Equity, excellence and choice

A funding model for Australian schools should be based on clear guiding principles.

Firstly, every child, regardless of the school he or she attends, is entitled to the best education that our nation can provide. Simplistic arguments about the relative merits of government and non-government schools lose sight of the fact that the model must reflect what is best for all students.

Secondly, the funding model must balance excellence and equity. Additional support for students with special needs or a disability, and for Indigenous and refugee students, is paramount. All schools and systems must also be able to promote excellence, particularly in lower socio-economic communities.

Thirdly, the funding model must acknowledge the combined contributions of both State and Federal governments. It must also recognise that parents have a right to choose the educational environment that best suits the needs of their child. The emerging model should not discourage parents wishing to make a financial contribution to the school of their choice.

For the Catholic sector, the provision of a quality education is dependent on the reliability of the funding source. At the very least, Catholic schools need to have maintained the same level of funding in real terms it currently receives. Data from a variety of sources show that, on average, Catholic schools actually receive the lowest level of funding per student when compared to government and other non-government schools. And by operating as a ‘community of schools’, the Catholic system is able to direct its resources to where the needs are greatest.

Australia has a world class education system. It is essential that both State and Federal governments recognise that in order for this to be maintained, it must have a funding model that has equity, excellence and choice as its guiding principles.

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