

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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College Chair

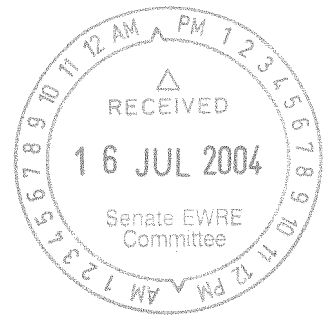
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11th June 2004

The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
Educational References Committee
Suite SG52
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

INQUIRY INTO FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

Introduction

Tarremah School is in its 13th year. Currently we have an Early Childhood centre with 70 children enrolled, a Primary School class 1 to 6 with 136 students and a Middle school with class 7 and 14 student which will continue into class 8 next year.

Tarremah's educational approach is unique. Although Steiner Education has been in existence since 80 years, its core values and methodology gain ever more relevance in current society and thus the demand for this education is increasing. It provides a positive and realistic pedagogical support to the young generation. This generation will have to find and maintain their own integrity in an increasingly technological and competitive social environment. Natural resources will become scarce and consumers and producers will be required to adopt different attitudes to life than they have at present, in order to create human centred life styles and work ethics for a sustainable future. Already on the horizon there are indications that future society will need to ask serious questions as to how society will find new values in life. Much of what is at present in the mainstream repeats and reinforces society's inherent problems. We believe that the challenge for future schools is to equip the next generation with knowledge, new ideas, integrity and ethical discernment to enable them to work with technology without jeopardising the social fabric of society and nature's balance.

The above is one of our core values in our educational service and it is here that we observe an ever-increasing demand for such educational values. According to the general trends in Steiner Schools around the world, our school in Hobart will be attracting more and more students not only from the surrounding suburban developments but from the interstate as well. Already there is a trend emerging; every year we see more parents moving from the mainland to Hobart because they have the prospect of sending their children to Tarremah.

Although Government Schools share our concerns, our methodology of teaching is unique and has over decades acted as a catalyst for the development of new educational approaches and we believe that government support to the Tarremah Steiner school not only assists our own school, but at the same time supports a multi-disciplinary development of educational choices for Tasmanian students and their parents.

For the above reasons we would like to make the following points

- School education is an important public good. Governments, both nationally and at state and territory level, have a responsibility to provide each Australian child - no matter what their family background or what school they attend - with a reasonable level of funding for their schooling. All school students deserve government support for their education irrespective of the school they attend.
- Non-government schools are important providers of education for the children of Australia and should be recognised for their contribution to the economic wellbeing of the nation. Over one million students are currently enrolled in non-government schools. Non-government schools account for one-third of total school enrolments and some 37 per cent of secondary enrolments. In all capital cities other than Darwin, non-government schools educate over 40 per cent of secondary students.
- Governments must recognise that a substantial proportion of Australia's system of school education, like the public systems of health and transport, is delivered by private (not-for-profit) providers. Government schools funding models must recognise the validity of diversity in schooling provision.
- Non-government schools are registered to operate as schooling providers with their state or territory government. The school registration process ensures non-government schools meet the public goals of schooling and community standards. Students attending non-government schools should be eligible for a reasonable basic level of funding by governments in support of their education. In addition, students with special needs who attend non-government schools should be able to access the same needs-based funding and government services available to students attending government-owned schools.
- Parents value diversity in schooling options and the freedom to choose among them in order to best meet the educational needs of their children. Parents who choose to educate their children in non-government schools demonstrate their willingness to play a partnership role with governments in funding the cost of their children's education.

- Parental contribution to the education of their children in non-government schools represents a significant proportion of Australia's expenditure on school education. If the students in non-government schools were educated in government-owned schools, governments would need to find another \$4.2 billion each year in recurrent funding alone to be able to educate all students to the standard currently available in government-owned schools. In our school, parents are asked to pay around \$3,500 for the primary school and \$3,800 for Middle School plus material and excursions apr. \$1000 per annum to meet the gap in funding from governments. We believe that this is a modest charge making it possible for parents to enrol of a fair cross section of the economic community.
- Students in non-government schools are not eligible for the same level of government funding as students attending government-owned schools.
- The current system of allocating general recurrent grants for non-government schools from the Australian Government (the SES model) provides a reasonable measure of the capacity of school communities to contribute to the costs of schooling.
- In contrast, funding for government schools is provided without any assessment of the financial circumstances of their school communities.
- Much of the recent public debate on schools funding has focused on the facilities available to independent schools. Unlike the provision of capital infrastructure in government-owned schools, facilities in independent schools are largely funded through borrowings and the generosity of school communities. It is estimated that, nationally, 86 per cent of funds for capital development in independent schools has been contributed by the school communities. This is another saving to governments.
- Australian government funding should be retained in its current form for the coming quadrennial period (2005 - 2008) to allow our families some certainty to plan for their financial commitments. Stability and certainty in funding is most important for our school's continued viability and ability to sustain quality in educational provision.
- Student Disabilities
 Funding received for Special Needs children needs to be increased to that given to Government Schools. Current funding received for children does not match Teacher Aide Salaries nor have a component available for specific resources or teaching aids. Parents may be asked to contribute financially, in addition to their school fees. For some parents, this is not feasible and consequently the child must either attend government owned schools or receive less assistance than is necessary.

Often children come to an independent school as the public system has not worked for them. Steiner schools, particularly with their unique approach to education, offer another option for the child with a specific learning difficulty.

Whilst the Literacy and Numeracy does assist in addressing such difficulties it is by no means sufficient. Additionally, school fees paid by parents cannot sufficiently address learning support and thus access to funding and professional services should be on a par with government schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Karl Kaltenbach
College Chair