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## **Federal Budget responds to areas of significant educational need says Catholic sector**

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has welcomed \$1.6 billion funding for Early Childhood learning and \$63.5 million to support gender equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls announced in the 2021-22 Budget, saying it responds to areas of significant educational need.

National Catholic Education Executive Director Jacinta Collins said the continuation of universal access to 15 hours of preschool will enable children to build critical foundations in the year before commencing school.

The Catholic education sector operates about 250 preschools and early learning centres educating nearly 5,000 children across Australia.

“The government’s commitment to a new four year agreement will support early childhood services and encourage more families to access affordable early learning for their children,” Ms Collins said.

“We know that quality early learning plays a key role in preparing children for a good start to school and we look forward to working with the government on identifying areas of reform to support increased preschool attendance and school readiness.”

The Catholic sector said the government’s commitment to fund 2,700 Additional Places in girls academies would help to provide culturally-appropriate support for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to achieve Year 12 attainment and post-school transition.

“While Year 12 attainment rates have improved in recent years through the Closing the Gap initiatives, there is an ongoing need to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to continue into further study and find meaningful employment,” Ms Collins said.

Nationally, there are 1,755 Catholic schools educating more than 777,000 students – or one in five Australian students and employing over 100,000 staff.