

# FUNDING PRINCIPLES

FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

December 2015



# E N D O R S E M E N T



The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference endorses these Funding Principles prepared by the National Catholic Education Commission. They are grounded in the School Funding Policy statement prepared by NCEC and endorsed by the Bishops Conference in 1987.

Catholic schools in Australia offer an essential contribution to the rich variety of options available to parents as they

determine how best to educate their children. The fact that 20% of all children in Australia are educated in Catholic schools testifies to this. A fair and equitable funding scheme for all schools, including Catholic schools, ensures that the possibility of meaningful choice continues to be open to all Australian families.

**Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB**  
**Chairman, Bishops Commission for Catholic Education**

# P R E A M B L E

Australia's Catholic schools, as an integral part of Australia's school education community, are a national asset. Over the past 200 years, a diverse, yet unified, network of 1,728 Catholic schools has developed and educates more than 750,000 students – one in every five students in schools – and employs almost 90,000 staff.<sup>1</sup>

Catholic schools reflect and celebrate the diversity of contemporary Australia. They make a substantial contribution to Australian society and to the Catholic Church in Australia. They will continue to contribute to Australia's development, confident about their ongoing relationship with the contemporary Australian community.

The mission of Catholic schools is to be more than providers of high-quality education that advances the common good of Australian society. Their belief in the intrinsic value of each student is based on a distinctive educational vision inspired by the example and message of Jesus Christ.

Through their culture, ethos and mission, and through the commitment of their staff and their educational programs, Catholic schools demonstrate that there is no separation between learning and living the Christian life.

The 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* recognises the importance for all young

Australians of developing spiritual goals. Catholic schools teach that a life lived in the love of God and in the Christian service of others has purpose and meaning.

Since the early 1970s, Australian Catholic schools have received significant funding support from Commonwealth, state and territory governments. This support has enabled Catholic schools to consolidate their collective position as partners in the national educational endeavour – partners with governments, families and Church communities in achieving shared educational goals for young Australians.

Commonwealth Government funding for Catholic schools enjoys bipartisan support. It has long been recognised by successive Australian governments that Catholic schools deliver value for the taxpayers' dollar, and that Catholic schools enhance social capital and community infrastructure. Recent years have seen Catholic schools across Australia efficiently deliver high-quality school facilities tailored to local needs. Catholic schools also continue to operate with government funding per student significantly below government schools.

## Successive governments have demonstrated a commitment to:

a. parental choice of schooling, including schooling based on the Catholic religious and education tradition, as a right deserving of government support;

- b. all children having the right to share equitably in public expenditure on education; and
- c. the equitable provision of adequate and appropriate resources to all schools.

Catholic schools provide a quality education option at reasonable cost for parents and families from a diverse range of religious, social, cultural and economic backgrounds across the nation. They are committed to supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable families, providing their children opportunity through education. Catholic schools respect the religious freedom of families who willingly enrol their children and thereby commit to the Catholic identity of the school.

To continue to provide quality education, Australian Catholic schools need appropriate funding from governments to ensure they remain an affordable option for families into the future. That funding should reflect the reality that the cost of Australian schooling increases annually as schools strive for higher standards and engage with a rapidly changing context.

Government and non-government schools are funded differentially in Australia's current federal and state/territory funding models. Inequities in school resources between states and territories remain a source of national debate and concern.

<sup>1</sup> Data sourced from NCEC 2014 Annual Report.

# BASIC FUNDING PRINCIPLES

The National Catholic Education Commission advocates for sustainable and equitable funding arrangements that reflect the principles outlined below.



## PRINCIPLE 1

### Parental choice

Parental choice means that

- a) In accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all Australian parents and carers “have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”.
- b) The right of parents and carers to choice of schooling, including schooling based on the Catholic tradition, is a right deserving of government support.
- c) Future parents and carers must have the same capacity as current and earlier generations of parents and carers to exercise their freedom of choice in schooling.

## PRINCIPLE 2

### Religious freedom

Religious freedom for Catholic schools means that

- a) Parents and carers are free to entrust their children to Catholic schools that respect their beliefs while confidently celebrating the Catholic mission and identity of the school.
- b) Catholic schools, respecting the rights and freedoms of parents and carers to choose schooling for their children in the Catholic tradition, are free to form and instruct students in the Catholic faith and celebrate the Catholic faith as an integral and inseparable activity of the Catholic school.
- c) Australian governments acknowledge the distinctive contribution Catholic schools have made, and will continue to make, to the development of Australian society, economy and culture.
- d) Commonwealth and state government funding arrangements respect the identity, integrity and autonomy of the Catholic school and education systems.
- e) Funding, compliance and accountability requirements support, rather than hinder or compromise, the authenticity or autonomy of the Catholic school and education systems.

### PRINCIPLE 3

## Educational partnership

Partnership means that

- a) Catholic schools work to deliver high-quality education that is open to all children whose parents and carers choose Catholic schools. This contribution to the community is on behalf of the Church in partnership with Australian governments, parents and carers.
- b) Parents and carers who choose Catholic schools for their children are genuine partners in the learning and formation of their children.
- c) As significant partners in the national educational endeavour, Catholic education authorities and stakeholders have a voice in key national policy and program decision-making forums.
- d) Catholic schools work to implement the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.

### PRINCIPLE 4

## A fair allocative mechanism

The school funding mechanism must guarantee that

- a) Funding allocations to Catholic schools are based on reliable and

objective data and a transparent mechanism that reflects cost pressures in schools.

- b) Funding for students with additional or special learning needs is fair and identifiable.
- c) All Catholic schools are eligible, on a needs basis, for Commonwealth and state government capital support that recognises their important contribution to community infrastructure.

### PRINCIPLE 5

## Funding equity

Equity requires that

- a) Catholic schools have a funding model that guarantees equitable access to Commonwealth and state funding – recurrent, targeted and capital.
- b) Catholic schools receive funding that meets the needs of increasing numbers of Indigenous students, students with disability and refugee students, as well as rural, remote and disadvantaged communities.
- c) The value of grants is at least maintained and reflects the real increases in the cost of education and the capital expenditure needed to ensure intergenerational equity.
- d) The capacity for Catholic state and diocesan school systems to allocate funding to schools according to assessed local need is recognised.

### PRINCIPLE 6

## Funding certainty

Certainty requires that

- a) Catholic schools and school systems have secure, guaranteed funding that is stable and predictable to provide quality outcomes for students.
- b) Catholic schools, as a large and genuinely national enterprise that educates one in five Australian children, have funding certainty enshrined in legislation.

### PRINCIPLE 7

## Accountability and transparency

Accountability and transparency mean that

- a) Catholic schools account publicly for the allocation and expenditure of government funds in a transparent, coherent and comparable manner.
- b) Catholic schools report on agreed national measures, using comparable data.
- c) Catholic schools continue to meet agreed accountability requirements to governments, parents and carers, and the Church community.

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