
MINISTER'S 'WHATEVER IT TAKES' APPROACH WILL HURT CATHOLIC SCHOOL FAMILIES

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Christian Zahra says Education Minister Simon Birmingham should be listening to educators and parents about how he can improve his widely-criticised school funding plan, rather than trying to win votes in the Senate with a “whatever it takes” approach to policy-making.

Media reports today outline how Minister Birmingham is seeking to gain the support of the Australian Greens and other cross-bench Senators to get his rushed school funding policy through the Senate before Parliament’s winter recess.

“In an unprecedented move, Catholic education leaders were shut out of the development of the Government’s school funding policy. Now, once again, educators and families are being left out of important discussions about the future of Australian schooling while the Minister consults with politicians instead,” Mr Zahra said.

“This last-minute frenzy to get his unpopular plan passed is what happens when a policy process is fraught from the outset, as has happened with this attempt to implement a flawed school funding plan for 10 years.”

Mr Zahra said reports that the Minister is set to increase his school funding package from \$18.6 billion to \$24 billion over the next decade continues an ongoing series of backflips.

“A few short months ago, Minister Birmingham said education policy was not about how much money is spent,” he explained.

“Here we are, on the eve of the Senate vote, and as the Minister sees his dreams fading, it appears it is indeed all about the money if it means securing support from the Greens or other Senators who are issuing a list of demands.

“Maybe we’re going to end up with another set of ‘special deals’ after the Minister completes his discussions with the cross-bench. That appears to be another looming broken promise in the Minister’s ‘whatever it takes’ approach.”

Mr Zahra said other media reports today show the impact the Turnbull Government’s policy is going to have on Catholic schools across the country.

“Independent analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office shows that the Minister’s plan would rip \$3.1 billion off Catholic schools over the next decade,” he said.

“It’s the latest evidence of the way Catholic schools and families who choose a Catholic school are going to suffer at the hands of the Coalition Government.”

Mr Zahra said many members of the Coalition are struggling to defend a policy that will take away school choice and see Catholic education in Australia become less affordable, especially for low- and middle-income families.

“Many Catholic school families are struggling to pay fees already and given the consequences of a policy that would take \$3.1 billion off Catholic schools over the next 10 years, higher fees will be the likely outcome,” he said.

“Minister Birmingham and his Coalition colleagues need to think long and hard about if they want this attack on Catholic education to be their legacy. Catholic school families would expect the Coalition to be more interested in developing policy in conjunction with educators and parents than trying to make a political deal,” Mr Zahra concluded.