

The Secretary,
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education References Committee
Suite SG.52, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Wednesday, 23 June 2004

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are parents of a child who attends the Blue Gum Community School in Hackett, ACT. We would like to make a submission to discuss why the current Federal Government's SES funding scheme is inequitable, discriminatory, threatens the viability of this school, and discourages the formation of new independent schools.

We chose the school because we wanted our child/children to have an education which is joyful, stimulating, creative, encouraging and which teaches them to be confident and resilient. This type of school is unique and has been highlighted as the type of educational institution which builds resilient and strong children. Blue Gum School fosters all of the fundamental attributes and skills described in the report *Employability Skills for the Future*, released by the Department of Education, Science and Training and the Australian National Training Authority in 2002.

Blue Gum is a relatively low fee school because it has the philosophy that all students should have the opportunity to have this type of education. This non-discriminatory approach is becoming impossible to maintain due to the current funding model. With this model Blue Gum Community School misses out on approximately \$ 100,000.00 in funding this year. It will require fees to be raised significantly to make up this shortfall. As parents of four children the rise in fees would make it impossible to continue sending our children to Blue Gum. These increasing fees will exclude many families from Blue Gum and threaten its viability as a result.

The current model is based upon flawed logic as outlined in the Connor's Inquiry into education funding. The level of funding is based upon incorrect assumptions about the wealth of the parents of Blue Gum students. The real socio-economic status of families cannot be based on their postcodes, because Canberra suburbs include residents from all walks of life. Many families have been assumed to be wealthy based upon their postcode despite having average or below average incomes, and Blue Gum Community School funding was thus put at a reduced level. The ACT government does not use the SES funding model as it has deemed it inappropriate for the ACT. So why does the Federal Government continue to inflict an inappropriate model upon Blue Gum Community School?

The Federal funding per child is significantly greater for independent schools in the same area and for Catholic schools in Canberra (\$ 1,817.00 per child for Blue Gum, \$ 3,404.00 per child for other independent schools, \$ 3,101.00 per child for Catholic schools). This is clearly unfair; especially as Blue Gum families are no different from

families at neighbouring independent schools nor from the families at Catholic schools.

Every other school is allowed to choose between the old ERI model and the new SES model. It is unreasonable that Blue Gum Community School is not given the same choice and as such is one of only two schools funded via the SES model.

The government appears to be ensuring the survival of wealthier, established schools and trying to ensure the poverty of new, independent schools.

We believe that Blue Gum Community School is a litmus test of the Federal Government's funding environment. If it fails it will indicate that the current funding model is strangling the formation of new innovative schools and with them goes enormous potential for Australia's future. Are we going to insist on conformity in our children and schools and stifle new ways of thinking? It would appear that this is the case as Blue Gum Community School is the only new independent school formed in the ACT since the introduction of the SES funding arrangements. Will the only choices for our children be Public or Catholic education? There can be a third way, where the creative soul of our children is encouraged to blossom and grow to their full potential.

We would strongly recommend the committee visit Blue Gum Community School and see for themselves what the inequities in the funding model is doing to the school.

Yours truly,

Kieran Vaughan John Duve