

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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SUBMISSION TO
THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

BY

THE FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSOCIATIONS OF
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN QUEENSLAND

The Federation thanks the Senate for the opportunity to participate in the discussion on future funding of schools in Australia.

SCHOOLING

Quality Education

Education is recognized by governments as being essential for the future of the nation. The **Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling** states that 'Australia's future depends on each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.'

Catholic schools focus on the total development of the individual - spiritual, moral, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical in partnership with parents. In catering for the diverse needs of each student the school provides a context for the individual's natural creativity to emerge.

Parents as the primary educators of their children are major stakeholders and partners with the school in the education process.

'The climate and role of the educating community is constituted by the interaction of its various components: students, parents, principals, teachers and non teaching staff.

Parents have a particularly important role to play in the educating community since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs. It is necessary to foster initiatives which provide the concrete support which the family needs and which involves it in the Catholic school's educational project.' The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium.

'Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue to be strengthened so that the educational goals of the school may be realised. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its specific and unique educational mission.'

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.

Particularly in the non government sector, parents are major providers of funds to the schools and systems. Parents within the Catholic system are required to pay tuition fees and increasing numbers of levies for specialist subjects, including vocational education, as well as providing significant capital and loan repayments for the construction and/or refurbishment of school buildings.

FUNDING

Equity

There is a continuing debate over the distribution of funds to the various sectors and the relationship and responsibilities of state and federal governments. It is significant to note that in Queensland almost 40% of families have children in both the state and non state sectors. The Federation believes that if governments at both levels are convinced that education is essential to the nation's future then they should ensure that sufficient funds are available for the provision of quality education for every student. Both the state and the non state sectors must have the resources available to provide for the individual needs of their students.

There is continuing debate over an effective funding formula. Neither the outmoded ERI nor the present SES system fully satisfies the needs of Catholic school communities. Within the Catholic sector in Queensland, the system of Group Funding, developed over a number of years by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, provides an assessment of the needs of each school community, particularly the disadvantaged, and is used to achieve equity in funding distribution. Despite this situation, fewer Catholic families are able to send their children to Catholic schools because of their financial circumstances. This is anathema to the philosophy of Catholic schooling and the Federation is seeking more effective funding mechanisms so that the Catholic school can remain open to all who seek its values and traditions.

Accountability

There should be appropriate accountability mechanisms for all schools. The school must be accountable firstly to its community for the provision of quality education and the community must have direct access to the decision making processes so that all stakeholders take responsibility for the school's educational project.

It is also accountable to governments for effective and efficient application of funding.

Federal-state relations

There is continual acrimony between the state and federal governments over the level of funding. It is essential that the funding process at both levels is open and transparent and that the true funding situation is able to be assessed. Some accommodation must be made between the state and federal governments so that funding is more integrated and more efficiently distributed. An examination of the funding situations in a number of other similar countries would show that governments take full responsibility for the funding of all schools and this may be investigated for Australia. Nothing is to be gained by governments and sectors creating conflict and blame for the present situation. Our children's futures are too important.

FUNDING PRINCIPLES

1. Governments will provide increased funding to schools at a level which takes into account the importance of education to the future of the nation.
2. Governments will ensure that quality education is available and accessible for every student in the nation.
3. Parents will have the choice in deciding the best education environment for their children.
4. Parents are recognized as major stakeholders in education and must be involved intimately in the decision making processes at all levels of responsibility.
5. Funding to be provided on the basis of need with the expectation that all schools will be able to provide quality education in line with the goals of the Adelaide Declaration.
6. Governments at state and federal level work in partnership to develop funding policies to overcome the present educational and financial difficulties.
7. An effective needs formula be decided upon for every school in the nation.
8. All schools and systems are accountable to their communities and governments for providing quality education and the effective and efficient use of funds.
9. The principle of subsidiarity is applied in that the most effective educational and financial decisions are taken at the local community level.

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