
FLAWED REPORT RELIES ON FALSE ASSUMPTIONS ON SCHOOLS FUNDING

Assumptions contained in a new report on school funding do not accurately reflect current and future government funding for schools in all sectors. As a result, the report provides a misleading picture of sectoral differences, National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox said.

Mr Fox said the report released by Chris Bonnor and Bernie Shepherd assumes school funding trends will continue according to trends observed in recent years.

“The report shows that funding to Catholic schools is closely tied to need, with more educationally disadvantaged schools receiving higher levels of government funding. Funding increases for Catholic schools between 2009 and 2013 reflect changes in government funding to address longstanding inequities between sectors,” he explained.

On average, Catholic schools continue to receive about 80 per cent of the funding per student received by students in government schools.

“The report clearly shows that across the spectrum of advantage, Catholic schools receive a portion of the government funding per student of government schools,” Mr Fox said. “This is an endorsement of the needs-based funding arrangements that have been in place in Catholic education for decades.

“The needs of students are complex, many and varied. School funding distributions per student are similarly complex and varied. It is dangerous to draw conclusions about school funding in Australia from simplistic and selective analysis.

“The Australian Education Act 2013 now determines Commonwealth funding for all schools in Australia. The funding system in this Act commenced in 2014, drawing heavily on the ideas contained in the *Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling*.

“By using funding levels from 2009 to 2013 and simply extrapolating future funding on that basis, there is a major deficiency in the analysis.

“Mr Bonnor and Mr Shepherd claim ‘It is easy to follow the trend and judge that within the next two-three years, students in Catholic schools will reach an average 100 per cent of government funding in several of the ICSEA grouping’. This claim does not reflect current policy settings,” Mr Fox said.

According to Commonwealth Government Budget papers, federal funding for government schools in 2015-16 will increase by 9.55 per cent, while funding for non-government schools will increase by 5.6 per cent.

“Funding projections should be based on what has been announced by governments for future spending, rather than continuing historical funding trends,” Mr Fox said.

The funding levels used in the report differ significantly from figures revealed during Senate estimates, he explained.

“Government funding for Catholic education reflects enrolments together with student and school need,” Mr Fox said. “The number of Indigenous students, students with disability and students facing other sources of disadvantage has continued to grow significantly in Catholic schools in recent years.

“Students in government schools, on average, are receiving substantially more funding from government than the authors use as the basis for their analysis, according to Senate estimates figures. That creates false comparisons and false assumptions,” he said.

Mr Fox said the report continues an intensifying and disturbing trend of analysis that is seeking to divide school sectors rather than to bring them together to make a positive contribution to all schools.

“Unfortunately this report appears to be motivated by a desire to undermine and question the legitimacy of government funding for non-government schools,” Mr Fox explained.

“Catholic education will continue to advocate strongly for funding levels in all schools that keeps pace with the actual cost of educating children based on their needs and with the understanding that regardless of which sector a family chooses, students should receive government support,” he concluded.