



11 SEP, 2020

SCHOOL FEE FREEZE

West Australian, Perth



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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CATHOLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL RELIEF

SCHOOL FEE FREEZE

EXCLUSIVE BETHANY HIATT

WA's Catholic schools are freezing student fees next year in a bid to ease financial pressure on parents amid the virus pandemic. The policy applies to 77,000 pupils at 163 schools across the State.

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Catholic schools fee relief

EXCLUSIVE BETHANY HIATT
EDUCATION EDITOR

School fees will be frozen at almost all of WA's 163 Catholic schools next year in a bid to ease financial pressure and provide certainty for families struggling with the current economic challenges.

Principals were told on Tuesday of the decision by Catholic Education WA not to increase fees next year. CEWA executive director Debra Sayce said schools had reported that many parents had lost their jobs or had their hours cut, making it difficult for some families to make ends meet.

"Parents are facing financial hardship and we've always maintained (that) access to Catholic education should not be denied based on people's capacity to pay," she said.

More than 77,000 students are enrolled at 163 CEWA schools across the State, with diocesan primary schools charging up to \$5000 a year and high schools about \$11,500.

Fourteen Catholic schools have the autonomy to set their own fees, but Dr Sayce said they may also choose to keep a lid on any increases. Dr Sayce said the fee freeze would not affect the quality of education and there was no intention to cut staff numbers or salaries.

"We are certainly not making any wholesale changes in staffing because schools have to work and operate and provide the quality education that they do," she said.

CEWA had set up a COVID-19 financial response team early this year to help schools with strategic planning for a worst-case scenario.

"We talked with all of our schools about bills, programs and additional cost savings," Dr Sayce said.

"Because we didn't have a lot of activities going outside of the school in Term 2, there were savings made there with access to venues and buses."

Dr Sayce said there had been a slight increase in enrolments at Catholic schools since the start of the year.

In March, when the effects of the pandemic first hit WA, Catholic schools guaranteed to keep children enrolled even if their parents could no longer afford to pay.

Schools provided more than \$23.4 million in fee relief by June this year, compared with \$21.5 million for all of last year.

The number of families seeking special fee concessions also increased. By June this year the value of fee concessions had nearly reached the \$6.74 million provided to families for the entire 2019 school year.

Media Statement

11 September 2020

State-wide commitment to zero percent fee increases for 2021

Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) Executive Director Dr Debra Sayce has confirmed there will be no increase in tuition fees in 2021 at CEWA-owned schools throughout the State.

“Western Australians have come together to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and we are very grateful to Government for their continued support of Catholic Education in Western Australia.”

“Our schools have reported that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents and caregivers have lost their jobs or had their hours cut, making it difficult for some families to make ends meet,” she says.

A survey of CEWA schools showed the number of families accessing fee relief through CEWA’s Health Care Card Discount Scheme had risen significantly. By June 2020, \$23.4 million in fee relief had been accessed by Catholic school families, compared to \$21.5 million for the full 2019 school year.

The number of families seeking special fee concessions was also up. By June 2020 the value of fee concessions was quickly approaching the \$6.74 million total reached in 2019.

With one in five WA students enrolled at 163 Catholic schools in metropolitan, regional and remote communities, Catholic Education plays an important role in the lives of thousands of Western Australians.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has been upsetting and destabilising for many young people. Now, more than ever, every child in Western Australia deserves to feel supported and should have access to a great education regardless of what school they attend.”

Catholic Education understands the need for families to have certainty and stability. That is why Catholic diocesan schools are providing families with the assurance that fees won’t rise in 2021,” she says.

While 14 non-diocesan Catholic schools have the autonomy to set their own fees, these schools share a commitment to minimising the impact of COVID-19 in their communities.

“Catholic schools are a part of every community and as WA’s fourth biggest employer, Catholic Education supports more than 11,000 teaching and non-teaching jobs across WA, as well as creating employment in many local support sectors.”

“Catholic Education is committed to supporting our State’s COVID-19 recovery. Through these challenging times, the wellbeing and learning of students has been at the forefront of our decisions. Combining this focus with our emphasis on creating certainty around fees and ensuring job security for our staff, has helped to minimise the impact of COVID-19 in our school communities,” Dr Sayce concludes.

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