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Submission to the House Standing Committee on education and employment Inquiry into the Australian Education Bill 2012

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ASEPA represents approximately 1000 schools leaders who lead in the area of special education in all sectors and types of Australian Schools. This submission is presented on behalf of our membership and represents the view of our organisation. ASEPA also engages in quality research in the area of school leadership and special education and is internationally recognised as a lead agency in this highly specialised area of schooling.

The importance of engaging with school leaders and recognising their knowledge is an area that has not been addressed in the Bill. School leaders bring essential salient information, skills and expertise to educational policy. The Bill should reflect and value the knowledge, skills and expertise of school leaders.

The Education Bill must be structured to enable the delivery of quality education and improved outcomes for all students. If all sides of politics are in agreement about what is best for students in terms of education across Australia this should be reflected in a long-term bipartisan agreement to secure the future for our students. Something as important as education should not be dependent upon funding or election cycles, it requires a long term commitment, regular review and guaranteed funding to ensure sustainability.

The Preamble and the Objects of the Bill

The preamble needs to have some reference to the fact that a major element of school leadership is community leadership. School principals consistently report that effective schools are bound to their communities through partnerships with all who make up that community. This is highly important in the development of inclusive schools and needs to be mentioned in the preamble.

The preamble also states that Australian schools should be "highly equitable". This term is not defined and must be defined within the Bill. There is a need for the Bill to align with the definition used in the Review of School Funding - Gonski Report, which defines equity in education as ensuring that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions [p. 105]. The elaborations in the report relating to equity should also be included in the

Bill. Equity does not mean that everyone gets the same. The Bill needs to enable schools need to address what teachers and schools do for students to improve. This will in turn ensure that every child in every classroom improves every year. This is about value adding and this should be the measure of accountability for schools.

ASEPA believes to ensure consistency that modification of the Objects of the Act is need. ASEPA sees that the major blueprint for education is the Melbourne Declaration and that the Bill should reflect this blueprint. Both of the goals from the Melbourne Declaration are clearly defined and as such there can be no ambiguity as to the intent of the Bill.

Developing a National Plan Improving the performance of schools and school students

ASEPA agrees that the Australian Education Bill 2012 is an important step towards improving the educational outcomes for all Australian students and creating school environments which support a high quality, equitable education for all Australian students.

ASEPA believes that education for students with disability should focus on quality outcomes in academia, culture, physical activity and civic participation. Students with disability should be enabled to perform to their full potential in these areas.

ASEPA believes that through support with targeted resources aligned to individual need, Australian students with disability can achieve high educational outcomes, which enable their participation in a diverse, skilled workforce.

ASEPA supports all proposals for development and supply of targeted supports to students with disability being specifically aligned to achievement of educational outcomes that are identified and measured against defined goals.

ASEPA believes that in order to develop and implement a national plan for continuous school improvement and improved student outcomes this requires comprehensive and continuous consultation with the profession at every stage. For improvement to occur then it must be focused, early, sustainable interventions that not only address learning but also student wellbeing and be accessible to every student in every school in Australia.

Quality teaching

ASEPA believe that quality teaching is more than a skill set and is about professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement. School Improvement is not about compliance, it is about supporting growth and development and measuring what has changed as a result of learning and teaching. This is how a school adds value to student outcomes. There is considerable evidence both nationally and internationally that demonstrates that compliance alone does not lead to school improvement. It is in the area of quality teaching that we need to demonstrate leadership and learn from the mistakes of other countries and not go down the compliance measure for school improvement. Compliance will not demonstrate to the community or authorities any more than the current system does.

Developing benchmarks

Context is the most important aspect in the development of any benchmarks for assessing the

performance of schools students. For example a benchmark of attendance with national averages may be one of the benchmarks. However if a student with poor attendance demonstrates a marked improvement after quality interventions from the school, but still fails to meet the national averages of attendance in the benchmark then the school will not show improvement although there has been significant improvement for that particular student. This type of system of school improvement does not allow for distinctive schools to demonstrate improvement and adopts a one-size fits all approach.

The sole purpose of data is to inform teaching practice and to examine what is working and what requires improvement. Research shows that the collection of data for data sake does not lead to school improvement. Data is useful in schools when it is used to focus on teaching and learning strategies and outcomes. While it is correct that there is no story without data it is also very true that there data is irrelevant without a story.

