

Birmingham ‘confused’ about fee rises? We can set him straight

Education Minister Simon Birmingham is reportedly ‘confused’ about fee increases in Catholic schools stemming from his own funding model.

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Executive Director Stephen Elder can put him straight.

‘The Minister appears to be living in a fantasy world where the significant funding cuts the government has inflicted on some Catholic schools would not flow through to those schools’, Mr Elder said. ‘He has, in effect, been desperately hoping that Catholic systems would totally ignore his so-called “needs-based” funding model in how they allocated grants.

‘As the CECV has repeatedly warned since May, the Turnbull Government’s new model has resulted in significant cuts to funding for Catholic schools. As a consequence, fees have had to rise – even despite our efforts to minimise the blow by allocating transitional funding to affected schools.

‘But Senator Birmingham’s confusion over this matter should come as no surprise.

‘Senator Birmingham is confused about school SES scores, the key determinant of funding for non-government schools under his Gonski 2.0 package.

‘The Gonski Panel – whose work he claims to be implementing – said in their final report over five years ago that a system-weighted average was an appropriate funding mechanism for Catholic education and that SES scores should be reviewed and replaced as soon as possible.

‘Senator Birmingham is confused about funding for students with disability. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on Students with Disability was never designed to be used for funding purposes. Yet that is what he has done – despite declaring last year that it “fails a basic credibility test”. The Minister does not appear to understand how his changes will misallocate funding and risk massive cost blowouts.

‘Senator Birmingham is confused about policy processes. SES scores and the NCCD should have been reviewed before he put them at the heart of a 10-year funding package, not as an afterthought. Schools now face huge uncertainty over future funding while these critical parts of the funding formula are reviewed, reported on and, presumably, amended in new legislation.

‘Senator Birmingham is confused about how to consult with stakeholders. He only spoke in detail with independent school advocates in developing his new funding model. Catholic and government school systems were shut out.

‘Senator Birmingham is also confused about “needs-based” funding. A proper needs-based funding system would not direct hundreds of millions of dollars in government grants to elite independent schools that already reach their resource standard from parental fees and charges.

Media Release



CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION OF VICTORIA LTD

‘Finally, Senator Birmingham is confused about why Catholic schools vigorously oppose his new funding model. The Minister believes the problem is one of communication, rather than policy substance.

‘We can put him straight. The Turnbull Government’s new funding model has cut the amount of funding attracted by some 180 Catholic schools in Victoria and over 600 nationally in 2018. At the same time, the government has undertaken a number of unprecedented actions that have undermined the ability of the Catholic system to reallocate government grants between Catholic schools to mitigate losses.

‘The new funding model and the government’s actions mean many Catholic schools across Victoria are increasing their fees next year.

‘And unlike Senator Birmingham, Catholic schools and the government systems are under no illusions about his funding model. It is the biggest special deal ever offered to elite independent schools.

‘No wonder they’re the only group praising the Minister.’

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