

Independent schools gaming disability funding

Freedom of Information data has confirmed warnings wealthy independent schools are gaming the new federal funding system for students with a disability, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Executive Director Stephen Elder says.

Federal Education Department figures released under FOI show disability loadings for Victorian independent schools will almost double from \$63.7 million this year to \$123.3 million in 2018, while the amount for Catholic schools – responsible for almost one in four Victorian school children – will drop from \$164.9 million to \$148.9 million across the same period.

‘These figures have confirmed what we have been saying since the Gonski 2.0 package was released in May,’ Mr Elder said. ‘Under the Turnbull government funding for students with disability in Catholic schools will decrease significantly.’

‘Education Minister Simon Birmingham is letting wealthy independent schools – the biggest backers of his funding policies – game this system.’

‘Less than 10 months ago Senator Birmingham declared the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability results showed “extreme disparity” from state to state, warning it “fails a basic credibility test”.’

‘He may have changed his mind since then and put the NCCD at the centre of his new funding policies, but three crucial problems remain.’

‘The NCCD is not collected consistently. It relies on teacher judgment, but there is no evidence that teachers are compiling the data the same way – within schools, within states or across school sectors.’

‘The NCCD inherently favours wealthy schools. Schools can only count students who receive “adjustments”. Wealthy schools can afford to make more adjustments for their students – and they also have the staff to complete all the paperwork. The data collected to date proves it is biased.’

‘The NCCD results are also going to be almost impossible to effectively audit. “Judgement” is subjective. Even though the government has announced it will use the data to fund schools, it has been unable to determine how to audit the data to ensure consistency.’

‘Senator Birmingham’s new funding approach effectively allows schools to write their own cheques. It seems from the data collected to date that some independent schools have written themselves very large cheques indeed.’

‘It is glaringly obvious that the NCCD needs to be subject to an independent review. It strains credulity to say that one in four students in independent schools in Victoria has a disability.’

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