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## PARTIES ASKED ABOUT CATHOLIC EDUCATION PRIORITIES

As the federal election approaches its final week, hundreds of thousands of families across Australia are being provided information about how the major political parties will support the education of students in the country's 1,731 Catholic schools in the coming years.

Last month, Catholic education sent a series of seven questions to the Coalition and to the Australian Labor Party, asking about issues including needs-based school funding, capital funding, support for students with disability, religious freedom, and school and system autonomy.

The parties' responses have been shared with Catholic schools and Catholic school families.

"With the 'Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes' policy and the 'Your Child. Our Future' policy, the Coalition and the Australian Labor Party have given their respective blueprints on school education over the short and medium term," National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox said.

"But given the complexities of school funding, it was important that parties were given the opportunity to more clearly explain how some of the major issues facing Catholic schools would be addressed through their policies."

Mr Fox said parents of school students and those who value school education have been taking a keen interest in the federal election. In 2014, the Commonwealth spent more than \$14 billion to support students in all schools.

For Catholic and independent schools, in particular, Commonwealth funding is hugely important.

"With 70 per cent of the cost of educating a Catholic school student, on average, coming from governments, and mostly from the Commonwealth, school funding policy is a very important election issue for the 765,000 students in Catholic schools and their families," Mr Fox explained.

"And with the level of fees required by schools directly linked to levels of government funding, families want to know how funding policies implemented by whichever party forms government after the upcoming election will affect them."

Mr Fox said capital funding to support increasing demand for school places in the coming years is a key consideration for Catholic school parents.

"As many as 180,000 additional students are expected to be receiving a Catholic education by 2025, and how new schools are paid for and how existing schools can provide places for additional students is an issue of national significance," he said.

"There is a need for financial support from government to construct and expand schools to meet the growing school-aged population."

The National Catholic Education Commission launched the [SchoolFundingFacts.com](http://SchoolFundingFacts.com) website in April to help inform parents and the community about how Australian schools are funded and to explain the important role of Catholic education in Australia.

“Catholic education is focused on how government policy supports all students in all schools, and students with additional learning needs should receive extra support for their education, regardless of which school they attend,” Mr Fox said.

“Over the past decade, the number of students with disability and the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools has doubled.

“Government funding and government policy has been crucial to that ongoing welcome and Catholic schools will continue to support the needs of students from all backgrounds in cooperation with families and governments.”

The document including the questions for political parties and the responses that have been provided can be accessed on the National Catholic Education Commission website: [www.ncec.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au)

**CONTACT:** Gavin Abraham • NCEC Communications Manager • 02 8229 0802 • 0408 825 788