

GBW:vt

23 May 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

Today (Tuesday), the Federal Government introduces into Parliament its new schools funding bill. In the past weeks, I have become disheartened by the ongoing war of words between the Catholic education sector and the Federal Government about what the new model will mean for Catholic systemic schools. It has become bitter with senior government ministers calling the Catholic leaders 'dishonest'. This kind of language achieves nothing.

The debate has become so hostile because despite it being three weeks since the new model was first announced, the Catholic sector, which educates 1 in 5 students across the country, still does not know what the new arrangements will mean for their schools, particularly in the long-term. This is giving rise to rumours of big fee increases as early as next year. When things are not clear, people become anxious. It does not need to be this way.

Government funding of Catholic schools does not mean that Catholic schools end up receiving more funding than government schools. When the funding provided by state and federal governments is combined with school fees and other sources of income like local fundraising, Catholic schools end up receiving around the same overall funding as government schools. Not more - around the same.

The main problem with the new model is the proposed change to how schools will be allocated funding. The government wants to fund each school according to its suburb's individual's Socio Economic Score (SES) rather than averaging out the SES scores for all Catholic schools. This is suggesting that everyone who sends their child to a Catholic school in a suburb that has a comparatively high SES can afford to pay high fees. This is wrong.

Bishop Vincent and I have no wish to place additional financial pressure on families, many of whom are already struggling to meet cost of living pressures. Regardless of where they live and the school they send their children to, parents should not be expected to absorb the kind of fee increases written about in newspapers in the past week.

Equity and fairness should sit at the heart of any funding model. The Catholic sector and the Federal Government should be able to sit down in a constructive and respectful environment to ensure that the new model is fair for all.

While I appreciate the challenges of arriving at a model that everyone can be happy with, I am hopeful that sensible debate will follow in the days ahead. Government funding should never be taken for granted, but neither should Catholic school families. I will continue to take up the issue of funding fairness with our elected representatives - local, state and national. I ask you to contact your local member and make your view very clearly known as well.

It is time to change the game. We need agreement on a model that provides clarity, fairness and certainty for all government and non-government schools.

Yours sincerely



**Gregory B Whitby**  
Executive Director  
Catholic Education  
Diocese of Parramatta