

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

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

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**Organisation:** Bold Park Community School

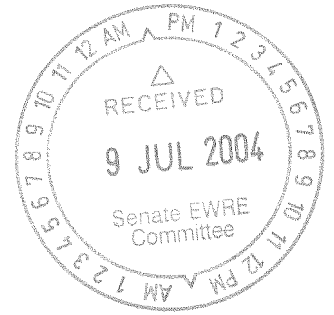
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The Secretary  
Employment, Workplace Relations & Education  
References Committee of the Senate  
Suite SG53  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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

The following key concerns of the Bold Park Parents Advisory Council are discussed below, followed by a recommendation:

- 1/ The potential of the current model to prevent the establishment of parent-initiated innovative education.
- 2/ The flow-on effect of the SES model on State funding and funding for capital development.
- 3/ The false presumption that all families in a particular geographic area have the same resources to support their educational choices.
- 4/ The inequality that is created between schools that registered for primary education before SES model funding and those that registered or will register afterwards.

### **KEY CONCERNS**

#### **1/ The potential for the current model to prevent the establishment of parent-initiated innovative education**

Parent-initiated and community-administrated schools offer the Australian public an educational choice in which innovation and curriculum development can thrive. These schools offer the community an alternative model of education. This is to the benefit of education in general, in that it offers alternative solutions and ideas.

Loss of the opportunity to discuss dynamic educational practice would be of great detriment to the community. Bold Park Community School and other innovative

schools offer the educational community an alternative educational and administrative model and have had the effect of challenging teachers to reflect on their educational practice.

The current SES model will prevent schools such as Bold Park Community School from being established and developing in the future as there is very little support for schools during their development phase. The ERI model acknowledged that schools in the process of establishment cannot charge fees equivalent to those charged by established, resource-rich schools and newly established schools therefore need added support to allow them to grow. The SES model makes it very difficult for schools to develop their capital resources while providing appropriate educational programmes from recurrent grants. Schools backed by religious groups do not face the same challenges as schools which are established by non-aligned community groups. In Western Australia there has only been one other non-aligned school established since 2000. This school was established in the country and therefore qualified for a much higher funding level.

## **2/ The flow-on effect of the SES model on State funding and funding for capital development**

In Western Australia an SES score of 120 also means that Bold Park Community School receives the lowest possible State Funding assessment, namely level 1-3. The State government has recognised the different nature of Bold Park Community School by granting a small funding increase for 2003 where other schools in the 1-3 category did not receive this increase. We were grateful for this recognition; nevertheless we are still not funded at a level similar to other schools in the same area with a similar population. Moreover, the increase received was not the same as that for schools in higher categories.

We are still considered a resource-rich school for the purposes of capital grant and low-interest loan funding. Bold Park Community School has occupied three premises in the last five years, is operating out of demountables and is only now starting to build its first building. We are clearly not a resource-rich school.

## **3/ The false presumption that all families in a particular geographic area have the same resources to support their educational choices**

The SES model assumes that all families in a particular geographic area have the same resources. In some areas, such as the western suburbs of Perth, this has resulted in the SES scores of families, whether resource-rich or not, being very high. This in turn has obviated the possibility of low fee paying schools in those areas. As many families cannot access high fee paying schools, this limits choice for much of the community. There are still some low fee paying options in the community, for those seeking Catholic education, but all other members of the community can only choose between high fee paying schools and government schools. If the federal government strives to offer choice and diversity in education to all communities then it should also

support the possibility of low fee paying schools for all members of the community in areas with high SES scores.

#### **4/ The inequality that is created between schools that registered for primary education before SES model funding and those that registered or will register afterwards**

Bold Park Community School had originally operated as a State-registered kindergarten and pre-primary school from 1994. We made the decision to extend to primary school in 1998, but were not permitted to register as such with the Commonwealth until primary classes were introduced in 2000. This resulted in funding being determined on the SES model rather than the ERI model. Evaluation under the ERI model would have resulted in funding based on Bold Park Community School being a low fee paying school with no resources. We applied for registration in 1999 before the SES model was introduced but were not granted registration until 2000. It is not equitable for government policy to disadvantage an existing school relative to comparable schools.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Bold Park Parents Advisory Council has presented its case to the Minister for Education on several occasions, not only by letter, but also in person, when he visited the school in 2002. The Minister has acknowledged that Bold Park Community School deserves special consideration, but has stated that under current legislation this is not possible. We therefore request that school funding assessments include the option that a school may appeal against its SES score and request a variation based on the circumstances relevant to its particular circumstances. Currently an appeal is only possible in relation to addresses of families and not the circumstances of the school. We ask that this be made applicable particularly to schools in the process of establishment. This will increase the diversity of educational choice offered to the Australian community and challenge this community to improve the application of educational and social principles in our schools.

Ideally a funding model should contain a number of components including a resource component and this would allow for the recognition of the differing nature and circumstances of schools. Any model based on a single measure impacts negatively on schools which are not part of systems and which offer an a true educational choice.