



Catholic Education
Diocese of Parramatta

Australian Education Bill 2012

A Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta
New South Wales Australia

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1. Executive Summary

Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Education Bill (2012) and provide a Catholic school system perspective from Western Sydney – one of the fastest growing areas of school education in Australia.

As a system of schools, we cater for the diversity of learning need through a relentless focus on building the capacity of teachers and school leadership.

Some key points to note about the Bill:

- The competitive business nature of the language used in the Bill is fundamentally at odds with the stated goals.
- The diverse nature of schools requires a funding model that provides certainty to schools and systems over the longer term (10 years) rather than the current short term four year cycle.
- A broader, more holistic evidence base is required to ensure that policy development and implementation reflects actual student and teacher needs.
- The administrative burden of any new funding model should be appropriate to amounts of public funding being provided and costed to include support.
- The capacity of a family to pay school fees should not be taken for granted and therefore not be included as a basis for funding.
- The ability to cater for the needs of students and teachers is strengthened by partnership in an enterprise system of schools and central office.
- To be reflective of the research evidence, the Australian Education Bill 2012 must include drivers for the transformation of schooling that are not tool or funding driven. They are a:
 - deeper understanding of the diverse nature of people and how they learn;
 - global view that informs local teaching and learning;
 - strong foundation of theory and evidence;
 - relentless focus on the needs and capabilities of every student through good teaching and teacher capacity building.

2. Introduction

The Australian Education Bill 2012 will frame the delivery of school education into the foreseeable future.

Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Bill and provide a Catholic school system perspective from Western Sydney – one of the fastest growing areas of school education in Australia.

Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP is the Bishop of Parramatta and guides CEDP in the education and formation of students. Bishop Fisher is also the Sitting Chair of the NSW Catholic Education Commission.

The Catholic system of schools in Parramatta comprises 22 secondary schools incorporating two Trade Training Centres, 55 primary schools and four Catholic Early Learning Centres with over 43,000 students and 4,500 teachers. The cultural diversity of our schools in Western Sydney is unmatched by any school system in the country. As a system of schools, we cater for the diversity of learning need through a relentless focus on building the capacity of teachers and school leadership.

It is in the areas of diversity and capacity building that this submission is focused. This submission represents the views of Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta and does not purport to represent the position of the Catholic systems or schools in other dioceses.

3. Assumptions of the Bill

The first assumption is that the use of business competitive practices and language to describe a human relationship practice such as education, will help students to learn. The language of the Bill is steeped in the rhetoric of corporate managerialism and business competitiveness that was part of the unhelpful rhetoric of the 'school improvement' agenda of the Blair (UK) and Bush (US) governments of the 1990s and 2000s.

The language and intent of the Bill:

- takes a narrow focus on high-stakes test scores to measure 'school performance' and to determine ongoing funding based only on NAPLAN scores (Gonski et al, p. 157)
- attempts to drive 'achievement' through competition (Part 1 Lines 15-19)
- liberally uses business capital terms such as 'workforce', 'economy', 'productivity' (Preamble Line 5), 'performance' (Preamble Line 8), 'school improvement' (Part 2 Line 14), 'reform' (Part 2 Clause 7 heading), and 'deliver teaching' (Part 2 Line 24)
- has a 2025 focus on a competitive global ranking of schools (Part 1 Lines 15-16).

This rhetoric confuses the Bill's otherwise laudable emphasis on schooling practices that do make significant difference to student learning such as catering for diverse need and building the capacity of teachers and school leadership. The language assumes that schools need to be 'reformed' and 'improved' rather than *build on* existing practice and *transform* (which change both form and substance or both process and outcomes) and *build capacity*.

Professor Andy Hargreaves (2012), a highly regarded educational expert who has expanded the understanding of educational leadership and what works in schools through his extensive research on teachers and education systems around the world, warns against the increasing prevalence of a 'business capital' approach to education:

'...when we begin to move the whole profession of education to serve the short-term interests of business capital, it comes at an immense price and carries dangerous assumptions about the nature of the teacher...'

CEDP does not support the use of business language in an Education Bill that encourages competition between or within schools as it is not supported by research.

