

12 February 2013

The Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into the provisions of the *Australian Education Bill, 2012*

Dear Secretary

The key to Australia's economic and social wellbeing, now and into the future, is a highly educated population. This is the foundation for ensuring Australia is able to meet the challenges and opportunities of a highly volatile global economy. It is also key to the ongoing social cohesion that has been so central to our nation.

However, despite recent reforms, significant numbers of young Australians are not achieving key educational outcomes and making positive transitions to further education, training and employment. At the same time, the educational performance of a number of our neighbours has improved.

As representatives of a broad range of organisations working with hundreds of thousands of Australians, we are all too aware that young people with poor educational outcomes are more likely to experience unemployment and poorer health outcomes, and rely more heavily on income support payments. This creates additional economic and social costs for individuals and the community as a whole.

Recent data shows that the relationship between student background and educational outcomes is more pronounced in Australia than in other comparable high performing OECD countries. Year 12 completion rates, for example, are significantly lower for Australian students from low SES than for students from high SES – 56% compared to 75%.

As Australia's population ages and some of our international competitors improve their educational performance, harnessing the potential of **all** young people will be essential if the economic and social prosperity Australia has long enjoyed is to continue. Yet Australia's future prosperity is far from guaranteed.

As organisations with a long history and expertise in working in communities across the nation, we believe that we can and must do better on the educational outcomes achieved by young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is not only in their best interests; it is undoubtedly in our nation's best interests.

In light of the current educational challenges facing Australia and the importance of education to the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and the nation as a whole, we are very supportive of the broad thrust of the *Australian Education Bill 2012*. In particular, we strongly endorse the Bill's Objects focused on achieving a high quality and highly equitable schooling system. We also strongly support the allocation of school funding based on need and the recognition in the Bill of the educational disadvantage associated with a range of student and school factors.

We are cognisant that this new funding approach gives rise to significant additional investment being required from the Commonwealth and the States/Territories. It is our shared view that the future wellbeing of individual young Australians, their families, communities, and the nation as a whole, justifies such investment.

We would urge that two amendments be made to the Bill. Firstly, that *meeting student need* be the first principle identified under the national plan for school improvement, given that the wellbeing of students should be at the core of the work of schools.

Recommendation 1

That *meeting student need* be the first principle of the national plan identified in the *Australian Education Bill 2012*, followed by *quality learning*.

Secondly, not-for-profit community organisations, such as those we represent and many others, are currently engaged in a range of partnerships with schools which are contributing to the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of children and young people across Australia. We therefore recommend that this partnership role be acknowledged within the Bill.

Recommendation 2

That the *Australian Education Bill 2012* explicitly acknowledge in the Preamble (as a minimum), the key role not-for-profit community organisations play in supporting improved educational outcomes.

We look forward to hearing of the outcome of the Committee's Inquiry and would be happy to provide further input if required.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lisa O'Brien, CEO, The Smith Family

Kasy Chambers Director, Anglicare Australia

Dr Cassandra Goldie CEO, Australian Council of Social Services

Tony Nicholson, Executive Director, Brotherhood of St Laurence

Teya Dusseldorp, Director, Dusseldorp Skills Forum

Jan Owen AM, CEO, Foundation for Young Australians

James Barron, CEO, Group Training Australia

Toby Hall CEO, Mission Australia

Dr John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul
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Michael Traill AM, Chief Executive, Social
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Anne Hollonds, CEO, The Benevolent Society

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