



**Submission to the  
Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and  
Public Administration**

**INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND  
COST SHIFTING**

**from**

**THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION**

**Authorised by:**

**Denis Fitzgerald**  
*Federal President*

**Robert Durbridge**  
*Federal Secretary*

**Australian Education Union  
120 Clarendon Street  
Southbank Vic 3006**

**Telephone : 03 9693 1800  
Fax : 03 9693 1805  
E-mail : [aeu@aeufederal.org.au](mailto:aeu@aeufederal.org.au)**

## **AEU SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COST SHIFTING**

The Australian Education Union (AEU), representing 155,000 members from all parts and communities of Australia is pleased to make the following submission to your Inquiry.

We will focus on the fifth of the Terms of Reference:

“The scope for achieving a rationalisation of roles and responsibilities between the levels of government, better use of resources and better quality services to local communities.”

We also base our contribution informed in part by media comments which were made at the time of the initial announcement of the Inquiry which suggested that local government might well consider being given responsibility for the conduct of education within their respective communities.

The AEU cautions strongly against the shift of responsibility for education to local government. It would jeopardise the quality of systematic provision of education, worsen levels of educational inequality and provide further opportunity for state, territory and federal governments to unreasonably shift costs and responsibility to local government.

The AEU welcomes the positive role that some local government authorities and individuals play in support of education within their areas. However, for local government to accept or seek an enhanced responsibility for education provision would be full of risk. The history of quality education provision in Australia has been based on the principle of establishing and maintaining systems of education which derive their resource base from a central source and have these resources distributed in such a way as to allow all children access to quality provision. This has meant that children and communities of modest means should not be held back by their isolation, socioeconomic status or background.

Experience overseas, in countries such as the United States, indicates that when education funding and responsibility is held primarily at the local level there is a high degree of variegation of educational resourcing and opportunity. Wealthier communities have far better funding for the education of their children. State and territory governments there can and do blame local authorities for the under-resourcing and consequent underperformance of local schools. Isolated and disadvantaged communities are those that thereby suffer the most under such a division of governmental responsibilities.

This is not to suggest that there is not existing and troubling inequality and inequity in education in Australia. Such inequality has indeed been exacerbated by Federal Government policies which have hugely favoured private schooling, by which 70% of Federal schools funding has been directed to the 30% of students in private schools. This has generally advantaged the already more privileged and has led to funding being skewed to urban, east-coast private schools.

Federal government funding is now the fourth largest line item in the Federal Budget and nearly \$5 billion annually will be directed from Canberra to private schools. Local government might well be interested in such policies which significantly harm the educational opportunity and futures of children within their areas.

It may be further observed that consideration of local government authorities taking on education as a responsibility might well be especially badly timed as state, territory and federal governments engage in intensified projects of cost-shifting. Given that the Federal government now claims, for example, that they have a particular responsibility for funding private education Federal authorities might welcome the opportunity of "offloading" the task of resourcing and supporting public education.

It is the duty of organisations such as the AEU to ensure that federal, state and territory governments accept their responsibility to properly fund and support the 2.25 million children in Australia who rely on public education to build their lives and futures. It is also our responsibility to caution against any re-arrangement of responsibilities which might unfairly work against the interests of many of these children.