

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



School funding can be difficult to understand and sometimes confusing. Understanding a few basic facts can help.

Here are some answers to commonly asked questions.



1 WHY DO GOVERNMENTS FUND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS?

Catholic schools have taught Australian children for almost 200 years. Today they educate one in five students and are a vital partner with government and independent schools in delivering quality education to 3.9 million students nationally.

The true cost of schooling in Australia is much higher than most people realise. The federal government estimates the basic cost in 2019 at \$11,343 per primary student and \$14,254 per secondary student. Most families cannot afford these costs especially if they have two or more children. Costs are significantly higher for disadvantaged students.

Federal and state governments recognise the importance of education and provide some funding to all not-for-profit, non-government schools, so that most are affordable and accessible to Australian families.

Because of this government funding, 93% of Catholic schools can provide families with a quality education while keeping fees below \$6,000 per student per year (73% charge less than \$3,000 per year).

Without government funding, Catholic schools would need to charge families the full cost of educating their children. Most families would have little choice but to move their children to a government school, where taxpayers fund the full cost.

2 HOW MUCH DO CATHOLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITIES CONTRIBUTE?

Australia's Catholic school communities contributed over \$3 billion in school fees and other private fundraising in 2017.

On average, federal and state governments fund approximately 70% of the cost of running Australia's Catholic schools each year while our school communities pay the remainder.

In 2017, Australia's Catholic school communities also funded almost 90% of the cost of expanding and upgrading their schools – a considerable saving to the taxpayer annually.

3 WHAT ABOUT THE IDEA THAT ONLY PUBLIC SCHOOLS SHOULD RECEIVE PUBLIC FUNDING?

There are many good reasons why not-for-profit, non-government schools also receive public funding:

1. **AFFORDABLE CHOICE:** A strong, non-government school sector means families can afford to choose a school that reflects their values and beliefs – an important feature of a pluralist society; otherwise, only wealthy families could afford to have a choice.
2. **IT'S FAIR:** All families pay taxes and therefore deserve some government funding support for their children's education.

3. **SHARES THE LOAD:** Catholic and independent schools educate 1.3 million children, or one in five Australian students. Without affordable non-government schools, most of those students would need to be absorbed into the public school sector, which is already stretched.
4. **HEALTHY COMPETITION:** Given that schooling is compulsory, a network of accessible non-government schools provides healthy competition and improves all schools.
5. **TAXPAYERS SAVE:** On average, Catholic school families pay over \$3 billion in fees each year. Fees and other private income cover some of the costs of school including 90% of capital works (\$1.3 billion) – costs that taxpayers would otherwise have to meet.
6. **NOT JUST SCHOOLS:** Governments fund many other private sector activities such as GP visits, medicines, hospitals, aged care, child care and private bus services.

4 BUT MONEY GOING TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS MEANS LESS MONEY FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DOESN'T IT?

The Catholic school sector has always supported a strong, properly funded government school sector because all students deserve a quality education.

All students in all school sectors are funded according to the same measure – the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which is made up of a base amount (\$11,343 per primary student and \$14,254 per secondary student) plus loading for six types of disadvantage.

In public schools, the SRS is solely funded by taxpayers; families are not required to fund any of the SRS.

In Catholic and other non-government schools, families are expected to pay 10-80% of the base amount according to an assessment of their financial capacity. Governments only fund the balance (plus all loadings for disadvantaged students). The more families can afford to pay, the less public funding a non-government school attracts.

5 HOW MUCH GOVERNMENT FUNDING DOES EACH SCHOOL SECTOR RECEIVE?

On average, government schools receive almost \$2,000 per student (or 15%) more in government funding than Catholic schools receive.

In 2017, Government schools received \$13,196 per student in combined federal and state/territory government funding, compared with \$11,458 per Catholic school student and \$9,410 per independent school student.

6 WHAT IS THE CHOICE AND AFFORDABILITY FUND?

The purpose of the Choice and Affordability Fund is to keep long-standing, low fee non-government primary schools viable without diverting funds from schools serving lower income families.

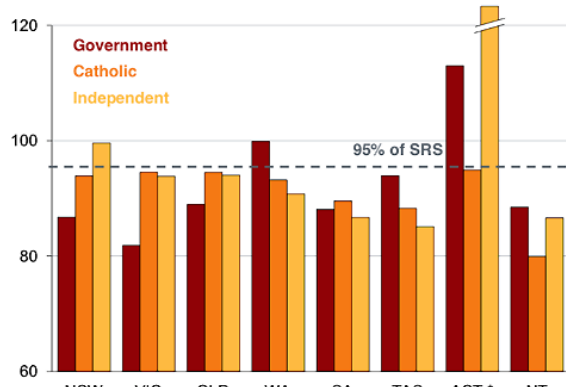
The fund is a way to ensure low fee non-government primary schools – that have operated for decades – continue to provide an affordable choice alongside the local, free government school.

7 MANY GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS DO NOT RECEIVE THEIR FULL SRS. WHY?

This is true for schools in all sectors as the following Grattan Institute table below illustrates.

Figure 2.1: Funding levels differ by state and sector but most systems are funded less than their targets

Combined government funding as a per cent of SRS, by state, 2016



Notes: * ACT Independent schools receive combined government funding at over 150 per cent of SRS.

Source: Grattan school funding model, based on analysis of data published by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training.

The SRS was introduced in 2014 and requires many state and territory governments to significantly increase their education spending, as they are the majority funders of public schools which educate two-thirds of all students. A phasing-in period has been allowed over several years, with federal government assistance.

Most non-government schools should reach their correct funding level before all government schools do because they are less dependent on state government funding. The federal government has committed to fund its full share of the SRS for all school sectors by 2023.

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DO NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS REALLY USE GOVERNMENT FUNDING TO BUILD FACILITIES LIKE EQUESTRIAN CENTRES AND INDOOR SWIMMING POOLS?

Catholic Education can only speak for Catholic schools, but those types of facilities are normally built by high fee schools and are funded by the school communities themselves through loans paid off by parents over 10-20 years (through building levies, fundraisers, donations etc.)

Catholic schools prioritise any capital funds from government to the neediest schools in each State and Territory to build or upgrade learning facilities.

Australia's 1,746 Catholic school communities raised \$1.3 billion in capital funds in 2017 and received just \$152 million from federal, state and territory governments.

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DO GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS EDUCATE THE MOST DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS?

Government schools educate twice as many students as non-government schools (2.6 million compared with 1.3 million) because there are far more government schools in Australia (6,646) than non-government schools (2,831).

Government schools therefore educate more students in all categories than non-government schools.



Catholic schools have a proud record of serving disadvantaged communities. Almost 1,000 of Australia's 1,746 Catholic schools have a socio-economic status (SES) score of less than 100 (a scale from 60 to 140), indicating they mainly educate students from low to middle income families.

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HOW MANY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS ARE EDUCATED IN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

There has been a significant increase in enrolment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students over the past decade in Catholic schools.

In 2018, there were almost 23,000 Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander students in Australian Catholic schools, or 3% of total enrolments.

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HOW MANY STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY ARE EDUCATED IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?

The number of students with a disability in Catholic schools has grown strongly.

According to the latest Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), there are 137,746 students with a disability in Australia's Catholic schools. This represents 18% of all enrolments in Catholic school.

Source: Funding data from My School 2017. Other data from the Australian Government Department of Education.

