
GOVERNMENT IMPOSES UNFAIR FUNDING POLICY ON AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Christian Zahra says while Catholic schools across Australia are bitterly disappointed that the Federal Government has imposed a flawed funding policy on them without consultation, they will today continue to do what they have done for 200 years – provide a great education to one in five Australian students.

A rushed process to overhaul school funding concluded early today, with Education Minister Simon Birmingham doing a range of special deals with cross-bench Senators to force his education funding package through the Federal Parliament.

“While the cross-bench Senators were consulted, educational leaders, schools and families were locked out of a process that has now put in place a flawed 10-year school funding plan,” Mr Zahra said.

Mr Zahra said the Government, under pressure from within its own party room, made a couple of minor tweaks to its policy that will affect non-government systems.

“Under significant pressure from the Catholic schools sector, the Minister finally agreed to a review of the socioeconomic status (SES) methodology – six years after Gonski recommended it, four years after the National Education Reform Agreement required it and 12 months after his own department encouraged it,” he explained.

“The retention of the system-weighted average approach to funding non-government school systems for another year does not go far enough. That approach, which was recommended by the Gonski Panel, should have been locked into the 10-year model.

“The system-weighted average approach not only allows Catholic schools to provide educational options in rural and remote Australia, it also helps keep Catholic schools affordable and accessible for low- and middle-income families.

“But the uncertain future of the system-weighted average, as well as radical changes to the fee expectations for Catholic primary schools, means principals and families are increasingly worried about the affordability of Catholic schools in coming years.”

Mr Zahra said there remain a number of concerns about the implementation of this rushed policy, including the use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for students with disability, the operation of the National School Resourcing Panel and the conditions on funding the Minister will be able to introduce.

“A better approach to developing education policy would have involved a proper consideration of the views of educational leaders from all sectors, whose voices were largely ignored in favour of the voices of politicians,” Mr Zahra concluded.