

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

Submission no: 7B

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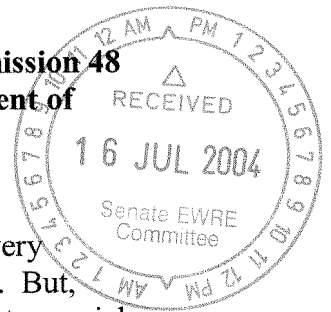
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**Supplementary Submission Challenging Significant Elements of Submission 48
from Christopher Evans of the Schools Group within the Department of
Education, Science and Training (DEST)**



I believe there is much to support in this DEST submission 48. I certainly very strongly support the common school starting age initiative set out on page 2. But, whereas impressive suggestions are referred to in respect of generally uncontroversial initiatives involving handfults of millions of dollars per annum, this submission 48 is notably brief and grossly inaccurate in respect of the SES funding model policies and practices which dominate the distribution of the many billions of dollars per annum presently spent by the Australian (i.e. Commonwealth) government on schools.

The following passages challenge several claims made in this DEST submission 48 to the present Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools, under two sub-headings.

The Need to End the Consultative Gerrymander and Associated Bias and Hypocrisy

Submission 48 on page 2 refers to “government schools” but then on page 7 refers to “State government schools”. I urge this Inquiry to recognise that, in the absence of ideological bias favourable to or opposed to public schools, the Australian government should consider itself a partner of state governments in the running and funding of government schools, as well as non-government schools. The Australian government is not merely an agency of the Anglican, Catholic and other churches, but presently acts as though it is by affording greater respect, consultation and funding levels to religious schools than to public and other non-religious schools. Such grossly inequitable special treatment and favouritism is vividly illustrated in the 1998 report ‘Schools Funding: SES Simulation Project Report’ (by the then Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, available online at www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/publications/1998/simulation%20report.pdf), which on page vii states as follows:

The Project was managed by DETYA with the guidance of a Steering Committee representative of non-government schools. The membership of the Steering Committee was as follows:

- Mrs Therese Temby, National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC);
- Mr Fergus Thomson, National Council of Independent Schools’ Associations (NCISA);
- Mr Peter Crimmins, Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACCS);
- Mr Chris Duncan, New South Wales Catholic Education Commission;
- Mr Frank Pegan, Victorian Catholic Education Office;
- Mrs Fiona Ogilvy-O’Donnell (during November–December 1998, Mr Garry Le Duff), State Associations of Independent Schools;
- Mr Adrienne Jericho, representing independent school systems; and
- Professor Stephen Farish, University of Melbourne.

The Committee was chaired by DETYA, Ms Aurora Andruska, and assisted by a DETYA secretariat, Ms Helen Tracey, Ms Trish Wilson and Mr Mark Semmens.

A Reference Group was also established for the Project, including peak national non-government school bodies, non-government school groups and systems from each State, and non-government school parent and teachers’ union representatives, to provide wider links with the non-government school sector.

The above shows that the Commonwealth government has seen it fit to conduct extensive consultations, on matters influencing the destination of billions of dollars worth of public funds, with groups exclusively representative of non-government schools and entirely absent of public school representatives, despite the fact that public schools continue to educate approximately 70% of Australians. In these consultations and policy formulations, the Australian government has, ironically, been extremely inclusive of schools which are exclusive on religious or financial grounds, yet has bluntly excluded input from representatives of inclusive public schools. The Australian government's establishment of this *consultative gerrymander* is further illustrated in the following extract from page 11 of the DEST submission 48 itself:

The paper *Resourcing the National Goals for Schooling: An Agreed Framework of Principles for Funding Schools* although endorsed by the State and Territory governments through MCEETYA was not endorsed by the Australian Government. The Australian Government abstained from voting and had the following preferred position recorded in the MCEETYA minutes:

“That Council note the current draft of the Resourcing National Goals for Schooling: An Agreed Framework of Principles for Funding Schools paper and asks AESOC to engage in a process of broad consultation with the school community in each State and Territory in both government and non-government school sectors including the National Catholic Education Commission, the National Council of Independent Schools’ Associations, the Australian Parents’ Council, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the National Anglican Schools Commission, Australian Association of Christian Schools, National Office of Lutheran Schools, Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia, Christian Parent Controlled Schools and the Australian Primary Principals Association and report out-of-session to MCEETYA following the consultations.”

The funding framework principles endorsed by State and Territory governments through MCEETYA were developed without the full consultation of the education sector and were not endorsed by the Australian Government. Non-government schools were excluded from the process of developing these principles, despite the fact that non-government schools educate approximately 33% of Australian primary and secondary school students.

