Independent Studies, the Grattan Institute, The Age newspaper and even the architect of the SES methodology himself, have said it fails to understand families and their ability to pay fees.

"Labor and Greens Senators have acknowledged that widespread criticism, but the Government has said that despite the fact the Gonski panel said the SES should be reviewed and despite the flaws in the methodology, they aren't interested in fixing it."

Mr Zahra said given the central importance of SES in the funding of Catholic schools, hundreds of thousands of families across the country will suffer the consequences of the Government's unwillingness to improve a deficient measure of need.

"The Government's policy will especially impact the many families who are already making significant sacrifices to give their child a Catholic education," he said.

"Under this faulty model, a single-income family with four kids renting a house is currently deemed to have the same ability to pay fees as a two-income family with one child that owns the house next door.

"Rather than fix that anomaly, the Minister is trying to enshrine this failed policy for the next 10 years. Minister Birmingham is telling those struggling families that they should dig a little deeper to pay their school fees. He doesn't seem to understand the reality those families are facing."

Mr Zahra said Senators and MPs are telling the NCEC that they are hearing the concerns of parents and principals – but not everyone is listening.

"Minister Birmingham is building his policy house on sand and he's refusing to listen to his parliamentary neighbours – inside and outside the Coalition party room – as they point out his foolishness," he said.

"Catholic school families rightly expect more from this Minister and this Government. Today's report just disappoints them further," Mr Zahra concluded.