

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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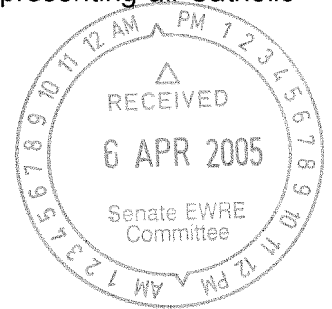
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Introduction:

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) is the peak body representing all Catholic schools in Queensland. It has delegated authority in the areas of:



- Funding
- Advocacy, negotiation and agreements with government
- Research and collection of statistical, financial and educational data relevant to the Commission's prime functions

QCEC is responsible for all Commonwealth funding and the majority of State funding being provided to Catholic school authorities in Queensland.

The Queensland Catholic system comprises 283 schools, which are the responsibility of 24 different authorities. The largest authority is Brisbane Catholic Education (Archdiocese of Brisbane) which is responsible for 154 schools. There are 197 primary schools, 68 secondary schools and 18 composite schools and these are spread over a wide range of geographical locations and include students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. (The mean SES score for the Queensland Catholic system is 100).

Enrolment trends of Indigenous students in Catholic Education indicate that there has been a significant increase since the mid 1980's. In 2004, Indigenous enrolments of 2962 students represented 2.7% of total enrolments.

Catholic Boarding Schools offer a choice for Indigenous parents, for their children's education post primary. These Indigenous students are predominately from the Torres Strait Islands and the remote Aboriginal communities of Cape York Peninsula, and isolated regions of the north-western and south-western Queensland. The numbers of Indigenous students who access boarding facilities is significant. For example, in the Townsville Diocese 48% of Indigenous boarding students are from remote areas.

The Catholic system is a system that operates in parallel to the government school sector and in one instance is the sole provider of education. QCEC is committed to providing education in partnership with the government and independent sectors as a service to the community as a whole.

The Commission welcomes the Australian Government's reforms in identifying the disadvantage affecting Indigenous students in remote locations. As a general principle, Government policies have recognised Indigenous peoples as the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia, regardless of geographic location.

1st Issue

The Commission therefore is disappointed that the Commonwealth has redefined Indigenous disadvantage, according to the *remoteness of the school* and not according to educational needs of the Indigenous student.

Furthermore, there is no recognition in the new programs, in SRA, ITASD or PSPI of the disadvantage and educational barriers of remote area students whose parents or caregivers choose the boarding option – regardless of the school sector. There is no recognition or acknowledgement of the flexibility required and additional costs to schools with residential arrangements, to meet the pastoral and educational needs of Indigenous students from remote areas.

2nd Issue

The legislation require QCEC to report on all Indigenous funding including General Recurrent Grants funding identified for this purpose. The accountability requirements being proposed will be difficult to deliver given that our systems do not record what proportion of funding is attributed to Indigenous students. Apportionment of costs to meet such requirements will be onerous and tend to be artificial.

3rd Issue

The Short-term funding nature of SRA is an issue, when we are implementing programs to benefit the educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people. School authorities and their budgets cannot easily change when government determined priorities defund worthy programs. There is no recognition of what is working well.

4th Issues with SRA-IESIP

We draw attention to two areas of concerns. The first one deals with the funding mechanism where SRA appears to be excluded from the process of supplementation, which applies, to other commonwealth programs. The second concern is with the administration of these programs.

- Delays in signing the new agreement. DEST is still to clarify issues that were raised from the state level. We are informed that no education institution has as yet signed their agreement.
- SRA guidelines do not acknowledge or address the disadvantage and educational needs of remote area students whose parents/caregivers choose the boarding option for secondary schooling –regardless of the school sector. It is imperative that Indigenous students whose families choose the boarding school option are not overlooked or disadvantaged, and is included in new initiatives targeting students from remote areas.
- There is no recognition or acknowledgement of the flexibility required and additional costs to schools with residential arrangements, to meet the pastoral and educational needs of Indigenous students from remote areas. It therefore imperative that Indigenous students from remote areas in non-remote schools are supported to the same level as Indigenous students in remote areas in remote schools.
- Non-government providers will be disadvantaged in meeting accountability requirements due to the delays in accessing validated years 3,5 and 7 testing data.

