

MEDIA RELEASE

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AEU Report distorts the facts

The Australian Education Union (AEU) report on school infrastructure funding and the media coverage today is, yet again, a poor characterisation of figures which advances sector division and undermines the whole of the Australian education system.

The Executive Director of the National Catholic Education Commission, Jacinta Collins, said the report undermines the hard work and sacrifice of thousands of Australian families who contribute to the capital costs of their child's school.

“Catholic families contribute 90% of the funds used for capital in our schools, the remaining 10% from state and government grants are targeted to growth areas and lower socio-economic communities” she said.

The report cherry picks examples to serve a political agenda, using terms like elite and prestige to characterise non-government schools. The majority of Catholic schools are low fee and provide education across a diversity of postcodes, socio-economic advantage and family circumstance.

The report highlights, for example, St Marys Cathedral College Sydney, which is neither elite nor high fee. A fact attested by the Prime Minister himself, having studied with fee relief alongside First Nations students who had come from local government schools.

The report also completely distorts the nature of recurrent government funding by implying that schools ‘reallocate recurrent funds’ to capital projects.

As ACARA explains, under the Australian Education Act 2013, an approved authority for a non-government school must not use government recurrent funding for the purchase of land or buildings for the school, the construction of a building, or part of a building, for the school, capital improvements for the school, any form of loan, credit facility, or other interest in relation to the above.

Catholic schools receive capital funding principally from parents through fees with a small contribution in the form of grants from the commonwealth and state governments. Government schools receive capital funding principally from their state government.

Reporting and recommendations which focus on federal funding and paint a picture of gross disparity, ignore the reality of our education structures within a federated system where state governments run and principally fund government schools.

“Catholic schools work exceptionally hard with their communities to be prudent financial stewards of the funds which come from government, other income and overwhelmingly from parent contributions. These funds are used to ensure our schools continue to deliver the quality Catholic education that millions of students (1 in 5) have experienced across Australia for over 200 years” Ms Collins said.

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Media enquiries

Jude Coen, Media and Communications Advisor, 0419 425 406

Catholic education is Australia’s largest non-government school provider, educating 830,000 -or one in five Australian students - and employing over 115,000 staff across 1,750 mostly low-fee schools, as well as operating over 700 early childhood education and care services.