The second assumption underlying the Bill is that competition can buy and produce equity. By linking funding only to outcomes (measured only by NAPLAN results, Gonski et al, p. 156) and neglecting to fund inputs (building the capacity of teachers and school leadership), there is the potential to encourage a results-only focused school sector that neglects the importance of human growth and happiness. These are consistently identified by successful school systems (e.g. Finland) as significant factors in student learning success.

The nature of a competitive approach to education (Prime Minister Gillard described education as a 'race' in the Second Reading of the Bill to Parliament) ensures that some students will be 'winners' and some will be 'losers' and thereby entrenching 'disadvantage' in the fabric of the Bill. This is fundamentally at odds with a Bill Preamble that states...

'All students in all schools are entitled to an excellent education, allowing each student to reach his or her full potential so that he or she can succeed and contribute fully...'
(Preamble Lines 6-8).

Being ranked in the top five countries in the world by 2025 should not be a goal of the Australian Education Bill (Part 1 Lines 15-16) as it is aspirational and may encourage educational practices that do not develop the whole person.

Competition does not drive equity in education – building each teacher's and child's capacity to learn does.

The third assumption is that inputs into human practices will equal outputs i.e. for a certain level of 'Reference School' funding (Gonski et al, p. 157), 'school and student performance' (Part 2 Clause 8 Lines 4 and 5) will reach 'benchmarks'.

The Pareto Principle, as an observation of human activity, shows that this is clearly not the case.

Humans are diverse by nature and the principle observes that most things in life (input, effort, reward, results, output) are not distributed evenly – some will contribute more than others. The principle is generally quoted as an 80-20 breakdown. For example:

- 20% of a population will hold 80% of the wealth
- 20% of a population will commit 80% of the crime
- 20% of factors influencing student life success come from school while 80% are social and personal and outside the school's control
- 20% of schools (actually 16%) meet the 80% Gonski et al benchmark for a 'Reference School' (p. 158).

The work of Gonski et al (p. 157) fits the general observation – schools with 20% of students in the lowest 2 Bands of NAPLAN (reading, numeracy) over 3 years represent 80% (actually 84%) of all schools. The assumption made by Gonski et al is that the provision of a standard input amount of funding per student (primary \$8,000 and secondary \$10,500) will enable a benchmarked standard of outcomes (outputs) for all students. Even allowing for the loading amounts based on

- disability
- Indigeneity
- low SES
- NESB
- school size and location

will not necessarily change the output and Gonski et al recognise this... 'there are students who do not meet benchmarks, nor are they included in any of the loading categories' (p. 168).

There is no evidence provided that this funding model is substantially different or fairer or likely to achieve any different results than the current model.

The diversity of student populations is complex and highly trained quality teachers and school leadership are best placed to determine learning need.

4. Principles

CEDP supports the development of policy to implement the Bill however it must be recognised that education policy effects take time:

'Policies...are useful, but blunt instruments. Under the best of circumstances, they can influence the allocation of resources, the structure of schooling, and the content of practice; but those changes take time and often have unexpected effects'
(Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988)

CEDP understands that there are current policies and national projects in place to implement the Bill (Part 2 Clause 7):

- Quality teaching – Australian Performance and Development Framework and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- Quality learning – Australian Curriculum
- Empowered School Leadership – Empowering Local Schools
- Transparency and accountability – National Partnerships and MySchool website
- Data – NAPLAN
- Meeting student need – nationally agreed definitions of 'disability'

CEDP understands that there is further policy and project implementation work to be done across each of these areas. In developing these, CEDP advocates the use of evidence-based policymaking where policy development is based on evidence showing the likelihood of success. Significant work should be undertaken to collect Australian data (especially in relation to 'disadvantage') to support better policy development and implementation. This should include:

- Evidence for practice (informational) – research evidence based on more than just consultancy (e.g. Grattan Institute) or OECD reports. Evidence needs to include academic research related to policy trajectory analysis
- Evidence in practice (transformational) – experience of practice integrated with research
- Evidence of practice (formational) – user-reported evidence of the changes resulting from inputs (adapted from Todd, 2008).

