



Broken Bay Catholic School Parents

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## Submission

# Review of Socio-Economic Status (SES) Score Methodology

February 2018

## **1. Preamble**

1.1 This submission has been prepared by the Broken Bay Catholic School Parents (CSP), on behalf of the parents and carers in 44 Catholic systemic schools in the Diocese of Broken Bay, NSW.

1.2 The CSP is the official parent body recognised by the Bishop of Broken Bay and the Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office (CSO) to advocate, represent and support the participation of all parents and carers in our Catholic systemic school communities and strengthen the important partnership between parents and school.

1.3 This submission does not seek to duplicate the work of peak Catholic Organisations nor does it propose alternate methodologies or comment on guiding principles. Rather the submission represents the voice of Broken Bay parents, outlining specific cases of parents and carers within our system whose choice of sending their children to a low-fee Catholic school, is impacted by the current SES methodology and the implications into the future for all parents to choose a local faith-based school for their children.

1.4 The CSP believes that all parents have a right to choose the most appropriate education for their children, including low-fee Catholic schools. To preserve school choice for parents, it's important for the government to support the low-fee Catholic school model as an affordable option to free public schools in all areas, in all postcodes.

## **2. Catholic Systemic Schooling in Diocese of Broken Bay NSW**

2.1 The Diocese of Broken Bay in NSW stretches from Northbridge on Sydney's lower north shore to Lake Munmorah in the northern part of the Central Coast. Within this diverse geographical landscape, covering an area of 2,763 square kilometres, there is also a significantly diverse socio-economic make-up, not just in each of the three separate geographic regions – North Shore, Northern Beaches & Central Coast – but also within same suburbs and within the same street. The SES review needs to acknowledge that there are wide differences of income and wealth within the Broken Bay Diocese. A broad approach assuming all families in a particular suburb or area have the same capacity to pay does not reflect the true situation of families in the Broken Bay Diocese. Currently Year 6 fees at St Cecilia's Balgowlah are \$4,922.00, compared to St Kevin's Dee Why where fees are \$3,546.00. Six kilometres and a 15 minute drive separate these schools.

2.2 Catholic schools have a commitment to high quality and low fees stemming from a long-held tradition of a Catholic education being accessible to all those who choose it for their children regardless of background, experiences and walks of life. The current SES methodology limits real choice for many Broken Bay families, who generally are low to middle-income families, some living in areas with particularly high SES ratings. By virtue of their postcode's socio-economic-status higher fees are required reducing their choice for

Catholic schooling. Many families already make great financial sacrifices to send their children to our Broken Bay Catholic schools and school fees are already a major consideration for families' budgets. The original Gonski Review highlighted the inaccuracy of the SES methodology when it stated it should be replaced because it "is subject to a potentially large degree of inaccuracy". To be a real choice for Broken Bay families our Catholic schools need to operate with low or at least moderate fee levels. It should not matter where you live nor what your income is.

### **3. Response to the Issues Paper**

#### **Capacity to contribute**

3.1 Utilizing the SES methodology to calculate a school's resource allocation makes wide-ranging assumptions about the capacity of that community of parents to contribute to their school's resourcing. All families in that area are deemed to have the same capacity to contribute. (It would be like basing income tax rates on postcodes rather than individuals' income.) As the 'capacity to contribute' of parents is the key measure used to determine the overall funding allocated to each school, the result for Broken Bay Catholic schools has seen a significant increase in fees resulting in parents having to make the difficult decision to leave their local catholic school as the "capacity to pay" measure does not reflect their actual financial situation. We need a better system for accurately identifying the needs of each school. It needs to more fairly reflect the needs of each student and the capability of parents to pay. The students attending a particular school are not necessarily representative of the socio-economic averages of the areas in which they live and as is the case in Broken Bay quite often travel from outside the schools geographical areas.

3.2 Utilizing the SES methodology to calculate school's resource allocation, makes wide-ranging assumptions about the capacity of that community of parents to contribute to the school's resourcing. Deriving SES score from the SES of the students at that school in a particular geographical area, does not accurately represent the circumstances of our Broken Bay families and is expecting too much of parents in the middle to upper middle SES bands where the higher cost of living in Sydney basin needs to be taken into consideration.

