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### NEW SCHOOLS OPEN AS DEMAND FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION GROWS

Seven new Catholic schools have opened across Australia this year, allowing more and more families to access the Catholic education they are seeking for their children, National Catholic Education Commission acting executive director Danielle Cronin has said.

“Tens of thousands of students are starting their educational journey this week and the holistic, Christ-centred education on offer in Catholic schools continues to be a popular choice for Australian families,” Ms Cronin said.

“New Catholic schools have opened in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, taking the number of Catholic schools in Australia to 1,738 – from inner-city locations to some of the country’s most remote areas.”

Ms Cronin said estimates from across the country suggest dozens of new Catholic schools will be needed in the coming decade to meet growing demand.

“On the back of growing enrolments across all school sectors and the interest in the education Catholic schools provide, there is a commitment to make a Catholic education available in areas where families desire one,” she said.

Ms Cronin said Catholic education’s ability to meet that demand will be reliant upon school funding that meets the needs of students and schools.

The many new Catholic schools that are expected to open in 2018 are being planned under a cloud of funding uncertainty.

“Catholic education offices across the country are mindful of the needs of their local communities and are working with them to deliver the affordable Catholic schooling they desire,” Ms Cronin said.

“But there remains a lack of clarity about how existing and new schools will be funded in 2018.

“Catholic education leaders making plans for new schools and families who are planning for their children’s schooling are currently in the dark about how Commonwealth funding will be distributed in 11 months’ time.”

Ms Cronin said the Turnbull Government must proceed with discussions about a new school funding model with urgency – but with a collaborative and consultative mindset.

“Catholic schools educate one in five young Australians and the hundreds of thousands of families who choose our schools – and indeed the families of all Australian students – rightly want funding certainty.

“Catholic education, as the largest non-government provider of schooling in Australia, must have a seat at the negotiating table as decisions are made about the best use of the available funding for schools and students,” she explained.

“Parents want to know that the high-quality education currently offered in Australian schools will be maintained into the future and can continue to be improved with funding levels that are reflective of the needs of all students in all schools.”