

**EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING**

**SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING**

**Outcome:** 1

**Output Group:** 1.1 – Funding for schools

**DEST Question No. E718\_04**

Senator Carr asked on 18 February 2004, EWRE Hansard page 117.

**Question:**

The minister also says : *Every* child in a Catholic or independent school receives less public funding than they would in a public state school. Have you done an analysis of every school?

**Answer:**

*Funding for schools*

Senator Vanstone took this question on notice on behalf of Minister Nelson. As a result, DEST is unable to provide a response to this question.

(QON E718 \_04 – RELEVANT TRANSCRIPT)

**Senator CARR**—The minister also says:

*Every child in a Catholic or independent school receives less public funding than they would in a public state school.  
Have you done an analysis of every school?*

**Mr Evans**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—Every school?

**Mr Evans**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—Can we have a look at that?

**Mr Evans**—I would need to check whether it was to be made available at this time.

**Senator CARR**—Why is that?

**Mr Evans**—That document has not been on the public record as of yet.

**Senator CARR**—What is the problem? The minister has made the statement:

*Every child in a Catholic or independent school receives less public funding than they would in a public state school.*

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I am wondering what the analysis for that statement is.

**Senator Vanstone**—The document may have been prepared in the course of giving advice to the minister, in which case it would be for the minister to decide.

**Ms Paul**—The aggregate result of course is shown in the bar graph.

**Senator CARR**—I appreciate that. I see the bar graph. But I would like the evidence that the department is using to justify the statement that ‘every school’—

**Senator Vanstone**—That is a question I will take on notice for the minister.

**Senator CARR**—I am advised that the Queensland government is asserting that there are non-government schools in that state that receive more from public sources than comparable government schools.

**Dr Harmer**—I think this was the assertion made at the ministerial meeting. We were interested in that because it does not really fit with what we know as the facts about the relative funding of the private sector versus the state school system. We asked Queensland to provide us with the information on that because we were very interested if they had information. I am afraid that, up until now, they have not been able to give us any information.

**Mr Evans**—We have asked them on several occasions. We have asked them in writing to provide the basis of the claims that their minister has made in MCEETYA meetings, and nothing has been forthcoming.

**Senator Vanstone**—It does seem appropriate that, if the New South Wales government—of which you are not a member and no-one here appears to be a member—wants to make an assertion and you want it tested, you should get a colleague to test it in the New South Wales Parliament. I make the point that it is not the job

of Commonwealth officers to be accessed through the estimates committee to do work in effect to confirm or

otherwise allegations made by the New South Wales government.

**Senator CARR**—That is fine. I actually referred to Queensland.

**Senator Vanstone**—Well Queensland!

**Senator CARR**—An assertion had been made by officers here that they have done checks on every school.

I am challenging that assertion based on the information that has been provided by a state government.

**Senator Vanstone**—You have asked if you can have the table, and the question has been taken on notice. Then you have asked quite specifically about an allegation made in Queensland. I am saying that, if you want

that tested, test it in Queensland through some colleagues there.

**Senator CARR**—That is terrific, Minister.

**Senator Vanstone**—I thought it was friendly.

**Senator CARR**—I have asked the officers if they are familiar with it, and the secretary has confirmed that he is aware of it and he has asked for further particulars from the Queensland government.

**Mr Evans**—We raised it in writing with Queensland in November. We raised it again at a meeting of Commonwealth and state officials I believe in December. I raised it again as recently as last week.

**Ms Paul**—We thought it was odd because on the face of it the highest comparative rate is 70 per cent of AGSRC, as you know, and the lowest rate is 13 per cent. We thought it was odd and would really like to know

if there is an example. But so far, most unfortunately, we have not had advice of that.

**Senator CARR**—How do you know how much is spent in each government school? How does a Commonwealth officer know that?

**Mr Evans**—The calculation that is included in one of the tables in the minister's press release uses state provided average government school recurrent cost both primary and secondary and we know for each of the

schools in the state their enrolments both primary and secondary or combined. We can do a calculation to determine that to a particular price base and then adjust it up to 2003 prices. So it is an average level of funding for the numbers of students that are going to that school.

**Senator CARR**—That is what I thought you would say. It was in fact an average. Your calculations are based on averages; they are not calculated on the basis of how much money is actually spent.

**Mr Evans**—The average AGSRC figure is an amount that is actually spent.

**Senator CARR**—Yes, but you do not know how much you spent at Moonee Ponds Central in Victoria, do you?

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**Mr Evans**—I have not seen a list by the education department to tell me that.

**Senator CARR**—No, you have not. But you have made a calculation and you have said to me that you can tell how much money is spent on every school in this country. You cannot provide that information at all.

**Mr Evans**—If it goes up in one school then it has to go down in another.

**Senator CARR**—That is an average figure. You do not know how much is spent in every school. You know how much is spent on average.

**Mr Evans**—I think the point that is being made here is that, when you look at the figures on the left-hand side of the page, you see that they are all figures below \$4 million or \$5 million while the figures on the righthand

side are all significantly higher for schools with similar enrolment sizes. That is the take-out from that particular table.

**Senator CARR**—Is it not the case that schools are funded on all sorts of different bases, even within the state systems? Within the public education system each school receives different amounts based on enrolments, teachers, special needs, facilities and particular programs?

**Mr Evans**—Yes, there are differences. But, first of all, this is a recurrent figure; this is a figure that is provided by the state. It is using a state figure that they say is the average cost of a primary or secondary enrolment in their state.

**Senator CARR**—That is not what you said to me. You said that you—

**Mr Evans**—No, that is what I did say.

**Senator CARR**—You said that you have done a check on every school in Australia.

**Mr Evans**—No, it is not my media release.

**Senator CARR**—So it is not right.

**Mr Evans**—No—

**Senator Vanstone**—Senator, can I ask you a question? Do you have a school that indicates that the press release is incorrect?

**Senator CARR**—It is not my place here to argue the toss, but I am—

**Senator Vanstone**—With respect, you are arguing the toss.

**Senator CARR**—I am not here to argue—

**Senator Vanstone**—The press release is put out. You are attacking public servants over their calculations and yet it appears you do not have a basis for doing so. If you do, put it forward.

**Senator CARR**—This is not attacking public servants; you have got no idea what attacking public servants is like.

**Senator Vanstone**—No, in the context of your rudeness it certainly is not—I quite agree!

**Senator CARR**—This is just a friendly chat late in the evening.

**Senator Vanstone**—But the simple question is: do you have an example—

**Senator CARR**—You are not tired and emotional tonight, are you?

**Senator Vanstone**—to demonstrate that the press release is incorrect? Or are you simply wasting—

**Senator CARR**—I have got a statement here that the minister—

**Senator Vanstone**—Excuse me. Are you simply wasting a large amount of time at Commonwealth expense with all these people sitting here watching you go through some calculations when you do not have a school to demonstrate that it is wrong? If you have it, come up with it.

**Senator CARR**—Minister, you can tell me this. The minister's press release said: Every child in a Catholic or independent school receives less public funding than if they were at a state school. That is a statement that the minister has made. I am asking the officers how is it possibly justified?

**Senator Vanstone**—The adviser can tell you how that has been put together. You do not seem satisfied with that and you seem to be inferring consistently that you have a school that demonstrates that is incorrect.

**Senator CARR**—If you actually listened to what was going on here, you would not be wasting your breath.

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**Senator Vanstone**—I have been listening; I am suggesting that you are wasting everybody's time.

**Senator CARR**—You have taken on notice my request to have the information provided that supports your modelling.

**Senator Vanstone**—Yes, I have taken it on notice and I have said that I will refer it to the minister.