

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir or Madam

Inquiry into Indigenous Education Funding Arrangements

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) represents the interests of 94 South Australian Independent schools, with an enrolment in excess of 37,000. AISSA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Inquiry.

The AISSA is committed to increasing the numbers of Indigenous students in the South Australian Independent school sector. The AISSA *Reconciliation Statement* provides a commitment that AISSA will '*encourage member schools to implement strategies that will increase the level of enrolments of Indigenous students...*'. Research indicates that students from Indigenous backgrounds continue to experience less favourable educational outcomes than non-Indigenous students. AISSA is committed to improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students.

Equitable funding arrangements, which support the needs of Indigenous students in the Independent school sector, are a critical element in achieving both the above commitments.

The Australian Government is the major source of government funds for Independent schools. Independent schools in South Australia have limited access to State funds and, hence, rely significantly on Australian Government sources of funding, including supplementary funding for Indigenous education, literacy and numeracy, special learning needs and languages. As a consequence, any changes to Australian Government funding arrangements can have major implications for Independent schools.

It is of significant concern to the AISSA that the new conditions of funding for Indigenous education do not take into account the dispersed nature of the Indigenous enrolments in the Independent sector or the impact that these arrangements will have on access for Indigenous students. A potential consequence of the new arrangements is that a significant proportion of at risk Indigenous students in the Independent school sector could be disadvantaged.

In this response, the AISSA focuses on the Terms of Reference as they apply to South Australian Independent schools. Following the provision of some background information and an outline of Commonwealth funding programmes for the 2001-2004 quadrennium, the response raises specific concerns, relating to the implementation of elements of Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) and Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Projects (IESIP), which AISSA argues disadvantages Indigenous students in a large number of Independent schools. The AISSA further provides some suggestions of appropriate ways to overcome these issues.

The AISSA is concerned, however, that the Terms of Reference focus solely on Commonwealth sources of funding which are directly related to improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Funding for Indigenous education needs to be considered within a broader context that encompasses all funding sources, both State and Commonwealth, which are available to improve the educational outcomes of all Indigenous students. Hence, the limited terms of this Inquiry may not give a complete picture of the current situation. The AISSA fails to see how this will be of benefit in increasing the educational outcomes of Indigenous students.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following points provide some context to the AISSA response. The most recent DEST data indicates that in 2004:

- The numbers of Indigenous students in Independent schools were relatively small and widely dispersed across schools in the sector.
- 340 Indigenous students were enrolled in 55 South Australian Independent schools. Indigenous enrolments in the Independent sector in South Australia have increased each year over the past five years from 197 in 1999 to 340 in 2004.
- 219 students were enrolled in Lutheran schools, with the remaining 121 in non-Lutheran schools.
- 41 schools had five or less Indigenous students enrolled.
- Only 2 schools had an Indigenous enrolment of more than 20 students. Both of these schools are in rural and remote areas.
- A number of Indigenous students from remote areas were enrolled in metropolitan boarding Indigenous schools.

Benchmark achievements for Indigenous students in the South Australian Independent school sector follow the same trends as South Australian Statewide Benchmark data, across the years 3, 5 and 7 benchmarks, with Indigenous students consistently performing at lower levels than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

2001-2004 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The 2001-04 quadrennium funding arrangements enabled schools and school education authorities to access funds for a wide range of Indigenous Education programs and projects. Some of these were managed by AISSA through "cluster arrangements" on behalf of Independent schools; others through the South Australian Independent Schools Targeted Program Authority (SAISTPA); and some were accessed directly by schools. These programs

and projects included:

- Targeted Outcomes Projects (TOPS)
- Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS)
- *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS)*
- *Working Together for Indigenous Youth (WTIY)*
- Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes (SAISO) Programme
- Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Programme
- Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS)
- ESL-Indigenous Language Speaking Students Programme (this is coordinated by the Lutheran Schools Association).

