
FUNDING POLICY VACUUM ALLOWS FOR DISTRACTIONS

Catholic education leaders are becoming increasingly frustrated by seeing the future of school funding played out in the media and via unnamed Government sources, rather than through collaborative and constructive dialogue with key education stakeholders, National Catholic Education Commission acting executive director Danielle Cronin says.

Ms Cronin said media coverage today provides a distraction from the key issues facing schools and schools systems in the coming months.

“Funding discussion driven by Cabinet leaks and media speculation does not help parents, schools or school systems understand how Commonwealth school funding will support a quality education for Australia’s 3.8 million students in 2018 and beyond,” Ms Cronin said.

“The priority must be to move all systems and all schools closer to being funded according to their need, rather than moving funding between schools and states and territories in aid of other policy objectives,” she said.

“Catholic education is concerned that simply transferring school funding between states and sectors will do nothing to address the various educational needs across Australian schools.”

Ms Cronin said the reality of how needs and funding vary across Australian schools, particularly between states and territories, means that the Government’s aspiration for greater funding simplicity is looking less and less achievable in the short time between now and when current school funding arrangements expire at the end of this year.

Ms Cronin reiterated the Catholic sector’s long-held view that many barriers remain to achieving a simpler needs-based, sector-blind funding model.

“There are aspects of the current model that were always intended to be reviewed and improved, but this hasn’t happened. The outstanding issues requiring attention in the school funding model will take more than a few weeks or months to address,” she said.

Ms Cronin said there are legitimate and serious concerns across Australian schools and systems that time is running out when it comes to planning for 2018.

“There is not sufficient time remaining to define, analyse and negotiate changes to the Schooling Resource Standard and understand the implications for all schools in advance of the legislative and administrative arrangements that would be required to implement a new funding model for the 2018 school year,” she said.

“Schools’ and systems’ ability to plan, both financially and in terms of staffing and education programs, has been adversely impacted by the lack of funding certainty. This is not in the interests of Australia’s children or families and must be urgently addressed.

“As the largest non-government provider of school education in Australia, Catholic education expects detailed consultation on any proposals to change the current funding arrangements. To date, no formal proposals have been put to Catholic education.

“It is important that discussions commence soon and proceed quickly, providing clarity for families, schools and systems for the years ahead.”

Catholic schools, on average, currently receive about 83 per cent of the per-student government funding that government schools receive.