

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools**

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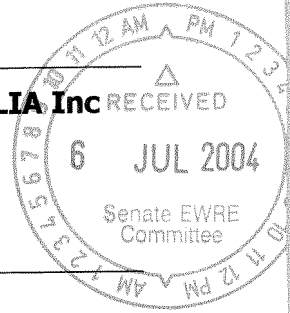
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# Submission to the Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools 2004

## *Introduction*

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia is a voluntary association of 140 schools located in metropolitan Perth and rural and remote areas of Western Australia. Member schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Included in the membership are:

- Schools affiliated with larger and smaller Christian denominations, for example, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- A Jewish school
- Community Schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Indigenous community schools
- The Speech and Hearing Centre.

## *Accountability*

- Independent Schools in Western Australia are required to be registered by the State Government before they can commence and thereafter are subject to periodic inspection and re-registration.
- For initial registration, schools must demonstrate that they can satisfactorily meet the requirements of Part 4, Clause 159 of the School Education Act 1999.

- During the periodic re-registration, schools are required to provide comprehensive information on policies and practices in the following areas:
  - Implementation of the Curriculum Framework
  - Teaching and learning programs and samples of student work
  - Recording and reporting of student achievement
  - External benchmarks used by the school
  - School strategic/development plans
  - Staff qualifications
  - Duty of care and safety issues
  - Evidence of implementation of stated policies
  - Governance structure
  - Finances
- Being in receipt of Australian Government per capita funding, all independent schools are required to complete the annual financial questionnaire produced by DEST and to participate in benchmark testing.
- A further, and significant, level of accountability is that to the parents who have chosen the school for their children. Schools report on a regular basis and through a variety of means, including newsletters, annual reports and the ability to access directly the Principal and teachers.

### ***New Non-Government Schools***

- Those who wish to establish a new non-government school in Western Australia must have their application assessed by the cross-sectoral Non-Government School Planning Advisory Committee (NGSPAC) which makes recommendations to the State Minister for Education.
- The process for determining whether a school should be recommended for registration as defined in the Education Act (1999) is currently under review and a project is in place to determine an appropriate planning framework.

### ***Model of Funding***

- The Association supports a model of funding in which a basic entitlement is supplemented by a needs based component.

- As the introduction to this submission indicates, the independent sector in Western Australia is a varied one. The spread of SES indices is one element of this diversity (see *Appendix A*). Other elements of diversity are the geographic location of the school, the educational philosophy and ethos on which the educational programme is based.
- In focussing on SES, it should be noted that in Western Australia the ranking of the schools is that which would have been expected with one or two exceptions.
- The model has delivered a number of advantages to schools within the independent sector, most notably:
  - The increase in the maximum level of funding to 70% of the AGSRC has been of great assistance to the schools with the lowest socio-economic profile, most notably the Aboriginal Independent Community Schools.
  - An increase in the level of per capita grants for primary education with the minimum level rising to 13.7%
  - The increase in funding to schools in regional, rural and remote areas of the State. Schools in these areas have a lower SES than an equivalent school in metropolitan Perth. The ERI had no mechanism to recognise the additional costs of the delivery of education in these areas. Indeed the ERI could penalise these schools which, like their government school counterparts, often have lower student/teacher ratios, for example.
- While the SES model is not perfect, it is preferable to the model it replaced, the ERI. Any model is dependent on data and that used to calculate a school's SES is renewable every five years through the data from the ABS Census. The data on which a school's ERI is calculated dates back, for the majority of schools, to 1985.
- The ERI relied on complex data collection being formula driven. Schools in existence prior to 1985 had an ERI assigned to them based on historic data. To some extent, schools established once ERI was operational were able to select a particular level of resource usage which delivered an identifiable level of per capita funding.
- Much has been made by the critics of the SES model of the fact that it has significant increases in funding to the same schools in the former ERI categories 1 to 3. In Western Australia, all but two of these schools were in existence prior to the introduction of ERI. Once placed in an ERI category, it was extremely difficult to be

re-classified. From this point on, the category determined the level of fees needed for the school to deliver its programmes.

- The introduction of the New Schools Policy resulted in schools, other than those which were part of an existing system, being limited to funding in Categories 1 to 6. For some of these schools, particularly those in regional areas, the SES model has provided a more appropriate level of funding than their arbitrarily assigned ERI category.
- It has been argued that school fees should be integral to the determination of the level of government funding. School fee levels are linked to the level of per capita funding provided by the State and Australian Governments over the period of their existence. Equally they are linked to the structure of each school's curriculum, which is determined by its ethos and philosophy. The size of the school in the context of the breadth of its curriculum has a significant impact on the fee level.

It is not wise to assume that high fee levels necessarily indicate an excessive use of resources. A school with a small secondary enrolment which, in response to parental requirements, offers a broad curriculum, particularly in the post-compulsory years, will need to charge a high level of fees.

