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## CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS COVER ALMOST ONE-THIRD OF EDUCATION COSTS

Parents of students in Catholic schools continue to pay almost 30 per cent of the cost of educating their child, on average, despite increases in government funding to meet the changing educational needs of students in Catholic schools, new government data shows.

School funding data on the My School website showed that the share of recurrent funding that Catholic school parents pay has been consistent in recent years at 29 per cent.

On average, a student in a Catholic school receives \$2,000 less in government funding than a government school student.

“The fees that Catholic school parents pay have been increasing at about the rate that government funding has been increasing, in an environment in which the cost of educating students has been increasing,” National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox said.

“Parents and students are choosing Catholic schools for a wide range of reasons, as they always have, but in recent years there has been a particularly strong increase in the number of families choosing a Catholic school for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student or a student with a disability,” Mr Fox said.

In both categories, the number of students has doubled in the past 12 years and the proportions have increased significantly in a broader context of record overall enrolment in Catholic schools.

“Catholic schools are committed to supporting all students and all families who seek a Catholic education, and they have a special mission to support students facing disadvantage,” Mr Fox said. “The Commonwealth and state and territory governments must continue to support the learning needs of students, regardless of school sector.”

Mr Fox said school funding is likely to be a major theme of this year’s federal election. Objective analysis to inform that debate should be welcomed, he said, but added that it is disappointing to see some policy discussions being hijacked.

“Just today we’ve seen two reports that seek to create a competition between government and non-government schools and use flawed analysis to further fuel that unhelpful discussion,” Mr Fox said.

“Analysis was released last year that failed to take into account new Commonwealth legislation governing school funding. It was rightly criticised then as providing a false impression to support a particular ideology. Those assertions, based on flawed assumptions, have been used again this week.”

Catholic schools, on average, receive about 80 per cent of the government funding of students attending government schools.

Mr Fox said Catholic educators will use the upcoming federal election to advocate for needs-based funding to support the education of students in all school sectors – government, Catholic and independent.

“It is a widely-held belief in the Australian community that school funding should support all students, regardless of the school chosen. Any serious contribution to the policy discussion must reflect that reality,” Mr Fox concluded.