Catholic education has approached both major parties about their education policies and how they will affect the 735,000 students educated in the 1,706 Catholic schools across Australia. Both major parties were asked six questions, and their responses are provided below.

### Australian Labor Party

**How will your party support parents to choose the education they want for their children, and ensure religious freedom for Catholic schools is preserved?**

*Federal Labor's Better Schools Plan will deliver an extra $1.6 billion in additional funding for Australia's 1,650 Catholic systemic schools over the next six years, if every state and territory signs up. Of this, more than $1 billion will flow from the Federal Government under the Better Schools Plan. Federal Labor has the utmost respect for the integrity and autonomy of the Catholic education system, and the Better Schools Plan preserves the religious freedom Catholic schools enjoy.*

*Federal Labor recognises the significant role Catholic schools have played in the Australian education sector for more than 150 years, serving some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia.*

*It is an educational system with a proven track record - from educating some of our best and brightest, to taking on some of the most disadvantaged students.*

*The Rudd Labor Government and the National Catholic Education Commission worked constructively and respectfully over many months to secure agreement on the Better Schools Plan funding and reforms.*

*The additional funding under the Better Schools Plan will enable Catholic systemic schools to implement the signature reforms of the Better Schools Plan including initiatives around quality teaching, quality learning, meeting student need, empowered school leadership and better data collection and research to drive improvements within schools.*

*Federal Labor has set an ambitious target for Australian schools to be in the top five in the world in reading, maths and science by 2025 — this goal can only be achieved by working together with Catholic schools. The Better Schools Plan will ensure that every Australian child, irrespective of where they live, which school they attend or their family background, goes to a school with the resources required to deliver a great education.*

**How will your policy affect the ability of Catholic education systems and schools to distribute funding according to locally-identified needs?**

*The Better Schools Plan recognises local Catholic Education Commissions as the system managers of schools within local Diocese and provides for distribution by the Catholic education offices based on locally-identified need.*

**How will your policy deliver additional government funding to support student needs and ensure funding levels are above the real cost of educating a child?**

*The Better Schools Plan Federal provides an indexation rate of 4.7 per cent on Commonwealth funding from 2014. This generous indexation rate is locked in, providing certainty for schools through to 2019. In return, state and territory government have been asked to commit to 3 per cent indexation. This generous indexation rate will ensure schools continue to receive real funding increases through to 2019 as well as the additional funding that will flow based on the needs of individual students.*

### Liberal-National Coalition

**The Coalition appreciates the vital contribution that Catholic schools make to Australian society by educating almost 750,000 children. We believe in parental choice and parental rights. We strongly support the rights of Catholic schools to conduct and govern themselves in every respect in accordance with their religious beliefs and values. This includes curriculum, school practice and enrolment.**

**How will your party support parents to choose the education they want for their children, and ensure religious freedom for Catholic schools is preserved?**

*The Coalition strongly supports the ability of Catholic education systems to flexibly and responsively redistribute funding according to local need.*

*We do not support policies which seek to impose or restrict this capacity. We will remove any administrative requirements in the Australian Education Act 2013 that reduce system autonomy.*

**How will your policy deliver additional government funding to support student needs and ensure funding levels are above the real cost of educating a child?**

*The total amount of Commonwealth funding committed by the Liberal-National Coalition over the forward estimates will be maintained and will be indexed each year to meet rising costs. This means that if the Coalition is elected, the Commonwealth will spend an additional $2.8 billion to 2017 on all schools.*
2013 FEDERAL ELECTION: FUNDING POLICIES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

How will your policy support the needs of students with particular disadvantage, students with disability and other special needs to receive funding to meet their needs, regardless of the school they attend?

"At the heart of the Better Schools Plan is a new, fairer school funding approach based on the needs of individual students. This new fairer funding approach is based on the core recommendations of the independent Gerald Review, which includes extra money for disadvantaged schools and students. The Better Schools Plan combines funding models that add a loadings based on the individual circumstances of the school and its students: for Students from low SES backgrounds; Indigenous students; Students with low English proficiency; Students with disability; school size and location. More information about how much additional funding each of the loadings will attract can be found at www.betterschools.gov.au."

The Coalition will commit to the same quantum of funds provided over the forward estimates which includes funding for students with particular disadvantage, including those with a disability. We believe extra support for these students should be made available, regardless of the school attended.

The Coalition will also ensure that Catholic systems have the ability to use Commonwealth funding to support locally-developed programs that improve the educational outcomes of students with additional needs."

What government funding for the capital needs of Catholic schools do you have planned? Does this funding recognise Catholic education’s support of disadvantaged communities and willingness to establish new growth areas?

"The Rudd Labor Government recognises the increasing demand for new schooling facilities in high growth areas and recognises Catholic education’s willingness to establish new schools in growth areas. Federal Labor will continue the non-government capital grants program with around $140 million in 2014 and more than $722 million through to 2019. This funding will assist Catholic schools serving some of our most disadvantaged communities address growth and expand. This investment builds on the $16.2 billion Building the Education Revolution that transformed schools across the country, including Catholic schools."

"The Coalition will establish, when the Budget allows, a new Capital Infrastructure Fund that can be accessed by Catholic schools, in addition to government and non-government schools. The Coalition has taken this approach because it recognises that Catholic schools are often some of the first infrastructure developed in new growth areas. These schools may not be built without government support potentially depriving parents of a choice of education for their children.

The Coalition also recognises that Catholic school communities need to refurbish classrooms and other school facilities. This can often be difficult for some school communities. This fund will also be available to support Catholic schools upgrade their existing facilities."

How will your policy deliver funding certainty for schools?

"Federal Labor’s Better Schools Plan delivers an extra $15 million in public funds over the next six years, if every state and territory signs up. The plan provides certainty about the additional funding that will continue to flow to schools through to 2019."

"The Coalition remains committed to supporting parents choose a Catholic education for their children.

The total amount of Commonwealth funding for Catholic schools over the forward estimates will be exactly the same as committed by the Labor Government and indexed over those four years."

Australian Labor Party responds as authorised by G. Wright, 5/9 Sydney Avenue, Braddon ACT 2612

National Catholic Education Commission

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