

The Uniting Church in Australia
Board of Education
Synod of New South Wales and the ACT



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

Dear Mr Carter

I write with concern on behalf of the Uniting Schools Group located within the Synod of New South Wales and the ACT with concern at the perceived difficulties there will be if the Government is unable to have the School's Assistance Bill 2008 passed by the Parliament before the end of November 2008. As far as we can see the Rudd Government is honouring its election commitments to the non-Government schools, particularly in relation to maintain the existing funding arrangements.

Whilst there are some provisions in the current Bill which hold concern for our schools, the inability to have the legislation passed by the end of the last Parliamentary sitting in 2008 will have dire consequences for a number of our schools if they do not get their normal Government funding by mid January 2009.

I am sure that it is not the intent of the Parliament but nonetheless it is of critical concern to us and we would like to be assured that funding will be received in mid January 2009.

We do have reservations with the Bill, mainly through the lack of specificity in relation to the National Curriculum and the requirement to identify all sources of school income. However, we support the concept of a National Curriculum in principle so long as there is sufficient flexibility for schools to adopt differing educational philosophies and approaches that are currently widely accepted. At the moment there is minimal information as to whether this will be catered for in the National Curriculum.

Also we have no difficulty with the principle of accountability and transparency of schools in relation to educational, financial operations. What is concerning us is the lack of detail as to what information will be required and how this information will be compared with the Government and non-Government sectors of the education spectrum.

We are certainly working with the Association of Independent Schools of NSW of which we are members and support their negotiations in relation to these issues with the different parties making up the Parliament. Therefore we are open to any questions you might have about the impact of this legislation and its failure to pass the House in reasonable time.

Yours sincerely

Mr Jim Mein
Director: Schools' Ministry