

# Media Statement

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## Facts not perceptions should drive school funding decisions

Media reports today state that some Catholic school systems are claiming that new Australian Government funding arrangements create “distortions” for Catholic school funding in terms of how parents’ capacity to pay fees is assessed.

Undermining the Catholic system argument, the new funding arrangements utilise a measure of parental capacity to pay, the “SES methodology” which has been in place for both Independent schools and Catholic schools since 2005, or in other words, for 12 years.

The only change to this “SES methodology” in that 12 years is that it has been refined and now utilises even more fine-grained Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data to make its assessment of parental capacity to pay more accurate.

It is worth noting that the SES methodology incorporates an appeal mechanism for schools that consider that the SES does not accurately reflect their parent population. Over the 12 years, a small number of Independent schools have successfully appealed their SES score. Significantly in the same 12 years, no Catholic systemic school has ever appealed their SES score.

The Catholic argument hangs on the concept that the amount of fees that parents in a school can pay should be measured by the fees that the school is charging rather than what parents can afford to pay. Using this logic, all non-government schools should just charge minimal fees and cost-shift the bulk of their costs to the government.

Clearly fees charged are not a measure of parental capacity to pay. So why are fees in Catholic systemic schools so low? Because the funding that Catholic systemic schools attract from the Australian Government bears virtually no resemblance to the funding that arrives at the Catholic school gate. Catholic system authorities undertake wholesale reallocation of government funding to individual Catholic systemic schools according to their own funding methodologies.

The intention of this reallocation is to ensure that all Catholic systemic schools can charge very low fees regardless of where the school is located or the community it serves. This is not merely based on opinion or observation, but rather it is an accepted and widely promoted policy of Catholic education. For example, NCEC Media Release of 22 May 2017 states “.... redistribution within Catholic systems has allowed school communities to receive the funding they need, while maintaining an inclusive, low-fee Catholic school system across the country and across all demographics.”

Analysis of ABS data also shows that the characteristics of Catholic schools are changing over time. The 2016 census data shows that students from low income Catholic households are most likely to attend a government school (55 per cent) rather than a Catholic school. It is only as the income increases in Catholic households that students are more likely to attend Catholic schools.

The Independent sector supports the Review of the SES methodology currently being undertaken by the National School Resourcing Board, and stresses the need for decisions to be made through analysis of rigorous data rather than perceptions or misinformation.

ENDS

ISCA Media contacts: Barry Wallett 0411 278 612 | Brendan Walsh 0411 850 515