
FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS, SIMPLISTIC COMPARISONS DISAPPOINTING

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox says Fairfax Media reports this morning use flawed assumptions and simplistic comparisons to create a misleading picture of how Australian schools are funded.

“Discussion on school funding should be driven by facts, not by cherry-picking of data and flawed assumptions. Flawed analysis does nothing to support teaching and learning in Australian schools,” Mr Fox said.

“Australian schools are funded based on the needs of the students in those schools. According to the latest available data, government schools, on average, receive \$12,100 per student from government. Catholic schools receive \$10,000 and independent schools \$8,200 per student.”

Mr Fox said today’s media reports selectively use the interesting – but limited – school funding data that is publicly available on the My School website to create a false impression that Catholic schools receive higher levels of funding than nearby government schools.

“Fairfax Media has used, in two states, a handful of schools – out of more than 9,000 schools across the country – and sought to claim non-government schools are overfunded,” he explained.

“The My School website can not give a full understanding of the drivers of school funding. As one example, the number of students with disability, who attract higher levels of government funding, is not listed on My School.

“A simplistic comparison of two nearby schools and their funding allocation without a deep understanding of the school context does not provide a true picture of funding.”

Mr Fox said there has been a narrowing of the funding gap between government funding for government and Catholic schools in recent years, but that has reflected student needs.

“The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools and the number of students with a disability have doubled over the past decade,” he said.

“The proportion of students in Catholic secondary schools has also increased relative to the government sector, and funding is higher for secondary students than primary students, driving up the per-student funding average.

“Despite those factors, among other drivers of school funding, Catholic schools still receive just 83 per cent of the per-student funding a government school student receives from the government.”

Support from state and territory governments, who are the majority funder of government schools, is also a factor in how government funding changes over time, Mr Fox said.

He explained the projections on future school funding cited by Fairfax are drawn from a seriously flawed report that assumed historical, needs-driven changes in school funding would continue in the coming years.

“The way the Commonwealth funds schools in Australia underwent significant change in 2014, so to assume that funding changes up to 2013 will continue under a new funding model is simply not credible,” Mr Fox said.

Mr Fox said that the funding model implemented by the Australian Education Act, in place since 2014, has seen government schools favoured in Commonwealth funding increases.

In the current Budget year, government school funding has gone up 9.55 per cent, while non-government school funding has increased 5.7 per cent. In 2016-17, government school funding from the Commonwealth will go up 11.7 per cent and non-government school funding 6.9 per cent.

“All Australian students should receive funding from the government that reflects their learning needs, regardless of which school they attend,” Mr Fox concluded.

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