

**Submission**

to

**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS,  
SMALL BUSINESS AND EDUCATION  
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

regarding

**States Grants  
(Primary and Secondary Education  
Assistance) Bill 2000**

from

**THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN  
SCHOOLS**

**2 August 2000**

The Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations  
Small Business and Education Legislation Committee  
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## **SUBMISSION REGARDING STATES GRANTS (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ASSISTANCE) BILL 2000**

### **Introduction**

The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) is a national association of some 236 Protestant Christian schools responsible for the education of more than 60,000 students. These schools are in all Australian States and Territories.

AACS welcomes the opportunity to put its views relating to the above Bill before this Senate Committee.

Schools represented by AACS are both systemic and non-systemic. There are three systems: one responsible for all five Christian schools in the Northern Territory, the Swan Christian School System has six schools in WA, and the Victorian Christian School System has 11 systemic schools. All other members of AACS are independent, non-systemic schools. While many schools are primary only, most enrol both primary and secondary students. Less than ten schools are exclusively secondary.

All but one member school are co-educational. Forty per cent of the member schools are in regional, rural or remote Australia. Five schools are specifically for indigenous students. The Christian schools represented by AACS predominantly serve working and middle class Australian families in urban and rural communities.

## General Comments on the Bill

The AACS submission will be focussed on those aspects of the Bill that deal with funding provisions for the non-Government sector. In particular, this submission will address the views of AACS as it effects member independent systemic and non-systemic schools as distinct from Catholic school systems.

There are two major provisions in the Bill that this submission will address. The first relates to the changed SES General Recurrent Grants funding for non-Government schools, while the second addresses the new arrangements and accountability requirements for Targeted Programmes.

## General Recurrent Grants

Currently, the Educational Resources Index (**ERI**) is used to determine need in the non-Government sector. The ERI Review conducted by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) demonstrated that the ERI was not transparent, did not deliver equity nor does it provide for flexible review for schools serving communities where other neighbourhood, non-Government schools attract much higher levels of funding.

The Socio-economic Status (**SES**) Simulation Project was conducted throughout the non-Government sector in an attempt to measure the capacity of non-Government school communities to support their schools of choice. The SES model is transparent and equitable. It demonstrates clearly which communities are the neediest and, therefore, justly attract the highest level of Commonwealth Government funding support.

**AACS unequivocally supports the introduction of the SES-based funding mechanism for General Recurrent Grants to non-Government schools.**

Our Association recognises the financial implications for the Commonwealth regarding SES General Recurrent Grants. It, therefore, **supports the phase in** of the new General Recurrent Grants over the next quadrennium, 2001 - 2004.

Similarly, AACS recognises the financial arrangements made by member schools whose SES would entitle them to less funding. These schools would be severely disadvantaged in the marketplace if their funding was decreased. Therefore, AACS supports the provisions in the Bill to **funding maintain these schools** in real terms.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the proposed legislation is the transparent linkage that will be established between General Recurrent Grants from the Commonwealth and Average Government School Recurrent Costs (**AGSRC**). Under the ERI system, this relationship only existed through supplementation. In the Bill and the attached Schedules, a clear percentage (%) relationship is

established between the funding received by non-Government schools and the AGSRC.

AACS notes and supports the ongoing arrangement for the Commonwealth to provide **supplementation** on an annual basis reflecting movements in the AGSRC some 18 months previously.

The Bill also makes welcome provision for **distance education** funding to non-Government schools. This funding is at the base level (13.7%) of the AGSRC for General Recurrent Grants. The requirements set out in Section 4 (3) of the Bill adequately safeguard distance education provision in the non-Government sector.

While making formal provision for the recognition of existing non-Government schools systems, the Bill does not make provision for the formal recognition of new non-Government **school systems**. Because non Catholic system authorities will be funded on the aggregate SES scores of their member schools, there is no need to make formal arrangements regarding systemic recognition. AACS supports the provision in the Bill (Sections 9 and 10) for the identification of **Approved Authorities or Nominated Authorities** for the purposes of the (Act).

AACS welcomes the provision of transitional emergency assistance for existing schools and establishment assistance for new non-Government schools.

### Targeted Programmes

The Bill provides for a restructured arrangement for the delivery of Targeted Programmes within the non-Government sector. This restructuring, while allowing for greater flexibility, places additional emphasis on accountability.

The new broadbanded **Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes Programme** is welcomed. Previously, there was demarcation in the funding provisions for Literacy and Numeracy and Special Education. This demarcation precluded education authorities from establishing funding priorities within their sector. It also inhibited the concentration of available resources on the most disadvantaged students and disadvantaged school communities. The new structure will allow for greater flexibility in directing funds to the most needy students.

**Special Education per capita grants** have been rationalised so as to provide for a more equitable distribution of funds to students. Previously, the size of the allocation was inversely proportional to the needs of the school determined by the ERI. Therefore, eligible students with disabilities attending Category 12 schools received no additional (per capita) funding while similar students attending Category 1, 2 and 3 schools attracted some \$2,000 additional (per capita) funding. Now that the funding arrangements have been averaged against

a constant quantum in real terms, all schools with eligible students with disabilities will receive \$522.

Also welcomed is the new broadbanded '**Languages other than English Programme**'. Encompassing previous Priority Languages funding and Community Languages funding, this new programme will result in renegotiated allocation of funds for the independent sector.

The Commonwealth has placed increasing emphasis on **accountability**, particularly for Targeted Programmes. The provisions in the Bill identifying performance measures (sub section 19 (a) and (b)) emphasise **outcomes-oriented accountability**. AACS supports the **same treatment** of Government and non-Government schools for the purposes of accountability arrangements negotiated through MCEETYA.

### **Other Provisions**

Most of the provisions in the Bill relating to Capital Grants for non-Government schools remain substantially the same.

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