Dear parents,

In recent weeks there has been considerable media coverage of the Coalition Government’s new education funding package, *Quality Schools*, and its impact on Catholic schools. As is always the case with these matters, there have been exaggerations and distortions in some reporting, so we are writing to inform you of the facts about the government’s proposals and how Catholic school communities are responding.

Analysis of *Quality Schools* by both the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), and the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has found that under the proposals, Catholic schools will face funding cuts in real terms, meaning schools will have to increase fees or cut back on valued programs to keep pace with the rising costs of education.

It is important to recognise that the proposals are not yet law. We hope that with other members of the Catholic education communities around Australia we will be able to persuade the Coalition to amend its planned measures or other parties to block them in the Senate.

We believe the proposals threaten the independence and accessibility of the Catholic school system and your rights as parents to choose a values-based education for your children. The funding proposals run contrary to principles of Catholic education that we know so many of you cherish; to provide an affordable, quality education infused with the spirit of the Church’s teachings to as many families as possible by minimising fees.

**Facts about Catholic school funding distribution**

Currently, federal funding for Catholic education is allocated using what is known as a system-weighted average, or through “one big school” system. Money goes to a central Catholic education body which then distributes it across schools on a basis designed to meet special individual needs while minimising fees. The government plans to do away with this and replace it with a system centred around what are known as school socio-economic status or SES scores, a statistical tool used to measure the “capacity to contribute” of individual school communities, or the ability of parents to pay fees.

Catholic education authorities have long argued these SES scores paint a broad-brush picture of schools based on their neighbourhoods that doesn’t take into account individual circumstances. It’s important to note that while the government claims it is implementing the vision of the Gonski review of school funding, the final Gonski report recommended that the use of SES scores be reviewed.

As parents you are all too aware that where you live does not necessarily equate to your ability to afford expensive school fees. The government’s proposals do not consider the different circumstances in each
school community and removes the ability of Catholic education authorities to make special allocations across individual schools for factors such as numbers of VET and VCAL students, refugee families and students with other distinct considerations while spreading the fee burden fairly.

The focus on individual schools and their SES scores under the government’s plans will compromise the independence of Catholic education and risks placing new fee imposts on parents.

How parents can work in partnership with their school communities
As the government’s proposals are not yet law, Catholic education leaders across the country are working hard to make sure the Coalition, the opposition and all the parties in the parliament understand that our students will be disadvantaged if the measures in Quality Schools are enacted.
Catholic schools are not asking for any “special deals”. Instead, all that is being requested is fair and equitable treatment that is consistent with the Gonski recommendations.

Your school principal will have received information from the CECV about how the Quality Schools package will affect Catholic education in Victoria. Principals, along with school board members, have been asked to invite their local federal MPs to your school to discuss the implications of the new funding model and to show them everything Catholic school communities work hard to provide for families in their electorates.
Principals have also been informed of how parents can make their voices heard and assist their schools.

On behalf of the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body we urge you to participate in meetings with local MPs where possible or take the time to phone or – particularly – write to their electorate offices to help them understand the implications for the government’s proposals on parents and our school communities. Your principal will have received material that can assist you with this task.

The coming weeks will offer the perfect opportunity for these activities. The federal parliament does not sit during the week beginning Monday 5 June and then rises for the winter recess on 22 June, meaning MPs will be in their electorates during this time.

We urge all parents in Catholic education communities to work with principals, school boards and school community leaders to ensure our voices are heard, loudly and firmly, in the school funding debate. We have included further information on the funding model and its impact on Catholic schools with this letter. The Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body is consulting closely with the CECV and nationally as we work to encourage all school communities to play their part.

We would like your school board to provide us with a contact person from your school community as we are keen to hear about meetings with local MPs and any other experiences at your school. This way we can make sure we are in touch with all the members of our Catholic school community so we can share ideas and information that will help us in our task of supporting Catholic education and parents of children in Catholic schools. We can be contacted on secretary@vcspb.catholic.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Morgan Murphy
Chairperson

Rachel Saliba
Executive Officer

CORRESPONDENCE:
Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body
PO Box 3, East Melbourne VIC 8002
Email: secretary@vcspb.catholic.edu.au
www.vcspb.catholic.edu.au