

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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Introduction

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) operates 157 schools throughout WA.



The system comprises 109 primary schools, 29 secondary schools and 19 composite schools. These are spread over a wide range of geographical locations and include students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

The Catholic system is a system that operates in parallel to the government school sector and in some instances is the sole provider of education eg 7 isolated aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region. CECWA is committed to providing education in partnership with the government and independent sectors as a service to the community as a whole.

Catholic education in WA is administered by CECWA which takes responsibility for the receipt, distribution on a needs basis, accountability and reporting of government funding.

CECWA operates a policy of providing a Catholic education for all who seek it in so far as resources permit. To this end it monitors enrolments and fee policies to ensure that barriers to participation are minimalised. CECWA's policy is to approve minimum annual fee increases.

Catholic schools in WA educate 64,000 students staffed by 3,800 full time equivalent teachers.

Model of Funding

Any model of funding for schools must acknowledge the three sources available to a greater or lesser extent for all schools – the Australian Government, the State Government and the local community. For Catholic schools this includes parents, parish communities and various fundraising activities.

A feature of the operation of Catholic schools in WA is that the Australian Government funding is paid to the CECWA which then redistributes it on a needs basis. This is the only way that schools in remote and isolated communities can provide the quality of education required to address their substantial needs.

Funding for the Catholic sector for the next quadrennium is based on the aggregation of schools' socio-economic status scores. This has resulted in moving towards funding of 58% of the Average Government Schools Recurrent Cost (AGSRC). The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has set 60% of AGSRC as the target for Australian Government funding of Catholic schools with the State Government contributing 25% and the local community 15% on average across the system.

The retention of the AGSRC as the most appropriate basis for funding calculations is strongly supported.

In WA the State Government per capita recurrent funding flows directly to schools.

There are two areas of Australian Government funding that require urgent attention. These are the funding of students with disabilities (SWD) and capital funding.

Students with Disabilities

There has been a significant increase in the number of students and the level of disabilities of the students enrolled in WA Catholic schools in recent years. This has meant that limited resources have had to be stretched further than ever before in an attempt to meet the needs of these students.

CECWA acknowledges its responsibility to provide for these students in the most appropriate setting. The new Disability Discrimination Standards will mean that even more pressure will be placed on these limited resources.

CECWA proposes that funding for SWD be on the basis of a percentage of the costs of SWD in Government schools, similar to the way in which systems receive General Recurrent Grants by reference to a percentage of the AGSRC.

Capital Funding

The orderly and planned development of any school system requires significant capital funds to establish and maintain schools so that a genuine right to choice in schooling can be exercised.

In WA, all parents contribute to the repayment of loans that are taken out by schools to provide basic and essential capital infrastructure in addition to tuition fees and charges.

Catholic schools require additional Australian Government support to upgrade existing older stock, build new schools in growth areas, provide modern technology, provide specialist facilities for vocational education and training and capital costs for access to students with disabilities.

In addition the Catholic system in WA faces the daunting task of providing appropriate teacher accommodation in remote and isolated communities.