



Endorsement

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference endorses these Funding Principles prepared by the National Catholic Education Commission. They are grounded in the *School Funding Policy* statement prepared by NCEC and endorsed by the Bishops Conference in 1987.

Australia's Catholic schools are a gift to the nation, and in response enjoy unprecedented community support. A fair and equitable funding scheme for all schools, including Catholic schools, is the bedrock underpinning for all Australian schools, including Catholic schools.

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FUNDING PRINCIPLES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Preamble

Australia's Catholic schools are a national asset. They currently educate one-fifth of all the nation's school students. From 19th and early 20th century foundations across the length and breadth of the continent has sprung a diverse, yet unified, network of 1700 schools which are educating 696,000 students and employing 78,000 staff. Catholic schools reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia. They have made a substantial contribution over many decades to Australian society and to the Catholic Church in Australia and overseas. They will continue to contribute to Australia's development, confident about their ongoing relationship with the contemporary Australian community.

The mission of Catholic schools is to be more than providers of high quality education, advancing the common good of Australian society. Their belief in the ultimate intrinsic value of each individual student is based on a distinctive educational vision inspired by the example and message of Jesus Christ. Through their culture, ethos and mission, and through the commitment of their staff and their educational programs, Catholic schools demonstrate that there is no separation between learning and living the Christian life. Catholic schools teach that a life lived in the love of God and in the Christian community service of others has purpose and meaning. The *2008 Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* recognises the importance for all young Australians of developing spiritual goals.

Since the early 1970s Australian Catholic schools have received significant funding support from Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments. This support has enabled Catholic schools to consolidate their collective position as partners in the national educational endeavour: partners with governments, families and church communities in achieving national educational goals for young Australians. Catholic schools provide a quality education option at reasonable cost for parents from a diverse range of religious, social, cultural and economic backgrounds across the nation. To continue this effective partnership, Australian Catholic schools need the funding support of governments. Moreover, the cost of Australian schooling increases annually as schools strive for higher standards and engage with a rapidly changing agenda.

Commonwealth Government funding support for Catholic schools is bipartisan. It has long been recognised by successive Australian governments that Catholic schools deliver value for the taxpayers' dollar, and that Catholic schools enhance social capital and community infrastructure. In particular, successive governments have demonstrated a commitment to:

- parental choice of schooling, including schooling based on the Catholic religious and education tradition, as a right deserving of government support;
- all children having the right to share equitably in public expenditure on education; and
- the equitable provision of adequate and appropriate resources to all schools.

Australian schools, both Government and non-government, are funded differentially by Governments, both Commonwealth and State/Territory. The consequent inequities in school resources across schools remains a source of national debate and concern. NCEC advocates that the time has come for an agreed settlement between Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments which defines the relative funding responsibilities of all levels of government for both Government and non-government schools.

Basic Funding Principles

Principle 1: Parental choice

Parental choice means that

- In accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all Australian parents "have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children".
- The right of parents to choice of schooling, including schooling based on the Catholic religious and education tradition, is a right deserving of government support.
- Future parents must have the same capacity as current and earlier generations of parents to exercise their freedom of choice in schooling.

Principle 2: Religious freedom

Religious freedom for Catholic schools means that

- Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments acknowledge the distinctive contribution Catholic schools have made, and will continue to make, to the development of Australian society, economy and culture.
- Commonwealth and State Government funding actively supports and encourages parental freedom of school choice for their children.
- Commonwealth and State Government funding arrangements respect the identity, integrity and autonomy of the Catholic school.
- Catholic schools, respecting the rights of parents to choose schooling for their children in the Catholic tradition, are free to form and instruct young people in the Catholic faith and publicly celebrate the faith.
- Funding, compliance and accountability requirements support rather than hinder or compromise the authenticity or autonomy of the Catholic school.

Principle 3: Funding equity

Equity means that

- Catholic schools require a funding model that guarantees equitable access to Commonwealth and State funding – recurrent, targeted and capital.
- Overall Commonwealth and State funding from the beginning of the next funding period will be at least equal in real terms to funding levels at the end of the current period.
- Catholic schools require additional funding support to meet the needs of increasing numbers of Indigenous students, students with disabilities and refugee students, as well as students/schools at risk and schools serving disadvantaged communities.
- The value of grants is maintained through annual supplementation by indexation to actual costs in government schools.
- The capacity for Catholic State and diocesan school systems to cross-subsidise schools according to assessed local need is recognised.
- Catholic schools have appropriate access to funds allocated for special purposes – for example, computers.

Principle 4: Educational partnership

Partnership means that

- Catholic schools work on behalf of the church in partnership with parents, Commonwealth and State Governments and other education providers to deliver high quality education open to all children and young people whose parents choose Catholic schools.
- Catholic education authorities are actively engaged in key national policy and program decision making forums.
- Catholic schools work to implement the Melbourne *Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.

Principle 5: Funding certainty

Certainty means that

- Catholic schools and school systems require secure, guaranteed funding that is stable and predictable over a specified future period.
- Catholic schools, as a large and genuinely national enterprise, require a solid basis for funding certainty in Commonwealth legislation.
- Catholic schools are able to account publicly for the allocation and expenditure of government funds in a transparent, coherent and comparable manner.

Principle 6: Supporting accountability

Accountability and reporting mean that

- Catholic schools will report as negotiated on agreed national output/performance parameters through the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) using fully comparable data.
- Catholic schools will continue to meet agreed financial accountability requirements to governments and to parents and the church community.
- Funding agencies recognise the responsibilities of Catholic school authorities, dioceses and religious institutes for the management of Catholic schools.

Principle 7: A fair allocative mechanism

The funding mechanism must guarantee that

- Funding allocations to Catholic schools are based on reliable, objective third-party data and mutually acceptable public criteria.
- Specific funding for students with additional learning needs is identifiable.
- Funding levels are indexed annually using a transparent mechanism.
- Funding levels are reviewed and updated periodically.
- All Catholic schools are eligible, on a needs basis, for Commonwealth and State Government capital support.
- Access to State and Territory Government funding of Catholic schools is consistent across States and Territories.