

MEDIA RELEASE

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Addressing growing educational disadvantage is an issue for all school sectors

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is calling for a broader discussion on educational disadvantage in Australia, highlighting that it is a challenge faced across all schooling sectors, not just government schools.

NCEC Executive Director Jacinta Collins said despite the often-skewed analysis presented by some groups, disadvantage is a growing issue for all sectors, particularly Catholic schools.

“With approximately two-thirds of Australian students enrolled in government schools, it is expected that these schools will have the highest number of students experiencing disadvantage,” Ms Collins said. “However, Catholic and other non-government schools also educate a substantial and growing proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and play a critical role in ensuring educational equity.

Catholic Education has been included as a part of a cross-sectoral reference group on the UTS + Ramsay Foundation fellowship project led by Dr Michele Bruniges AM into concentrations of disadvantage. This project confirms that disadvantage has increased in all school sectors across Australia in recent years. The research also shows there have been significant improvements made by targeting support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Catholic Education looks forward to receiving the detailed analysis from Dr Bruniges and recommendations for supporting students across all sectors.

The number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Catholic schools is increasing, with over 42 per cent of students falling into the bottom two quartiles of socio-educational advantage. For government schools, 57 per cent of students are in the bottom two quartiles and 30 per cent for other non-government schools.

“Unlike government schools, parents in Catholic schools are required to contribute at least the minimum of 10 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS),” Ms Collins said. “For families experiencing severe financial hardship, these contributions are often out of reach, yet Catholic schools remain committed to providing high-quality education to all students, regardless of their background through financial hardship provisions and other affordability measures.

“Catholic schools serve some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia, with nearly 40 per cent of schools in rural, regional and remote areas where they are sometimes the only schooling option for families,” Ms Collins said.

“Catholic schools add enormous value to their communities, working alongside government to support student learning and wellbeing.

“It is essential that discussions around funding and support for disadvantaged students include all sectors so that every child, no matter where they live or what school they attend, has the opportunity to succeed.”

Background

Nationally, the 2024 percentage of students with the lower socio-educational advantage (SEA) quartiles by school sector:

Sector	Bottom SEA	Lower Middle SEA	Bottom two SEA combined
Catholic	15.6%	26.9%	42.4%
Government	31.2%	25.8%	57.1%
Independent	11.5%	19.3%	30.8%

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

Australia's 1,755 Catholic schools educate 820,000 or one in five Australian students in and are the largest provider of schooling outside of the government sector.

Media enquiries

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