

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

Introduction

Currambena was established in 1969 by a group of parents, teachers and educators committed to providing an alternative to the educational systems available at the time. 'Currambena' is an aboriginal word meaning 'happy place'.

Currambena is founded on the belief that all children are individuals with common needs for both security and challenge in their learning environment. In a school environment that is safe and happy children's self esteem will grow and their innate curiosity and desire to know will rise to the challenge of new learning experiences.

The aims of the school are expressed formally as:

1. To provide a school environment that:
 - Respects the individuality of the child
 - Fosters self determination in the child
 - Develops the child's creative and critical abilities
 - Stresses cooperation rather than competition
2. To maintain high academic standards consistent with the preceding objects.
3. consistent with the preceding objects;
 - the school shall be secular
 - the school shall be co-educational
 - no class shall have more than 25 pupils
 - there shall be no school uniform
 - there shall be individual assessment and no competitive examinations, and
 - it is the policy of the school to abstain from corporal punishment.
4. To respect and safeguard the professional status of the teachers.
5. To strive for cooperation between teachers, other educators, parents and children.
6. To allow for pupil participation in the affairs of the school and to encourage involvement in the community outside the school.

7. To make use of the latest techniques and advances in education for the continuing development of the school and to stimulate educational thought and practice in Australia.

Funding

Currumbena Primary School is a single campus, coeducational school with a current enrolment of 65 day students. Currumbena has an SES profile of 120. Currumbena is a member of the Australian Association of Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE).

It is estimated that a primary school child received approximately \$1,073 in State and \$1,933 in Federal funding in the 2003 financial year. Currumbena received no capital grants. Parents paid an average of \$4,719 in private contributions in the form of fees in the 2003 financial year. It can be seen that sixty four per cent of the costs of educating a child at Currumbena is raised from private sources.

Non government schools

- School education is an important public good. Governments, both nationally and at state and territory level, have a responsibility to provide each Australian child – no matter what their family background or what school they attend – with a reasonable level of funding for their schooling. All school students deserve government support for their education irrespective of the school they attend.
- Non-government schools are important providers of education for the children of Australia and should be recognised for their contribution to the economic wellbeing of the nation. Over one million students are currently enrolled in non-government schools. Non-government schools account for one-third of total school enrolments and some 37 per cent of secondary enrolments. In all capital cities other than Darwin, non-government schools educate over 40 per cent of secondary students.
- Governments must recognise that a substantial proportion of Australia's system of school education, like the public systems of health and transport, is delivered by private (not-for-profit) providers. Government schools funding models must recognise the validity of diversity in schooling provision.
- Non-government schools are registered to operate as schooling providers with their state or territory government. The school registration process ensures non-government schools meet the public goals of schooling and community standards. Students attending non-government schools should be eligible for a reasonable basic level of funding by governments in support of their education. In addition, students with special needs who attend non-government schools should be able to access the same needs-based funding and government services available to students attending government-owned schools.

- Parents value diversity in schooling options and the freedom to choose among them in order to best meet the educational needs of their children. Parents who choose to educate their children in non-government schools demonstrate their willingness to play a partnership role with governments in funding the cost of their children's education. They contribute to the cost of their children's education from their after-tax dollars.
- Parents who exercise their freedom of choice in schooling options for their children should not attract financial penalty. Parents should not be penalised for their willingness to spend money on their children's education.
- Parental contribution to the education of their children in non-government schools represents a significant proportion of Australia's expenditure on school education. If the students in non-government schools were educated in government-owned schools, governments would need to find another \$4.2 billion each year in recurrent funding alone to be able to educate all students to the standard currently available in government-owned schools. In our school, parents were asked to pay around \$4719 in fees in the 2003 financial year, to meet the gap in funding from governments.
- Students in non-government schools are not eligible for the same level of government funding as students attending government-owned schools.
- The current system of allocating general recurrent grants for non-government schools from the Australian Government (the SES model) provides a reasonable measure of the capacity of school communities to contribute to the costs of schooling.
- In contrast, funding for government schools is provided without any assessment of the financial circumstances of their school communities.
- Much of the recent public debate on schools funding has focused on the facilities available to independent schools. Unlike the provision of capital infrastructure in government-owned schools, facilities in independent schools are largely funded through borrowings and the generosity of school communities. It is estimated that, nationally, 86 per cent of funds for capital development in independent schools has been contributed by the school communities. This is another saving to governments.

- Australian government funding should be retained in its current form for the coming quadrennial period (2005 – 2008) to allow our families some certainty to plan for their financial commitments. Stability and certainty in funding is most important for our school's continued viability and ability to sustain quality in educational provision.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Oxley
Treasurer