

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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Submitter: Ms Susan Hughes
Executive Officer

Organisation: Victorian Parents' Council

Address: Suite 4, Burke Road
CAMBERWELL VIC 3124

Phone: 03 9804 0906

Fax:

Email: vicpc@vicparentscouncil.vic.edu.au

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The **Victorian Parents' Council** represents the parents of children attending independent and Catholic schools within Victoria.

Since its establishment 45 years ago the VPC has argued that

- parents are the primary educators of their children
- parents have a right to choose the most appropriate school for their children
- this right is supported by all governments
- all children deserve to receive a level of funding from governments to support their parents in making that choice based on the real cost of educating a child in a government school
- it is children, not schools, who should be funded
- there must be accountability for public funds

Historically the Commonwealth Government has taken primary responsibility for delivering funding to non-government schools.

In Victoria one-third of all school children attend a non-government school and by Years 11 and 12 the figure is over 40%. Yet the Victorian State Government directs less than 7% of its annual education budget towards these children.

Children with disabilities attending Victorian non-government schools receive only a small percentage of the additional State Government funding they would receive if they were students at a government school.

The obvious inequities of this system have been addressed by the Commonwealth Government.

The current funding model, the SES model, is a needs- based model which looks at the ability of parents to pay fees based on the socio-economic status of a school's parent community.

Schools serving the wealthiest communities therefore receive the lowest levels of funding; those serving the poorest communities receive the highest levels. In no instance do students at non-government schools receive more in total government funding than students attending a government school.

The SES funding model funds students not schools. Funding is delivered on a per student basis. In some schools it is delivered directly to parents, in other schools it is put towards developing scholarships etc.

The levels of funding to independent schools must be viewed as a per student amount over a four year period to get a true picture of how much is being actually delivered to each student.

Students attending government schools are fully funded (apart from parent voluntary contributions etc) by governments. Independent and Catholic schools receive the majority of their income from parent contributions.

The fee levels in the non-government school sector begin at around a few hundred dollars per year. Parents in government schools at the same time report being required to pay similar amounts, and sometimes even more, in school related expenses and contributions.

It is also well established by ABS data that a greater percentage of parents earning over \$70,000pa send their children to government schools.

The vast majority of parents who choose to send their children to non-government schools are making financial sacrifices and directing all their discretionary income towards paying fees. Why are they less deserving of receiving some financial assistance than high earning parents exercising their right to choose a government school for their child and therefore being fully funded?

In terms of accountability parents would agree that schools should be accountable to governments as being in receipt of public monies. They welcome a level of regulation that ensures the safety and security of their children and the proper administration of their chosen school, but at the same time does not interfere with the school's ability to follow a particular philosophy and curriculum.

Parents are in fact the key to accountability in the non-government sector. If they are not happy with a school, they simply move on. A poorly managed school which fails to achieve academic benchmarks for its students, will not survive without parent support.

The VPC believes that the current funding model used by the Federal Government is transparent and equitable.

All children should be in receipt of some government assistance towards their education regardless of where they attend school.

Susan Hughes
Executive Officer
Victorian Parents' Council
Suite 4, 681 Burke Road
Camberwell VIC 3124
P O Box 647 Hawthorn VIC 3122
Tel 03 9804 0906
vicpc@vicparentscouncil.vic.edu.au