2005-2008 FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Under the 2005-2008 funding arrangements the above programmes, with the exception of the ESL-Indigenous Language Speaking Students Programme, either no longer exist or have undergone substantial changes. Of particular concern to the AISSA is that school education authorities, such as AISSA, are more restricted in accessing funds on behalf of their school sector.

In the following section AISSA identifies specific concerns raised by the new arrangements. These comments address particular elements of the funding package including components of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) and Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Projects (IESIP).

Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA)

In regard to the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA), AISSA is specifically concerned with elements of the funding arrangements which relate to the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) and the Parent School Partnership Initiatives (PSPI). We make no comments on other parts of this programme.

Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS)

- **In-Class Tuition Years 4, 6, and 8**

This new programme provides tuition in years 4, 6, and 8 for those students who have not met the benchmarks in Years 3, 5, and 7. AISSA questions the decision to exclude students in R-3, 5, 7 and 9 from accessing ITAS by focusing support on post-benchmark failure as opposed to early intervention. AISSA does not consider that intervening *after* a child has failed is an appropriate way to proceed. Research findings have clearly indicated that early intervention is a key to educational success for at risk students.

Moreover, the conditions for ITAS funding stipulate that ...*Only schools with 20+ Indigenous students in metropolitan areas* will be able to access the ITAS funds. Under the current enrolment profile, this means that all Indigenous students not meeting Year 3, 5 or 7 benchmarks in all metropolitan Adelaide Independent schools will be denied access to the ITAS program. No Independent school in metropolitan Adelaide has an enrolment in excess of twenty students. This is of significant concern to the AISSA given the, above mentioned, benchmark data which indicates that Indigenous students are consistently performing lower than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Research has indicated that failure to meet the benchmarks can have long term consequences for children and young people. For example, in the case of literacy it has been found that those students who fail the Year 3 benchmark, but receive no early intervention, do not in most cases make up this knowledge in later years.

Targeting the proposed in-class tuition at students in Years 4, 6 and 8 will further mean that students in the early years (Reception to Year 3), who may have already been identified as at risk of not meeting the benchmarks prior to Year 3, will not be able to access additional tuition. It is also possible that if a student has failed the benchmark in Year 7 when that student makes the transition from Year 7 (Primary school in SA) to Year 8 (High School in SA) vital information about their levels of literacy and numeracy achievement in the Year 3, 5 and 7 Benchmarks assessments may not be taken with them to new schools, hence, putting them at risk of not accessing the ITAS in Year 8.

Taking into consideration the dispersed enrolment pattern for Indigenous students, AISSA considers that a cluster funding model for ITAS funding should be available so that school education authorities with small enrolments can apply for ITAS funds on behalf of all eligible students. This cluster model is currently used to enable school education providers to access SRA funds for eligible Indigenous students. AISSA believes that this is a more efficient, equitable and effective funding model.

- **Year 10, 11 and 12 Tuition**

This new scheme aims to increase retention and completion rates. The current Guidelines state that eligibility for Year 10, 11 and 12 tuition is to be assessed following an educational assessment. However, clarification is required as to what constitutes an educational assessment and what information any assessment report should include. It is crucial that guidelines are available for educators who conduct educational assessments. In addition, eligibility criteria based on educational assessment outcomes should be available to ensure all Indigenous students have equitable access to tuition support.

Indigenous students in Years 10, 11 and 12 in South Australian Independent schools are achieving improved SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education) completion rates. Tuition support at Year 10, 11 and 12 for Indigenous students is of particular importance in supporting these improved SACE completion rates. Indigenous student enrolment in senior years is without exception widely dispersed and the tuition program provides a crucial additional mentoring component to ensure Indigenous students are not isolated in their school setting. Consequently, isolation within a school should be included as an eligibility criterion for tuition assistance.

AISSA recommends that wherever persons external to the school are engaged to deliver services to school students both in-school and out-of-school hours, such as the hire of tutors for ITAS, stringent screening procedures are in place as a condition of DEST funding.

