

# TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

SHADOW MINISTER FOR EDUCATION  
SHADOW MINISTER FOR WOMEN

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Dear Jacinta,

Thank you for your letter outlining the National Catholic Education Commission's Federal Election 2022 policy priorities.

Labor believes a great education is the ticket to a lifetime of opportunity. We want every Australian child to receive a world class education. We believe that parents should be able to choose the type of education that best suits their child and family.

If Labor is fortunate enough to win the federal election, Catholic schools will have funding certainty. When the Liberal Party moved to cut funding from Catholic schools in 2014, Labor opposed the cuts. We stood side-by-side with your schools and forced the government to give up and retreat on their cuts to non-government schools.

Under a Labor Government, the funding arrangements that exist for non-government schools under the Government right now, will continue in full under Labor. There will be no cuts to Catholic school funding. We also believe that all students should be able to learn in great schools with world class facilities. Labor has announced a Schools Upgrade Fund for building upgrades and to support better ventilation, so students can learn in a COVID-safe environment. As part of the fund, Catholic schools will be able to apply for small grants totalling \$50 million in extra funding in 2022.

Schools will be able to use the funding for school improvements, and to improve ventilation and air quality by buying air purifiers, upgrading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, building outdoor learning spaces and replacing windows and doors so they can let fresh air in. Labor will continue to deliver capital funding for Catholic schools under the Capital Grants Program and we'll work with States and Territories as part of the next school funding agreements so that school systems have the facilities they need to teach growing numbers of students. We will consider ongoing support for the Non-Government Reform Support Fund as part of this process.

In early learning and care, Labor will focus on implementing our \$5.4 billion commitment to make early education and care more affordable for working families as a priority. This commitment will improve access to affordable, high quality early learning and care for 1.2 million Australian families.

Every Catholic-systemic school in the country will benefit from Labor's Student Wellbeing Boost in 2022, with schools, on average, receiving \$20,000 in extra funding. Schools will be able to use the additional funding to get their students' mental health and wellbeing back on track, with funding able to be used for extra school mental health professionals, like psychologists and school counsellors; proven student wellbeing and mental health initiatives; and camps and excursions, as well as sporting and social activities that improve kids' wellbeing.

Labor will invest \$10.5 million in a new voluntary mental health check tool that primary schools will be able to use, with parents' permission, to identify kids who are struggling and make sure they can get the help they need. We will also work with States and Territories on the implementation of the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

One of the key challenges facing all school systems at the moment is the shortage of teachers. Labor will work with you to ensure there are enough well-trained teachers, including subject specialists, to serve our school communities. We will ensure that teaching is a valued, respected profession with career paths for highly experienced teachers, retaining their skills in the classroom.

As you know, Labor believes all Australians have the right to live their lives free from discrimination, including people of faith. We commit to you that we will act on this as a priority if we form government after the coming election. I reiterate that an Albanese Labor Government will act to:

- Prevent discrimination against people of faith, including through the introduction of religious anti-vilification protections.
- Protect all students from discrimination on any grounds.
- Protect teachers from discrimination at work, while maintaining the right of religious schools to preference people of their faith in the selection of staff.

Labor is committed to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) process. If elected, we would recommence the ALRC's Inquiry into the Framework of Religious Exemptions in Anti-Discrimination Legislation, which the Morrison Government has placed on hold, and would carefully consider what the ALRC recommends in formulating legislation.

Labor will approach the matters you and others have raised in an inclusive and constructive manner, in consultation with people of faith and religious organisations, including Catholic schools, as well as with all Australians interested in this important work to advance the nation. Labor sees the expansion of our anti-discrimination framework to protect Australians of faith as an opportunity to unite the nation, not divide it.

We look forward to working with you to achieve this for people of faith across the country.

Yours sincerely,



**Tanya Plibersek**

*29 April 2022*

## Further clarifications to the Australian Labor Party's policy responses

### **Early Education**

A number of early education providers affiliated with the National Catholic Education Commission will benefit from Labor's changes to the Child Care Subsidy, which will leave 96% of families better off by raising the maximum subsidy rate for the first child to 90%.

### **ATSI students**

Labor established the Closing the Gap framework and we're committed to funding the policies and programs required to deliver change. We know Catholic schools do an excellent job around the country educating First Nations students. In many remote towns, the Catholic school is the only school. We're always open to working with you on how we can improve education for First Nations students. We've recently announced our [First Nations languages program](#), which will benefit Catholic schools.

### **CTC Review**

Labor believes families should be able to choose a faith based education in a way that doesn't put unacceptable pressure on the family budget. When the Government moved to cut funding from Catholic schools and change the Capacity to Contribute formula, Labor stood side by side with the Catholic School sector in opposing the Government's cuts. We will continue to work with schools to ensure funding fairly and accurately reflects a school community's capacity to contribute to the cost of students' education.