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## FRUSTRATION, CONCERN GROW AFTER ANOTHER SCHOOL FUNDING DELAY

The National Catholic Education Commission says the Turnbull Government risks further alienating education stakeholders if it decides to announce the amount of funding the Commonwealth will spend on Australian schools in future years without extensive consultation with the sector.

NCEC acting executive director Danielle Cronin said it has become clear that there will not be meaningful discussion about the issue of future school funding when Minister for Education and Training Senator Simon Birmingham meets with state and territory ministers in Hobart on Friday.

“For meaningful school funding negotiations to take place, all sectors, including the Catholic and independent school sectors, must have a strong voice in this process,” Ms Cronin said.

“That voice must be heard before the Government decides how much money it is going to allocate to school funding in 2018 and beyond and before it decides how that money will be distributed across jurisdictions and sectors.”

Ms Cronin said it would be unacceptable for the Turnbull Government to announce its school funding plans in the May Budget without significant consultation with the Catholic and independent sectors, as well as state and territory education ministers.

“An open and collaborative process would preclude the Minister from making an announcement about the size of the school funding pie and then spending the following weeks telling sectors and jurisdictions how the pie is to be cut into 9,400 pieces to support each Australian school,” she said.

“The Minister, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer need to fully understand the funding realities schools and families are facing before deciding how much money they will allocate to support the teaching and learning taking place across the country. Meaningful consultation is the way to gain that understanding.”

Ms Cronin said all Australian school students deserve access to fair and equitable funding from government.

“That funding must also deliver certainty and predictability for schools, systems and, most importantly, families. Current government processes are not delivering on this promise,” she said.

Ms Cronin said systems and schools need funding certainty. A lack of funding certainty, as currently exists in relation to funding in 2018 and beyond, means systems, schools and families are unable to adequately plan for their educational, administrative and financial needs.

Delivering certainty as soon as possible allows the greatest opportunity for schools and systems to undertake considered and strategic planning, rather than the short-term planning necessitated by funding uncertainty, she said. It also allows any unintended consequences to be quickly addressed to avoid adverse effects for systems, schools and students.

“Families are rightly concerned about possible fee increases resulting from funding changes from next year,” Ms Cronin said.

“Catholic education is acutely aware of the sacrifices parents make to send their children to Catholic schools and are aware that many families are under financial stress as school fees and other cost of living pressures mount while wages growth is low.”