

# CATHOLIC VOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN



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FREE

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# Parents say 'no'

**WORRIED** Catholic school parents are uniting to fight planned government funding cuts that are feared will affect fees and enrolments.

The head of an organisation representing Catholic school parents in the Archdiocese, Paul Compton, said the proposed cuts could not have come at a worse time.

Many parents already under financial stress to pay existing fees would not be able to afford the calculated increases.

"Schools are reporting that inquiries are down, and parents are rightly asking 'how can I commit to six years of Catholic education when there is so much uncertainty around fees?'"

Archbishop Christopher Prowse has urged Catholics to inform themselves and to lobby their political representatives.

"We are not looking for any special deals," he said. "But we are expecting new arrangements to be fair and reasonable."

"As your Archbishop, I am particularly concerned that the proposed model will unfairly cut very significant funding to our schools, but especially to our ACT schools."

The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn educates 22,000 students in 56 schools and has more than 2000 staff.

More than 500 parents, students, education professionals and politicians attended a meeting called by Catholic School Parents Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn.

One principal, Frances Robertson, of St Patrick's Central School, Cooma, told the gathering the term 'funding' should be removed from the discussion and be replaced by 'investment'.

Director of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese Ross Fox has described the situation as "dire".

"Mr Birmingham sent a letter to



Paul Compton (middle) with parents and students at St Thomas the Apostle Primary Kambah. Picture: FiveFoot Photography.

every Catholic school in the ACT confirming lower funding in 2027 than 2017," he said.

"These funding cuts ignore the fact that if the same parents enrol in a government school, government funding will be significantly higher and fees lower."

"I urge all parents in Catholic schools to consider the impact on their school and contact their political leaders and demand to know why their children deserve

to have government support cut over the next ten years."

St Mary MacKillop College principal Michael Lee is outraged by the funding cuts.

"Our funding to support those needs, and indeed the needs of all our students, has been frozen for 10 years and then will be cut by \$777 per student. This means a net loss of \$4.6 million," he said.

St Thomas More Campbell principal Julie Wiley emphasised

the issue of the school's parents' capacity to pay extra school fees. "I believe many of our parents couldn't afford a fee increase," she said.

Parent Mark Brookhouse, a pensioner based in the south of Canberra, holds grave concerns about the cuts.

His son Connor, a student at St Mary MacKillop College, has a disease that causes progressive damage to the nervous system.

"The extra money is going to have to come from somewhere and sadly it is impacting the most vulnerable in our society," he said.

ACT Liberal Senator Zed Seselja said he would push for the best outcome in consultation with Federal Minister for Education and Training Simon Birmingham.

*For more coverage on the education funding reform issue turn to pages 6 and 7.*



**ACT LIBERAL SENATOR ZED SESELJA** has promised to push for the best outcome for ACT Catholic schools.

Education Minister Simon Birmingham had made it clear the Government was committing an additional \$18.6 billion for all schools starting from 2018, he said.

Funding would grow from \$17.5 billion in 2017 to \$30.6 billion in 2027.

This includes \$2.2 billion in new funding over the first four years following an additional

\$1.2 billion in last year's budget.

Senator Seselja said the overall goal was to move to a system where all schools and states have an equal Commonwealth share of the schooling resource standard over the course of a decade.

"For Catholic schools, Mr Birmingham has indicated that across Australia the Catholic school system will see per student growth of around 3.7 per cent over the next four years and 3.5 per cent over the decade," he said.

**"PARENTS WILL NOT WELCOME THE FEE RISES NECESSARY TO COVER THE FUNDING CUTS"**

ROSS FOX



# THE FUNDING



**PARENT AND PENSIONER MARK BROOKHOUSE** says the new funding proposals "make you feel left high and dry".

His son Connor, 14, who has been struck with *Friedrich's ataxia* an inherited disease that causes progressive damage to the nervous system, has enjoyed 10 years of Catholic education, first at St John Vianney's and now at St Mary MacKillop College.

Mr Brookhouse, 50, says due to chronic medical issues he went on a self-funded

pension two years ago after 26 years in the public service

He says he will struggle to pay any increase to fees due to his modest income.

"The extra money is going to have to come from somewhere and sadly it is impacting the most vulnerable in our society," he said.

"I am a pensioner which makes it very hard."

Mr Brookhouse praised the college and principal Michael Lee, who he says has looked after his family over the years.

"All of this makes you feel left high and dry and it seems that the Government just doesn't care," he said.

"I pay my taxes like everyone else, but funnily enough they aren't going to where my son goes to school."



**THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION** is seeking urgent discussions with the Government to find out how the new funding model will affect individual schools.

It is also seeking assurances that the new funding arrangements will not adversely affect students and their families as well as teachers and staff.

The commission believes many questions have been left unanswered, including what happens to students with disability funding and indexation after 2020.

"The Federal Government must reveal the basis for its funding calculations or its new plan will have no credibility," Acting Executive Director Danielle Cronin said.

"The Government has claimed Catholic schools will be better off under its new proposal, [but it] has refused to provide sufficient detail to our sector to enable us to understand and test the actual impact of the Government's proposal on school funding allocations for next year.

"At face value, it appears Catholic schools could be worse off on both counts over the next 10 years."



**ARCHDIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION ROSS FOX** says Catholic schools across the ACT are already reporting significant parent concern and fewer inquiries in the traditional enrolment period.

Proposed funding cuts “have caused concern amongst principals that parents are choosing government schools instead of Catholic schools for their children next year on the basis of increasing fees and affordability issues”.

