



Queensland Catholic Education Commission

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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
P O Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA
ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached the Commission's submission relating to the Inquiry into Schools Assistance Bill 2008 & the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Byrne
Executive Director

**INQUIRY INTO
SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE BILL 2008
& THE EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008**

This submission is from the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. The Commission is the peak body representing all Catholic education authorities in Queensland which together operate 287 schools. The Commission is also the approved authority of an approved school system (Section 9) the Schools Assistance (Learning Together-Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004.

This submission relates to the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. In particular it relates to the provisions under which the Commonwealth intends to maintain support for the achievement of improved Indigenous outcomes.

Catholic Education is committed to supporting the Government to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes and is currently working towards that goal:

- The number of Indigenous students in Queensland Catholic schools has increased by 24% over the past five years to 3496 in 2008.
- In 2007, 212 Indigenous students graduated from Year 12 in Queensland Catholic Schools.

Sections 64 to 69 of the Bill provide for Indigenous Supplementary Assistance for Indigenous students with funding as follows:

- Non remote schools \$1600 per primary student and \$2250 per secondary student.
- Remote and very remote schools \$3850 per primary student and \$4400 per secondary student.

This arrangement replaces four programs provided for under the Indigenous Education (Targetted Assistance) Act 2000 which were in place for the period 2005-2008.

The Commission endorses the new funding framework contained in the Bill for the funding of Indigenous education. The Commission believes that the arrangement avoids prescriptive inputs and provides the flexibility for each education authority to work with Indigenous communities towards improved educational outcomes for their students.

Catholic boarding schools in Queensland have provided and continue to provide a valuable option for Indigenous families particularly families living in remote and very remote locations in Australia. In 2008 there were 656 Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic boarding schools. Of these 533 (81%) were from remote or very remote locations as detailed:

- 35.5% (233) from Torres Strait communities, including Bamaga
- 45.7% (300) from other remote/very remote communities including Indigenous communities
- 18.8% (123) from non-remote areas

The Catholic boarding schools are mostly located in major regional cities with some in Brisbane. Because of the location of the schools they will be funded at the lower level of the abovementioned two tier system. We respectfully submit that the funding model fails to recognize the very high costs of

enrolling remote Indigenous students. The cost of supporting these students is significantly higher than that of non-boarding Indigenous students.

Additional costs are incurred in the planning and preparation with family and community in transitioning these students from home to boarding school. Intensive literacy and numeracy programs are provided by schools, particularly in the first couple of years of secondary education, to assist students to reach the literacy and numeracy levels similar to the rest of their cohort. Health and well being and other support mechanisms such as operating transition centres, providing counseling, family support, clothing, etc. are required to ensure the students are successfully transitioned into their new environment and to support their learning and retention in school.

To be able to provide this level of support (and if equity is to prevail and the Government's aspirations delivered) then the Commission strongly believes that Indigenous students from remote and very remote locations should be funded at the higher rate of the two tier scale.

The Queensland Catholic system under the Bill will receive in 2009 over \$317,000 less than was received in 2008. The aggregated shortfall for Catholic boarding schools amounted to \$748,000 – a 30 percent decline. It is understood the Bill (Sections 70 and 71) provides a guarantee to maintain funding but that this will diminish over time. While the Commission acknowledges that a guarantee will assist the Queensland Catholic system it does not overcome the concern that the significant contribution boarding schools are making is not being appropriately recognized. Further, the Commission believes that the operation of the guarantee over time will be administratively cumbersome and lead to uncertainty in available funding.

The Commission has calculated that if remote students are funded at the remote rate then overall funding for Indigenous students in Queensland, based on 2008 enrolments would increase by \$818,000 or 10.3%.

The Commission requests that the Committee recommend that funding for Indigenous students living in remote and very remote locations be funded while they are at boarding school at the rate applicable to remote and very remote schools.