

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Council on Education and Employment inquiry into the Australian Education Bill 2012.

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**DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT SOUTH
AUSTRALIA**

**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND
EMPLOYMENT**

INQUIRY INTO THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION BILL 2012

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1. Introduction and summary

The Department for Education and Child Development South Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives inquiry into the Australian Education Bill 2012.

South Australia supports the five reform directions for school improvement in the National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI) that underpin the Australian Education Bill 2012:

- Quality teaching;
- Quality learning;
- Empowered school leadership;
- Transparency and accountability; and
- Meeting student need.

South Australia agrees that these reform directions are important to ensure the success of our children and young people as individuals, citizens and contributors to the economy.

South Australia is pursuing a broad child development agenda as we have a firm belief in the critical role of the early years:

To flourish in their lives as new global citizens, children of the 21st Century need healthy, safe, connected and inclusive communities; seamless and responsive social services; opportunities to create and be influenced by the creative arts and culture; and educational and employment opportunities that meet their diverse needs. Long term sustainable economic and cultural growth is achieved through nurturing the next generation.¹

We also acknowledge the power of family and community engagement in a child's learning:

¹ *Every chance for every child: Giving South Australian children a good head start:* Government of South Australia, 2012.

As parents, we all have a critical role to play as partners in the education of our children. The broader community, including employers, the media and volunteers can also contribute to help strengthen a society that values quality education.²

Our schools and their communities have experience in using resources flexibly and selecting programs that best meet the needs of their learners.

The global funding approach outlined in the Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) and reiterated by the Australian Government in October 2012 lends itself to increased flexibility and requires an accountability regime at the outcome level to be effective. This funding approach implies much greater freedom and local management decisions on the mix of inputs required in each individual school.

South Australia is keen to retain this flexibility and looks forward to coming to agreement with the Australian Government on a coordinated ambitious reform program.

2. Reform agenda for public education in South Australia

The Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) South Australia was formed in October 2011. The new department brought together care, education, child protection and child and maternal health services to provide comprehensive and unified support for our state's children and young people.

The purpose of the DECD is outlined in the core document *Brighter Futures*:

Children and young people are at the centre of all that we do. We will work together to ensure positive outcomes for all young South Australians.

The establishment of the Department for Education and Child Development provides South Australia with the opportunity to fundamentally reform the way that services are designed and delivered to children, young people and families across the State. By improving the way we work across disciplines and with communities, we will strive for:

- *all children and their life chances to be at the centre of policy-making;*

² Minister's foreword in *Numeracy + Literacy: improving foundational skills for learning and life*, DECD 2012

- *families and carers to access easily the range and intensity of services they need for the health, development, education and safety of their children;*
- *communities to be engaged as partners to generate improved outcomes for children and young people so that they are given every chance to achieve their potential.*³

In 2012 the South Australian State Government strengthened its commitment to the importance of early childhood by announcing the *Every Chance for Every Child* (EC4EC) priority. EC4EC is one of seven strategic priorities that help to focus efforts and drive the work of government in respect to budgets, policy making and the legislative agenda.

The aim of *Every Chance for Every Child* (EC4EC) is to create a place where all children are safe, healthy and happy, and where they get the best chance to learn and become confident and successful adults. With this in mind, greater focus is being placed on the development of every child and their family from their earliest days.

Through EC4EC children and families will be engaged and consulted about the way services are delivered to ensure that their needs, aspirations, concerns and ideas form the very foundation of new models for education, care and child protection.

EC4EC is focussed on four evidence based outcome areas from pre-birth to age five years that will directly support positive outcomes for children and their families. The four evidence based priority outcomes for EC4EC are:

1. Children are born healthy - giving babies the best start in life by engaging parents in antenatal care early in pregnancy.
2. Confident and engaged parents and families – supporting parents and family networks to raise healthy and happy children.
3. Healthy child development and wellbeing – ensuring children are developing well and receive the support they need by creating conditions in which families and children can thrive.
4. Quality early learning – children and families accessing quality early learning opportunities in the years before formal schooling.

³ http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/aboutdept/files/links/Directions_for_the_new_dep.pdf

Through initiatives such as *Brighter Futures* and *Every Chance for Every Child* the South Australian Government is deeply committed to working in and for communities. We are striving to strengthen engagement at local level and co-produce services and programs that are demonstrated to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

In part, these new commitments have their origin in a long tradition of devolved authority in public education in South Australia.

South Australian schools have been encouraged to take on greater decision making since the 1970s. In the Review of Funding for Schooling David Gonski and his committee observed that South Australia is one of the two most 'decentralised systems'.⁴

Greater autonomy in resource allocation has come about through the *South Australian Education Staff (Government Preschools and Schools) Arbitrated Enterprise Bargaining Award 2010* which included individual workload protection for teachers. This Award paved the way for schools to be funded via a Student Centred Funding Model.

Our funding model for schools has four parts:

1. Student centred funding which covers core teaching, learning, leadership, teaching support and administration;
2. Other funding which provides the resources required to support students with special needs; resources for specific projects and utilities and maintenance. This component includes funding for students with disabilities, low SES, Aboriginal education and English as a Second Language;
3. School based Preschool; and
4. Supplementation (special circumstances).⁵

Our government school principals now have the freedom to recruit staff to suit their school's circumstances. In 2011 DECD implemented a new recruitment and selection policy that provides principals with increased autonomy in vacancy management and staff appointment processes.