5th Issues and concerns with ITAS

Queensland is the only state that has strong links with Torres Strait Islander students with English as their 3rd or 4th language. Aboriginal students from remote and the urban communities maintain pigeon/Creole languages and yet the Australian Government does not recognise this. ITAS will now

be available only to those Indigenous students who failed to meet one of the National Benchmarks in Years 3, 5 and 7 in the previous year. We believe that our students who do not have English as their first language will be disadvantaged by this ITAS change because it means that schools will not be offer the same level of support. ITAS support will be decreased and schools will have to seek other funding from a limited school budget.

- There is no supplementary support available to students in the early years.
- It is inequitable to legislate that Indigenous student in Brisbane metropolitan or regional schools with enrolments of 20 or less Indigenous students will be denied access. Furthermore it is inconsistent with the Government's Year 3 Tuition Voucher program, which provides intervention for **all** students that fail to meet the year 3 benchmark regardless of enrolments levels of their school. This is inconsistent.
- We note that clustering of schools is permitted under the SRA and PSPI programs but not under the ITAS in – class program another program inconsistency.
- The change of policy is further demonstrated by the eligibility criteria of In-Class Tuition Programme, which precludes Indigenous students located in a capital city (except Darwin).
- Under the changes in secondary level, Year 8 and 9 is excluded from ITAS support. This will be a major challenge in our boarding schools where intensive English language programs assist our students who do not have English as their first language. Homework centre major set back for Year 10.
- It's inequitable that ITAS will only be available to Year 8 students who failed to meet the benchmarks and who transition in same system. This will provide a new challenge for the boarding systems where a significant proportion of Year 8 students from government schools in remote communities.
- Meeting benchmarks does not mean that indigenous students have equality, nor does it mean that students are being encouraged to develop further skills and improve their educational and training prospects in later life. The emphasis is on a deficit model where students have to fail the benchmark but they need ongoing help.
- The timeframe of using ITAS funds is not satisfactory due to the time delay for receiving the

funds. To assist student in this program it will need to commence at the beginning of each year. Students in 2005 have not accessed ITAS funds.

- Delay to the release of ITAS funding will impact on the ongoing employment IEW's.
- The "new flagship project" for teaching literacy under IESIP is the Scaffolding project. This is not available nationally – it is only available to NT. We understand that a pilot project was conducted here in Shalom College and it was successful. Why wasn't such a successful program rolled out to other states and Territories?

5th Issue/s of the NEW 'Whole of School Intervention Strategy' WoSI - PSPI

- Each DEST district office in Queensland has different methods and responses to WoSI – PSPI. No clear guidelines or assessment criteria are outlined in policy. Approval processes are not transparent and DEST unable to clarify the role ICC in the approval process.
- No clear percentage or dollar allocation according to remoteness, eg. National or state, local.
- Process for the submission - what is accepted and not accepted - no acknowledgement of the current trends for curriculum and the protocols of education institutions.
- Competitive-based funding applications are a disincentive for parental involvement. Significant efforts by school communities in submitting application have been rejected. Brisbane and Townsville no 'Concept Plan" been approved.
- Schools with smaller numbers of indigenous students won't compete. Because of the approval rate is zero.
- DEST officers do not acknowledge the need for educational authority to be linked with Reforms and initiatives from a State level. It will need to be reflected in the curriculum, we must provide appropriate pedagogy and method for teaching Indigenous students.
- The policy objectives of PSPI are the same as the SRA and IESIP funds - To provide a better practical structure PSPI funding should be per capita based.
- Timeframes for this strategy is not in line with schools Calender
- Submission will be based on creative writing skills.

6th Issue Capital funding

- Insufficient information to submit application no criteria.eg. Abergowrie and Thursday Island should eligible for additional supplementary support. How do we access?