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Higher than expected fee rises would see a quarter of students moved out of non-government schools

Eighty five per cent of parents with children at non-government schools reported that they would struggle to pay higher than expected fee rises and be forced to make 'significant sacrifices' to keep their children at the school of their choice, with 25 per cent saying they would have to move their children to different schools, according to a national survey carried out by the Australian Parents Council (APC).

The figures were consistent across both Catholic and independent schools.

"This just goes to show that the non-government school sector is far more sensitive to funding changes than many people realise. Higher than expected fee rises would have an enormous impact on hundreds of thousands of families, who have chosen to send their children to non-government schools and put enormous pressure on government schools." said APC President Shelley Hill.

Parents are concerned about the impact of the Australian Government's new funding arrangements, that will use income tax data as a measure of parents' capacity to contribute to school fees, according to the survey.

Seventy-five per cent say they want to know the likely impact on school fees at their child's school, 65 per cent were worried about fairness and nearly half wanted to know more information about how accurate using income tax data will really be.

As one respondent succinctly commented: 'Tax data does not show family circumstances.'

"The government needs to address all parent concerns and make information widely available to families. We are after all the biggest stakeholders in this debate, who ultimately foot the bill for our children's education. Parents need to have confidence that the new system is going to be fair for everyone," explained Shelley Hill.

The survey, which was completed by 676 parents around Australia, found the education issues they are most concerned about are the quality of teachers (85 per cent), children's well-being (78 per cent), provisions to help all children achieve their best (72 per cent) and tailored teaching and learning for each student (65 per cent). When asked what the single most important issue was, children's well-being came out on top.

These issues came out way ahead of any others. The next nearest areas of concern were young people being prepared for work (43 per cent) and the management of technology and cyber bullying (42 per cent).

'Parents value good teaching and children's well-being above all else. They know that these two things are the foundations of a good education. Quality teachers and happy children equal productive classrooms. Parents also want to see children treated as individuals and every child given opportunities,' said Shelley Hill.



One respondent commented that ‘our children need to be happy and healthy in school with a key focus on mental well-being and this is achieved through education in a way which each child learns to the best of their ability.’

Others commented that ‘school needs to provide more for individual learning styles and less about fitting into the box,’ and there needs to be a ‘focus on enabling all kids to thrive and reach their full potential’.

‘We would appreciate less of a cookie-cutter approach.... and a more individual approach helping each child,’ wrote another.

Several commented on the value of teachers and called for more support.

‘We need teachers that are passionate about teaching to foster a love of learning and for our children to feel valued members of a school community and to feel they can contribute successfully to society.’

‘You can have the best teachers but no support. They have too much on their plate.’

One parent wrote that ‘the stress that teachers are under to accommodate the individual needs of students, without the resources required, particularly in the inclusion of students with special needs and high behavioural needs’ was an issue.

Commentators also wanted parents to be included more in their child’s education.

‘Schools and Education Departments seem to forget that they are providing a service to us as parents and our children as students and they do not take our needs or opinions into account.’

‘I’m concerned about how little parents are consulted about curriculum and what is being taught.’

The survey also looked at the reasons why parents chose particular schools for their children. Forty-six per cent of parents who decided on non-government schools cited religion or ethos as a deciding factor. More than 50 per cent of Catholic and independent school parents also said that best fit for their child, school culture, safety and well-being, location and reputation were important considerations. By far the least important factor across all school sectors was NAPLAN scores, with five per cent of parents surveyed saying they were a consideration.

‘Parents choose non-government schools for a multitude of reasons, but what is obvious and supported by our survey findings is that they simply want the best for their child and have their well-being at heart.

‘Parental choice is a fundamental right in the Australian education system that is obviously valued by many parents. It is important that this choice is kept accessible and affordable,’ said Shelley Hill.

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Contact media@austparents.edu.au or 0410 149853 for more information or interviews. To find out more about APC please visit www.austparents.edu.au.



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Background information:

The survey was carried out across Australia over October, November and early December. It was open to all parents and completed by 676 people.

APC is an apolitical, non-profit organisation representing parents of children at non-government schools and parents generally.

To find out more about APC please visit www.austparents.edu.au.