

If the Prime Minister is right, so many are wrong

In an exchange during Question Time yesterday, Prime Minister Turnbull refuted comments made on 2GB by Catholic Education Executive Director, Stephen Elder.

Speaking to Alan Jones, Mr Elder highlighted the flaws of the SES scoring system, and compared a parish school, Holy Rosary Primary School in Kensington, which has an SES score of 119, to Geelong Grammar, which has an SES score of 115, saying:

'This small parish primary school that is opposite housing commission flats where parents are making sacrifices to send their kids to this school – 10 per cent of the kids are on the Health Care Card – they're saying it is richer than Geelong Grammar.

This is how flawed it is.'

The Prime Minister used Question Time to claim that Mr Elder's remarks were 'not correct' and that they were in fact 'wrong'.

Playing down Catholic education's concerns about the SES scoring system, Prime Minister Turnbull claimed that Catholic education authorities could redistribute funds to cover any losses felt by schools, but would also have to take responsibility for any changes.

'The funding is provided, ... as the gentleman you referred to [Stephen Elder] knows very well, to the Catholic system in a lump sum, and they can distribute it as they wish and explain how they distribute it,' he said.

Mr Turnbull went on to defend the flawed model, saying it had been in place for a long time.

'The Government is being thoroughly transparent in how it calculates the funding on a transparent, consistent needs basis, using the same SES criteria that have been used by federal governments, both Labor and Liberal, for many, many years.'

Mr Elder said that the Prime Minister's excuse that the SES scoring system had been in place for many years wasn't good enough.

'I am not prepared to tell schools they are going to lose funding because of an outdated funding model Malcolm Turnbull and Simon Birmingham refuse to fix,' Mr Elder said.

'Particularly when so many others have made the same case for change, including the man who was the brains behind the SES scoring system when it was first introduced by the Howard Government.'

In interviews on 28 May, Associate Professor Stephen Farish said that 'the SES scoring system is outdated and needs to be reviewed ... It is clearly not working at the top end for the more prestigious schools ... It is clearly time to overhaul it ...'

Media Release



CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION OF VICTORIA LTD

Associate Professor Farish is not alone:

- **Gonski Review – Final Report:** ‘The current SES measure ... is subject to a potentially large degree of inaccuracy as the students attending a particular school are not necessarily representative of the socioeconomic averages of the areas in which they live ...’
- **Grattan Institute:** ‘The Catholics argue that it is wrong to assign students the average socioeconomic profile of the catchment area in which they live, because their students are on average less well off than independent school students from the same catchment. There is some analysis to back this argument.’
- **Centre for Independent Studies:** ‘Since the Catholic system mostly charges low fees, it is disadvantaged by school SES scores ... Certainly there is a strong case for reviewing the arrangements for calculating school SES scores and considering alternative methods ...’
- **Judith Sloan:** ‘averages at the collection district level often do not reflect the real circumstances of the parents of children attending non-government schools ... some of the wealthiest and highest-fee schools stand to gain a great deal from the Birmingham needs-based model ...’
- **The Age:** ‘Despite federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham's energetic defence of the SES model, arguing that it has been reviewed and reformed and is a credible way to measure families' capacity to contribute, it's clear this model is inadequate ...’

Mr Elder said that the weight of evidence against using the SES scoring system could no longer be ignored.

‘Five and half years ago, even David Gonski identified that the SES measure was inaccurate.’

‘If they really want a transparent and consistent needs-based funding model, they need to undertake a full review of the SES scoring system immediately.’

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