### ***The Adelaide Declaration for Schooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

- In summary, the Adelaide Declaration requires that schools:
  - 'develop fully' the talents of all students;
  - work to ensure that students attain "high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum"; and
  - are socially just and promote social cohesion.
- The great majority of independent schools in Western Australia reflect the cultural diversity of Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Even those schools with a highly specific religious foundation are only mono-cultural in this regard and indeed, in most cases, enrol students who are not adherents of the religion.
- It is inclusivity rather than exclusivity that characterises the independent sector in Western Australia. This diversity is both economic and cultural.

- In 2002 the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia commissioned Professor Heather Jenkins of Curtin University of Technology to conduct research on the integration of students with disabilities in independent schools, entitled "A Choice for All: West Australian Independent Schools' Response to Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties".

This report identified that there were a significant number of students with disabilities enrolled in schools within the sector. The number is far in excess of that which quantifies students who access Australian Government Targeted Programme Funding. This difference is due to the lack of appropriate levels of funding.

In her conclusion, Professor Jenkins notes:

*"The report concludes that the survey and interviews have demonstrated the profound impact of students with disabilities and learning difficulties on the West Australian independent school sector, with many schools making noteworthy progress towards genuine inclusive education in spite of significant inequities of funding between government and non governmental sectors. The impression emerges of an education sector undergoing major transition, one that recognizes its shortcomings while continuing to adapt and respond to a significant group of students with special educational needs whose parents seek the educational choice and diversity that is the distinguishing feature of independent schools within Western Australia."*

## **CONCLUSION**

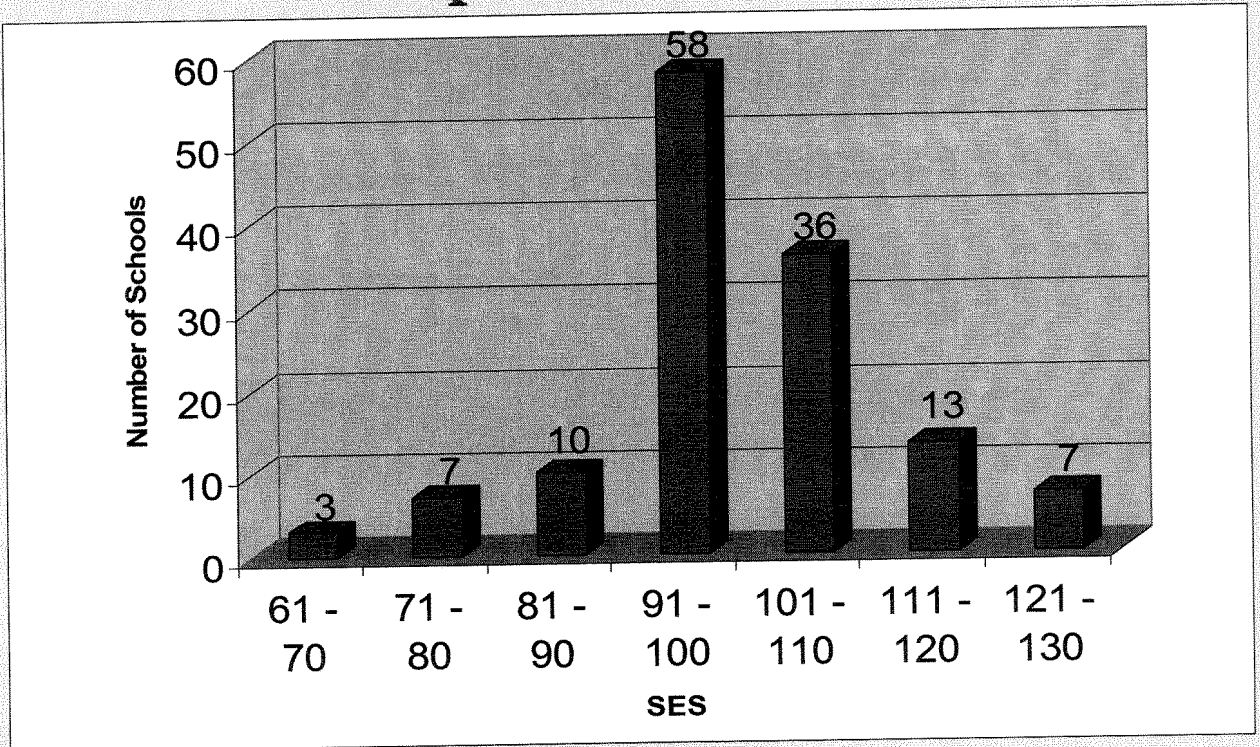
The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia believes that independent schools play a vital part in the education of Australian students. Member schools of AISWA serve some of the most remote and disadvantaged communities in Australia. Students who attend independent schools deserve to be funded through a model based on the principles of:

- Equity;
- Incentive;
- Flexibility;
- Transparency;
- Simplicity; and
- Predictability

As defined by the submission of the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA).

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## Distribution of SES scores in WA Independent Schools



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