There are many circumstances that need to be considered:

- The family may only have one working parent and /or their income may be lower, or they may have to commute extensively for work
- They may have a large number of children, and / or a complex family structure
- There is no accounting for variability of income even within small areas;
- No accounting for the many costs faced by families with young and school aged children
- It does not reflect circumstances of separated and / or blended families
- There is no accounting for families that own, or are buying or renting their home.
- The additional costs of children and special needs/disability within families

3.3: Parent's choice of a Catholic education for their family also means that state and federal governments contribute less funding towards the education of their children.

Some Broken Bay families have already felt compelled to leave their Catholic school to attend the local government school – this comes at a higher cost to taxpayers and puts a strain on public schools that are already overcrowded.

There is a strong fear in Broken Bay Diocese, that if families were to change from Catholic schools to government schools, it would see the possible demise of individual schools through the reduction of their parent and financial base, thereby potentially leading to school closure. The question families of Broken Bay are asking, is why should a family who is already making a significant sacrificial choice to send their children to a local Catholic school, be put under pressure with rising school fees for that choice, because of where they live.

## **4. Testimonials from Broken Bay Parents**

### **Postcode 2076**

My husband and I have been blessed with 5 beautiful children. A Catholic education is something we hold very important and which we're committed to. Currently, it's a struggle to send them to a diocesan school and we forgo many other things in order to pay school fees as they currently stand. Put simply, any increase in diocesan catholic school fees would push our family out of the catholic school system altogether. It has been difficult for us as a family to absorb the already increased fees; particularly the 23% in 2016 fees and any further increase cannot be absorbed by our already tight family budget. We are already a two full time income family and there is no capacity to work more or increase our family income enough to afford a rise in school fees, and yet we persevere because a catholic education is a priority for us.

### **Postcode 2257**

My partner works in Sydney, I used to. We moved to the central Coast due to cost of living in Sydney, I made a massive decision to leave my corporate job in Sydney, because I wanted to be involved in my daughter's life, and juggling my career and family was impossible, it was affecting my family. If they increase the fees at St Leo's I would have to go back to working in Sydney and it's the last thing I want to do. That's the school we want her to go to. I have just retrained to work closer to home; my family is so much more balanced and less stressed than before. To feel like I would have to choose between a higher paying job and being a mother again would cause me a lot of anxiety and to feel like I couldn't provide her with the education she needs because I cannot re-enter the Sydney workforce as I will be closer to 50 when she starts high school will feel awful. Working in Sydney again will make it really hard to support my daughter in life and in school, that's not what I want for our family.

**Postcode 2073**

We are a family of 5 with 3 kids under 7. If we could afford to pay, school fees would currently represent 12.5% of our monthly income. We have no investment assets. The percentage breakdown of our monthly income is as follows: 55% rent; 15% preschool; 7% health insurance; 6% Utilities; 7% fuel and car expenses like rego; 10% to spend on all other monthly spending but usually only covers groceries and other expenses. We pay an extraordinary amount of our monthly pay in rent as we cannot even contemplate owning a home in the Sydney basin and to move away would mean we are away from our support network where we are in a situation where 1 partner travels for work more often than they are home.

**Postcode 2096**

We are a family of three living in Freshwater, NSW. Our decision to send our only daughter to a Catholic school is due to the Christian education that we as parents consider to be important as part of raising our child. The recent rise in tuition fees has impacted our ability to manage finances for this year. We live in a two-bedroom apartment which we are now outgrowing as we try to provide our child more space to study. However, the rise in fees has prevented us from providing better living conditions for our family and as we see it, further increases in school fees will have a tremendous impact for our future. Further rises in school fees will mean that we may have to give up the Catholic education that we value for our child and move to our local public schools, in turn, putting pressure on overcrowded schools. We have to deal with the rising cost of basic necessities and as average income earners, the continuing rise on the cost of living are far more than the increase of our wages per annum.

Living in the Northern Beaches considered as high socio-economic area does not reflect families like us. We earn an average income and happen to live in the area because this is one place we call our home, our community, our network of support. To have to move because we no longer can afford to live in the area is devastating not only to the wellbeing of our family, it also impacts the community as a whole.

