

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements**

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## Introduction :

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) is the peak body representing all Catholic schools in Queensland. It has delegated authority in the areas of :

- Funding
- Advocacy, negotiation and agreements with government
- Research and collection of statistical, financial and educational data relevant to the Commission's prime functions

QCEC is responsible for all Commonwealth funding and the majority of State funding being provided to Catholic school authorities in Queensland.

The Queensland Catholic system comprises 283 schools which are the responsibility of 24 different authorities. The largest authority is Brisbane Catholic Education (Archdiocese of Brisbane) which is responsible for 154 schools. There are 197 primary schools, 68 secondary schools and 18 composite schools and these are spread over a wide range of geographical locations and include students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. (The mean SES score for the Queensland Catholic system is 100).

The Catholic system is a system that operates in parallel to the government school sector and in one instance is the sole provider of education. QCEC is committed to providing education in partnership with the government and independent sectors as a service to the community as a whole.

QCEC takes responsibility for the receipt, distribution on a needs basis, accountability and reporting of most government funding.

Catholic schools in Queensland educate over 108,000 students staffed by 6812 full time equivalent teachers and 2717 non teaching staff.

The Commission welcomes the Australian Government's reforms in identifying the disadvantage affecting Indigenous students in remote locations. As a general principle, Government policies have recognised Indigenous peoples as the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia, regardless of geographic location. The Commission therefore is disappointed that the Commonwealth has redefined Indigenous disadvantage, according to the remoteness of the school and not according to educational needs of the Indigenous student.

There is no recognition in the Guidelines of the disadvantage and educational barriers of remote area students whose parents or caregivers choose the boarding option – regardless of the school sector. There is no recognition or acknowledgement of the flexibility required and additional costs to schools with residential arrangements, to meet the pastoral and educational needs of Indigenous students from remote areas.

The change of policy is further demonstrated by the eligibility criteria of In-Class Tuition Programme which now precludes Indigenous students located in a capital city (except Darwin) from accessing this programme to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes if the school they attend has less than 20 Indigenous students enrolled. Accordingly in these schools an Indigenous student who fails to meet year 3, 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks will receive no assistance.

The legislation will require QCEC to report on all Indigenous funding including General Recurrent Grants funding identified for this purpose. The accountability requirements being proposed will be difficult to deliver given that our data systems do not record what proportion of funding is attributed to Indigenous students. Apportionment of costs to meet such requirements will be onerous and tend to be artificial.

We would be happy to elaborate on any of the above points if the Senate Committee were to schedule hearings in Brisbane.