
BUDGET DELIVERS INDEXATION CERTAINTY ON SCHOOL FUNDING

The National Catholic Education Commission says the additional recurrent funding confirmed in tonight's federal Budget gives certainty on funding indexation to principals, school staff and families.

"Investment in schools to ensure quality teaching and learning is critical to the future of Australia," NCEC executive director Ross Fox said.

The 2016-17 Commonwealth Budget confirmed there will be \$1.2 billion in additional funding to support all Australian schools from 2018 to 2020. This reflects a commitment to indexation at 3.56 per cent for school funding beyond 2017. Over the forward estimates, funding for government schools will increase by 33 per cent, while funding for non-government schools, including Catholic schools, will increase by 22.7 per cent.

In 2016-17, funding for schools under the Australian Education Act is expected to grow by 8.7 per cent – reflecting a 6.9 per cent funding increase per student in non-government schools and 11.7 per cent per student in government schools.

"The Coalition Government's announcement that per-student school funding from 2018 will increase at 3.56 per cent each year is a significant improvement over the previous policy of indexing funding at the rate of the consumer price index," Mr Fox said.

"There was no logical reason why petrol prices and the price of fruit and vegetables would determine changes in funding for Australian schools."

Mr Fox said the commitment to education demonstrated through increased recurrent funding, while lower than increases in recent years, should ensure funding keeps pace with real school costs and therefore should avoid pressure on school fees.

"The Government's 'Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes' document commits to needs-based funding for all schools," Mr Fox said. "If the needs of schools and students increase, additional funding will be required. This cannot be a zero sum game.

"The number of students with disability and the number of Indigenous students has doubled in Catholic schools over the past decade. It is important that needs-based funding applies equitably to all school sectors."

Mr Fox said the additional \$118 million announced in the Budget to provide interim funding to support students with disability is a welcome initiative. Catholic education will continue as a committed partner to realise identification and funding arrangements for students with disability that meets the needs of these students.

"Parents will want to understand the overall context of the Budget and how these initiatives are sustainably funded. They will also naturally compare these policies with alternative proposals for schools to judge the effect on school fees and the teaching and learning in their child's school," Mr Fox said.

"It is vital to the future of Australia that schools are effective in meeting the learning needs of students while at school and in life beyond. This will not be assisted by red tape or additional reports, but rather sensible initiatives to ultimately support quality teaching and learning in classrooms. In principle, Catholic school authorities will want to avoid imposition of additional cost without clear benefits that assists quality schooling."

Mr Fox added that the continuation of the capital funding program for non-government schools is highly valued.

“Additional funding is still needed for the vital social infrastructure of schools throughout Australia. With Australian families continuing to exercise school choice and seek enrolment in Catholic and independent schools, there is a need for financial support from the government to construct and expand schools to meet the growing school-aged population,” he explained.

“More than 70 new Catholic schools costing in the vicinity of \$1 billion are planned to start construction in the next five years, with parents currently in line to pay the vast majority of that cost. Without additional government funding, these schools may not be built.”

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