

## ALARM FOR NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN GREENS' POLICY

The National Catholic Education Commission and Catholic School Parents Australia have warned that the Australian Greens' education policy will create uncertainty for non-government schools, limit school choice for families and students, and could cause Catholic school fees to increase.

NCEC executive director Ross Fox said the Greens are using the final days of the campaign to promote their educational policy, but the policy creates conflict between the government and non-government sectors and could undermine the education Catholic schools provide to 765,000 students across Australia.

"The Greens' education platform calls for funding for government schools to be prioritised ahead of non-government schools, irrespective of need," Mr Fox said. "This position cannot be reconciled with the Greens' stated commitment to needs-based, sector-blind funding.

"The Greens have called for funding to be taken from non-government schools and given to government schools. Taking money from non-government schools will certainly see school fees rise dramatically. Taken as a whole, the Greens' education policy would be likely to damage non-government schools across Australia."

CSPA chair Tony O'Byrne said while schools, parents and students will welcome additional support for teaching and learning, non-government – and especially Catholic – school parents have grave concerns over the Greens' broader education policy.

"Parents who choose Catholic schools, including many parents who aren't Catholic, have made that choice because of the ethos and values present in that community," Mr O'Byrne said.

"The Greens' plans to dictate the employment policies of Catholic schools would be a direct attack on their identity and on school choice. It is a concern to all those who value non-government schools and the contribution they make. Such an imposition would fly in the face of the fundamental right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of association."

Mr Fox said Catholic schools, located in every corner of Australia, are educating growing numbers of students with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, working in partnership with students, teachers, school staff, parents, governments and other schools to create a high-quality Australian education system.

"Catholic schools currently receive, on average, 83 per cent of the per-student funding a government school receives, with parents making a significant contribution to their child's education," he explained. "That contribution would have to grow if the Greens abandoned the principle of funding being sector-blind, as well as needs-based."

Mr O'Byrne said hundreds of thousands of Catholic school parents and grandparents will this weekend want to give their backing to a party that supports the education of their children and grandchildren.

"Many of us lived through the divisive debate on school funding, pitting sector against sector, and it is deeply concerning that some political parties wish to reignite that debate," he said.

"School choice is overwhelmingly valued by parents. Parents are concerned that there would be a seismic shift in the way Catholic schools can operate if the Australian Greens were in a position to implement their school policies."

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