He called on Education and Training Minister Simon Birmingham to urgently address the funding cuts to ensure parents are not forced out of non-government schools by increasing fees and reduced funding.

With family budgets under pressure, parents had said that they were already struggling to pay schools fees.

“Parents will not welcome the fee rises necessary to cover the funding cuts,” he said.

“These funding cuts ignore the fact that, if the same parents enrol in a government school, government funding will be significantly higher and fees lower.”

He is encouraging parents in Catholic schools to consider the impact on their school and to contact their political leaders and demand to know why their children deserve to have government support cut over the next 10 years.

**ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE** said Catholic schools were not looking for any special deals in the funding proposals.

In a pastoral letter, he said, “As your Archbishop, I am particularly concerned that the proposed model will unfairly cut very significant funding to our schools but especially to our ACT schools.

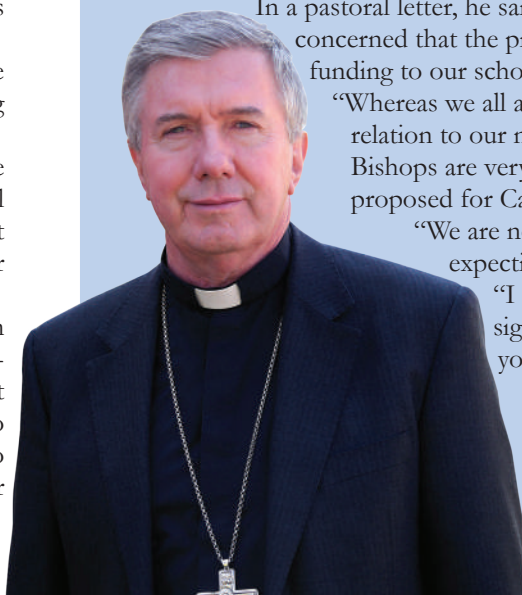
“Whereas we all agree that responsible stewardship is needed in relation to our nation’s resources for education, the Catholic Bishops are very concerned about the new funding model proposed for Catholic schools.

“We are not looking for any special deals. But we are expecting new arrangements to be fair and reasonable.

“I urge you to become more informed on this most significant issue and register your concerns with your elected politicians.”

The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn educates 22,000 students in 56 schools and has more than 2000 staff.

For further information, see [www.cg.catholic.edu.au](http://www.cg.catholic.edu.au)



# freeze



**JULIE WILEY, PRINCIPAL OF ST THOMAS MORE PRIMARY CAMPBELL**, believes “many of our parents couldn’t afford a fee increase”.

“They choose to send their children to St Thomas More’s because they value a Catholic education,” she said.

“They know there’s a financial commitment in doing so, and many of our parents pay school fees before anything else.

“They don’t have the disposable income the Minister seems to think they do.”

Ms Wiley said in the funding model, St Thomas More’s is compared to the Shore School in North Sydney.

“We should be compared to the school across the oval – Campbell Primary,” she said.

“We do not have the facilities that Shore do and our parents’ capacity to pay exorbitant school fees is also very different.



**PRINCIPAL MICHAEL LEE** says funding cuts at St Mary MacKillop College of \$777 a student after 10 years are a disgrace.

He was outspoken at a public meeting at St Clare’s College saying that the Gonski 2.0 model was not “fair for all”.

Under this model, base funding of all students at MacKillop has been frozen for 10 years and then will be cut, including for students with disabilities.

“This was confirmed to me over the phone by Minister Birmingham’s office,” he said.

“After 10 years, MacKillop’s funding will be cut by \$777 per student, a net loss of \$4.6 million.

“This is a disgrace and is not fair.

“Over the same period, Canberra Girls Grammar will receive additional funding of \$8.8 million.

“I do not begrudge CGGS getting this money, but it does not put any fairness test in my mind and does make

one question the Prime Minister’s claim that the Gonski 2.0 model is ‘fair for all’.”

Mr Lee said everything would be done to avoid sudden and sharp fee hikes to current and future families and that the quality of the educational experience of MacKillop would not be compromised.

“The college will run class sizes in keeping with guidelines of the Enterprise Agreement. Class sizes alter during term time as the college enrolment does change, but the EA size is usually closely adhered to.

“Clearly the Gonski 2.0 funding model is unravelling as the government’s figures change and are challenged.

“Let’s work with what we’ve got in a calm, mature manner, and work towards better and fairer times for Catholic education in Canberra.”

**ST FRANCIS XAVIER COLLEGE FLOREY PRINCIPAL ANGUS TULLEY** says the work of leading a school is complex enough without further stress regarding funding.

Mr Tulley, who is president of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn Principals’ Association encompassing 56 schools, believes the situation is “dire”.

Mr Tulley said the Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association, the Catholic Secondary Principals Association and the Catholic Schools Parents

Australia, have written to the Minister to express “serious concern that aspects of the recently announced funding package will undermine the Catholic sector’s ability to offer affordable and accessible Catholic education”.

He says those involved with Catholic education must plan for one of two scenarios: The first is that the changes are stopped and there is further consultation before changes are made to funding policy.

The second is that the changes go ahead and Commonwealth funding for Catholic schools in the ACT drops from \$109 million today to as little as \$101 million in 2027.

“During this time school costs are expected to rise by \$50 million,” he said.

“ACT Government schools can expect an increase of funding between 75 per cent and 145 per cent over the next 10 years.

“On the other hand, funding for ACT Catholic schools has not just been frozen; it will be cut.”

Mr Tulley said Catholic schools offered a low-fee inclusive education. Catholic school students saved the Government money as they received less Federal and State/Territory money. ACT Catholic schools received the lowest State/Territory funding in the nation.

