

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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Queensland Teachers' Union Submission to Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee



Inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools

The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) notes the Australian Education Union's (AEU) comprehensive Submission to the Inquiry.

The QTU wishes to make the following brief Submission.

Overview

Major problems exist in relation to the provision of Commonwealth funding for all schools. An analysis of where Commonwealth school funding is directed reveals systemic inequities that exacerbate already existing imbalances between school resource levels.

Recommendation: Existing Commonwealth funding arrangements for all schools should be urgently overhauled so as to allocate funding on the basis of need.

Impact of SES Funding Model

The Socio-Economic Status (SES) funding model for non-government schools introduced by the Howard Government in 2001 is seriously flawed. It is not based on the actual incomes of families with a student or students at a particular school and does not take into account the resource levels of schools or their capacity to raise income.

Since its inception, the SES model has delivered the biggest Commonwealth funding increases to the nation's most wealthy non-government schools. The average funding increase of these wealthy schools (category 1 schools under the former ERI funding model) has been more than 160%, with a number of them receiving boosts of over 250%. Less wealthy non-government schools have received much smaller funding increases. Furthermore, recurrent government school funding increases from the Commonwealth have simply been based on indexation, meaning virtually no rise has been registered in real terms for the public education sector.

The overall effect of the introduction of the SES funding model and simple indexation of recurrent funding for government schools has been a further divide in the proportion of Commonwealth spending directed towards the respective government and non-government sectors. The share of Commonwealth funding going to government schools is set to drop to only 31.9% by 2006/07 despite the sector containing at least two thirds of total enrolments.

Recommendation: The existing SES funding model for non-government schools should be urgently overhauled so as to include an assessment of both existing school resource and income levels, and socio-economic factors. The model should also include appropriate processes for auditing to ensure compliance and consistency.

Cost of Public Education

The basic costs of educating students in the public system exceed costs in the non-government sector for a variety of reasons. These reasons include the fact that the public system educates the vast majority of students in rural and remote areas, the vast majority of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and other special needs, the vast majority of Indigenous students and the vast majority of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These factors markedly increase the cost of educational delivery and place ever-increasing resource pressure on government schools.

The high costs of education in rural and remote areas are particularly relevant in Queensland given the relatively decentralised nature of the state. Furthermore, Queensland's rapid population growth, and consequent enrolment growth, is placing significant strain on school facilities in key parts of the state. Additional capital spending is required to fund new government schools and extensions to existing government schools in high growth areas. The Federal Government has a responsibility to make a greater contribution to capital funding in the public education system.

Recommendation: Commonwealth recurrent and capital funding for government schools should be increased significantly in real terms in line with the cost pressures and resource needs in the public education system.

Conclusion

The Queensland Teachers' Union thanks the Senate for initiating this Inquiry and trusts the process will lead to fairer funding arrangements for Australian school students.

Queensland Teachers' Union
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