
RADICAL FUNDING FREEZE PROPOSAL UNJUSTIFIED, WOULD HURT STUDENTS

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox says a proposal to freeze funding for Catholic schools would abandon the principle of needs-based funding and would be a serious blow to the education of students in non-government schools.

A new report from the Centre for Policy Development includes a recommendation to cancel important and necessary increases in government funding for Catholic and independent schools.

“To propose a freeze on the funding levels for 1.3 million students from all backgrounds is radical and unjustified. It would have dire consequences for the future of non-government schools and the education of those students,” Mr Fox said.

“Parents would likely see school fees increase, and for many families those increases could take away their ability to afford those fees. That would increase enrolments and pressure in government schools, pushing up Australians’ taxes.

“It suggests the principle of needs-based funding would be abandoned in favour of sector-based ideology.”

Mr Fox said the report seeks to find answers to problems of inequity in Australian schools, but proposes an attack on non-government schools as a way to address the issue.

“All schools in all sectors have a role to play in achieving equity and excellence in Australian education. Pitting sector against sector does nothing to address the challenges we see in school education,” he explained.

“The priority should be for every Australian school to provide a great education, rather than telling parents they cannot choose the school that best suits their child.”

Mr Fox said the authors have once again tried to claim there are injustices in the way schools are funded while relying on projections that are not credible.

“It is true that school funding has been changing in recent years, and the gap between funding for government and Catholic schools has been narrowing, but that narrowing has reflected students’ needs,” he said.

“Even with those changes, Catholic schools today receive, on average, 83 per cent of the per-student government funding that government schools receive.

“Using reliable funding projections, rather than ignoring current school funding policies, Catholic schools will in 2020 still be receiving much less in per-student government funding than government schools.”

Mr Fox said a doubling in the number of students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over the past decade has been a driver of increases in Catholic school funding. Non-government schools have also seen significant increases in the number of secondary enrolments, relative to government schools, which is a major contributor to increased per-student funding levels.

“Families are choosing Catholic schools in record numbers, and they value the fundamental right to choose the school they think can best meet the needs of their child,” he said.

Mr Fox said Catholic school leaders, parents and students will take comfort from the fact that such sectoral divisions are not entertained by those who make decisions about school funding.

“Political leaders have thankfully embraced a strong Australian school system that provides needs-based funding to students regardless of which school they attend.

“Those leaders have rightly denounced the division wrought by some as a distraction from the important debate on supporting the learning of Australian students,” Mr Fox concluded.

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