



# Premier of Queensland

For reply please quote: *IGR/JE – TF/13/13680 – DOC/13/106757*

21 JUN 2013

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Education,  
Employment and Workplace Relations  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Executive Building  
100 George Street Brisbane  
PO Box 15185 City East  
Queensland 4002 Australia  
**Telephone +61 7 3224 4500**  
**Facsimile +61 7 3221 3631**  
**Email [ThePremier@premiers.qld.gov.au](mailto:ThePremier@premiers.qld.gov.au)**  
**Website [www.thepremier.qld.gov.au](http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au)**

Dear Committee Secretary

The Chair of the Senate Legislation Committee, Senator Gavin Marshall, wrote to me on 19 June 2013 inviting the Queensland Government to provide a submission to you on the Australian Education Bill 2012 and the Australian Education (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013 (the Bills).

I am pleased to provide a submission but extremely disappointed at the short time frame for the inquiry. The fact that your committee received a reference for an inquiry on 19 June, requiring submissions by 21 June 2013 and reporting by 24 June, indicates the contempt for the business of government, and of the Australian Parliament, by the Federal Government. It appears that the Federal Government does not want to properly consider the implications of its far-reaching proposals, or work cooperatively on them with the states and territories.

Queensland's submission is composed of four parts:

- this covering letter
- the comments I previously provided to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Workplace Relations on the Australian Education (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013 (**Attachment 1**)
- specific feedback on the Bill (**Attachment 2**)
- the Queensland Government's direct action plan for schooling, *Great Teachers = Great Results* (**Attachment 3**).

Let me be clear about Queensland's position — we do not support either Bill and will not be participating in the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) or the National School Improvement Plan (NPSI) as they are currently envisaged by the Bill. Queensland opposes the funding system, the prescriptive and input focus of the NPSI and the Federal Ministerial control of schools, which are embedded within the Bill.

The funding system proposed in the Bills is not one that provides significant additional funding to Queensland on a two-for-one basis as claimed by the Prime Minister. It actually requires greater additional funding from Queensland than that provided by the Federal Government.



The Queensland Government has never tried to tie the Federal Government to prescriptive measures, such as maintenance of effort, ongoing reporting or, indeed, the relative proportion of funding given to one school system or another. So why is the Federal Government, as the minority funder of Queensland Government's state schools, seeking through these Bills to require these things and more of Queensland schools?

The Queensland Government is the owner and manager of state schools and regulator of non-state schools and provides nearly 90 per cent of government funding for state schools. The Queensland Government aims to remove needless red tape and regulation in general and will not support the Federal Government adding even more regulation.

While Queensland welcomes additional Federal Government funding for state schools, such funding should be provided through a funding system that is sustainable, efficient and equitable and, above all, is good for every Australian school. The nationally consistent funding system proposed by the Bills achieves none of those things. The Bills seek to direct states and territories as to how, and under what circumstances, we fund our own state schools through an unaccountable regime of federal ministerial control over all schools. This will not lead to efficient or equitable outcomes as decisions by different federal ministers over the years will be grandfathered into increasingly complex and opaque funding outcomes, with widespread anomalies between schools.

Unlike the Federal Government, the Queensland Government has never sought to play off one sector against another or indicated that one level of funding in one state/territory or school system is necessarily good or bad. Why then do these Bills aim to discriminate between states merely according to how much states and territories spend on a notional per student basis? Expenditure per student costs are overwhelmingly driven by school staff costs and size of classes, and it provides no indication of efficiency, effectiveness or equity.

I note that the Federal Government has argued that, if there is no change to the funding arrangements, federal government funding will be indexed at three per cent a year. This argument was comprehensively disproved in Senate Estimates a fortnight ago, where it was revealed that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations had effectively made up that indexation rate. Queensland notes that, despite the provisions in the legislation, the funding model appears to magically produce different funding offers for different states, which are substantially different from what Queensland was offered by the Prime Minister on 16 April 2013. How can such a funding arrangement provide ongoing certainty to schools and school communities?

Moreover, Queensland remains concerned that, regardless of whether all states and territories agree to the funding arrangements proposed, nothing in the Bills gives adequate comfort that an individual state may not be penalised through the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC) processes for assessing Good and Services Tax (GST) relativities in support of Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation (HFE).

Queensland considers that the Federal Government's position, that the Federal Treasurer direct the CGC to exempt the funding provided under both Bills from HFE, undermines the very premise of HFE, provides a greater level of risk to state and territory budgets, and is unsustainable into the future. The CGC's methodology is complicated enough as it, why complicate it even further?



