

Catholic Education welcomes Coalition's election pledge to support Indigenous boarding and expand early education centres

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has welcomed the Liberal-National Coalition's election commitments to increase Indigenous Boarding Grants and support the Labor Government's Building the Early Education Fund, as well as to establish a new Raising the Regions Program.

NCEC Executive Director Jacinta Collins said the Coalition's \$100 million pledge to build and expand boarding schools for 660 Indigenous boarding students, along with a \$15.9 million increase to cover ongoing boarding costs, is a critical investment to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities.

"This commitment acknowledges the unique and pressing challenges faced by schools like St John's Catholic College in the Northern Territory and Mount St Bernard College in Far North Queensland, where boarding is often the only viable option for students from remote areas," Ms Collins said.

"Boarding is not a luxury - it is essential. The cost of delivering culturally safe, boarding and education for First Nations students, especially in remote communities, is high. Without consistent and long-term support, many families and school communities are left struggling to sustain these opportunities.

"Catholic Education has been focused on sector inclusion as one of our key priorities this election," Ms Collins said. "The inclusion of non-government schools in the eligibility criteria recognises the significant role Catholic schools play, alongside government and other non-government schools, in closing the education gap.

"The funding, if delivered, would allow us to build on our progress, such as the 100 per cent Year 12 completion rates for First Nations students in Canberra Goulburn and South Australia, by ensuring long-term, sustainable support," she said.

"We are also pleased to see the Coalition support the Labor Government's \$1 billion Building the Early Education Fund, which is another key election priority for Catholic schools.

The Coalition will also establish a new Raising the Regions Program to deliver early childhood education and care in 'child care deserts' and regional and rural areas in need.

"Providing high-quality early education from the outset is essential and integrating early childhood education and care centres on Catholic school sites, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas, is an urgent aim for the Catholic sector. This approach responds to the needs of families with 40 per cent of schools located outside metropolitan areas, while supporting a seamless transition to school."

Australia's 1,751 Catholic schools educate 820,000 or one in five Australian students and is the largest provider of schooling outside of the government sector. The Catholic education sector has seen 161% growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment over 10 years.

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