

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools

The Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Inc is a community organisation which represents the interests of state school Parents and Citizens Associations throughout Queensland. It has a history of more than 50 years. Approximately 1300 P&C Associations are affiliated.

QCPCA believes that the primary objective of the school system is the provision of a high standard of education, relevant to student and community needs in a changing society.

The philosophy underlying QCPCA policy centres on the principles of equality, excellence, humanity and participative democracy.

The principle of equality addresses the need for the public school system to be inclusive and accessible to all and to be of a quality, which will enable all students to achieve their individual potential in society.

The principle of excellence implies that **the public school system must provide for all students the best quality education available**, which will enable them to learn how to learn throughout their lives and to apply the knowledge for the benefit of themselves and of others.

By humanity, we mean that public education must be geared to develop among all students the humane qualities of kindness, sense of justice and concern for others.

The principles of participative democracy hold that an egalitarian, excellent and humane system is most likely to be achieved and its benefits are most likely to be realised when those involved in the system - students, parents, citizens, professionals - are enabled to be partners, through representation in all decision making processes of the system.

QCPCA believes that the above tenets together form an essential statement of principles for guidance in its practical activities toward achieving an excellent, empowering, public education system for all Australians.

QCPCA policy states:

“GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Council believes that:

1. Education is a right. **It is the responsibility of government to finance completely a free, universal and public system of education, of the highest standard**, which;
 - a) ensures the same range of educational opportunities to achieve the best outcomes across all groups of students;
 - b) enables all students to have a high quality, challenging, successful and satisfying school experience;
 - c) encourages diversity within and among government schools where this is needed to meet the educational needs of students.
2. Federal and State/Territory governments should actively support public education by:
 - a) providing as a priority adequate resources for public education of the highest standard;**
 - b) working collaboratively with government school parents and teachers and their organisations to promote the public system above any other system, emphasising the value of public education and the positive aspects of our schools;
 - c) affirming government schools, their students and teachers, whenever unjustified and inaccurate criticism occurs in the media;
 - d) working towards the abolition of discriminatory and selective admission and expulsion practices in all schools that receive government funds.”**

The capacity of any school to realise the National Goals for Schooling is only limited by resources allocated to it. The public education system must be sufficiently resourced to enable it to provide a quality education for all current and future students who attend. QCPCA believes that the object of a public education system is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop the skills and understanding necessary to shape their own lives and to participate constructively in shaping the society of the future.

To achieve this objective, a public education system must:

1. be accessible to all, irrespective of class, culture, gender, disability, age or geographic location;
2. be free (ie: fully publicly funded and provided) so that school experience of the highest quality is not dependent on capacity or willingness to make a financial contribution;

All parents who send their child to a government school must be confident that their child will receive an education that will prepare them for a life where they can contribute actively to Australian society. There should not be the perception that to get a ‘better education’ it can only be delivered at a “publicly-funded private school”.

QCPCA support the notion of choice for parents in the education of their child for whatever reasons eg tradition, religion, but it must be a user pays system when they choose to move outside the state provided system. If funding is provided to the non-government sector then the baseline funding must be calculated on an “as needs” formula to ensure equity. All forms of income especially fees and donations, must be taken into account when assessing this. This must be balanced with consideration given to exceptional circumstances such as when a parent has no choice but to send their child to a non-government school due to isolation or access.

All governments should provide for school and community infrastructure to support the proper development of existing neighbourhood schools and their associated local communities, before public funds are used to encourage the establishment of new, government funded, non-government schools at a local level.

If the focus of funding is to ensure that schools have the capacity to meet the National Goals of Schooling then the funding model must take into consideration what capacity already exists in

schools. On this basis the SES model must be fundamentally flawed. The Socio-Economic Status (SES) funding model does not take into consideration the resources and capacity of schools to deliver education outcomes. Because the SES model only takes into consideration the Socio-Economic Status of a statistical division that students live in rather than the individual's or family's SES it is not a particularly good indication of resources that are available to the individual students.

The assertion by the coalition that non-government schools are their responsibility to fund is a policy decision that is not based on the Constitution. We do not accept that it is the role of the Federal Government to fund non-government schools to the often excessive amount that it now does. Further, the funding regime for non-government schools is totally foreign to other forms of government. There is no other enterprise in the private sector, we are aware of where the government provides funds to construct building (new schools) and provide recurrent operational funding. It certainly doesn't happen in health or transport, so what is the fundamental difference in the education sector?

Regardless of the funding models employed to distribute the allocated funding the larger question still remains unanswered and that is "What resources are required to meet the National Goals of Schooling?" While this question remains unanswered the debate on how funding is distributed will continue unabated. It is the differential funding that uses a flawed and biased formula to provide federal funds to students in non-government schools at levels that far outweigh their government school peers. This inequity flies in the face of the great Australian principal of giving everyone a "fair go". When government schools continue to be in need of funds to provide the essential elements of education (let alone any extras) while some of our non-government counterparts, who receive funds plus income from fees and other sources, enjoy the luxury of a choice of where to put the 5th or 6th cricket pitch, there will always be a perception of inequity at grass roots level.

In terms of accountability QCPCA believes that- "Annual audited accounts, including all financial operations and sources of income of schools **receiving government funds** should be made available to Education Queensland and should be open to public scrutiny." This statement applies equally to Federal government funds that for transparency, reporting requirements must be of the same standard imposed on government schools. It is difficult to think of other instances where government provides funding to organisations, or individuals, but does not demand stringent reconciliation of the expenditure of funds against pre-determined performance criteria.

While we support the Government putting in place requirements linked to the provision of funding to States/Territories the Commonwealth should be realistic in the requirements they impose. While it is necessary to ensure that an overarching framework exists, it must allow for the diversity of individual needs to deliver expected outcomes. For example the recently announced proposed requirements to funding included the right of principals to hire and fire staff. Queensland's current system of teacher transfers makes sure that schools even in the most remote areas of the state are adequately staffed. Just because something works in smaller compact states does not mean it is easily or successfully transferred here to Queensland, where almost half of our schools are in rural and remote areas. Common sense should be the guiding factors when developing the requirements to ensure that the main driver is consistency and accountability to deliver agreed outcomes for our students and sadly this does not appear to have any place in the current system.

The time has come to no longer delay in rectifying the situation. Nothing is to be gained by creating a binary conflict between the private and public sectors and continuing to perpetuate the perception of the haves and the have-nots. Our children are too precious a resource of this country to allow more children to miss out as the years pass, while the debate rages over who has the responsibility and to what degree. For QCPCA the bottom line is that public schools should be the **first priority** of any State/Territory or Federal Government.