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## FUNDING CERTAINTY IMPORTANT FOR SCHOOLS

The National Catholic Education Commission has highlighted the importance of funding certainty for Australia's schools and proposed that the Australian Government Budget ensure that government funding for schools keeps pace with real school costs beyond 2017.

The NCEC has raised the issue of funding certainty from 2018 in its 2015-16 pre-Budget submission, explaining that the current proposal to index school funding at the consumer price index and enrolments will not meet the needs of students and schools.

"The funding in the current forward estimates of the Budget has education leaders concerned at the long-term pressure on schools," said NCEC executive director Ross Fox.

"Over the past decade, CPI has run at an average of about 2.8 per cent annually, but the average increase in the actual costs of running a school has been almost double that, at 5.4 per cent."

Mr Fox said while CPI can fluctuate, schools costs are driven by very different factors, including technology costs, school upgrades and construction, and salaries of school staff.

"School funding has to keep up with the cost of actually educating a child, rather than be tied to an index that fluctuates with measures like exchange rates and international oil prices," Mr Fox said.

The NCEC has also identified the level of funding for students with disability and the burden of capital costs associated with building new Catholic schools and upgrading existing facilities as other priorities in its pre-Budget submission.

A failure to increase capital funding to meet the needs of the growing school age population could prevent a Catholic education being available to many families.

"Projections from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest demand for Catholic schools could require 30 new schools to be built each year. The lion's share of the funding for that construction currently comes from families and the local community," Mr Fox explained.

"This is unlikely to be sustainable for the growth required."

For students with disability, which have increased by more than 50 per cent in Catholic schools since 2007, the NCEC is calling for funding that is related to need. Under funding arrangements introduced in 2014, the unintended outcome is that the funding available to systems and schools to support students with disability is highly variable without any good rationale.

"There is a significant difference between the funding students with disability new to Catholic education attract compared to the funding attracted by students with disability already in the Catholic schools," Mr Fox said, adding that the current funding shortfall arising from that issue is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$20 million for Catholic schools nationally.

"This shortfall was not intended by those designing the system and will affect the resources available for students with disability in Catholic schools. The Commonwealth Government should address this unintended outcome of current funding arrangements," Mr Fox concluded.