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## POLITICIANS WARNED ABOUT RISKS OF LOCKING IN FLAWED MODEL

The National Catholic Education Commission has written to federal politicians to ensure they understand the impacts of the Government's overhaul of school funding before the political debate resumes in Parliament this week.

NCEC acting executive director Danielle Cronin said the letter outlines some of the problems with the way school funding will be allocated, as well as identifying the areas of confusion caused by the publication and distribution of incorrect figures.

"The Government is seeking to implement a 10-year school funding model despite there being widespread criticism of the fundamental issues that determine how the Commonwealth allocates funding to schools and students," Ms Cronin said.

"The Schooling Resource Standard is the main determinant of school funding for all Australian schools. Grattan Institute education expert Peter Goss has said the SRS has flaws and was developed 'with too little evidence'.

"The Socio-Economic Status score is a significant determinant of school funding for non-government schools. The designer of that methodology says it's 'clearly not working'. The Gonski Review said it should be reviewed and replaced because it is subject to 'a potentially large degree of inaccuracy'."

Ms Cronin said given the central importance of those deficient measures, there should be significant concerns about the passage of legislation that will dictate school funding for the next 10 years.

"But the model goes further in using problematic measures to support students," she explained.

"Funding for students with disability is set to be determined using the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data, which has been shown to be anything but consistent. Minister Birmingham has said the statistics generated under the NCCD 'fail a basic credibility test'. So why is he implementing it?"

Ms Cronin said those various factors, among many others, have created a new school funding model that won't deliver real needs-based funding.

The new model has also been a source of financial confusion for parents, teachers, principals and politicians.

"In my discussion with some politicians, including those sitting on the crossbenches, there has been genuine surprise when they have seen how the Government's new school funding policy will allocate less funding to hundreds of Catholic schools next year than they have been allocated this year," Ms Cronin said.

"The School Funding Estimator website has misled politicians, parents and principals, by providing funding allocations for 2017 that bear no resemblance to the funding schools have already been allocated this year under existing legislation."

Ms Cronin said there are 617 Catholic systemic schools that will be allocated less funding next year than this year, as well as 14 Catholic independent schools that face funding cuts in 2018.

“The list of schools set to lose funding includes schools across the socio-economic spectrum, including some very low-SES schools, and a number of schools for students with disability and other special needs,” she wrote in her letter to politicians.

“It includes schools in all parts of the country. This list demonstrates that the model does not accurately reflect need in the Catholic sector.”

Ms Cronin said it is important for politicians to understand the real impacts of the Government’s unpopular changes to school funding when they return to Parliament to consider whether it should be supported in the Senate.

“There is broad opposition to this legislation, for a wide range of reasons,” she explained.

“A 10-year funding model should not be locked into legislation while so much uncertainty and confusion exists in schools, in family homes and in the meeting rooms of political parties.

“Party rooms and Senators face an important decision. They can lock in a flawed model or they can force the Minister and his colleagues to go back and do the work they should have done: review and refine the needs-based elements of the model and have meaningful consultation with the schooling sector. They can then bring another Bill forward for consideration at a later time.

“In the meantime, they should roll over current funding arrangements to give schools funding certainty for next year,” Ms Cronin concluded.