ASEPA knows that special schools are data rich with teachers continuously collection both quantitative and qualitative data on which they base their judgments about student achievement. This data is sometime school-based data relevant to the distinctive school context and other data is for systems. This data is rich and forms a picture of how a school value adds to the learning of their students. This data is not easily aggregated and therefore has not been added to the Myschool data collection. This is very problematic for special schools as well as primary and secondary schools with significant cohorts of students with disabilities, as currently the majority of schools have little or no students with disabilities performance data on the Myschool website. ASEPA strongly recommend that the Bill includes specific reference to data collection for ALL students with disability in ALL schools who do not participate in the current Naplan testing. ASEPA recommends that specific reference be made to ACARA conducting research on methods of data collection that can demonstrate via the Myschool website how ALL schools value add to students with disabilities learning over time.

Education for students with disability should be aligned to measurable goals and outcomes, and aim to significantly improve support for students with disability to:

- Achieve their educational goals alongside their peers without disability.
- Prepare students with disability to undertake tertiary qualifications.
- Prepare students with disability for post-school training and employment.
- Improve individual capacity to engage actively in social, economic, cultural and political life.
- Ensure that they can be active and informed citizens as per the goals of the Melbourne Declaration

Support will be provided to ALL schools to find ways to improve continuously by analysing and applying data on the educational outcomes of all school students including outcomes relating to the academic performance, attendance, behaviour and wellbeing of school students.

Empowered school leadership

There are a lot of terms used for Empowering local leadership and there is a need to use one specific term that is defined in the Bill. As empowering school leadership is one of the major focuses of the Labor government's education policy it is necessary to ensure that the Bill reflects this consistently and that the premise of high performing or quality leadership is incorporated into the Bill. ASEPA suggests that reference to the AITSL Principal Standard is referred to in this section and some commentary on leaders having access to high quality training, professional learning and support. Context remains of the utmost importance when addressing empowering school leadership. There is no one size that fits all schools. Schools are very distinctive in their nature and are becoming

increasing differentiated. Empowerment can not mean being buried in administrative tasks. Adequate administrative support is essential to allow school leaders to focus on student learning and staff professional learning. The focus of the school leader must remain on the classroom to ensure improved outcomes. ASEPA believes that empowerment of school leaders will improve student outcomes if adequate supports are in place.

Meeting Student Need

ASEPA believes inclusive practices are enhanced when specialist teachers are available to provide classroom and individual support. ASEPA supports a range of service delivery opportunities for students to meet their specific learning needs in a range of settings. ASEPA firmly believes that meaningful inclusion, where students are demonstrating educational outcomes, is not a one size fits all model of delivery.

ASEPA believes that the Bill needs to reflect Australian schooling by placing the highest priority on:

- (a) identifying and addressing the needs of school students, including barriers to learning and wellbeing;
- (b) providing additional support to school students who require this additional support;
- (iii) gathering and sharing evidence about the most effective methods of improving the performance of schools and school students.

School Funding

There is wide community recognition that the current school funding model does not meet the needs of all students as previously stated. ASEPA endorses the intentions of this Bill to improve the situation for all Australian students from 2014. ASEPA sees that urgent work is needed to further model and test a loading for students with disability. ASEPA believes that when calculating the loading to fund resourcing supports to improve social, curriculum and participation outcomes that this should include but not be limited to physical, technological, digital and social supports aligned to individual needs.

ASEPA would support financial assistance to States and Territories, based upon the following principles:

- (a) every school student will have the opportunity to have an excellent education;
- (b) base recurrent funding will be allocated according to a formula that calculates an appropriate amount for every school in recognition of the costs of providing a high quality education;
- (c) educational disadvantage as outlined in the Gonski Report will be recognised and addressed through providing additional recurrent funding in the form of cumulative loadings

Conclusion

While ASEPA members applaud the government's initiative to ensure every young Australian benefits from their schooling ASEPA urges the Australian Government to bring greater clarity to the Australian Education Bill specifically in the areas outlined above. ASEPA is in general very supportive of the Australian Education Act 2012 and we are committed to participate in active dialogue to ensure its seamless introduction. ASEPA appreciate the opportunity to have input into this inquiry.

Should you have any queries about ASEPA's submission please contact Fiona Forbes, President of ASEPA for further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely



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