

Misleading editorial in The Age on school funding doesn't add up

Commentary from The Age today on school funding is fundamentally misleading and does not present an accurate or balanced picture of school funding.

“It is misleading to say that the bipartisan school funding arrangements made by the Federal government in 2018 were a “special deal” for Catholic and independent schools” said Victorian Catholic Education Authority Acting Chief Executive Officer Bruce Phillips.

“In fact, these changes related to the correction of a clear bias in the School Resourcing Standard model, which was confirmed by the independent National Schools Resourcing Board, that underestimated the needs of Catholic schools and low-fee independent schools.”

“As a result of those arrangements, Australian Government funding is now better targeted to non-government schools with lower-income families”, he said.

The bipartisan funding arrangements ensure that Catholic parents have the option for an affordable faith-based education that provides their children with every opportunity to receive the best possible education.

The SRS model treats government and non-government schools differently, which The Age fails to recognise.

Non-government schools are expected to raise significant private income to reach their resource standard, over and above their SRS funding received from governments. The Age maintains that non-government schools are “lavished” with funding, but this ignores the reality that many schools face significant challenges raising the expected fees.

Far from being “over-funded”, the Productivity Commission estimated in its 2020-21 figures that government schools received \$22,538 per student in public assistance, while non-government schools received public funding of \$13,892 per student – a differential of \$8,646 per student.

Additionally, unlike government schools, Catholic school communities in Victoria self-fund around 90% of their capital needs, including land purchases for new schools. With demand for a Catholic school education increasing in Victoria’s growth corridors, it is a substantial and growing cost burden ignored by the SRS model and The Age.

The Age editorial also warns about “real life, damaging consequences” of the shortfall in funding relative to the SRS model in Victoria. This claim highlights the weak link between the SRS model and student achievement, given Victorian schools consistently have the highest or second-highest NAPLAN scores in Australia in Reading and Numeracy in Year 3 and Year 5.

The community and taxpayers would be better served by an analysis that respects the importance of parent choice and is focused on fair funding for students in every sector, rather than repeating the same tired arguments designed to undermine funding for students in non-government schools.

The Catholic school sector in Victoria educates 213,000 students and has 28,000 teachers and staff across its more than 500 early learning and school communities.

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