

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **MINISTER, OPPOSITION LEADER ADDRESS CATHOLIC EDUCATORS**

The joint hosts of the National Catholic Education Commission 2016 Conference have said the presence of Minister for Education and Training Senator Simon Birmingham and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten at the gathering of 1,400 Catholic educators shows the value the politicians place on the role of Catholic schools in Australian society.

“With just 12 days until the federal election, Minister Birmingham and Mr Shorten have prioritised this event to explain their parties’ vision for Australian education and the important role that the 1,731 Catholic schools across Australia play in that educational enterprise,” NCEC executive director Ross Fox said.

Tim McDonald, executive director of Catholic Education Western Australia, said the visit “strengthens the already close bond that the 163 Catholic schools in Western Australia have with local and national political leaders in supporting the education of 78,000 students in all parts of the state”.

Minister Birmingham told the conference the Catholic school sector is “not an appendage, but an intrinsic and essential part of the Australian education system”.

“The values which your sector reflects make a positive contribution to the education of many Australians and provides a steadying influence in an increasingly turbulent world,” the Minister said.

He said the Coalition Government is committed to school funding that is “genuinely based on the principles of being affordable, needs-based, stable, simple, fair and transparent”.

Mr Shorten, who was accompanied by Shadow Cabinet Secretary Senator Jacinta Collins, reflected on his own Catholic education growing up in Melbourne and recognised the important work of Catholic schools today in supporting students from all backgrounds.

“Catholic schools are as diverse as the nation, from the bush to the outer suburbs to the inner cities, from refugee kids, to country kids, to Aboriginal kids. You name it, you cover the diversity of the Australian story,” Mr Shorten said.

Mr Shorten said “it is a good thing and fine thing that we are having a debate in this nation about education funding”, but he said it was important that the debate doesn’t turn into a divisive one about privileging one school sector over others. He said that debate must not be revisited.

Mr Fox said Catholic education’s ability to educate one in five students across Australia is heavily reliant on support from governments, and particularly the Commonwealth Government.

“Catholic school parents make significant financial contributions to the education of their children, spending more than \$3 billion in fees per year, supplementing the \$7.5 billion in government funding that supported teaching and learning in 2014,” he explained.

Dr McDonald said Mr Shorten and Minister Birmingham’s attendance enhanced the largest-ever National Catholic Education Commission Conference.

“For the tens of thousands who work in Catholic education, the obvious commitment and admiration these two political leaders have for those educating young Australians will be part of a process of renewal and reinvigoration during these days in Perth and the ongoing work in Catholic schools,” he said.

**CONTACT:** Gavin Abraham • NCEC Communications Manager • 0408 825 788

**Authorised by Ross Fox, National Catholic Education Commission, Level 3, 156 Gloucester St, Sydney**