Parent School Partnership Initiatives (PSPI)

The AISSA supports the objectives of the PSPI. However, this strategy requires Indigenous communities and parents to participate in a competitive, submission-based funding process. Where there are only 2-3 Indigenous students enrolled in one school the potential for Indigenous parents and communities to apply successfully for funds may be limited, resulting in students and parents not getting the benefits of the funding.

The enrolment profile of Indigenous students across the Independent sector means that schools with low numbers of Indigenous students may have difficulties in accessing funding for this Initiative.

In the 2001-2004 quadrennium, the AISSA was able to access funds from the VEGAS Programme on behalf of all Indigenous students in the sector. This Programme had similar objectives which were directed at students in Years 8-12 with a focus on goal setting, improved attendance and retention.

The AISSA supports a model whereby, in addition to parents directly accessing funds, it may also access PSPI funds on behalf of its schools as the most flexible and efficient way to meet the needs of Indigenous students and families in Independent schools.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION STRATEGIC INITIATIVES PROJECTS (IESIP)

Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA)

Under the new arrangements the funding for SRA is 'frozen' at 2005 levels for metropolitan areas for the remainder of the quadrennium. The outcome of this is that provision of services and funds for Indigenous students in metropolitan areas may decline over the quadrennium.

The AISSA appreciates the opportunity provided to continue to receive SRA funds on behalf of Independent schools under the "cluster" model. However, there are potential difficulties with the revised SRA funding model in which annual SRA funding is to be finalized in the calendar year (following the August census). Specifically, there are inherent administrative problems with the model as a result of figures being adjusted late in the calendar year. To overcome these difficulties, AISSA recommends that Funding Agreements should provide the opportunity for committed but unspent funds to be carried forward to the following year.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES, ACCOUNTABILITY

AISSA does not directly access mainstream recurrent funding from the Australian Government. Consequently, non-systemic schools are directly accountable to the Australian Government via their Resource Agreements. Further, school education authorities that supply services to non systemic schools are not authorised to collect data from those schools.

However, in situations where AISSA accesses Indigenous Education funds on behalf of Independent schools the degree to which it may be responsible for reporting on how schools are meeting the costs of Indigenous education through other funding sources remains an issue.

The level of reporting and accountability, compared to the relatively small funds available for each Indigenous programme, continues to be an ongoing issue. The range of funding sources for different programmes and projects result in a diversity of accountability and reporting requirements. Accountability arrangements should be evaluated to ensure that they improve the educational outcomes of students and the effective use of government funds.

AISSA recommends that a more integrated approach to the number of programmes is necessary to reduce and rationalise the degree of reporting and accountability required of school education authorities. This should include utilising nationally collected data such as the literacy and numeracy benchmarks in Years 3, 5 and 7.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

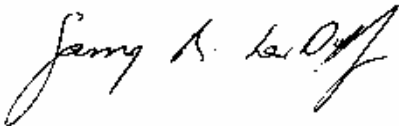
AISSA has serious concerns that rather than substantially increase the funding for Indigenous education, existing funds have been redirected from one group of Indigenous students located in capital cities to another group located in remote areas.

AISSA considers that it is too early to comment specifically on the likely educational outcomes of the new Indigenous funding measures in relation to the objective of accelerating educational outcomes for Indigenous students. However, it is of significant concern that Indigenous students in the Independent school sector, at risk of not meeting the Years 3, 5, and 7 benchmarks, who are located in metropolitan areas will not have access to ITAS funding.

AISSA recommends that an alternative scheme such as the "cluster" TOPS model be available for other programmes, so that the school education authority can apply for Indigenous education funds on behalf of its schools.

Please do not hesitate to contact Helen Lambert on Ph: 08 8179 1412 or Email: lamberth@ais.sa.edu.au if you wish to discuss this response.

Yours sincerely



Garry Le Duff
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