

9 April 2025

The Hon Jacinta Collins
Executive Director
National Catholic Education Commission
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Dear Ms Collins

Thank you for your correspondence of 31 March 2025 regarding the National Catholic Education Commission's (NCEC) 2025 policy questions.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring every child has access to a quality education regardless of their location, background or socio-economic status. The Catholic education sector plays a critical role in making this a reality.

Catholic education has made an enormous contribution to young people, their families, parishes and communities in Australia for more than 200 years. The Government recognises the important role faith-based-schools play in our education system and the community. This is why the Government is focused on ensuring a balance between protecting teachers from discrimination and enabling schools to continue to operate in accordance with their religious ethos.

Your letter requests a commitment that funding arrangements for the Catholic system are maintained. I give you that commitment. School funding arrangements for non-government schools will remain unchanged. In 2025, the Government will provide the Catholic sector an estimated \$10.4 billion in recurrent school funding. This is in addition to funding of \$75.3 million through the Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF), and \$134.9 million available to Catholic schools through the Capital Grants Program (CGP) - with indexation of the 2026 program in line with increases to price and wage costs and growth in the Catholic sector in line with current practice.

Regarding Capacity to Contribute settings, thank you for your continued engagement to further improve the timing and stability of CTC scores. I am pleased that the Department of Education (the department) has found efficiencies and will now bring forward the publication date of these scores. I am advised that this could be brought forward even earlier – by 6-8 weeks – with ongoing collaboration between the department and non-government schools.

When Labor came to government we were met with acute teacher shortages. We needed to turn that around and have worked with the states and territories to attract, train and retain teachers. Our National Teacher Workforce Action Plan is a collaborative effort bringing together experts, all jurisdictions and the non-government sector to take significant and practical action to address this.

This includes \$337 million in investment by the Albanese Labor Government to deliver:

- 4,000 additional university places in education
- Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships worth up to \$40,000 each
- 1,500 additional places in the High Achieving Teachers Program
- a cross-sectoral Teacher Workload Reduction Fund, and
- improvements in the professional development of teachers.

In relation to Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships, a future Labor Government would consider expanding the program to allow a commitment to teach in areas experiencing teacher shortages in non-government schools if the program is under-subscribed. I note that once a scholarship recipient has met their two- or four-year commitment to teach obligation, they may choose to work in any school sector or early learning setting. This ultimately benefits the whole system by supporting an expanded and skilled workforce in the future.

With regard to sector-neutrality in national teaching and workforce initiatives, a returned Albanese Labor Government commits that future policy programs funded by the Commonwealth in school education are sector blind.

The Capital Grants Program remains for non-government schools only. It will provide approximately \$1 billion of funding to non-government schools over the next four years, with more than half directed to the Catholic system. The program will be indexed every year and the Albanese Labor Government will continue to deliver this funding.

Regarding the Productivity Commission's recommendations in the *Future foundations for giving report* on the future of philanthropy, the government won't change the tax arrangements and DGR status of school building funds or religious education activities.

To support student wellbeing, the Government has provided \$203.7 million for the *Student Wellbeing Boost*, \$307.18 for the *National Student Wellbeing Program*, and \$4.2 million over four years to the *Australian Schools Anti-Bullying Collective*. The Government is funding the *Anti-Bullying Rapid Review* and included NCEC on a reference group to support the work of the review. Under a re-elected Labor Government, NCEC would continue to make this valuable contribution to policy-making.

In terms of funding for boarding providers supporting First Nations Students, the Government has extended the Indigenous Boarding Provider Grants (IBPG) program for a further 2 school years, through to the end of 2026. This is expected to support around 50 boarding providers, the majority of which are schools, that are in turn supporting around 2,500 First Nations students. The National Indigenous Australians Agency is continuing to administer IBPG over the \$44.2 million extension. I understand it is currently finalising grant agreements with recipient providers for 2025 and 2026.

On the Schooling Resource Standard, as part of the Albanese Government's Better and Fairer Schools (Full and Fair Funding) Agreement, the first National Enabling Initiative is a review of the Schooling Resource Standard base and loadings calculation methodology. This will be undertaken from 2027, and an Albanese Labor Government will welcome your involvement in that review.

As you are aware an Albanese Labor Government will invest \$1 billion in the Building Early Education Fund to build and expand up to 160 additional early learning and care centres in areas of need, with a particular focus on school sites. This includes non-government school sites, and Catholic education providers will be eligible to apply for grant funding. A returned Albanese Labor Government would as a priority ensure that non-government providers are briefed on the program settings and timing of the release of this funding. I note that the Coalition opposes the Building Early Education Fund and so Catholic schools would not have access to early education infrastructure funding if they were elected.

The National Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools Australia were involved in the negotiations for the Better and Fairer Schools Agreements (BFSA). As you know this historic national agreement has, for the first time, put every school in the country on a path to full and fair funding – 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard. Non-government schools are funded either at or over this level. The additional Commonwealth funding for government schools provided in these agreements is tied to reforms that states and territories will deliver in government schools. While there are no new obligations under the BFSA for non-government schools, jurisdictions are required under the agreement to support and work with their non-government school sectors on national reform directions and national enabling initiatives.

The Schooling Resource Standard as designed by the Gillard Labor Government in response to David Gonski's first landmark review is designed to be consistently applied across the country. The calculation of the formula does not include reference to state-based taxation policies. Catholic schools will be able to participate in a review of the SRS settings that will occur under a returned Albanese Labor Government.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the NCEC for your engagement over the past year and for your significant contribution to education in this country.

I look forward to further discussions on important reforms throughout the year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Clare". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jason" and last name "Clare" clearly legible.

JASON CLARE

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
MEMBER FOR BLAXLAND