

Census confirms Birmingham bias against Catholic schools

A new analysis of 2016 census data demonstrates the Turnbull/Birmingham funding model is structurally biased against the Catholic school system while overfunding elite independent schools by hundreds of millions each year, according to Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Executive Stephen Elder.

The bias means that comparison between Catholic and independent school of funding rates based on the current model – such as those repeatedly referenced by Fairfax Media – are both invalid and misleading as school need is measured in a way that systematically disadvantages Catholic schools.

‘2016 Census data shows that the families who attend Catholic schools in each statistical area tend to have lower incomes than the families who attend independent school,’ Mr Elder said.

‘This not only repeats the pattern shown in 2011 Census. It not only confirms – yet again – that the main metric for deciding funding for non-government schools, school Socio-Economic Status, or SES scores, is fundamentally flawed.

‘It shows that Education Minister Simon Birmingham knew when he put SES scores at the heart of his funding policies for non-government schools he was not only treading on very shaky ground, but potentially marching into quicksand.

‘The Census data exposes the deep and fundamental flaws and shameful bias at the heart of Gonski 2.0.

‘Senator Birmingham has the luxury of a six-year term. His House of Representatives colleagues may be facing the voters as early as this spring.’

The Census data and its implications are detailed in the attached research brief. The research brief also highlights how independent school associations are selectively and disingenuously reporting Census data to mislead the community about how independent schools compare to Catholic schools.

The major source of bias in school funding arrangements lies in the approach used to calculate the most important metric for Catholic and independent schools – school SES scores.

As part of the SES scoring methodology, all families who live in the same statistical neighbourhood (Statistical Areas 1 or SA 1); an area encompassing about 150 households and 400 people, are assumed to be exactly the same, irrespective of the type of non-government schools they attend.

Media Release



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Families in Catholic schools are assumed to be identical to families who attend elite independent schools, despite the fact that these families often pay significantly different schools fees.

‘This assumption defies common sense’ Mr Elder said, ‘and 2016 Census data – like the 2011 Census data before it – yet again confirms it is wrong.

‘Senator Birmingham cannot accuse Census data of spin or pleading for a special deal.

‘He should swallow his pride and admit his decision to put SES scores at the heart of funding policy was not only wrong but instead created a special deal for independent schools, even though the Catholic system educates far many more students.

‘He has the policy and the politics wrong.’

‘As for the independent school associations, we have clearly revealed in our research brief the tricks they have played with Census data to mislead the community. It seems these associations will go to any lengths to protect special deals for elite independent schools’.

A copy of the CECV Research Brief is [attached](#)

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