
SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT BE REDUCED TO TEST RESULTS

“The goal of Catholic schools is to educate the whole child to the highest standards possible – academically, socially, spiritually and pastorally. No school should be reduced to the test scores of its students.”

That’s the message from National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox, who said Catholic educators are proud that Australian Catholic schools are today welcoming students in record numbers.

Mr Fox said educational research has an important role to play in informing education policy, but statistics don’t begin to describe how individual schools meet the needs of individual students.

“With students in Catholic schools on average receiving less than 80 per cent of the government funding of a student in a government school, Catholic schools are effective and efficient,” Mr Fox said.

A study published in the journal *Labour Economics* has been well-publicised over the past week. It found that despite higher academic results at Catholic schools compared to government schools, non-government primary schools make no significant difference to school outcomes once student and family background is taken into account.

Research over more than a decade has variously found Catholic schools have a positive impact on academic and non-academic school outcomes, regardless of student background. On international test results, for example, Australian Catholic schools are high-performing and highly equitable. The precise results vary depending on the available data and the statistical method chosen.

Those findings don’t come as a surprise, Mr Fox said. And Catholic schools focus on far more than test results.

“For almost 200 years, Catholic schools have provided quality schooling for families that choose a Catholic education. More than 300,000 Australian families are making that choice today.”

“With Catholic schools educating one in five children across Australia, representing a cross-section of society, we would expect to see students in Catholic schools reflect the broader community.

“Catholic schools have significant numbers of students with disability, Indigenous students and students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, so are largely reflective of the overall school population.”

Mr Fox said there is a place for robust studies and analysis to shape thinking about teaching and learning, but limitations of such work can’t be ignored.

“Rigorous, peer-reviewed research that informs quality teaching can help schools – including the best schools – improve the education in their school. Education leaders should be examining strategies that can support all students in all schools across all sectors,” Mr Fox concluded.