⁴ *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report* (Page 44)

⁵ http://www.leadersdesktop.sa.edu.au/resource/files/links/School_RES_Notes_2013_24_1.pdf

Our schools and their communities have vast experience in using resources flexibly and selecting programs that best meet the needs of their learners.

3. Key issues for the Department in relation to the national school reform agenda as set out in the Australian Education Bill 2012

DECD is anticipating that the new legislation and supporting agreements with the Australian Government for schooling will provide public education in South Australia with maximum flexibility to pursue reforms that have been proven to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

We support the development of high level nationally agreed reform directions for Australian schooling and acknowledge the leadership and past successful collaborations with the Australian Government in this regard.

Since 2009 we have found the structures of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations and the National Education Agreement to be a strong and acceptable foundation for progressing agreed national reform. These national agreements have provided our department with welcome flexibility to pursue the outcomes agreed by COAG in 2008 and to blend these with the defined reform agenda of the state government.

South Australia has entered each National Partnership Agreement (NPA) for schooling and early childhood education offered by the Australian Government. Several of these NPAs have provided considerable flexibility and allowed us to build on our strengths and tradition of innovation. *Empowering Local Schools* has encouraged our schools to expand their already considerable local authority. The Youth Connections program in the NPA on *Youth Attainment and Transitions* gave us the ability to reach out to our most severely disengaged young people with greater effect by linking it with our own internationally recognised *Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs)*.

We have appreciated this flexibility to undertake innovative reform without the constraint of undue financial risk and possible financial penalty.

South Australia supports the following core elements/reform directions for school improvement in the National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI) that underpins the Australian Education Bill 2012:

- Quality teaching
- Quality learning
- Empowered school leadership
- Transparency and accountability
- Meeting student need.

These reform directions are consistent with the requirements for quality education that our own experience backed by international evidence shows us are essential for the success of our children and young people as individuals, citizens and contributors to the economy.

The South Australian Government has made long term investments in education and care for the early years because we know that these years play a critical role in later educational success of young people. DECD is committed to family and community engagement in a child's learning and we are encouraged that Line 23 of the Preamble of the Bill makes reference to '*partnerships across the broader community*'.

Drawing on our own local experience, we believe that the task of achieving the aspirations of the Australian Education Bill 2012 and the National Plan for School Improvement will require considerable focused attention on quality early childhood programs and community engagement.

We note that the Minister for School Education the Honourable Peter Garrett AM MP has committed to moving amendments to the *Australian Education Bill 2012* during 2013. We support a finalised Act that retains the authority of our government to plan for, resource and deliver school education.

DECD is open to development of a new agreement that covers all sectors and has the next level of detail about the reform directions that underpin the Australian Education Bill.

We have valued the 'outcomes' approach to educational reform introduced by COAG in 2008 over the Schools Specific Purpose Payment. On this basis, South Australia supports flexibility for our state to decide on and administer programs that contribute towards achieving the aspirations of the Australian Education Bill 2012. South Australia agrees with observations by David Gonski and others that decades of programs targeted at disadvantaged groups have not resulted in improved outcomes

in all cases. We want to be able to invest in programs that have a proven record of success for our students in our own community contexts.

DECD can see great opportunity for alignment of South Australian reform priorities and Commonwealth reforms (including the NPSI); particularly measures for improved teacher quality, increased local autonomy and improved performance management.

DECD is already using a funding model for schools that is similar to the global funding approach recommended by Gonski and supported by the Australian Government, where every student is provided with base funding plus loadings for need.

The global funding approach foreshadowed by the Australian Government lends itself to increased flexibility and requires an accountability regime at the outcome level to be effective. This funding approach implies much greater freedom and local management decisions on the mix of inputs required in each individual school. For instance we know that in some South Australian public schools the provision of extra support for new teachers will be a priority and they will be keen to secure extra support for this purpose. In other schools staff and parents will recognise that smaller class sizes across the school lead to better results for children and wish to direct their investments accordingly. These significant input decisions are best made locally by those who know the particular needs of their children and young people.

4. Specific comments in relation to the contents of the Australian Education Bill 2012

Preamble: Lines 26-30

This clause could also acknowledge the role of state governments in setting strategic directions, making resourcing decisions, participating in regulatory requirements and coming to agreement with our schools about their performance as well as delivering educational services.

DECD proposes that this clause is expanded as follows:

As Australia's schools are diverse, the Australian Government will recognise the role of the Governments of the State and Territories, non-government educational

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*authorities, other partners and schools in **setting the strategic direction, resourcing, delivering and ensuring quality outcomes** for school education, and work with them to support and lift the performance of schools and school students.*

The *Preamble* should recognise the need for a financially sustainable approach to the implementation of school funding reforms.

Part 2 – Improving the performance of schools and school students:

6 Developing a national plan

Sub clause (c) *Provide opportunities for school students to develop capabilities to engage with Asia* may be better situated under *Section 7 Quality learning*.

5. Conclusion

South Australia views the Australian Government's plans in relation to school education as an excellent opportunity to collaborate further on agreed reforms that can be pursued at local level. We see opportunities within this collaborative environment to blend state and national priorities and look forward to maintaining flexibility over resourcing in order to assist all children and young people in this state to achieve their potential.