Non-government school representatives dominate the list in the quote preceding the above paragraph, which begs the questions: **what about the government schools which still educate some 70% of all Australian children??** Yes, it is wholly apt and indeed commendable to include minorities in consultation and policy development in respect of school funding, but surely not to grossly disproportionate extents which drown out the overwhelming government school majority (and, on this point, please note that whilst 33% of all school kids are now in non-government schools, this figure is only 28% or so in primary schools, and rises above 30% largely because less public school kids stay on to complete year 12). The Australian government has clearly engineered a policy making climate where representatives of non-government schools educating barely a few percent of all Australian children

have had as much or more say in funding policy as representatives of the 70% of Australians who are educated in public schools.

I urge the Inquiry to recognise this outrageous consultative gerrymander and the link between this gerrymander and the manifestly absurd SES funding model that is presently in place. To put it bluntly: consultative and policy forming groups dominated by non-government school representatives have shown themselves incapable of developing a competent and even-handed funding model. The result has been a funding regime that, typically and on average, has been grossly over-favourable to non-government schools, whereas a competent and even-handed funding scheme would have left billions per annum in additional funding available for public schools – assuming an unchanged Australian government commitment to overall funding across all schools.

Plainly False Claims Affecting Billions of Dollars Worth of School Grants

Submission 48 states on page 8 that:

Non-government schools are funded according to a formula which measures the socio-economic status of the communities they serve. ... Schools educating the wealthiest communities receive about 13.7% of that cost. The socio-economic status (SES) approach provides an open and simple measure of need based on independent information which is consistent for all schools.

The above paragraph is entirely misleading and false, as follows:

As my original submission (number 7) plainly demonstrates (see especially pages 4-10), the funding formula presently employed *does not* measure the socio-economic status of the communities which non-government schools serve *in any substantive sense at all*. The methodological absurdity of the present SES model is such that it is actually far truer to say that non-government schools receive funding levels *based on the SES levels of communities which government schools serve!!*

Substantive and anecdotal evidence alike make it clear that Geelong Grammar School is one of the wealthiest schools in Australia, yet Geelong Grammar receives well above the 13.7% figure stated above. Geelong Grammar Corio is due to receive **33.7%** of “the cost of educating a student in a State government school” from 2005-2008 whilst the present system remains in place (for 2001-2004, Geelong Grammar has been receiving **37.5%** of the cost of educating a student in a State government school, based on an SES score of 111). According to the SES scores which DEST has produced, there are approximately 200 schools Australia wide which are “wealthier” than Geelong Grammar. I urge the Inquiry to recognise the obvious absurdity of this outcome as hard proof of the absurdity of the SES model generally, and the SES score determination process in particular.

The DEST submission 48 claims (on page 8 as above) that “The socio-economic status (SES) approach provides an open and simple measure of need based on independent information which is consistent for all schools”. Yes, the system is simple – indeed *simplistic* to the point of producing SES scores for schools which

have only the slightest connection with the actual families of the actual students of the actual schools. As my original submission 7 described, SES scores for non-government schools reflect the needs of government school children more than of non-government school children.

The present SES system is also plainly inconsistent across different schools. As has been stated several times previously, the dominant flaw of the SES score determination process is the fact that the SES score of a given school is based largely on families who have no connection at all with the target school. Furthermore, as my submission 7 makes clear (see especially the tables on pages 23 and 24), most families unconnected with an individual non-government school – who nevertheless (absurdly) contribute to the SES score of that particular non-government school – are, typically and on average, of significantly lower SES than the families of children who attend the particular non-government school. Accordingly, the SES system will in general produce absurd scores (in the computer jargon sense of “garbage input data gives garbage output data”), and will only rarely produce SES scores which are more or less accurate. Such genuine “fluke” accurate scores will occur for schools in which the families unconnected with a given school are of SES levels matching the generally small minority who *are* connected with the school. This is likely to happen for relatively low fee, low SES non-government schools in relatively high SES locations, where poorer government school families will more or less cancel or balance out the wealthier high fee non-government school families living in the same school catchment areas.

These flaws in the system mean that the SES scores of genuinely high SES schools are generally grossly under-estimated (Geelong Grammar again being one of many prime examples), but the SES scores of nearly all non-government schools are brought down to some extent at least by the absurd inclusion of (generally lower SES) government school families in the data used to determine funding levels for non-government schools.

I urge the Inquiry to assess the DEST submission 48, and legitimately question DEST staff, mindful of the concerns raised in this supplementary submission.

Regards,



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