CEDP believes that the principles outlined in the Preamble which underpin policy related to the Bill should recognise:

- That every child has the capacity to learn
- The right of every child to an opportunity to learn
- The right of every child to have a good teacher to help them learn
- That children have a diversity of learning needs
- The right of every parent to choose the type of education they desire for their child e.g. religious, secular, other. Any new funding model must enable students from a range of backgrounds to access our schools.
- That teachers must be valued as professionals to make good pedagogical decisions
- That schools are best placed to flexibly respond to local learning needs
- That systems and schools must have funding certainty over the longer term
- That school systems are an interdependent supportive network of schools
- That broad-based quality evidence must be used to inform, transform and form policy development and implementation
- That policy success should not only be measured by things that are easy to measure – activity data collected should be broad-based and longitudinal.

CEDP strives to achieve alignment and coherence between the work of schools and the central office. The Bill refers to an 'individual school entitlement' approach which may reduce the role of the central office to that of administrative support only. CEDP, as an enterprise system is only able to achieve a relentless focus on what works well in schools in relation to student learning through interdependence achieved through mutual support. This involves a much stronger central office role in building the capacity of school leadership and teachers than purely administrative support.

Outside of our control is the alignment and coherence of Federal and State policy development which impacts on our system of schools and the non-government sector generally.

Greater coherence and alignment and bipartisan support for policy implementation would ensure:

- the achievement of the long-term goals of the Bill regardless of the government of the day
- a coherent vision of achievement between the tiers of government
- the ability of CEDP to meet requirements and respond to local need
- the ability of CEDP to plan for the longer term.

5. Data

Gonski et al (2011) decries and outlines the lack of available data on which to base the Funding for Schooling report –

'...in practice...data are either currently not available at all or not available on a nationally consistent basis...and reliable performance measures would need to be developed...' (p. 157)

We believe that evidence-based decision-making is fundamental to providing good policy development and so we support every effort being made to develop nationally agreed standards for:

- identifying 'disability' (Gonski et al, p. 167)
- determining the effect on learning of Low SES, NESB and Indigeneity (Gonski et al, p. 167)
- measuring attendance, retention and completion, and post-school destinations (Gonski et al, p. 157)
- collecting higher quality data (Part 2 Clause 7 Paragraph 5).

The timely availability and quality (validity and reliability) of data is important to consider when developing, gathering and reporting data sets – both for system planning and pedagogic purposes. Past government project data collection (e.g. National Partnerships in Teacher Quality, Low SES and Literacy/Numeracy) has not been easy to respond to, nor very helpful to the sector, due to:

- cumbersome data collection techniques – asking complex questions at short notice
- unreasonable timelines to gather local data
- constantly changing reporting templates
- simplistic data collection methods e.g. numbers of participants, anecdotal opinion
- NAPLAN data not being available immediately to support teaching and learning decisions – it is a diagnostic test but results are not available until six months after.

CEDP welcomes the movement of the NAPLAN tests to an online environment by 2016 for more immediate feedback to parents, teachers and students. If they became available, we may further support the development of online diagnostic tests that are open, online and adaptive to student responses. These would allow parents to work with their children at home as a support for school learning.

CEDP also welcomes and supports the development of broader-based tools to provide holistic evidence about school success.

6. Teacher Quality and Standards

The terms 'quality', 'excellent education', 'benchmarks' and 'standards' are used throughout the Bill without being defined. There seems to be an assumed understanding of the meaning of these terms in relation to building the capacity of teachers and school leadership for the improvement of student learning.

Richard Elmore (2008), a long-term education researcher into what is effective in promoting student learning on a large scale, talks about the 'instructional core' of teaching and that:

'...there are only three ways to improve student learning at scale:

- 1) Raise the level of content that students are taught*
- 2) Increase the teachers' skill and knowledge that they bring to teaching of that content*
- 3) Increase the level of students' active learning (engagement) of the content...'*

When we talk about quality teachers providing excellent education we often focus on the characteristics (professional standards) of the teachers themselves. While these are important, the focus must be on the active process of teaching – what happens in the instructional core and how it can be improved. Elmore (2008) has shown that focusing only on standards (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, the Australian Performance and Development Framework for Teachers and The Australian Professional Standard for Principals) is not enough to 'improve student learning at scale'.

