Victorian Catholic Education Authority

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Catholic education election scorecard reveals major differences in school funding commitments

A scorecard revealing major differences between Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition on five priorities affecting Catholic education has been released by the Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA) ahead of the state election.

While both major parties have committed $500 million for non-government school infrastructure, VCEA's *Catholic Education Election Scorecard* reveals major differences in their commitments to protect existing school funding arrangements and abolish payroll tax on non-government schools.

The Liberal-National Coalition has committed to maintaining existing recurrent funding arrangements and abolishing payroll tax on non-government schools.

Labor has decided to change the recurrent funding model and has not committed to abolishing the payroll tax on non-government schools, leaving VCEA concerned about the potential major financial impact on Catholic schools.

VCEA Chief Executive Officer Professor Elizabeth Labone said the differences were significant for Victoria's 494 Catholic schools, which educate more than 218,000 students from approximately 160,000 families.

"These are fundamental funding decisions that affect the resources available to Catholic schools and the affordability of education for families," Professor Labone said.

"Catholic schools already save taxpayers billions of dollars by educating one in five Victorian students with substantially less government funding per student. Catholic school communities also fund more than 85 per cent of capital investment themselves. Supporting our schools helps governments deliver education and new school places at a lower cost to taxpayers."

VCEA's modelling estimates that changes to the existing recurrent funding arrangements would leave Catholic schools more than $200 million worse off over the next four years.

"Our concern is that changes to longstanding recurrent funding arrangements would leave Catholic schools receiving substantially less funding than they would under the existing formula. In real terms, this is a funding cut."

This comes at a time when Catholic schools are facing rising costs, particularly the need to provide competitive salaries and conditions for teachers and staff, including those benchmarked against the new Victorian Government Schools Agreement.

"Any reduction of the magnitude that would be created by not delivering the 25% funding linkage would place substantial pressure on school budgets, with potential consequences for fees, staffing, educational programs and facilities."

"Around 90 per cent of Victorian Catholic schools charge less than $5,000 per student each year. Keeping Catholic education affordable for families is a critical part of the overall education system in Victoria and depends on adequate and predictable government funding."

Professor Labone welcomed the commitments from both Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition to provide $500 million over four years to non-government school infrastructure. This follows VCEA's advocacy for capital investment to build new Catholic schools in growth areas, create additional student places and upgrade existing facilities. Catholic school communities already contribute more than 85 per cent of capital investment themselves.

“These are significant commitments that will help Catholic schools deliver new and upgraded facilities and additional student places for Victorian families,” Professor Labone said.

Professor Labone also welcomed the Coalition’s commitment to maintain existing recurrent funding arrangements and abolishing payroll tax on non-government schools.

“These commitments provide important funding certainty for Catholic schools and will help schools direct more resources towards educating students.

“We have sought the same funding certainty from both major parties and will continue advocating for policies that support accessible, affordable Catholic education, regardless of which party forms the next government.”

On school planning reform, Labor has committed to streamlining school approvals, while the Liberal-National Coalition has committed to accelerating precinct planning and working with VCEA to improve the identification of new school sites.

On early learning, Labor has committed to continuing the Building Blocks program. The position of the Coalition to continue ongoing funding for the Building Blocks program is unconfirmed, however, they have committed to undertaking an Early Learning Structural Review, including a review of early learning infrastructure needs and existing service capacity.

Every child enrolled in a non-government school saves the Victorian taxpayer $9,000 a year. Any significant movement of students into government schools if the cost of Catholic and other non-government education becomes unaffordable would place additional pressure on the government school system and future government expenditure.

“If funding cuts force families out of Catholic and other non-government schools and into the government system, taxpayers would ultimately face higher costs as the Government takes on responsibility for educating those students,” Professor Labone said.

The scorecard and full assessment are available at: vcea.catholic.edu.au/state-election/.

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