

## **The Coalition's Response to the National Catholic Education Commission 2025 Federal Election Questionnaire**

### **Ensure Affordability and Choice**

**Commit to maintaining affordability and funding certainty by guaranteeing that federal, state, and territory governments will work in unison to deliver their commitments with no adverse changes, such as state payroll tax, that are not accounted for in the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) model's calculations of school need.**

A Dutton Coalition Government will support parents choosing the best school that suits their family and will deliver Commonwealth funding for all schools fairly and sustainably.

Unfortunately, the Albanese Government excluded the Catholic and Independent sectors from any meaningful consultation on the negotiations of the ten-year school funding and reform agreements for 2025 to 2034. The Coalition will ensure the Catholic and Independent sectors have a seat at the table again.

The Coalition will work closely with states and territories to ensure the Catholic and Independent sectors receive the school funding contributions agreed in the School Resourcing Standard.

It should be noted the Coalition also opposes the imposition of payroll tax on non-government schools, as has occurred in Victoria.

**Relieve cost of living pressures on Catholic school families by ensuring a future solution to the flawed settings of the SRS Capacity to Contribute measure be advanced to 2025, including a commitment to maintain the compensation of the Choice and Affordability Fund beyond its current term to 2029.**

Under the previous Coalition Government, annual school funding nearly doubled – from \$13 billion in 2013 to \$25.3 billion in 2022 as we implemented a needs-based funding model, designed to be 'sector-blind'.

The former Coalition Government established the Choice and Affordability Fund of \$1.2 billion to provide adjustment support for Independent and Catholic schools over ten years to 2029, with \$735 million allocated to the Catholic sector.

A Dutton Government will review these arrangements.

**Support Catholic schools to continue to build communities of faith and preference the employment of staff who share and support their ethos and mission.**

A Dutton Coalition Government will support the rights of religious organisations, including faith-based schools when employing staff to preference those who adhere to the beliefs of that religious organisation.

The Coalition believes Australians should be free to follow their religion, or lack of religion, without discrimination, and that religious schools and bodies should be able to employ staff based on their values. Under a Dutton Coalition Government religious Australians will not go backwards and freedom of religion will remain a cherished right in Australia

**Promise to deliver sector-neutrality for national quality teaching and workforce initiatives, including providing Catholic school communities with access to Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships.**

As a principle, a Dutton Coalition Government will support all school sectors with access to any new programs, including to support the teacher workforce and the implementation of evidence-based practices.

A Labor-Greens minority government would present a serious risk to funding arrangements for non-government schools. The Greens have previously vowed to abolish “special deal[s]” like the Choice and Affordability Fund, with the Greens schools’ spokesperson recently describing non-government schools as a “leech on public schools”. The Greens have made clear school funding “...will be put on the table in any post-election negotiations.”

**Address hardship, wellbeing and disadvantage**

**Every family and student deserves access to quality education and mechanisms that address their needs, regardless of their background. Please indicate your support for the following measures:**

**Preserve existing programs and introduce new initiatives to improve equitable and sector neutral access to mental health and wellbeing support to address increasing challenges faced by school communities.**

As a principle, a Dutton Coalition Government will support all school sectors with access new programs, including to improve access to mental health and wellbeing support.

Child and youth mental health remains one of the Coalition’s highest priorities. A Dutton Government will invest an additional \$400 million to deliver a world-leading focus on youth mental health.

**Increase access to targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including Indigenous Boarding and Closing the Gap initiatives.**

Improving rates of Indigenous school attendance, retention and learning outcomes is a key priority of a Dutton Coalition Government. Indigenous attendance at school has declined under the Albanese Government.

A Dutton Government would build further on our strong track record of supporting boarding school facilities for Indigenous students from remote communities.

We recognise the unique challenges for Indigenous students in remote communities; boarding schools play a vital role in providing access and opportunity to high quality education.

We also acknowledge the crucial importance of Catholic schools in educating Indigenous students in remote and very remote communities, including in locations where no other schooling is available.

**Review and refine funding loadings to better support student needs including disability and disadvantage, as well as smaller schools, and those located in regional, rural and remote areas.**

When the Schooling Resource Standard was introduced as a mechanism to provide needs-based funding, the Coalition acknowledged the need to refine settings as appropriate.

**Build and innovate for the future**

**As Australia's support for non-government schooling grows, so too must our investment in its delivery. Catholic Education remains a vital part of Australia's social and economic success but requires strong investment today to prepare and empower future generations. Will you support the following measures?**

**Commit to ensuring Catholic schools have fair and sector-neutral access to targeted funding for early childhood education such as the Building the Early Education Fund and vocational education, including the expansion of early childhood education services on school sites.**

Catholic school settings contribute to parents' choice for early childhood education and care and the former Coalition in Government ensured families using these services had access to Child Care Subsidy.

As a principle, a Dutton Coalition Government will support all school sectors with access to new programs, such as new programs to increase the supply of early childhood education and care funding.

**Provide targeted funding to support educational excellence and quality teaching via school upgrades and increasing the Capital Grants Program.**

The Coalition will continue to fund Catholic and Independent Schools for capital works.

The Capital Grants Program was established by the Coalition to provide a regular (annual) opportunity for schools to apply for capital grants and is implemented through Capital Grant Authorities.

A major threat to the funding of the capital works for non-government schools is the abolition of deductible gift recipient (DGR) status for schools, as recommended by a Labor-commissioned Productivity Commission report. Tax-deductible school building funds play a vital role in funding school infrastructure particularly for low-fee paying schools.

**Deliver adequate support so Catholic schools can continue to lead and implement national reforms for educational excellence and quality teaching.**

Getting back to basics with explicit instruction and other evidence-based teaching practices is a key priority of a Dutton Government.

We commend the national reforms being implemented by Catholic school systems which are delivering high-quality teaching and learning, underpinned by explicit teaching and other evidence-based practices.

A Dutton Coalition Government is determined to accelerate the uptake of these reforms in every classroom which is crucial to raising academic standards across the country so that every young Australian achieves his or her best potential.

We will provide certainty for all school sectors and will continue to value the role of the Catholic school sector which educates 20 per cent of Australia's children and young people.