Using a standards-only approach to teacher quality introduces a QA (Quality Assurance) standard to the profession in the same way that a QA standard exists for project management, car making or ball-bearings.

CEDP welcomes the use of professional standards as one part of assuring teacher quality while recognising that, on their own, they will not necessarily guarantee teacher quality nor improve student learning. CEDP believes that building teacher and school leadership capacity in the distinctly human practice of education through engagement with the instructional core will be most effective.

The Bill should support the standards but go further to support all aspects of Elmore's model shown.

7. School Funding

CEDP understands that the Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report (Gonski et al, 2011) will be used as a basis for a model of 'Reference School Resource' funding with subsequent loadings based on need or disadvantage (Part 2 Clause 9). The report also identifies that the loadings are...

'...not a guarantee that such schools will achieve those (educational) outcomes as this depends also on the effectiveness with which those resources are deployed...' (p. 166)

Money is not the only determinant of educational success. Education in the United States has experienced a 270% increase in expenditure in real terms over the past 12 years with negative performance occurring on all indicators (BY – The Next West Wing, November 1, 2012). The Australian Catholic University's Executive Director of the Public Policy Institute, Professor Scott Prasser (2013) points out that, to be most effective, the funding must be targeted toward meeting need and based on sound evidence (Prasser, AFR, 11/2/13, p. 26) and Gonski et al identifies that systems are best placed to work with schools to achieve this (p. 161, 164).

The funding position of Catholic education is constant. We support additional government funding for Catholic schools in order to close the funding gap between Catholic schools and government schools. This includes clarity around capital funding for meeting the growing educational needs of Western Sydney in terms of new school development and the maintenance of existing buildings.

If government funding to Catholic schools is frozen, or fails to keep pace with funding to government schools, Catholic schools will be forced to increase parent fees. Any fee increase will put pressure on many Catholic families, who may consider moving their children to government schools. Not only does this put more pressure on government schools but it also costs taxpayers more.

CEDP urgently needs clarity around the following:

Length of funding cycle

- Funding certainty for systems and schools is required over longer periods (10 years) rather than the current short-term cycles (four years). Short-term business or electoral cycles prohibit longer term planning especially related to demographic shifts in fast-growing areas like Western Sydney.

Continuation of the existing 'system block funding'

- CEDP operates as a system of Catholic schools and continuation of block funding is critical to respond flexibly to local need. Funding the system as an enterprise allows support for school communities who may not otherwise be able to meet the needs of their learners. This builds a contemporary organisation working interdependently to promote student learning, cater for diversity and build capacity. It allows certainty for schools to minister to local need while the central office removes the administrative burden from schools.

A family's capacity to pay

- A family's capacity to pay school fees should not be taken for granted. We do not support Recommendation 17 of Gonski et al, p. 175 advocating the reduction of the Reference School Resource funding amount to non-government schools of 10%.

Funding indexation (supplementation)

- Any new funding model must reflect economic reality and needs to break the direct link between the indexation of federal funding to increases in state education expenditure.

Administrative burden

- Government funding should not have onerous terms and conditions attached which will significantly increase the administrative burden on teachers and system staff. Current administrative demands of National Partnership and AITSL projects are numerous and onerous on system administration staff and have not been properly funded by the Partnerships. Any additional administrative requirements must be funded adequately.

Socio-economic status (SES) 2011 ratings

- The new model of SES ratings needs to be fully detailed and modeled to show what changes it will mean for funding and equity considerations

Delays in new funding model

- If it becomes necessary to delay the introduction of the new funding model from January 1 2014, we may support this if interim funding were adequately indexed in real terms to the January 1 2013 funding levels.

8. Conclusion

To be reflective of the research evidence, the Australian Education Bill must include drivers for the transformation of schooling that are not tool or funding driven. They are a:

- deeper understanding of the diverse nature of people and how they learn;
- global view that informs local teaching and learning;
- strong foundation of theory and evidence;
- relentless focus on the needs and capabilities of every student through good teaching and teacher capacity building.

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