

## Government funding cuts to students with disability

Today, over 10,000 students with disability are educated in Catholic schools across Victoria.

Government funding support is critical for our schools to meet the individual needs of these. In 2011, the Gonski Review recognised this when it recommended that students with disability be funded through a loading that should be matched to the needs of each individual student. Until this measure could be established, the Gonski Panel recommended that all students with disability were funded at the same rate.

While all students with disability receive the same loading from the Australian Government, within Catholic education, we differentiate the funding support provided to students based on our own assessment of each student's needs. This system is considered to work well.

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) trial was established to come up with a standardised definition of students with disability that could be used to compare spending and support in all states and territories.

The collection relies on surveys filled out by school principals and teachers, not assessment by medical professionals.

Under the NCCD there has been a significant increase in the number of students considered to have a disability. Initial analysis of the NCCD showed that some schools were over estimating the needs of some students with disability. In addition, as students are only counted in the NCCD if they are receiving an 'adjustment' for a disability, it appears this is favouring the wealthier schools which can afford to make individual adjustments to meet all the needs of their students.

School leaders and disability support groups, including Autism Support Australia, have said that the data is unreliable. Even the Education Minister said in December that the NCCD was flawed and that 'This data ... hasn't come to a credible landing point just yet.'

### So, why is this important?

On 2 May, the Turnbull Government announced that it will use NCCD from next year to determine how students with disability will be funded by the Australian Government.

This might have been all right, if the total amount of federal funding available to students with disability was to grow, but this will not be the case for Catholic education.

Under the Government's proposal, more students will be classified as having a disability but, in most cases, they will attract less funding to Catholic education.

This means that most students who are currently funded for their disability will receive less money from the government.

Based on the current data, the total funding provided to Catholic school students with disability will be 17% lower over the next 10 years.

It beggars belief that some of the nation's students who are in most need of funding support are going to be disadvantaged because of the Turnbull Government's decision to use a funding calculation for students with disability which its own Education Minister says is not credible.

