NAPLAN tests: Parents, principals call for equal funding for SA Year 7 students

By Tim Williams Education Reporter, The Advertiser, May 11, 2015 8:59PM

YEAR 7 students in SA schools should be funded at the same rate as those interstate because they sit the same NAPLAN tests and cover the same curriculum, parents and principals say.

As students from Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 begin the national literacy and numeracy tests on Tuesday, the state’s key Catholic parent group has renewed its campaign for funding fairness under the catch cry: “Same Curriculum. Same Test. Same Expectations. Less Funding!”

SA is the only state that has yet to transition Year 7s into secondary school, so they remain funded at the primary school rate, despite some Year 7s across all sectors being taught in middle school settings.

The Catholic sector says its students are missing out on $7 million a year and the independent sector estimates a $7.8 million shortfall, amounting to around $2000 dollars per child.
The SA Primary Principals Association says SA schools are collectively being robbed of tens of millions.

Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities SA executive director Ann Bliss said there had been “more handballing than we’d see in an AFL match” between the state and federal governments on the issue.

“This call is separate from any proposed shift of Year 7 into secondary settings but seeks funding equity irrespective of where Year 7 is placed,” she said.

“We feel ... NAPLAN week is perfect timing to highlight the inequity.”

South Australian Area Schools Leaders Association president Chris Roberts said some Year 7s were enjoying middle school facilities in science, technical studies and home economics, but those areas were difficult to resource under the current funding arrangement.

Neither level of government would say how much more SA schools would be entitled to or how much each government would have to pay if Year 7s were classified as high schoolers, but Education Minister Susan Close said she would raise the issue at the next meeting of education ministers this month.

“South Australian students deserve to be funded by the Commonwealth at the same rate as students in other states. They study the same material and curriculum and do the same tests,” she said.

“Some of our Year 7s are effectively in high school as they are in R-12 schools, yet are funded at the lower rate.”

A spokesman for Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne said: “If the State Government moved Year 7 students into secondary school they would automatically attract the higher rate of funding.”

A State Opposition analysis of NAPLAN results shows SA falling behind national averages in all four tested year levels, including Year 7. The Opposition’s policy is to move all Year 7s into high school.

This week will be the last time some students do NAPLAN tests on paper, as schools will transition to online testing from 2017.

Seymour College principal Anne Johnstone said online tests would pose “logistical challenges” for schools, but provide “greater data analytics and results which we can use to improve student learning experiences”. Year 3s Katie, Kiara and Sehansa will sit their first tests on Tuesday.