

Federal Budget: Catholic education welcomes the government's commitment to early childhood and boarding students in regional and remote areas

Catholic education welcomes the Morrison Government's commitments to increase early childhood services in regional and remote areas, and scholarships for boarding students, announced in tonight's budget.

National Catholic Education executive director Jacinta Collins said the government's recognition of regional and remote areas in early childhood and boarding services will strengthen the work schools are already doing in these areas.

"As well as dealing with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional, rural and remote areas in Australia have faced significant challenges in the past two years facing floods, drought and bushfires," Ms Collins said.

"These challenges have exacerbated and deepened existing inequalities for our students in these areas."

Early Childhood Education

The government has committed to \$19.4 million for Regional Education Early Childhood education and care to support more childcare places in regional, rural and remote Australia, and a further open round of the Community Child Care Fund will be held to support the establishment of up to 20 new childcare services in regional and remote communities.

"The more we can support the work of early childhood services, schools and families in these areas, the greater our ability to address disadvantage and improve outcomes for young people and their communities.

Across Australia, the Catholic education sector also operates about 400 preschools and early childhood centres, educating nearly 15,000 children across Australia.

"The government's commitment to 20 new centres in regional and remote areas will enable greater choice for families to access affordable early learning for their children," she said.

"As highlighted in our Pre-Budget Submission, the Catholic education sector is ready and willing to expand the delivery of early childhood education in response to increasing need from families.

"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 elected government on identifying further areas of reform to ensure early childhood services can be located with schools to better support families and ensure a smooth transition to school."

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Regional and Indigenous Boarding

The government has committed to \$17.3 million to extend a grants program to assist Indigenous boarding providers to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and a new \$10.9 million Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program to assist up to 200 families from low-SES communities with the cost of boarding school fees. Eligible families will receive \$15,000 per student each year for three years.

“We welcome the decision to extend support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and regional boarding students,” Ms Collins said.

“Around 40 per cent of Catholic schools are located in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia, with 49 boarding schools serving the needs of over 5,000 students.

“With limited private contribution from families, who are often experiencing disadvantage, our regional boarding schools face additional costs and challenges, and struggle to provide essential services for their students,” she said.

“This support will help to meet these critical needs and support better outcomes for regional, remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.”

NCEC is the peak body for Catholic Education in Australia and is responsible for the national coordination and representation of Catholic schools and school authorities

Nationally, there are 1,755 Catholic schools educating more than 785,000 students – or one in five Australian students and employing over 102,000 staff.