

Setting the record straight for families on government funding promises for Victorian Catholic schools

Catholic School Parents Victoria Executive Officer Rachel Saliba and Chair Matthew Williams say it is time to break down the facts on the government funding announcement for Victorian Catholic school students and their families. The Andrews Government announcement on Tuesday 25th October 2022, of funding of up to \$717 million for Catholic and Independent schools does not reflect the needs of families nor the breakdown of funding distribution from the current government.

'The first thing to point out is that Victorian Catholic schools will receive less funding than previously for capital works despite rising construction costs, with Labor pledging \$112.5 million per year over four years, and only for low fee Catholic schools.'

'This compares to the Liberal Nationals who have promised \$175 million per year over four years. This is more reflective of the \$150-200 million per year capital funding required to enable Catholic schools to meet student needs for a 21st century education, for school fees to remain affordable for families, and for new families in high growth areas to access a Catholic education for their children.' Ms Saliba said.

'While the Andrews Labor government has extended the free dental program 'Smile Squad' to include low fee Catholic schools, this won't take place until 2026. There are also many programs that Catholic school students are excluded from receiving, including the Head Start Apprenticeships Program, Agriculture Education Fund, \$641K Active Schools grants, \$1.6 billion support for students with disabilities support in schools, Mental health support in schools, Regional School Bus Program, Equitable access to teacher recruitment incentives and \$19 million to attract and retain teachers in government schools announced since the 2022 budget.'

'The total spend on government schools over the past 8 years was \$12.8 billion to improve classrooms, upgrade facilities and build new government schools.'

Mr Williams said that like government schools, Catholic education authorities are struggling to keep pace with demand to deliver new and upgraded school facilities in Victoria to meet the learning needs of students.

'Despite educating more than 20% of Victorian children, our school communities contribute 75 cents in every dollar of the funds used to build, upgrade, and maintain Catholic schools,' Mr Williams said.

'In other words, our families pick up the tab for nearly 75% of building works carried out at their Catholic schools and all Catholic school families, approximately half a million Victorian taxpayers, are contributing significantly to the education of all children in this State.'

'This is additional money that governments, and taxpayers, would have to find if these students were being educated in a government school because every student who attends a Catholic school saves Victorian taxpayers \$90,000 over the lifetime of their schooling career.' Mr Williams said.

As the second largest provider of schooling in Victoria, expanding and upgrading Catholic school facilities is essential to delivering a high-quality education, and meeting increasing demand for school enrolments.

'While Catholic School Parents Victoria welcome the support for capital funding for Catholic schools from both of the major parties, it is time for parents who choose a Catholic school for their children to be acknowledged and valued as critical contributors in 'The Education State'.

'All students deserve high quality facilities to help them achieve their best, regardless of which school they attend and if we are talking about equity in education, Catholic school students and their families must also be considered.'

'We call on the State government, should they be re-elected, to commit to invest in Catholic school

facilities beyond 2023 based on need and to continue to work with Catholic education authorities to negotiate fair and equitable funding for Catholic schools,' Rachel Saliba said.

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