

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

Submission no: 19

Received: 24/06/2004

Submitter: Mr Andrew Mullins
Headmaster

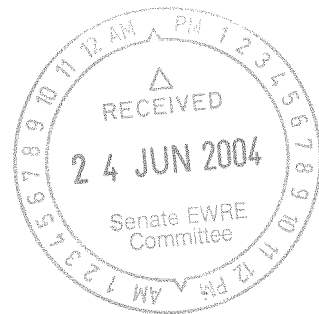
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We would like to draw the attention of the Committee to a number of issues.

a. **The current funding arrangements are philosophically unsound.**

There can be no objective justification for governments to withhold equitable funding to all parents (some form of voucher system). By the principle of subsidiarity, one of the pillar principles of social ethics, a higher body in the social hierarchy (government in this case) must not take to itself responsibilities that a lower body (parents in this case) itself can look after. In other words, the state has no right to be making decisions about which school a child should attend (unless we are talking of patent incompetence). Yet, by selectively tying financial assistance to particular schools, this is exactly what the current funding system does in Australia.

The state (philosophically speaking) exists for the family, not the family for the state... at least not in Australia. So, by the same principle of subsidiarity, the state must facilitate the desire of parents to educate their children according to the values they choose unless it can be demonstrated that those values be anti-social.

b. The current funding arrangements reinforce the continuing discrimination against parents who have children in non-government schools across Australia.

The current funding arrangements are blatantly discriminatory. In every case, parents who choose to send their child to an independent school receive lower levels of financial support than other parents... by way of recurrent funding and by way of capital assistance, and in a host of smaller ways as well (for example by way of financial subsidy to attend NSW TAFE courses). There is absolutely no justification for this discrimination. Despite the rhetorical rubbish that emanates from opponents of equitable funding, ultimately there can be no objective justification for discrimination that impedes access to essential services.

c. More committed parents not only are prepared to pay a higher proportion of their available income by way of fees, but they are then doubly penalized by receiving lower government subsidies for their child.

This is seen most clearly in the case of larger families who skimp on other things in order to fund education. Any government with a pro-family policy should be studying the impact that the current funding arrangements have on larger families to see if these families are receiving a fair go. My College would be amongst the schools with the most children per family ratio. The funding they receive in no way reflects the sacrifices these families go to... but it appears there is no political will to document and understand this anomaly in our funding regime.

d. The current system does not fund according to need, despite the rhetoric.

Despite all the current talk of needs based funding, funding for independent schools is based upon an analysis of parental home addresses. There is no genuine effort to understand the needs of schools. Redfield College is relatively new school with relatively poorly developed facilities in comparison with the local government high schools. For example, we have no hall nor dedicated library, we are cramped for classrooms, we have fewer specialist learning areas, etc; yet despite all this, we do have superb academic results and therefore deserve to gain equal recognition as a school. (Despite non-selectivity of students we were ranked second to James Ruse in HSC mathematics several years ago, according to SMH merit listings, and in the two of the last four years have been ranked in the top twenty schools in the state on merit list number crunching... again as a non selective school positioned amidst highly selective schools at the top of that list.) Nevertheless the per capita funding our students draw is far below the levels of local government schools.

- e. **Salary levels in the teaching sector are so constrained by the finite limitations on the state and federal revenue collection that unless governments decide to move to a user-pays approach in education the situation must continue to deteriorate. Teachers salaries cannot rise sufficiently to stay in step with the non education sector, and so the prestige of teachers and the status of schooling must continue to slide. This differential will only get worse.**

No government seems willing to accept what is obviously required, but risky politically. Our society has moved towards user-pays in every other sector, but not in primary and secondary education. Because the governments will not make these hard decisions, the status of the profession continues to decline and the repercussions are felt particularly in the area of boys' education.

In our society, free education is, for most people, an anachronistic relic; the great percentage of parents can now afford to financially supplement the education of their children. The reality is that the parents who send their children to a non government school prioritize education higher up the family budget. That these parents should be penalised because they place a higher priority on the education of their children is objectively unsupportable.

I would welcome the opportunity to appear in person before the Committee in order to elaborate on these views.

Andrew Mullins
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Redfield College
24 June 2004