



National Catholic
Education Commission

2nd Floor, Favier House
51 Cooyong St
BRADDON ACT 2612

GPO Box 3046
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

T +61 2 6201 9830
F +61 2 6257 7395
ncec@ncec.catholic.edu.au
www.ncec.catholic.edu.au

30 October 2008

Mr John Carter
Secretary
Senate Standing Committee of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

**Inquiry into the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation
Amendment Bill 2008**

Thank you for your letter of 23 October 2008 in which you invite a submission from the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) to this Inquiry.

I have attached a submission from the NCEC that supports the funding provisions of the Bill.

The NCEC would also like to support a separate submission tendered by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission that argues a specific and urgent issue relating to additional funding assistance for secondary Indigenous boarding students.

I would be pleased to meet with the Senate Committee if anything in our submission requires amplification or clarification.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Therese Temby".

Therese Temby
Chair

Encl.

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1. **In summary**, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) supports the funding provisions of the Bills and endorses the Commonwealth's ongoing approach to the funding of Catholic school systems on a four-year basis.
2. **Catholic schools** educate about 20% of all young Australians – over 690,000 students in about 1700 schools employing over 60,800 staff. The schools are distributed widely in every State and Territory, open to all families who seek a Catholic education, irrespective of income or social status.
3. **Catholic school systems** in each State and Territory provide extensive support services to schools, together with the necessary governance structures to ensure educational and financial accountability in Catholic schools. Catholic systems distribute Government funds on a needs basis to support schools in poor and remote communities.
4. **Commonwealth recurrent funding** for Catholic schools since 2001 has been calculated according to the SES methodology. The NCEC acknowledges that the SES approach is seen to have both strengths and weaknesses. The use of the SES methodology has provided a degree of funding stability for Catholic schools over the past two four-year funding periods.
5. **Catholic school funding** from both Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments amounts to about 75% of the funds provided by governments to government schools. The NCEC welcomes the proposed review of Commonwealth funding for nongovernment schools. We look forward to contributing to a funding policy discussion that will help reduce this public funding gap.
6. **The 2008 funding Bills** before the Senate have the overall support of the NCEC. The Bills enact the Government's election undertaking for status quo funding and indexation for Catholic schools for the period 2009-2012. The Bills also provide some additional funding and also increased operational flexibility for Indigenous supplementary assistance programs. We ask that Parliament expedite the passage of the Bills.

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7. The NCEC nevertheless has **some reservations** about the implementation of the Bills. As with the previous two quadrennial funding Bills (debated in 2000 and 2004), the NCEC is in a quandary when articulating its general support for the 2008 Bills because there is no regulatory detail to hand as to how the funding arrangements will be implemented. The NCEC is particularly concerned about new approaches to the publication of individual school data as a condition for funding.
8. The NCEC has no quibble with the collection, analysis, and distribution of data that informs teaching, improves student learning outcomes, gives accurate information to parents about student progress, informs the wider community about schooling outcomes, enables schools and school systems to make informed judgments on programs and resources allocations, and provides governments with general information about schooling outcomes. Catholic schools have been willing participants in existing financial and educational accountability regimes.
9. Not having seen the regulations, the NCEC continues to be concerned that these data will encourage invidious comparisons between schools, or will be used to denigrate certain schools or teaching programs. The NCEC is also concerned that the regulations will give the Minister power to force public disclosure of sensitive “absolute” data for comparative purposes (for example, per student income/expenditure at the school level) that will simply serve the prurient interests of some sections of the media. The NCEC has sought the Minister’s reassurance about some of these regulatory matters.