

31 October 2008

Mr John Carter  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600  
Fax: 02 6277 5706

Dear Mr Carter

**Subject: Senate Inquiry on *the Schools Assistance Bill***

Ballarat and Clarendon College is a Uniting Church co-educational school with a history dating back to 1864. Currently we have in excess of 1150 students enrolled from prep to Year 12. An Early Learning Centre was established in 2005 to accommodate to meet the need for introducing learning concepts for pre-school age children.

Our primary mission is learning in all contexts in an environment where it is safe to learn and fun is etched into all facets of the student's learning experience as we help our students discover who they are, who they want to be and how to achieve their objectives. Last year's VCE results indicated Ballarat & Clarendon College was the eleventh most successful of Victoria's 500 education providers and most successful regional school.

Throughout a student's time at Ballarat Clarendon College our focus is to maximise their competence, skills and capacity so that, at the end of school, when they stand on the threshold of their future, they can choose their "heart's desire".

The focal point of the school is the student. The role of the school is to support each student as he or she engages in the process of creating their future. We develop a clear understanding that their path through life depends on the choices they make and that path leads to opportunities for new choices. We cultivate an awareness of current reality while encouraging, stretching and supporting the dreams they have.

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Ballarat & Clarendon College

David Shepherd  
Principal

1425 Sturt Street  
Ballarat Victoria 3350  
T: 03 5330 8200 F: 03 5333 1513

614 Meir Street  
Ballarat Victoria 3350  
T: 03 5330 8300 F: 03 5332 3430

Grassy Campus  
King Island Tasmania 7286  
T: 03 6461 1114 F: 03 6461 1490

college@bcc.clarendon.vic.edu.au  
www.clarendon.vic.edu.au  
ACN 006 101 173



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With a total population exceeding 1150 students from Prep to Year 12, the College attracts from mainly Ballarat and satellite towns up to a 100km radius including Bacchus Marsh. The College does however enjoy strong support from boarders and accommodates 150 students in its boys and girls boarding facilities. Boarders generally, originate from Western and Northern Victoria and overseas.

Parents have a critical and pivotal role within the school and both work closely in partnership, recognising the potential of alignment of values and attitudes within the community, particularly to do with learning. The majority of parents are two income families with much sacrifice given to ensure their children receive their choice of independent education. The school also offers bursaries and scholarships bestowed to the College to encourage the pursuit of excellence in specific fields.

In response to the Senate Inquiry we respectfully express our concerns regarding how *the School Assistance Bill* may affect our philosophies, curriculum delivery and protection of our confidential information.

*The School Assistance Bill* raises concern from our College and we as a school community are anxious *the Bill* does not dilute the fundamental strength in learning, the development of a curriculum that has proven to exceed contemporary academic benchmarks. It is imperative we as an independent college can offer our current educational program and maintain our strong and unique curriculum development. A forced change in curriculum may impact on our capacity to deliver pastoral care, religious and cultural values. These are fundamentals in a Christian learning environment with a strong sense of values.

It has been reported widely *the Bill* will include a requirement for more in depth financial information. We already provide exhaustive reports to receive appropriate funding and are concerned more detailed financial information may be counter-productive if misinterpreted by publicity or at worst used for purely political purposes.

Accentuating our position is uncertainty surrounding the Federal Government's intent for using the States for collection and distribution of our financial information. We are ready to share information to consolidate strong funding models however reporting on gifts, raffle results and benevolent donations for funding calculation would be intrusive.

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Principal1425 Sturt Street  
Ballarat Victoria 3350  
T. 03 5330 8200 F. 03 5333 1513614 Mair Street  
Ballarat Victoria 3350  
T. 03 5330 8300 F. 03 5332 3430Grassy Campus  
King Island Tasmania 7256  
T. 03 6461 1114 F. 03 6461 1490college@bcu.clarendon.vic.edu.au  
www.clarendon.vic.edu.au  
ACN 006 101 113



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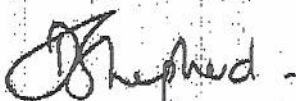
Much of these funds go towards funding minor capital items such as sporting and musical equipment. There is no argument all monies be declared for taxation purposes and we already forward our audited annual accounts. We are uncertain why these fund raised monies would be subject to scrutiny and calculation of future funding.

A further deep concern would be each State using the information supplied to calculate each State's funding model. Changing funding methods and using the additional financial information as a basis for these changes could destabilise the support we have received from successive governments in Canberra.

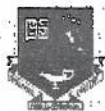
We note Catholic schools will, by agreement, continue to receive their funding from the Commonwealth yet non-Catholic independent schools will be predominantly financed by the States. The Senate should inquire and clarify why funding routes are proposed to be different between Catholic and non-Catholic independent schools.

We trust you can clarify the Federal Government's position in respect of *the School Assistance Bill* and that the Senate would not agree to any legislative changes to curriculum and funding which erroneously impact on our successful College achievements and close connections with the Commonwealth for funding dispersions.

Yours sincerely



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