Dear SES committee, when you review important matters that can gravely affect families, please consider the average Australian families like ours who live around the periphery of those who are wealthy

**Postcode 2256**

We are a low-income family with three children. 2018 fees for our three children to attend our local Catholic primary school are over \$6640, to be paid from our combined family income of \$40,000. Paying school fees is difficult, however we value our faith, our children's education and the community we belong to as part of our school. To afford Catholic schooling, as a low SES family, we had to move from Sydney to the Central Coast. As our eldest child nears the end of primary school, we wish to access a co-

educational Catholic high school. Our only choices are either St Leo's College (2276) 1 hour south, or St Peter's College (2259) 1 hour north of our home.

Many of the parents in our area travel to Sydney for work and prefer to enrol children at St Leo's rather than have 1 to 2 hours between their workplace and their children's school by enrolling at St Peter's. The SES score of expected students at St Leo's and predicted rise in fees, using the current methodology, does not represent the reality of families like ours. Our capacity to contribute is far below the calculations currently in use, but our children are no less deserving of the education we believe will serve them best.

### **Postcode 2256**

My daughter attends St Leo's College. St Leo's (Wahroonga) or St Peter's (Tuggerah) are the closest co-educational Catholic schools. I thought Catholic schools were all pretty much the same in fees no matter where you lived. I don't understand SES zones or how they impact school fees. I know there is a difference between systemic and private schools. I thought school fees were based on land value and how many students are in the school and what the school offers. The information and comparison of Catholic school fees isn't clear and doesn't make sense to me. St Leo's had a rise in school fees of 25% last year. We compared both high schools when enrolling our daughter and before the 25% increase there wasn't much difference in cost. That has changed now. I can't believe that after a 25% increase last year that fees will go up again.

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### **Postcode 2095**

We have three children, two of which attend a Catholic Boys High School which is situated in what is stated as a High SES area, but live outside of the suburb that our school is located in.

Our family is not Catholic but we choose for our boys to go to a Catholic high school for the values that they teach and the Pastoral Care that they receive.

We are by no means a wealthy family, but we like many families around Australia work hard to provide the best for our children

One of our children was diagnosed with ADHD in Year 3 (currently in Year 8), and went right through the public primary system. Sadly because the school was so large and there were many children with various needs, he was lost in the system. Although he is a very smart boy and excels in out of school sports he was deemed unworthy to represent the school and considered by many of the children at the school as a social reject.

We are so very happy with our decision to send our boys to a Catholic Boys High School as it especially provides our middle child with the education, pastoral care and the tools he needs to help him grow into a fine young educated man who is proud to be who he is.

Nobody has the right to take our choice away, disrupting our children's lives. Our kids have enough to worry about these days without having anxiety about if they are going to have to change schools as they know their parents cannot afford it.

Many children have already left the Catholic Schools and enrolled in the Public system, because we also still have a child in a public primary we can see the impact from both sides, and in case you haven't yet heard, it's not good. Our Primary school is already over capacity, and the education of our children is going to suffer.

So this issue is far greater than just the first thought of "How are we going to afford it", like hundreds of other families we are thinking "How is this going to affect our children"? Don't take away our right to choose, there is nothing right about it and we will not stop fighting for our rights.

#### **Postcode 2096**

We have had around 50 children leave our small school this year because of the potential increase in school fees, based on the flawed capacity to pay proposal, after the initial increase of 20% in 2017. That's approximately 17% of our school has already left amounting to approximately \$200,000 in school fees taken out of the education system, that taxpayers will have to fund in the public system. Families also now feel as though they have to consider the local public high schools as the fees of the systemic 'low fee' Catholic schools are out of their reach. Our school alone, is a very good example that families will have to leave or will leave if school fees go above what is considered feasible.

#### **Postcode 2095**

I now dread February each year - the post festive season and then school fee invoice arrives..... My son started the school with fees of \$3K+ now it's \$7K+. Not everyone on the Northern Beaches is wealthy; many are renting, have limited and overstretched household budgets that are increasingly under pressure from minimum wage growth. We sacrifice a great deal for a Catholic education but it appears under the current funding methodology that decision may be taken out of our hands, which is a real shame

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