

## The usual suspects miss the point on school funding reform

The Morrison Government's school funding changes have prompted a predictable chorus of complaints from opponents of support for non-government schools, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) Executive Director Stephen Elder says.

'Last week's funding announcement was not some sort of "special deal", as opponent of choice in education have claimed,' Mr Elder said.

'They were a response to clear failings and flaws in the school funding policy legislated by the Turnbull Government; a biased measure of need, discriminatory transitional arrangements and a failure to give families the school choices they want.

'Rather than acknowledge that Catholic schools were short-changed, we've had a range of critics line up to protest against additional funding being allocated to fix these policy mistakes.

'It's time to call these critics out for what they really are.

'The vast majority refuse to believe any funding of non-government schools is needs-based – because they don't believe governments should fund non-government schools.

'They're the people who insist Australia would be best served by a monopoly public education system, even though that would deny families choice in education – at a higher cost to taxpayers.

'There are the likes of failed New South Wales education minister Adrian Piccoli, who claims that "poorer Catholics should be outraged" by these changes.

'Mr Piccoli doesn't seem to understand that it is poorer Catholics who suffered the most under the Turnbull/Birmingham arrangements. Unless these families live in a poor area, they are assumed to be higher-income earners when it comes to funding allocations for their schools.

'It's actually poorer Catholics – and other low-income families who choose to send their children to non-government schools – who are the big winners from these changes; as they should be.

'Mr Piccoli's pronouncements indicate he does not understand the funding changes announced by the Morrison Government.

'He also rages against the "equity and fairness" of the new funding arrangements.

'Yet under the Turnbull/Birmingham funding arrangements, we have a situation where the exact same family can enrol in a government primary school, rather than a Catholic primary school, and receive five-times more public funding.

'Does Mr Piccoli genuinely believe that this is sector blind? That this is fair?

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CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION OF VICTORIA LTD

‘Then we have the Grattan Institute, which claims that “parents at advantaged Catholic schools can afford to pay their way”.

‘This is disingenuous because it ducks the real question: why should some families who enrol in a government primary school, rather than a Catholic primary school, receive five-times more public funding?’

‘Grattan ducks this question because it knows that current arrangements are not fair or equitable or sector-blind.

‘Grattan also makes claims about the incomes of families in Catholic schools. This “new analysis” appears to have been developed using tracing paper over high-level charts included in a recent report by the National School Resourcing Board.

‘This sort of analysis is embarrassing to Grattan and fails to acknowledge or address the structural bias of Turnbull/Birmingham funding model.

‘That’s unsurprising, as the Grattan Institute was one of the loudest barrackers for the passage of the botched Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017.

‘It lauded the Turnbull/Birmingham plans as “the best chance to end the funding wars” and “a precious opportunity to lock in fairer deals on school funding”, and later celebrated the passage of the bill as a “win” on school policy.

‘They’ve missed the point all along.

‘All this latest Grattan intervention offers is further evidence that its schools program is focussed more on media mentions than accurate and rigorous analysis.’

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