The Senate

Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee

Commonwealth funding for schools

August 2004

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Membership of Committee

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Senator Guy Barnett	LP, Tasmania	
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Senator Trish Crossin	ALP, Northern Territory	
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Sub-Committee for inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

Senator Kim Carr	ALP, Victoria	Chair
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***** Senator Johnston substituted for Senator Tierney for the inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools

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Terms of Reference

The principles of the Government's schools funding package and the effect of these principles on:

(a) the capacity of all schools to meet current and future school needs and to achieve the Adelaide Declaration (1999) on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century;

(b) the role and responsibility of the Australian Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, for quality and equity in public funding for government and non-government schools across Australia and for promoting efficiency and effectiveness in the allocation of public funds for schooling, including effects on enrolment trends in the government and non-government sectors;

(c) the effectiveness of accountability arrangements for state, territory and Federal governments' funding of government and non-government schools; and

(d) the application of the framework of principles for the funding of schools that has been endorsed by state and territory governments through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

AUSTRALIAN SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

11 August 2004

Senator George Campbell
Chair
Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Campbell

The subcommittee formed to deal with the inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools has completed its majority report.

We commend this report to the full committee.

Yours sincerely

Senator Kim Carr
Subcommittee Chair

Report formally adopted by the committee on 11 August 2004 for tabling on this day.

Senator George Campbell
Chair

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1 page 17

The committee recommends that the Howard Government should accept responsibility for resolving the divisiveness its school funding decisions have generated, and that the Commonwealth should demonstrate leadership in developing a new national consensus on school funding, with a renewed focus on equity and a determination to raise the quality of education in schools that are poorly resourced to deal with under-achieving students.

Recommendation 2 page 17

The committee recommends that the Australian Government accepts its responsibility for the support of high quality public school systems as a national priority, including the endorsement of the MCEETYA principles for schools resourcing.

Recommendation 3 page 38

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth note the overwhelming evidence put before the inquiry on the flawed nature of its funding arrangements for non-government schools, including:

- failure to take into account the total resources available to a non-government school in assessing relative need for funding;
- adoption of a funding scale that has provided the largest increases in funding to non-government schools that were already operating well above the resource standards in government schools; and
- creation of instability and insecurity in the post 2008 funding for the 50 per cent of non-government schools that are in one of the two 'funding maintained' categories for the 2005-2008 quadrennium, including 60 per cent of schools in Catholic systems.

Recommendation 4 page 39

The committee recommends that the SES non-government school funding model should be linked to the economic capacity of school communities, modified to include sources of private income including fees and linked to the educational needs of each school and its students.

Recommendation 5 page 50

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, through MCEETYA, should exercise its responsibility to ensure that financial data regarding school income and expenditure, whether on an aggregated or disaggregated basis, is provided and publicly presented and reported in a standard format, using a single accounting basis and reporting period. In the case of non-government schools, this data, both

aggregated and disaggregated to the school level, should be provided to the Commonwealth in a standard format on an annual basis, and tabled in the Parliament. Provision of full financial information in this manner should be a condition for receipt of recurrent funding.

Recommendation 6 page 50

The committee recommends that accountability provisions regarding non-government schools should be strengthened to require reporting by schools on a range of matters including:

- enrolment of students with disabilities;
- enrolment of Indigenous students;
- admission and exclusion policies;
- teaching staff;
- curriculum; and
- discipline policies.

Recommendation 7 page 60

The committee recommends that, pending discussions with state and territory governments through normal MCEETYA processes, the Government should be mindful of the rights of states and territories to legislative and administrative autonomy with regard to the operation of schools. The Government should not use school funding legislation as a vehicle to impose on the states and territories policies and practices that would normally be the subject of agreement through MCEETYA.