Supporting the right of parents to choose the education they want for their child

All children deserve the very best possible opportunities in life. A good education is vital to a child’s future.

A “one size fits all” approach to schooling does not hold water. Parents are best placed to make decisions about the educational needs of their child. Families need to be able to exercise choice when it comes to their children’s schooling.

Parental choice of school is underpinned in Australia by support from government. Choice is not only a right, but government funding allows it to work.

Funding for Catholic schools is a partnership between Australian families and governments.

Catholic schools have a commitment to affordability for families from all backgrounds. For this commitment to continue, schools depend on the current level of government funding support, indexed in real terms, as a minimum.

Ensuring Government support for Catholic schools continues is essential to guaranteeing real parental choice in education.

Funding certainty: a must for our schools and our communities

The Federal and State Governments combined provide considerable funding for Catholic schools and certainty around that funding is essential for planning and staffing in Catholic schools.

Governments must guarantee funding certainty for all Catholic schools.

Funding certainty means a guarantee of ongoing funding in full dollar value terms for all 1,706 Catholic schools.

It means security of enrolment for the 735,403 students currently enrolled in Catholic schools - one in five Australian students attend a Catholic school.

It means job security for the 85,306 Australians working in Catholic schools.

It means certainty for over half a million Australian families.

The National Catholic Education Commission calls for:

• funding fairness, for Catholic school funding to be brought closer to average resource levels in government schools;

• continued “block funding” to each State Catholic Education Commission for distribution to schools on the basis of need; and

• additional support for those students and schools who need a little extra help – including Indigenous students, students with disability, schools in regional and remote areas, and new arrival and refugee students.

Keeping Catholic Education affordable and accessible to all

Catholic schools welcome students from diverse cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Families from all walks of life choose Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are accessible to most Australian families. They are affordable because of modest tuition fees. No child is refused enrolment in a Catholic school because his or her parents cannot pay full fees.
Even after parent contributions are taken into account, Catholic schools are resourced at around 10% less than government schools. Income per student at Catholic schools is $11,079 per student and for government schools it is $12,034.

Catholic schools have a commitment to supporting all families – no matter what their economic or social circumstances. The capacity for Catholic schools to maintain this commitment as a minimum depends on government funding support continuing in real terms.

Catholic schools have been providing quality education to Australian children for over 180 years; this year alone 735,403 Australian children are being educated in Catholic schools.

**Supporting students with disability**

Catholic schools at all times seek to respect and nurture the God-given human dignity of all their students.

Students with a disability are warmly welcomed into Catholic school communities, where all possible resources are directed towards helping young people reach their full potential.

The number of students with disability in Australian Catholic schools is on the increase. Teachers and staff work tirelessly with students and their families with the resources available, but could do more given the resources and opportunity.

The National Catholic Education Commission calls for Government funding support for students with a disability to reflect individual needs, allowing for individually tailored resources and specialist care, getting the very best education possible.

Funding support for students with disability should be based on educational need, irrespective of the school they attend.

Both political parties agree in principle that students with disability should be funded equally, wherever they attend school. If this can be achieved, it will be a major breakthrough for Catholic schools as they seek to offer more support to these families.

**Catholic schools serve the wider community**

Catholic schools are committed to serving some of the most disadvantaged in the community.

As the second largest provider of education in Australia, Catholic schools have assisted countless Australian families over the last 180 years.

Catholic schools have a commitment to supporting all families – no matter their economic or social circumstance. The capacity for Catholic schools to maintain this commitment depends on the Government delivering funding support.

Catholic schools are resourced at 10% less than government schools. On average, the income per student in Catholic schools is lower ($11,079) than in government schools ($12,034).

Catholic schools need increased government funding support to be able to continue to provide quality education and services to some of the most disadvantaged in our communities.

**Breaking down barriers**

Indigenous Australians are among the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia today. Social, economic, education and health outcomes for many Indigenous Australians are sadly poor.

Catholic schools have long been involved in remote Indigenous communities, and in providing boarding opportunities for Indigenous young people in regional and urban centres. In recent decades Catholic secondary education has expanded its Indigenous education work to offer a wide range of opportunities to Indigenous students.
Today there are more than 17,000 Indigenous students enrolled, a rise of more than 7,000 students over the past decade. To ensure that Catholic schools provide the very best care and resourcing to give our Indigenous students every opportunity we need increased government funding support.

A key mission of Catholic schools is to ensure that students are not prevented from achieving their potential because of family circumstances. The State Catholic Education Commissions allocate available government funding on the basis of need to Catholic schools including those with Indigenous students.

Quality Catholic education in regional Australia

All children deserve the very best in educational opportunities - no matter where they live.

This has long been the philosophy of Catholic school education to build schools and provide education where it is needed most, including in regional towns and centres.

Catholic school education has a long and proud history providing quality education services to Australia’s regional communities.

One of the founders of Catholic schooling in Australia, Saint Mary MacKillop, was a pioneer in providing schools for children in regional and remote areas.

Today around 29% of Catholic school students attend a Catholic school outside a metropolitan area.

Supporting teachers who support our children

Our teachers are one of the great strengths of Catholic schools.

A total of 85,306 people are employed in our Catholic schools, the majority of them teachers.

Teachers in Catholic schools are committed not only to the highest academic standards for students, but also to the development of the whole person, within the Catholic faith framework.

Catholic education takes investment in teacher training and nurturing very seriously, acknowledging that good teaching is crucial to good learning.

We invest heavily for the future despite operating at around 10% below the average resourcing level in government schools.

We need funding to continue to be allocated to each State Catholic Education Commission for distribution to where it is needed most - a decision states and dioceses are best placed to make. This will ensure funds go where they are needed most and we can continue in our commitment to vital teacher professional development.

In addition, the National Catholic Education Commission is seeking appropriate funding to assist those students who need a little more help to get the best from their education, those that may be Indigenous, have a disability, live in a regional or remote area, or be new arrival or refugee students.

Investing in our teachers is vital to ensuring the best possible opportunities for our students.

Catholic schools – giving back to the community

Any debate on the amount of government funding received by Catholic schools and school systems must also recognise what Catholic schools give back to their local communities in a variety of ways.

Catholic schools are a national asset, educating children at substantially less cost per student than other schools, even when parent contributions are taken into account.

And, while Catholic schools offer a good return for taxpayer’s dollar, they also encourage their students to give something back to their community.
A key platform of the Catholic ethos in education is that Catholic schools educate young people in the notion of service and instil a commitment to social justice. They encourage practical action in social justice through a range of school-based programs.

These can range from high school students being part of the local Vinnies night patrol service for homeless people, to younger students taking part in environmental conservation programs in their community, or visiting the elderly in nursing homes. Support for Catholic schools translates into support for local communities.