



ALP Response
2019 Federal Election Questionnaire
National Catholic Education Commission

1. As the Commonwealth is the predominant funder of non-government schools, how will your party ensure Catholic schools remain affordable for most Australian families?

Labor is committed to funding all schools based on a proper assessment of need, while also supporting parental choice. Federal Government funding is essential to keeping a Catholic education accessible and affordable for all families who choose Catholic education for their children. Labor fought alongside Catholic school parents and teachers when their funding was slashed by the Liberals.

Labor strongly believes that low-fee Catholic schools make a valuable contribution to schooling in Australia, and that low and middle income families should be able to choose a faith based education in a way that doesn't put unacceptable pressure on the family budget. We understand that many Australian families are struggling under crippling cost of living increases while wages stagnate across the country. Labor will work with Catholic school systems to ensure that Commonwealth funding arrangements support reasonable fee arrangements in Catholic parish schools.

In addition to Labor's clear commitment to match the government's current funding arrangements, Catholic schools will benefit from a range of other initiatives:

- Labor will establish an Evidence Institute for Schools that will help improve schools and early childhood education centres by ensuring teachers and parents have high quality research at their fingertips.
- A Shorten Labor Government will invest an extra \$300 million to ensure students with disability get the support they need at school.
- A Shorten Labor Government will establish a new National Principals' Academy to give thousands of Australian principals advanced leadership training and support.
- Labor will work with universities, school systems and the teaching profession to improve the quality of teacher education.

2. What support will your party provide to help Catholic and other non-government schools upgrade learning facilities and keep pace with enrolment growth, given the rising costs of land, construction and classroom technology?

Commonwealth funding for non-government school capital expenditure is provided through the Capital Grants Program (CGP). Capital grants are additional to funds provided by State and Territory Governments, non-government school authorities, and school communities, which are responsible for providing and maintaining non-government school facilities. We note that the investment in capital funding for non-government schools increased from 2017 to take account of student enrolment growth. Labor in government will maintain the commitment to capital funding through the CGP and ensure funding is targeted to population growth areas to ensure access and choice

across the entire community.

3. What is your party's position on the right of religious schools and other religious institutions to retain faith-based exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation in relation to staffing, enrolment, curriculum and other policy matters?

Labor respects the right of all Australians to practise their religion freely. In our platform we declare: "Labor supports the appropriate protection of the religious freedom of all people."

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Tanya Plibersek, made our position on the rights of religious schools very clear in Parliament when she stated, "Schools are also entitled to have rules that ensure staff - and I'm quoting one of the organisations that wrote to me - don't 'deliberately and wilfully behave contrary to the values of the school.'" (Hansard, 16 October 2018, p.35).

Labor is not proposing to amend the indirect discrimination provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act that allow educational institutions to impose reasonable conditions, requirements or practices in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed.

At the same time, Labor is committed to reducing discrimination in Australian society where it can be done in a responsible way that respects freedom of belief and conscience.

We do not believe that freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination are mutually exclusive.

To that end, Labor believes that students and teachers and other staff of religious schools should be protected from discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality and other attributes covered by the Sex Discrimination Act.

4. Catholic schools are providing an increasing number of pre-school services for families that choose Catholic education. What will your party do to support this important stage of early childhood education?

Labor will establish a new \$1.75 billion National Pre-School and Kindy Program, which will guarantee every three and four year old will be able to access the early education they need for the best start to life.

Labor will work with all relevant stakeholders including the States and Territories and non-government sector to deliver the program. We are mindful that the implementation of the program will occur across a range of contexts that vary from State to State. We are committed to ensuring all children can access preschool in every setting in every State and Territory, and that parental choice is respected.

We are determined to ensure this policy benefits all three and four year olds in non-government as well as government and community run preschools and kindies, long day care centres and school site located early learning centres, which have become a feature of the Catholic school sector in recent years.

Labor believes parents and carers should be free to choose the setting that best suits their child's needs.