



CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION NEW SOUTH WALES

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NSW Bishops: unprecedented threat to Catholic schools

For the first time ever, all Catholic schools in NSW face a radical and immediate cut to their NSW government subsidy.

The Bishops of NSW are advised that the NSW Government is about to announce an unprecedented cut to the recurrent grant for NSW non-government schools of \$66.7 million per year, or 8% of the 2012 total. We understand that from January 2013, state government funding for Catholic systemic schools is to be cut by \$24.5 million per year. Catholic independent schools will face immediate cuts of up to \$496 per student.

NSW State government per capita grants provide 20% of the annual recurrent income for most systemic Catholic schools in NSW. They contribute significantly to teacher salaries and meeting other operational costs of every Catholic school.

Impact of proposed cuts on Catholic schools

The NSW Bishops reject the projected cut in NSW government funding to Catholic schools from 2013. We are seriously concerned that this decision:

- is an unprecedented withdrawal of government aid to Catholic schools
- breaks the long established trust of parents in continued government support for Catholic schools
- comes without prior consultation or reasonable notice
- impacts potentially on every systemic Catholic school in every diocese across the state
- will require systemic Catholic schools to increase their fees by about \$100 per student beyond planned annual increases, or find other school savings, to compensate for the cut in NSW government grants
- will require independent Catholic schools to increase fees by between \$58 and \$496 per student beyond planned annual increases, or find other school savings, in order to compensate for the cut in grants
- may force some families out of Catholic schools, force reductions of teachers and curriculum options, compromise other essential educational provisions or even force school closures
- comes at a time when most Catholic schools have already finalised their key staffing and budgeting decisions for 2013.

The Bishops are shocked that such a significant cut in NSW Government funding should come 'out of the blue' and precisely when Catholic school authorities and all Australian governments are exploring ways of increasing, not decreasing, government investment in all schools.

The recent Gonski report on funding for all Australian students relied upon Commonwealth and State governments negotiating future funding in good faith. Unfortunately, this NSW government decision erodes its credibility in such negotiations. It also repudiates the public positions of both the Commonwealth Government and the Federal Opposition that no school – government or non-government – will be worse off financially from 2014.

Over the past fifty years NSW and Australian governments have acknowledged the right of parents to government financial support for their choice of school. Government grants have enabled Catholic schools to remain affordable for most parents but many still struggle to meet fee payments. Now, for the first time ever, all Catholic schools in NSW are faced with the threat of a significant and immediate cut to their NSW government grants.

Bishops' commitment

The NSW Bishops are committed to doing our best to keeping Catholic schools affordable and to helping ensure the highest educational standards in them. Any reduction in funding undermines that ambition.

While the Catholic community recognises that in tough economic times governments seek to cut expenditures, we believe it is false economy to deprive our young people of educational opportunities. We expect government always to act fairly in such situations and not make the situation for struggling families worse. Parents with children in Catholic systemic schools already pay the same state taxes as anyone else and yet get only 25% of the state government recurrent funding per student that government schools get.

Planned response

The Catholic Church is proud to have been contributing to the education of the children of New South Wales for 190 years and is committed to continue providing that vital community service into the future. We only ask of governments that they be fair to our parents and children when it comes to school funding.

The NSW Bishops call on the Premier of NSW, Barry O'Farrell, to intervene immediately to block the announcement of what amounts to the biggest threat to NSW Catholic schools in decades, and to provide reassurance to the Catholic community and those families of all religious backgrounds who entrust their children to Catholic schools.

In addition, principals, staff and parents of children in Catholic schools, priests and parishioners are invited to contact their state Member of Parliament to highlight the potential impact of the cuts on individual schools within their electorate, and to seek clear answers to the following questions:

- *Since NSW government grants to non-government schools are linked to NSW government school costs, are government schools being subjected to similar reductions?*
- *Before making its decision, was the Government aware of the adverse impact it would have on individual non-government schools, parents and children?*
- *How can the NSW Government justify cutting funds to schools when it is simultaneously negotiating with the Commonwealth about how to increase future government investment in all schools, following on the recommendations of the Gonski report?*
- *How can the government defend such a large and immediate funding cut without any prior consultation or notice to schools who have already set their staffing levels and budgets for 2013?*

For all media enquiries please contact Mr David Collits on 0448 822 625 for Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, Chairman of the Catholic Education Commission, NSW