

New Nationals leader should go back to school on Catholic education

New Nationals Leader Michael McCormack needs a refresher course on Coalition school funding policy, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Executive Director Stephen Elder says.

‘In his very first television interview in his new job, Mr McCormack declared “We’ve got a needs-based funding system, it’s very, very fair for public and independent schools and the Education Minister is doing a fantastic job.”

‘Mr Cormack spoke of his fears at the time of his first speech in 2010 of a Gillard government “hit list” targeting non-government schools and “class warfare” in education funding.

‘And he boasted “all Catholic schools in my electorate... are getting more money”.

‘The schools in the seat of Riverina might be okay, but the Deputy Prime Minister should take a look at the very real Turnbull/Birmingham hit list.

‘Their new arrangements have already cut the amount of funding attracted by over 600 Catholic schools nationally and some 180 here in Victoria between this year and 2017.

‘Discriminatory transitional measures that give independent schools a decade to adjust but allow Catholic schools just six years – only revealed after the Gonski legislation was passed – will see Catholic systems lose \$1.1 billion between now and 2027.

‘Indeed, secret Education Department modelling leaked during the Gonski legislation debate last year showed the Turnbull/Birmingham package will leave Catholic schools \$4.6 billion worse off over a decade.

‘Last month CECV research revealed the Federal Coalition is spending \$747 million each year funding some 200 wealthy private schools that already meet their school resourcing standard from their own pockets. Three quarters of a billion dollars is being handed over to wealthy schools that don’t need it – where it won’t improve outcomes.

‘This money isn’t being spent on core literacy and numeracy skills. Instead, the evidence and subsequent media reporting suggests this funding fuels an arms race in fancy facilities between wealthy schools – the shooting ranges, orchestra pits, equestrian centres and the like.

‘Yet this is the “needs-based” system Mr McCormack describes as “very, very fair”.

Media Release



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‘Instead, nothing could be a clearer demonstration of how the school funding model is broken.

‘The SES scores system used to determine non-government school funding regards a small parish primary nestled alongside inner-city Melbourne public housing tower blocks, Holy Rosary Kensington, as being “wealthier” than Geelong Grammar, even though nearly a fifth of its students are classed as being educationally disadvantaged and a tenth come from Health Care Card holder families.

‘This is Mr McCormack’s “class warfare” in reverse.

‘The Nationals are proud to represent some of the poorest people in Australia.

‘Catholic education is also proud to offer a quality, low-fee, values-based education that is as open and accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of incomes.

‘Yet according to figures provided by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training some non-government schools will be expected to raise annual fees by as much as 400 per cent under the Turnbull/Birmingham policy.

‘In his first speech Mr McCormack declared: “The fact that 704,000 young Australians—or one in five students—receives a Catholic education should be evidence enough to this parliament that every cent of support is needed and well spent... Catholic schools are very accountable and always spend government funding wisely.”

‘He added: “Country people are sensible people. They are fair dinkum. They expect when someone says they will do something that they will follow through, deliver, get it done. This is why so many regional Australians feel let down at the moment.”

‘What must those same people now make of what we should now call the Turnbull/McCormack/Birmingham education funding policy – those people and their city cousins?

‘That “great job” Senator Birmingham is supposedly doing may well put a number of Mr McCormack’s colleagues out of theirs.’

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