

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Suite SG52
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

INQUIRY INTO FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

I make the following submission on behalf of Christian Schools Tasmania. Christian Schools Tasmania has a main campus, Calvin Christian School in Kingston (Kindergarten to year twelve) and three other campuses, namely Channel Christian School in Margate (Kindergarten to Year six), Emmanuel Christian School in Rokeby (Kindergarten to Year ten) and Northern Suburbs Christian School in Bridgewater (Kindergarten to Year six).

The Association that is now called Christian Schools Tasmania commenced fifty years ago in Hobart in July 1954. Following eight years of wonderful commitment and hard work by the pioneer members of the association, Calvin School, as it was then called, commenced in Kingston in 1962 as the first Christian parent-controlled school in Australia. There was, of course, no government funding at that time for such schools.

In 2004, Christian Schools Tasmania has an enrolment of approximately 900 students in the Hobart area. It benefits from Australian and State Government funding to the tune of nearly 68% of its total income. The Christian Schools Tasmania community is grateful for this funding from Government sources, at the same time recognizing that the existence of non-government schools in Australia represents a saving of tax payers' money in the order of more than two billion dollars per year.

Students enrolled with Christian Schools Tasmania represent a broad cross-section of the Christian community in Tasmania. Christian Schools Tasmania has many students from families who would not normally be able to afford to enrol their children in a non-government school. This is exemplified in the location of two of our schools in low SES areas where it is not uncommon for students to be provided with breakfast on arrival at the school. It is also evident in the level of fee assistance allocated to such families in the annual budget.

In the context of the above, I would like to highlight three areas that are of particular concern to Christian Schools Tasmania with regard to future funding of our schools.

1. Parental Choice

Christian Schools Tasmania believes that parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their children. Therefore, funding for schools in Australia should continue to develop on the premise that parents have the right to choose the most suitable school for their children. The current SES model for funding of non-government schools has proved to be a valuable tool in ensuring that government funds are directed to schools which have greatest need.

2. Students with learning difficulties/disabilities

This is an on-going source of difficulty for non-government schools, knowing that students in government schools in some states attract significant amounts of funding due to their disabilities, while if those same students were enrolled in a non-government school they would attract a very small percentage, eg 20%, of that funding. Christian Schools Tasmania believes that additional funding should be made available so as to ensure that the same level of funding be available to all schools where students with disabilities are enrolled, regardless of the sector.

3. Vocational Education and Training

The funding of VET in schools is not satisfactory.

Some funding is currently made available to schools for VET through ANTA. This funding is uncertain as it is not known from one year to the next whether it will be available to schools and in what amounts. This makes planning for VET in schools difficult.

The concept of seed funding in the VET area is important. However, it only addresses a fraction of the cost of delivering VET in schools. The cost of effective VET programmes is inherently more expensive than the cost of other programme delivery in schools due to the need for a teaching line as well as the coordination of training in the workplace.

The offering of Vocational Education and Training opportunities is vital to school programmes as they seek to respond to their students' educational and training needs. Christian Schools Tasmania therefore encourages the Australian Government to consider payment to schools of higher per capita recurrent funding for VET students than is currently the case.

While I recognize that schools and associations such as ours are able to present endless wish lists to governments, I humbly submit the above as priority areas that are worthy of serious consideration, in order that schools may provide excellent education to the communities that they serve in exercising responsible stewardship of their resources.

Yours truly,

Neil Rowcroft
Executive Director