

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES UNITE TO DEFEND SCHOOL CHOICE

The National Catholic Education Commission and Catholic School Parents Australia have warned the Government that the two organisations will continue to inform concerned Catholic school families and members of the wider community about the dangers of Education Minister Simon Birmingham's defective school funding plan.

With the Senate expected to vote on the Government's amendments to the Australian Education Act next week, there will be a concerted effort to ensure the voices of those who value a Catholic education and those who value school choice are heard.

"We know that Minister Birmingham is under pressure as more and more people – including his colleagues – come to understand the many problems in his proposed model," NCEC executive director Christian Zahra said.

"The Minister is trying desperately to get his policy passed through a rushed parliamentary process next week, so it is important that Catholic school parents and the wider community understand the implications of this school funding model.

"They can then make sure their elected representatives hear their concerns and hear about the damaging consequences of locking in an ill-considered policy, especially when it's being locked in for 10 years."

CSPA chair Tony O'Byrne said the Minister has run a fairly successful public relations and cross-bench lobbying process relying very heavily on misinformation.

"But as parents and cross-benchers hear more about the realities of the Minister's plan, they are always confused, often concerned and sometimes angry," Mr O'Byrne.

"That's because they rightly feel the Minister is only telling part of the story.

"There is a reason why Peter Goss from the Grattan Institute said Catholic schools will be 'big losers' under the Minister's model. Catholic school families are increasingly coming to understand that is true."

Mr Zahra said that understanding includes the reality of schools and students receiving less Commonwealth funding under the Minister's model.

"We know that the Government's policy, if enacted, would mean 260,000 kids in Catholic schools – more than a third of our students – will be allocated less Commonwealth funding next year," he said.

"That's using the actual funding allocations, not Minister Birmingham's highly misleading 'fantasy figures' – as they were called in the Senate."

Mr O'Byrne said the many flaws in the Turnbull Government's school funding model create major concerns for students and for families.

"Our current school parents want to ensure their kids can stay in their local Catholic school. Prospective parents don't want to see their choice of a Catholic school taken away because affordability and accessibility are a concern," he said.

"Catholic school parents and education leaders might have only a few days before this legislation is voted on. We are encouraging all Catholic school communities to make their voices heard. We will work tirelessly during these days to try to see this legislation defeated."