
Urgent fee relief available for Catholic school families

Catholic schools across Australia will extend school fee relief for families facing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Catholic Education Executive Director Jacinta Collins said Catholic schools have a long tradition of offering school fee relief and assistance to families facing financial difficulties.

“Catholic schools keep their fees as affordable as possible, but we know many families will be facing serious financial difficulties during this challenging time,” Ms Collins said.

“In each state and territory we are looking at ways to expand on the substantial fee relief arrangements already in place, to ease the financial strain on families, and to determine appropriate measures to best support the needs of families across the country.

“We saw recently through the bushfire season and ongoing drought, that some families are more affected than others, so we need to ensure that the right support and assistance goes to where it is most needed,” she said.

Ms Collins said financial relief is immediately available to families impacted by the pandemic.

“If families are affected by job losses, business closures or other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge them to speak to their school as quickly as possible, to get immediate relief and determine the level of assistance needed.”

“We appreciate how difficult it is for parents to come forward with financial concerns, but our schools will ensure each case is handled with care and discretion,” she said.

“We understand that many families are already under great pressure and strain, and we do not want them to be further burdened by school fee payments.”

In South Australia, families in Catholic diocesan schools who have lost significant income due to COVID-19 will receive a total school fee remission effective immediately, for an initial period of three months.

Catholic Education South Australia Director Dr Neil McGoran said for the state’s regional and rural communities, the COVID-19 pandemic comes amidst a range of other challenges such as bushfires, drought, loss of key industries and increasing unemployment.

“Amongst all the worries that we have at this time – worrying about the payment of school fees should not be one of those things,” Dr McGoran said. “All Catholic schools in SA are providing fee remissions to families financially impacted by COVID-19 and we will continue to monitor and respond to the impact on our families and our schools.”

Catholic Schools NSW Chief Executive Officer Dallas McNerney said it was critical for families in the state’s nearly 600 schools to have certainty.

“Now, more than ever, our families need certainty and support,” Mr McInerney said. “Catholic Schools NSW is actively considering how best to financially support our families at this time.”

“We are firmly of the view that no child should miss out on a Catholic education because of financial stress; this includes families seeking enrolment for their children for the 2021 school year.”

Queensland Catholic Education Commission’s Executive Director Dr Lee-Anne Perry urged families to come forward.

“Catholic schools are acutely aware of the hardships being experienced right across the community and are doing all they can to facilitate the ongoing education of all students,” Dr Perry said. “I urge any family facing difficulty with tuition fees to contact their school to discuss their situation.”

In Western Australia, Catholic schools families on a health care card will receive automatic fee concessions, and immediate support would also be available for those who do not qualify for a health care card.

“The health care card discount applies to all year levels from Kindergarten to Year 12, and additional financial considerations are also available depending on each family’s circumstance,” said Catholic Education Western Australia Executive Director Dr Debra Sayce.

“For parents who do not qualify for the health care card discount, but who are experiencing financial difficulties, arrangements can be made to provide immediate support to assist with tuition costs.”

Ms Collins said Catholic schools would offer a blend of onsite and remote learning arrangements next term.

“Subject to government advice, we anticipate that, by Term 2, Catholic schools will be offering a combination of onsite schooling for the children of essential service workers and remote learning for students at home.”

Nationally, Catholic schools educate more than 764,000 students – or one in five Australian students - in 1,746 schools, the vast majority of which are low-fee schools.