



16 August 2019

Committee Secretariat
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Extend Family Assistance to ABSTUDY Secondary School Boarding Students Aged 16 and Over) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Community Affairs Legislation Committee's review ((the review) of the *Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Extend Family Assistance to ABSTUDY Secondary School Boarding Students Aged 16 and Over) Bill 2019* (the bill).

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) is the representative body of Australia's Catholic schools. Working closely with the state and territory Catholic education commissions, the NCEC advocates for and seeks to constructively influence policy at the national level on behalf of Australia's Catholic schools.

The NCEC looks forward to participating in this review. The NCEC seeks to provide comment about the bill and the interaction between the bill and indigenous education more broadly, particularly as it impacts systemic Catholic boarding schools.

Australia's Catholic schools are diverse and universal in their reach, offering an education to all. The contribution that Catholic schools make to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is an important component of our mission. In 2018, there were over 23,000 ATSI students enrolled in Australia's Catholic schools. In many remote Indigenous communities, a Catholic school is the only local school. As growth continues, the NCEC expects that increasing numbers of ATSI students will be enrolled in our schools.

Comments about the bill

The NCEC is supportive of the bill. The extension of Family Tax Benefit (FTB) to ABSTUDY recipients aged 16 and over who study away from home is important. Good policy requires that families of ATSI students required to board at schools to access education are supported to meet the costs associated with their access to education. These costs include clothing, toiletries, medicines and pocket money.

The interaction between this bill and the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students in our schools

Many Catholic systemic boarding schools which educate high numbers of ATSI students, particularly those in the Northern Territory and North Queensland, experience significant challenges. One specific challenge is covering the full cost of providing an education to an individual ATSI student. Costs in our ATSI boarding schools include not only “in class costs” and other incidentals such as school equipment and excursions but also the cost of accommodation and 24-hour supervision. In addition, our schools tell us that many individual ATSI boarding students arrive at school without adequate equipment for the boarding school setting. In many cases, our schools are required to fund and provide the basic requirements of living away from home for these students.

While the NCEC acknowledges and supports the Government’s intention to support ATSI boarding students with additional FTB payments, we are concerned that the extension of the FTB will have little impact on many of the challenges that our boarding schools face.

The NCEC would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues with the Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Hamill
Deputy Director
National Catholic Education Commission