Dear Parents and Carers

Each year, the Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools (SACS) Board meets to review and set school fees for our Archdiocesan System of Catholic schools. Recent policy changes by the Catholic Education Commission NSW and the Federal Government have required the SACS Board to review the framework for the setting of tuition fees. This revised policy will mean that school systems across Australia must direct more of their educational funding towards the areas of greatest student need, as determined by the Socio-Economic Status (SES) rating of their community. In NSW, this will mean that a greater percentage of government grants will now have to be directed towards the education of students in rural and remote areas.

Also, under the expectations of the Federal Government Education Act (2013), school communities and education systems with schools in suburbs with higher SES ratings will be expected to contribute slightly more to the individual budgets of their schools.

As a result of this shift in the flow of government funding, it has become clear that the current system of charging the same tuition fee to every school in the Archdiocese, regardless of its location, can no longer be sustained.

Consequently, the SACS Board has made the decision to introduce a model of differential school fees for Sydney Catholic schools, to commence in 2015. Fee increases for next year will range from 4% to 9%, depending upon the SES ranking of each community. (The SES ranking is determined by the national census). For most families, the average increase in fees will be between 5% and 7%, slightly above the level of 2014, but generally in line with the typical increases in the cost of education and child care experienced around Australia. However, I do appreciate that for families in some areas of Sydney, the increase in fees will be higher than parents may have expected, and may, for some, impose a strain on the family budget.

An important point to highlight is that over the last 10 years, the SACS Board has kept school fee increases to an absolute minimum, usually in line with the ‘Cost of Living’ index, rather than the much higher ‘Cost of Education’ index. As a result, Catholic education in Sydney is significantly more affordable than in neighbouring Catholic dioceses and comparable non-government schools.

With respect to other fees and charges to support school budgets (e.g. books, equipment, technology etc.) which already vary from school to school depending upon local needs, the SACS Board has determined they should only increase up to a maximum of 5%. As in previous
years, the Parish/School Building Levy will increase in line with the Building Index Rate (approximately 5%) up to a maximum of $50 per family.

The SACS Board is also amending the current sibling discount policy on tuition fees. This has been done so that school fee relief can be directed more towards families where there is the greatest financial need. In coming years, through the Catholic Education Foundation, families on very low incomes will be able to apply for ‘means-tested’ bursaries to assist with the education of their children. Over the next five years, the discount for the second and third child in a family will be reduced by 5% annually. The 100% discount on tuition fees for families with four or more children will remain. The Board has directed that any additional fees collected as a result of the gradual phasing out of the sibling discounts be allocated to the Catholic Education Foundation which will administer the bursary program.

On behalf of SACS Board, I wish to once again restate our position that no Catholic child should be denied a Catholic education due to a genuine inability to pay fees. If any family is particularly affected by the changes in the fee levels for 2015, they are asked to approach their school principal for a confidential discussion.

The fees and charges for your individual school will be published and communicated in the normal manner, as appropriate for each school community.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Sydney. I am deeply appreciative of the trust and confidence that you have placed in our system of schools. While any increase in fees and charges is always regrettable, it is important that our schools in Sydney are appropriately resourced so that the quality and effectiveness of our education system can be maintained.

Yours in Catholic education

Dr Dan White
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS