

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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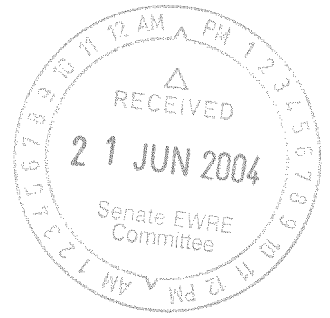
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**Submission to the
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**Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools
2004**

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools

Executive Summary

- The Association is a national peak educational organization and presently its members are Heads of 308 Independent schools in Australia educating more than 300,000 students. It welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this Senate Inquiry
- The members of this national Association have a strong interest in the quality of the education of all Australian children and pledge their support for government schools and other non-government schools
- We all want the best quality education for our children in our schools
- Stability and certainty in funding are most important for our members' schools if they are to have the ability to sustain quality in their educational provision
- If the quality of schooling is to be maintained, the funding model should be predictable, simple, transparent, flexible and equitable— with a basic entitlement for every child
- The SES Funding Arrangements are supported by an overwhelming majority of our schools
- Independent schools are an integral part of Australia's schooling landscape.
- The resourcing of our schools should be by the Australian Government, State and Territories governments, and parents and school communities in a reliable, stable and sustainable partnership
- Fostering choice and diversity has broadened and will continue to broaden the options available to parents. There is a widening of the income groups accessing independent schools. Children from all socio-economic backgrounds attend our schools
- Our schools are highly accountable, both educationally and financially, to their governing bodies, their school communities, their parents, their students, governments and regulatory bodies
- The Australian Government is the main source of public funding for students in our schools. Their continued commitment to quadrennial funding has helped in this long term planning
- It would be good to see a co-ordinated approach between the Australian Government and those of the States and Territories to ensure predictable and secure funding arrangements not only for our schools, but for all schools.

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools Submission 2004

Introduction

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools in Australia (AHISA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

The Association is a national peak educational organization and presently its members are Heads of 308 Independent schools in Australia educating more than 300,000 students. These schools are in each State and Territory in both metropolitan, regional centres and remote areas.

To be a member of AHISA, a Head must

- Be Head of a non Government, not-for-profit school that has in its own right the freedom to determine its offerings and method of operation
- Have a Governing Body that sets the policies of the school, to whom the Head reports directly and is accountable for the management of the school. In fact decision-making in our schools takes place at this level and there is far great accountability to school communities at this level than in other sectors or systems.
- Implement overall school policy with respect to the number and selection of staff, enrolment of students and budgeting
- Be the recognised channel of communication between the Governing Body and its staff on official business
- Accept the AHISA aims and practices
- Have a school that has students at least up to Year 10.

All of our schools are registered with the relevant state or territory education authority.

The members of this national Association have a strong interest in the quality of the education of all Australian children and pledge their support for government schools and other non-government schools, concerned for the education of the students in their schools. We advocate better resourcing for all schools and are concerned about the instability being created by the different approaches to funding by the various political parties. Australian Government funding is crucial to the capacity of our schools to continue to contribute to ensuring all young Australians can have access to quality schooling. We all want the best quality education for our children in our schools.

Funding Models for Schools

Stability and certainty in funding are most important for our members' schools if they are to have the ability to sustain quality in their educational provision.

Funding models for schools should be designed to meet the needs of students in our schools, finding a fair and equitable way of supporting the education of students. Funding models must recognise the substantial financial contribution

of families to the cost of the education of their children in independent schools.

If the quality of schooling is to be maintained, the funding model should be:-

Predictable – to allow for adequate financial planning and management

Simple – easy to understand, simple to administer, with low costs for schools

Transparent – reliable, transparent data to be used for assessment of need

Flexible – enabling funding level changes with changes in a school's community

Equitable– with a basic entitlement for every child.

The SES Funding Arrangements are supported by an overwhelming majority of our schools because

- They model a system of funding that centres on the interests of families and students, not schools. The SES model is far more student-focused than previous funding models
- They take into account the circumstances of the student population of a school to assess need, hence delivering greater equity for parents of independent school students **because** they are based on student and family need. In contrast funding for government schools is provided without any assessment of the financial circumstances of their school communities.
- They use objective data related to occupation, income and education through the use of student address data, rather than school-generated data. Census collection districts of 200-250 homes are used.
- The methodology is credible as a measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage. It has been used for more than twenty years by Catholic Education Commissions, Independent Schools Block Grant Authorities and Government Education Departments
- They give schools more flexibility to cater for a broader range of students, and to provide more diverse educational programmes
- They provide parents with greater choice of schools. Many parents of today give close attention to the educational options available for their children, and want to choose the right school for their child.

It is disappointing that there is uncertainty being created by proposed changes to a scheme that is only approximately four years old and still has not been fully implemented. This is destabilising for schools as well as being unhelpful.

Stability and predictability in resourcing are critical factors for schools to be able to operate effectively.

Support from the Commonwealth and State Governments

Independent schools are an integral part of Australia's schooling landscape. They are registered to operate as providers of schooling by their state or territory government. AHISA schools are not-for-profit schools who provide this public service to more than 300,000 students. The resourcing of our schools should be by the Australian Government, State and Territories governments, and parents and school communities in a reliable, stable and

sustainable partnership. If there is a reduction of a school's funding from either one or both of the government sources, then the shortfall has to be made up by the parents or the school community, who already provide a much higher percentage of funds than the governments, for their children's education.

- The United Nations Convention of Human Rights accepts that parents are the primary educators of their children
- Parents have a right to exercise choice in the education of their children.
- Students in our schools have a right to support from both Federal and State Governments. Governments, both at national and state and territory level, have a responsibility to provide each Australian child, no matter what their family background or what school they attend, with a reasonable level of funding – a basic entitlement - for their schooling.
- The funding by State and Federal Governments must be considered together if comparisons are made between non-government and government schools educational funding. Under the Federal Constitution, the States have the responsibility for schooling.
- The States have been the greatest beneficiaries of the Australian Government's involvement in school funding, because the Australian Government has played an increasingly important role in educational funding and provides the bulk of the public resources to students in independent schools.
- Our members would be pleased if State and Territory Governments would increase their funding to schools, helping them to achieve the National Goals for Schooling for the 21st Century
- Governments benefit financially from the exercising of choice by parents choosing independent schools for their children. The contribution of parents to the education of their children in independent schools represents a significant proportion of Australia's expenditure on education. There are significant savings to the taxpayer because students in independent schools do not receive funding at the level of the AGSRC.
- Unlike the provision of capital infrastructure in government-owned schools, facilities in independent schools are largely funded through borrowings and the generosity of members of their school communities. This is another saving to governments.
- The general community benefits from a diverse education system. There are significant educational, social and economic benefits.
- More than 70% of a school's operating budget goes on salaries. In Government schools this is paid out of the state budget. Independent schools use recurrent grant money to help pay these salaries, but the fees paid by parents account for much of this allocation.
- It is a pity that there is often inaccurate and misleading media information on funding comparisons between government and non-government school sectors. It would be pleasing to see State governments informing the public truthfully about who pays for school education. In fact it would be pleasing to see the total costs of school education from all sources revealed.

Choice and Diversity

Fostering choice and diversity has broadened and will continue to broaden the options available to parents.

- There has been steady growth in the number and size of independent schools over the past thirty years no matter what political party is in power and within our Association the increase has been in the low fee schools, especially in the establishment of new schools. Often the cultural and religious diversity of multi-cultural Australia is mirrored in these schools. Each school develops its own ethos and increasingly Australian families are taking time to choose the appropriate schooling option for their children.
- There is a widening of the income groups accessing independent schools. Children from all socio-economic backgrounds attend our schools. There is hard data to demonstrate that parents are choosing to educate their children across education sectors with many parents earning high incomes sending their children to government schools, while at the same time there are many parents making huge sacrifices to send their children to independent schools.
- Parents who exercise freedom of choice in schooling options and are willing to spend money on their children's education, should not attract financial penalty. It is important to remember that these contributions are paid in after-tax dollars. If Australia is to meet the National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century, this contribution by the parents of students in our schools must be recognised as a huge and significant contribution of private effort.
- It is a pity that students with special needs who attend independent schools are not able to access the same needs-based funding and government services available to students attending government schools. This is a real equity issue especially as the number of special needs children attending our schools has steadily increased over the last few years. Sometimes this places a huge burden on the parents of other students in the school to provide funds to cover the needs of these special children. Surely there is a case for the cost of school education for students with disabilities to be met by society, irrespective of the school sector in which the student is educated.

Accountability

Our schools are highly accountable, both educationally and financially, to their governing bodies, their school communities, their parents, their students, governments and regulatory bodies. Parents soon let you know it you are not providing what they expect! They are bound by corporate regulations, occupational health and safety requirements, in fact all sorts of legislation and regulations. In fact the accountability requirements of our schools are multi-dimensional with the Governing Body of our schools playing a key role. Because each school is independent, the government funding of each school is a matter of public record and each school must, each year provide extensive financial data to the Commonwealth Government, and demonstrate that funds have been used appropriately and effectively. There is no need to increase the accountability requirements. They are already extensive.

Each school must commit to the National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century.

Conclusion


It would be good to see a co-ordinated approach between the Australian Government and those of the States and Territories to ensure predictable and secure funding arrangements not only for our schools, but for all schools. This is necessary to enable our members to do the necessary forward planning required in today's world and vital for their long-term viability.

The Australian Government is the main source of public funding for students in our schools. Their continued commitment to quadrennial funding has helped in this long term planning. Within this funding arrangement it is sometimes necessary to have transition arrangements as the needs of some schools change, but these arrangements should always be in place long enough for a school to budget for the change. Funding adjustments need to be phased in over a period of time.

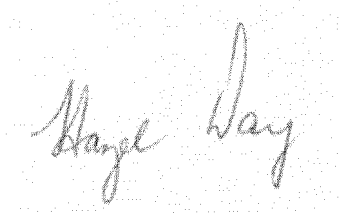
The contributions from State and Territory Governments to our members' schools are often of considerable significance and it is disappointing that uncertainty now pervades funding arrangements for our schools in many of the States and Territories. There has been real difficulty for some of our schools when funding changes have been made almost immediately with no lead-in time.

Targeted funding must be continued as it plays a crucial role in the progress towards achieving the National Goals for Schooling, particularly in AHISA schools, where they are governed and operated on an individual school basis. So much is expected of schools now that the cost of schooling is growing.

Submitted and approved by



National Chair – Malcolm Lamb



Prepared by Hazel Day

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