

John Carter

Committee Secretary

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Department of the Senate

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RE: Senate Inquiry into Schools Assistance Bill 2008-10-29

Dear John,

The Members of the Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) are passionate about the value and place of diversity in education and the central role of learner choice and responsibility for their own learning.

We welcome the Government's guarantee to maintain the current levels of funding for the next 4 years and hope that the planned Review will enable the development of funding which focuses on the needs of the individual and provides equity of access and is not dependent on requirements contrary to the philosophy of our diverse school communities.

We continue to be concerned that the Government has retained and increased the National Performance and Transparency Requirements which are part of the Funding Agreements between the Government and the Schools. Participation in national student assessments and reports to parents which include an assessment of the student's achievement against any available national standards and relative to the student's peer group at the school are contrary to the philosophies of many of our schools. We value the development of the individual in caring, co-operative learning environments. We seek policies and implementation of assessment and accountability processes which recognize individual difference and learning styles, enable collaboration and co-operation rather than competition and which reduce rather than increase the comparisons between students and schools which often results in low self esteem, constricted learning and fearful parents and communities.

The requirement to implement a national curriculum is of considerable concern as we seek the continued right for our schools to value and acknowledge explicitly what each learner brings to the table through implementation of diverse, flexible curricula including, emergent, negotiated and natural learning. When curriculum is viewed as "experience" teachers are co-learners with their students, responding and wondering together about their world and taking action in it. As teachers we are learning about the child, who they are, their aspirations, their interests their ways of knowing and understanding and building from those to support (or "scaffold") the child's learning in ways that are relevant, useful, timely, meaningful, engaging and inspiring. A national curriculum seriously distracts us from this process as the focus switches to ensure that external requirements are met rather than those of the learner whose sense of themselves as a self-directed learner who loves learning and will continue to learn throughout their life.

As a supporter of the philosophies of the Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) I wish to express my concern for the potential impact that a National Curriculum may have at the local level of education. If the detail of the Bill reduces opportunities for diversity and freedom of choice it will compromise a democratic society. The Australian society takes its strength from diversity, tolerance and acceptance of the many ways we live. I recognise the motives of a National Curriculum as a desire to create opportunities and pathways and social justice for all children in become active members of their communities. If this is a skill based curriculum I see that it has a high level of merit. If it is a content based curriculum I believe it will simply reduce the possibilities for learning.

Educational Assessment has too often been restricted to the empirically measurable - Reading skills and Number have always been the focus not only because they are valued but that they are more easily measured. Some things are not measurable and these are generally the most important learnings. It is clear by the absence of the arts - Visual, Literary and Performing (creativity) in the initial drafts of the National Curriculum that they are at a loss in this area. If funding for education is attached only to the measurable then a great deal will be lost.

Greg Richards