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From: Martin, Ian

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To: Committee, EM (REPS)

Subject: Inquiry into Civic and Electoral Education

22/05/2006

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Submission to the Inquiry into Civic and Electoral Education.

My name is Ian Martin.

I am an experienced teacher of senior Primary age students and have been for a considerable time. I have lead an annual excursion by our Grade 6 students to Canberra for many years. It is, for our school, one of the highlights of the Grade 6 year.

I make a response, from a personal perspective, to four particular matters.

1. The current Status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system.

In my experience, prior to the introduction of a unit of work on Federation and Government prior to us visiting Canberra, the children have very limited knowledge of government. We have a study of Eureka prior to a visit to Sovereign Hill in Grade 5, but this does not provide a detailed insight into "responsibilities" nor of our "electoral system". It does provide some knowledge of the background to our government, in the Eureka context. Some could argue that this was a true "democratic" model.

2. The adequacy of electoral education.

Again, if we were not to visit Canberra as part of our normal Grade 6 Curriculum, there would have been no prescribed need to study the electoral system. We do it because we believe we should, but I am unaware of any consequences that would have occurred because other schools did not have the same study unit.

However, now in Victoria, under the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards, there is considerable expectation that "Civics and Citizenship" will be taught. The information presented so far indicates that this will provide an excellent curriculum structure if implemented.

3. The age at which electoral education should begin.

This depends upon the level of understanding that is expected. Basic democratic principles can be implemented in the classroom from the time children attend school, but the specifics of "electoral education" are complicated and probably best left until at least year 6 or 7 if they are to be understood properly.

4. The access to, and adequacy of funding for school visits to the Federal Parliament.

I presented a document to Mr David Hawker last year identifying the inadequacy of funding support for this area. As stated earlier, we have been visiting Canberra regularly for a number of years. We have used the subsidy available through the National Capital Educational tourism Project to minimise costs. This has sat at \$15.00 for as long as it has been available.

I pointed out to Mr Hawker that our costs have been as follows.

- 2002 - \$288.00 / student [78 students]
- 2003 - \$301.00 / student [80 students]
- 2004 - \$324.00 / student [73 students]
- 2005 - \$376.00 / student [67 students]

As you can see, the costs have escalated rapidly and increase more as a result of fewer children attending – the bus costs the same whether it is full or half full.

We have been for a number of years, covering the cost of those genuine “can’t afford it” cases that we are aware of, but this causes considerable stress on our already stressed school budget.

To leave that subsidy at \$15.00 for the length of time that it has been, is an indication to me that the Federal government doesn’t value the visit to Canberra by school children. I am aware of some schools who can’t visit because of the cost, or who can only afford to do so in alternate years.

I believe that this is an area which must be meaningfully addressed.

Access is easy if you know to apply through the NCET Project, and the organisation distributes the funds available, in my experience, fairly and efficiently.

As a final point, we have always enjoyed the willing contribution made by our Local member, whoever it has been. Of recent times, Catherine King has been able to take us to her office and to a number of other areas within Parliament House, which has made the experience so much more valuable.

Yours faithfully,

Ian P Martin