The NPSI is too prescriptive and full of input controls that actually impede, rather than enhance, school autonomy and the level of control on individual government and non-government schools by the Federal Minister for Schooling is unprecedented and will not support improvements to schooling, including Sections 13(1), 24(6) 78(2), 106(2), 102(1) and 102(2). I am told that the draft regulations to be implemented to support those provisions are even more proscriptive than the Bill itself. This is not acceptable.

The outcome of these Bills is that, whether a state chooses to participate in the new funding system or not, the Federal Government is giving itself the power to determine the funding system for state schools and requiring that states commit to the prescriptive terms of the NPSI. These Bills give a federal minister powers over schooling that, in some instances, could be considered greater than those exercised by education ministers in some states, particularly in states like Victoria and Western Australia, which already have high levels of principal and school autonomy.

Similarly, the Queensland Government has introduced its own direct action plan for schooling — *Great Teachers = Great Results* — which includes a substantial expansion on our existing policy for enhancing school autonomy and reducing red tape for state schools. The *Independent Public Schools* initiative gives state schools the flexibility to account for, and address, differences in their students' needs, the character of their school communities, and the school's capacity to make the most of local opportunities.

From 2016, 120 state schools in Queensland will be operating on an independent basis, and all remaining schools will have the opportunity to become independent from this time, providing they meet required standards. Having just put in place these arrangements to liberate schools from the dead hand of bureaucracy, we will not accept the Federal Government having the discretion of using the provisions of these Bills to effectively intervene in the decisions of principals and school communities.

The Queensland Government believes that the most effective way to improve student outcomes is to lift the quality of the teacher in front of the class. For this reason, *Great Teachers = Great Results* also focuses on achieving professional excellence in teaching — elevating teaching standards across the board, rewarding high performance and positioning the highest performing teachers where they are needed most. Queensland considers that it is already tackling the issues of teacher quality and sees no need for the prescriptive NPSI and its regulatory overreach to be imposed over the top.

If the Federal Government is to play a role in enhancing teacher quality, it has more than enough power and resources to address this matter through the higher education system, yet it has not done so in the six years it has been in power. Why now and why in the context of centralising professional standards and teacher registration and accreditation, which are properly the responsibility of the states?

The Queensland Government asks that the Senate Committee consider the following questions in its report on the Bill and seek adequate answers from the Federal Government:

- If the Federal Government believes that equity in education is the problem, why isn't it seeking to extend and enhance the Low Socio-Economic School Communities (SES) National Partnership Agreement (Low SES NP) and provide ongoing funding beyond 2014 under the Students with Disabilities NP?



- If the Federal Government believes in improving teacher training and/or school leadership and development, why did it not develop a new NP on such terms and move years ago to address entry requirements into initial teacher training courses at universities? Why will it not agree to the New South Wales (NSW) proposals for limiting entry into teacher training courses?
- If the Federal Government believes that students with literacy and numeracy require additional resources on an ongoing basis, why did it not extend and enhance the Improving Literacy and Numeracy NP beyond 2013?
- If the Federal Government believes that giving students from disadvantaged backgrounds additional assistance, why is it cutting funding to early childhood education and terminating funding for states and territories under the Youth Attainment and Transitions NP?
- If the Federal Government believes in giving all students the best opportunity to engage in lifelong learning, why is it cutting funding to universities, and why did it take over a year to approve the Queensland Government's implementation plan for reform of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector? How can schools plan for the future if approval for all funding is at the discretion of the Federal Government minister's consideration of implementation plans as that could take months to complete, given that there are over 600 non-government schools in Queensland alone?
- If the Federal Government wishes to do all of these things in a more efficient and effective manner, why did it not simply roll all the funding in the existing state and non-state schooling specific purpose payments and put some of the requirements under the existing National Education Agreement?

The simple answer to all of these questions is that the Federal Government is seeking to control schooling through funding agreements requiring a huge bureaucracy in Canberra to implement a vast array of contradictory policies and procedures, even though it is not responsible for a single school.

The Queensland Government will not support the Bills in their present form as they amount to a de-facto Federal Government takeover of schooling. Such an outcome will not enhance accountability for educational outcomes, but will lead to even more bureaucracy, more filling out of forms for principals and teachers, and less freedom for our schools to address the rapid economic and social changes of the 21st century.

I note that the Victorian Education Minister, the Honourable Martin Dixon MP, expressed similar concerns in his media statement of 17 June 2013:

The Gillard Labor Government's legislation — despite claims by Federal Minister for School Education Peter Garrett — proposes major interventions into the decision making of school leaders. It gives the Federal Education Minister the power to direct the State Government, or even an individual school or school principal, to comply with its requests on school direction or the provision of data — potentially including student and family background or financial information.

Queensland believes that the Federal Government needs to completely re-think its approach to schooling education and urges all Senators to vote against the Bills.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely

 CAMPBELL NEWMAN

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