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## GOVERNMENT PEDDLES 'FAKE NEWS' ON NEW FUNDING WEBSITE

National Catholic Education Commission acting executive director Danielle Cronin says the Turnbull Government has further alienated the education community by publishing misleading information about the actual Commonwealth funding amounts that more than 85 per cent of Australian schools receive today and in future years.

The new "School Funding Estimator" was launched last night as part of the Government's recent "Quality Schools" policy announcement, several days later than expected.

"As pressure mounts on the Turnbull Government, a new website was launched under the cover of darkness that will actually serve to confuse parents and create competition and misinformation for schools about their funding levels," Ms Cronin said.

"The funding model used to populate the website relies on seriously flawed assumptions about the capacity of Catholic school parents to pay school fees.

"Families are already making significant financial sacrifices to send their children to a Catholic school. They justifiably fear their school choice will be taken away if fees have to increase in order to maintain resourcing levels."

Ms Cronin said the decision to launch this website, despite the reservations of the NCEC and other stakeholder groups, is reflective of the overall approach of the Turnbull Government during the rollout of its education reforms – proceed without meaningful consultation with the key stakeholders.

"Over the past several days, criticism has flowed towards the Government, including over the fact that a new website outlining Commonwealth funding allocations would not reflect the current or future realities of the allocations all systemic schools – Catholic, government and independent – actually receive.

"That will also create anxiety among Catholic school parents as they are being told by the Government that they are able to pay more in school fees than they currently pay."

Ms Cronin said Commonwealth funding models are relatively blunt instruments. Educational leaders, including principals and teachers, are best placed to understand the learning and operational needs of students and schools.

"That's why Catholic, government and independent systems are empowered to redistribute funding to schools and students who need it most. The publication of school-by-school data of the kind the Commonwealth has published will not accurately reflect for families or principals the funding their schools will actually receive," she said.

"This site has essentially by-passed system funding arrangements and will pit school communities against each other as they consider how their school will be funded in 2018 or in 2027 – and all before the Government has made any progress towards securing passage of legislation to change the Australian Education Act."

Ms Cronin said the many caveats and provisos contained on the website should have been enough to stop the Government from proceeding with its publication. Catholic education outlined its concerns about the website last week, but those warnings were not heeded.

"The website has the potential to mislead and confuse parents and taxpayers in relation to actual funding levels for all Australian schools. That is especially true because only Commonwealth funding is included in the figures presented. It does not include other important sources of funding for schools that make up their total funding levels," she said.

Ms Cronin said a website already exists – the My School website – that provides a more accurate picture of school funding, albeit retrospectively, because it includes funding from Commonwealth and state governments, as well as fees and other private income from families and the broader community.

"The last thing parents need is more confusion about the way schools are funded. This new estimator risks creating exactly that and creating serious concerns about the fee expectations for Catholic school families," she said.

"Catholic education will continue to fight for families so that they can continue to afford and access the schools they want for their children."