

Catholic education seeks clarity from parties on election priorities

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is calling on the major parties and a number of candidates in key seats to respond on policy matters in the leadup to the federal election.

The NCEC is the peak body representing over 785,000 students from 465,000 families and employing over 102,000 school staff in 1,755 Catholic schools. This represents around three quarters of a million voters.

NCEC Executive Director Jacinta Collins said the responses will be used to inform parents and staff ahead of the 21 May election.

“Every federal election we ask the major parties and some independent candidates to outline their policy positions on a range of issues that are important to our Catholic community,” Ms Collins said. “We communicate them to our parents, staff and other stakeholders so they can make an informed choice on election day.”

Ms Collins said the Catholic education sector is seeking assurances that parents will continue to have a genuine choice of schooling and affordable access to a faith-based education.

“Choice in the education of one’s child is one of the most important decisions a parent will make,” she said. “That’s why ensuring our children’s schools are properly funded and supported by the government is a critical issue for Catholic families across the country.

“Ensuring appropriate legislation to protect the rights of parents to choose a faith-based education for their children is a key priority and we will be seeking the support of the major parties to finalise the Religious Discrimination legislation that passed the House of Representatives, within the first 100 days of the new Australian Parliament.

“Both major parties have previously acknowledged the importance of our schools maintaining their religious ethos through their support for the protections proposed in the Religious Discrimination Bill,” Ms Collins said.

“We thank the many Members of Parliament who highlighted the importance of their local Catholic schools throughout the debate.

“This important legislation realises Australia’s international responsibility to protect religious freedom including establishing religious schools and the rights of parents to ensure the education of their children in line with their religious beliefs and values.

“We support further work occurring with the Sex Discrimination Act to ensure an appropriate balance of protections, and at the same time, ensuring that faith-based schools are able to operate within their religious ethos,” she said.

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Catholic education is seeking the following commitments in the 2022 Federal Election:

Supporting school choice

- Support for Catholic schools to be an affordable choice for Australian families through:
 - **Funding certainty** by continuing the 10-year agreement and the current level of **indexation** to reflect increasing educational costs
 - Refining **loadings for student need**, school size, regional and remote location
 - Maintaining the **Choice and Affordability Fund**
 - Advancing the review of the **Capacity to Contribute** formula to 2024 to ensure fairer parent contributions
 - Improving **capital funding** support to adequately resource learning environments

Enabling faith-based education

- Appropriate **legislation and educational policy** to enable Catholic schools to operate and teach within a religious ethos

Delivering national priorities

- Extending the **Non-Government Reform Support Fund beyond 2022** to support the delivery of the National Education Reform Agreement and emerging priorities such as quality teaching
- Supporting **Early Childhood Education** in the two years prior to school, capital funding to grow the number of services, and improved alignment for school delivery
- Better access to **Mental Health and Wellbeing** programs to address the increasing challenge of student mental health and wellbeing, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students
- Better access for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students** in Catholic schools to Closing the Gap initiatives that support the complex needs of students.

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