



MEDIA RELEASE

Catholic Schools Office Diocese of Armidale

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Australia Needs Low Fee Paying School Systems for Parental Choice

The government should protect low fee paying school systems such as the Catholic systemic schools. Catholic systemic schools educate 1 in 5 of every student in Australia in 1737 schools and currently save the government many millions of dollars in the cost of educating Australia's young people.

The Catholic school system has provided low fee paying schools for many generations. These schools continue to provide a choice for Catholic and non-Catholic parents right across the country. These schools are not to be confused with independent Catholic schools who like other independent schools are high fee paying schools which in many cases will receive a funding increase. For many years the Catholic systemic sector has provided a very effective and efficient educational system maintaining low fees as a result of the contribution of government funding and parent fees. They have traditionally spent less per capita than nearby government schools. Their academic performance is enviable!

As a system of schools we have been able to support schools in both city and rural and regional settings by distributing funds in such a way that kept schools open in small country towns and the poorer suburbs of cities. Many students from families suffering financial hardship attend Catholic systemic schools paying reduced or zero fees. The system supports this using its economies of scale. Under the proposed model even the Catholic Diocese of Armidale, containing many disadvantaged parts of NSW, will suffer a reduction to their base funding before loadings are applied. As a Diocesan system we will work against raising school fees. Whilst regions such as ours generally benefit from the loadings for indigenous, SES disadvantage, rural and remote location and school size we will be negatively impacted in other ways if the broader Catholic school system is weakened.

The Catholic system supports a needs based funding model. However, the Gonski 2.0 model ignores our 'systemness' and will put unsustainable school fee pressure on poorer families living in high SES areas in all parts of the country. SES was never intended to be a measure of education affordability or the capacity of parents to contribute school fees. Gonski identified this problem in his first report. Not everyone in a high SES area is wealthy!

We call on the government to further engage in the facts around future funding for Catholic systemic schools and reconsider the Capacity to Contribute funding model and the use of SES. The online Funding Estimation Tool is inaccurate in its figures and ignores the way school systems operate to support equity for students irrespective of where they live. We call on the government to increase the very modest \$40 million 'adjustment assistance package' to reduce the impact on the 620 schools facing a real funding cut in 2018 and 167 schools in 10 years' time. The weakening of the Catholic system will put unnecessary pressure on government school enrolments and remove the choice that Australian parents expect.

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