



3 May 2018

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Dear Archbishop Hart

After considerable thought, I am writing to you to express profound disappointment at the public commentary about Independent schools by the Executive Director of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Mr Stephen Elder.

In doing so, I want to first acknowledge the pioneering advocacy undertaken by leaders in Catholic education in support of the rights of parents to educate their children in schools that best match their values and their needs.

All of those involved in non-government education have benefitted from this advocacy.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge the right of Catholic education authorities to argue strongly in defence of their sector. After all, this is what Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) does in support of its Member Schools.

Having said that, and after careful deliberation, I feel compelled to express to you our dismay at the tone and content of Mr Elder's recent commentary.

A guiding principle for ISV is that our advocacy should be based on facts, and not denigrate schools in other sectors, nor the commitment and dedication of their staff.

Sadly, this has not been the case with Mr Elder's commentary. In campaigning against the Australian Government's school funding reforms, he has, unfortunately, repeatedly impugned the integrity of Independent schools and those who work in them.

He has accused staff in ISV Member Schools of making fraudulent claims in relation to students with disability; he has alleged we have been privy to 'special deals' with the government; he has alleged our Member Schools have misused government capital works funding; and he has falsely claimed to be acting on behalf of some of our faith-based Member Schools.

All of these claims lack foundation.

The content of some of his commentary mirrors that of the sectarian critics of non-government education, who would deny any government support to all non-government schools.

We are aware that his strident, ill-informed and ill-advised campaign has troubled many in the Catholic education sector, who aspire to higher standards in public debate.

As you know, ISV has conditionally welcomed the Australian Government's reforms to education funding as an attempt to ensure consistency, fairness and predictability. We welcome the prospect of a sector-blind funding model.

The funding changes are not perfect. Some Independent schools will lose, while others will gain, based on the needs of the students they enrol.

Mr Elder has taken a different view of the funding reforms. Unfortunately, in seeking to advocate for Catholic education, Mr Elder has sought to attack Independent schools, their staff, and their wider school communities.

His unseemly campaign risks bringing all non-government schools into disrepute.

Once again, I want to acknowledge that Catholic schools have a long and respected record of educational achievement that has benefitted generations of young Australians and enriched our society.

It is a matter of great regret that the common interests that we share with Catholic education have been called into question by Mr Elder's vitriolic commentary.

I hope you will appreciate that I have written to you after careful reflection. I feel, however, that you should be aware of our sincere concerns.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Green".

Michelle Green
Chief Executive