

2026 NEEDS BASED FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS – CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE DIOCESE OF CAIRNS

INTRODUCTION

Section 78(5) of the Australian Education Act 2013 (the Act) requires approved authorities (the Roman Catholic Trust Corporation for the Diocese of Cairns) to distribute all financial assistance received in accordance with a needs-based funding arrangement that is consistent with the Act.

Catholic Education Services is delegated by the Roman Catholic Trust Corporation for the Diocese of Cairns to serve and support the Diocesan mission in education. As an executive arm of the Diocese, Catholic Education Services assists the Bishop of Cairns in directing pastoral action through educational administration and support and is delegated to undertake responsibilities which serve, support and advocate for all educational ministries.

Financial assistance sources are recurrent grants from the Australian Government, Queensland Government and private income from fees, levies, and fundraising.

NEEDS BASED FUNDING ARRANGEMENT

The major sources of income for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Cairns are recurrent grants. Recurrent grants from the Australian and Queensland Governments are made available to schools as calculated by the funding formula of the respective government. Schools manage expenditure of recurrent grants within an overall system framework of policy and strategic direction to deliver services to students to achieve educational outcomes. This includes use of Australian Government Recurrent Grant loadings to meet additional needs of students with disability, First Nations students, students with socio-economic disadvantage, and students with low English proficiency. The additional cost of students due to location and size are funded from Australian Government Recurrent Grants.

Distribution of recurrent grants to schools as calculated from Australian and Queensland Governments ensures compliance with needs-based funding arrangements detailed in the Australian Education Act (2013).

Deductions from Australian Government Recurrent Grants are actioned prior to the grant being made available to schools and colleges as detailed below. These deductions are organised into three main categories: Catholic Education Services Programs, system funded school expenditure and contingency.

Fees, levies, and fundraising (private income) are the third source of income for Catholic Schools. This income is generated locally at each school and retained at the school to fund school expenditure.

RATIONALE FOR NEEDS BASED FUNDING ARRANGEMENT

The Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is used as the basis for the model that distributes Australian Government Recurrent Grants to schools. The SRS is an estimate of funding required for a school to meet educational needs of students. The SRS achieves this by providing a base amount for every primary and secondary student and 6 loadings to provide additional funds for disadvantaged students and schools. The extensive research and data used by the Australian Government in the development of this model are considered the appropriate methodology for distribution of Australian Government Recurrent Grants.

Adjustments to the funding model are necessary as no funding model will result in all schools being adequately resourced to meet student needs. The benefit of having a system of 30 schools and colleges makes it possible to fund services provided by the Approved Authority and system initiatives.

DEDUCTIONS FROM AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RECURRENT GRANTS -SUMMARY

The approved authority, Catholic Education Services, actions deductions from Australian Government Recurrent Grants to fund the following.

Deduction Category	Deduction Title	Detail
Catholic Education Services Programs	Catholic Education Services – Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Learning	Psychology and counselling, therapy and disability, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, staff supporting EAL/D, NCCD and inclusive education, specialist IET support in vision and hearing impairment, student wellbeing, Indigenous education
	Catholic Education Services – other programs	Executive Directors Office, Finance & Operations, Identity & Outreach, Learning and Teaching, Workforce Capability, School Support Services, Professional Standards & Safeguarding, First Nations Education
System Funded School Expenditure	Concession Card Tuition Fee Rebate	Low-income families receive a 70 % discount on tuition fees on presentation of the concession card issued by Australian Government.
	Cross Subsidisation	Support to small schools, new schools, and boarding schools with First Nations students from remote areas
	School Information Systems, network carriage, Catholic Education Network, IT support	Provision of internet, enterprise systems (licensing, maintenance, training) and IT support.
	Copyright levy, payroll, insurance policies, levies central bodies, staff housing	Levies to central bodies essential for the operation of a school plus provision of staff housing in regional areas.
Contingency	Contingency - general	Fund expenditure outside of budget and school capacity to fund.

In 2026 the deduction from Australian Recurrent Grants to fund the three deductions categories are Primary \$ 3,749 and Secondary \$ 3,414, per student.

DEDUCTIONS FROM AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RECURRENT GRANTS -DETAIL

Catholic Education Services Programs

Student Support Services Programs provides services directly to students across a range of areas (refer table).

Other Programs at Catholic Education Services provide services to assist schools with learning and teaching, financial management, leadership, facility management, human resources, and compliance with regulatory bodies.

- **System Funded School Expenditure; Cross Subsidisation – small schools, new schools, boarding school with remote First Nations students.**

Several small primary schools and colleges do not generate sufficient income (Queensland + Australian Government recurrent grants + private income) to fund essential expenditure. A transfer of Australian Government recurrent grants is necessary to maintain financial viability of these schools.

New schools require support due to significant expenditure in initial years of operation until enrolments are at a level where economies of scale and subsequently financial viability can be achieved.

Boarding schools that predominantly enrol First Nations students from remote areas employ a high level of staff in various categories (teaching, boarding supervision, support) to meet the high level of student needs.

- **System funded school expenditure - System initiative – concession card rebate on tuition fees**

Holders of a means tested concession card gain an automatic 70% discount on tuition fees. This scheme is a system priority to support low-income families and ensure they have access to Catholic schools.

- **System funded school expenditure – School Information Systems, Telstra, Catholic Education Network, and IT Support**

All schools and colleges use enterprise systems in place to administer school finances, student and family administration, student reporting, business intelligence, student behaviour and parent SMS. The licensing, support, network carriage charges, Catholic Education Network content filtering and scaling and technical support is funded at a system level.

- **System funded school expenditure - Levies to central bodies.**

All schools and colleges contribute to levies to fund essential services including copyright, payroll, project management, Catholic Education Queensland Limited, National Catholic Education Commission, financial audit fees, NAPLAN.

- **Contingency**

It is prudent planning to have funds available for unforeseen circumstances when needed.