

New data exposes school funding flaws

School SES scores – the key determinant of federal funding for Catholic and independent schools – are biased in favour of elite independent schools, previously unpublished data shows, leaving Catholic and other inclusive non-government schools short-changed.

The data, which has been drawn from several different sources, is contained in a new report released today by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV).

‘This report gives a new level of significance to the review of SES scores just unveiled by Education Minister Simon Birmingham,’ CECV Executive Director Stephen Elder said.

‘It confirms what Catholic education has been saying for years – that SES scores rip off Catholic schools.

‘The CECV study also shows that due to flaws in SES scores, wealthy independent schools will be overfunded by hundreds of millions of dollars next year.

‘Given that SES scores are the most important parameter for non-government schools in the Turnbull Government’s new funding model, the report makes a mockery of the Prime Minister’s and Senator Birmingham’s claims that they supports needs-based funding.’

School Socio-Economic Status (SES) scores are used to means-test families in Catholic and independent schools. They are calculated based on where students live. Under this broad-brush approach, all families in the same neighbourhood are assumed to have the same capacity to pay school fees.

‘SES scores are a very blunt instrument that produces extremely flawed outcomes,’ Mr Elder said.

‘They fail to recognise that high-fee and lower-fee schools in the same neighbourhood attract students from very different socio-economic backgrounds – and that as a result SES scores systemically short-change Catholic schools and provides windfall gains to wealthy independent schools.’

While SES scores assume all families in the same neighbourhood have the same capacity to pay school fees, data compiled by the CECV shows that:

- Within the same neighbourhoods, Catholic schools attract more students from families who hold a Health Card Care than independent schools;
- Within the same neighbourhoods, Catholic schools attract more students with disadvantaged backgrounds than independent schools; and
- Within the same neighbourhoods, Catholic school families usually have lower average incomes than independent school families – in many cases much lower.

Media Release



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The data also shows that the SES scores of high-fee, wealthy schools should be much higher as high-fee, wealthy schools often 'cherry-pick' the most affluent students from neighbourhoods. This practice artificially lowers the SES scores received by high-fee schools. Conversely, SES scores for many Catholic schools are too high.

Mr Elder said the CECV report cannot be ignored by the Turnbull Government's SES review; initially resisted by Senator Birmingham, then conceded as part of his Gonski 2.0 Senate horse-trading.

'This cannot be one of those "Yes, Minister" exercises in bureaucratic box ticking where the outcome is predetermined,' Mr Elder said.

'The evidence that has been prepared by the CECV is compelling. The funding model is broken. It fails to deliver to those in need.

'This report should be a call to arms not just for Catholic education, but for the other denominations with low-fee systemic schools who have been left short-changed by the Coalition's funding changes.

'We all have a moral responsibility to stand up for the families in our school communities.

'SES scores are a rort for wealthy independent schools – just like the dodgy new data on students with disability.

'If the forthcoming review into school SES scores does not result in significant changes in school funding then it will be a sham.

'Wealthy independent schools have been the main supporters of Senator Birmingham's new funding model. This report clearly shows why.

'If the review of SES scores is done properly and the funding model is fixed then these schools will lose out while Catholic and other low-fee non-government schools should expect increases in funding.

'We're about to discover: will Senator Birmingham stand by his mates in elite institutions with their equestrian centres and indoor pools – or stand for parental choice in education, and open and inclusive schools?'

The full CECV paper: *The Special Deal of a Lifetime SES scores, school fees and school funding* is available at: http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/c615d12e-df8e-4b62-b55b-8e9db8909472/CECV-Special-Deal-of-a-Lifetime_20171109.aspx?ext=.pdf

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