
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON SCHOOL FUNDING

A report from the Centre for Policy Development released today contains analysis of the Australian education system. National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox says the report contains flawed analysis and unsubstantiated claims.

Projections on school funding

The report's authors claim that by 2020, Catholic schools will be receiving higher levels of funding from government sources than government schools. The methodology used to create those so-called projections is seriously flawed and not credible, Mr Fox said.

"The funding projections have been done using historical funding data, a ruler and a pencil," Mr Fox said.

"When looking at future trends in school funding, it makes no sense to assume that future trends will be identical to past trends. The 'projections' in the report ignore the major changes to Commonwealth funding of schools that arose out of the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling and began in 2014. These arrangements have bipartisan support until 2017."

Mr Fox acknowledged that the gap between government funding for Catholic schools and government funding for government schools has narrowed, but the Australian Education Act has given preference to government school funding. This contradicts the claims in the report.

In 2015-16, government school funding from the Commonwealth increased by 9.55 per cent, while non-government school funding increased by 5.6 per cent. In 2016-17, government school funding is forecast to increase by 11.7 per cent, while non-government funding increases by 6.9 per cent.

"It is surprising that the report's authors appear not to understand recent funding changes which have attracted so much attention. Their reliance on historical trends and choosing to ignore the Australian Education Act when projecting future funding trends undermines the credibility of their analysis."

The authors have made similar claims on funding trends previously using the same flawed approach.

"One can only wonder if continuing to state these flawed claims as facts is driven by an ideological quest to paint an inaccurate picture of school funding," Mr Fox said.

"Analysis based on known trends shows that on average across Australia, Catholic schools will continue to receive significantly less government funding than government schools well into the future. There is not a credible scenario that would see Catholic schools have equal levels of government funding by 2020."

Selective analysis

In relation to analysis of funding, the report uses a subset of Australian schools to examine current and future funding trends. The subset of schools selected for analysis is not comparable between sectors because they are made up of very different schools and very different student populations.

The Australian Education Act assumes that primary students require only 76 per cent of the resources per student that a secondary student needs. This assumption is based on the historical funding patterns of primary and secondary schools over many years.

In the subset used in the report, almost 65 per cent of government school enrolments are in primary schools. The Catholic schools included in the subset have just 45 per cent of enrolments in primary schools.

That significant issue has been ignored when analysing the per-student funding levels between sectors.

Striving for equity and excellence in Australian schools

The CPD report includes observations on the challenge of achieving equity and excellence in Australian schools to ensure a quality education for all students.

The authors' proposal to freeze government funding for non-government schools casts doubt on their commitment to needs-based funding. Catholic and independent schools enrol hundreds of thousands of students with additional learning needs. A funding freeze will in no way help these students and schools.

Catholic and independent schools, like government schools, enrol both advantaged and disadvantaged students. The Australian Education Act, which has determined Commonwealth school funding since 2014, allocates funding according to need.

CONTACT: Gavin Abraham • NCEC Communications Manager • 02 8229 0802 • 0408 825 788

Authorised by Ross Fox, National Catholic Education Commission, Level 3, 156 Gloucester St, Sydney