

Queensland Association of State School Principals

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21 March 2014

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Senate Inquiry: Select Committee on School Funding

The Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP) represents Principals and other school leaders (Deputy Principals, Heads of Curriculum and Heads of Special Education Services) in state primary schools in Queensland. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry, which relates to a vital and futures-focussed area.

State schools in Queensland educate 71% of the state's youth from Prep to Year 7. This market share is expected to remain at a similar level in coming years, however all Year 7 students in Queensland will move into the secondary school sector from the beginning of 2015. This has particular relevance to this Inquiry, and this will become self-evident in our responses.

QASSP's response is organised under the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

QASSP bases its response on its Position Paper: Designing a Funding Model for Australian Primary Schools. This paper presents the views that have emerged from a decade of research into the resourcing of Australian primary schools.

There are more than 1,000 primary schools in Queensland. Their needs are extraordinarily diverse. Hence, the formulae that are used to direct funding to these schools must be sensitive to the differing needs if the schools are to achieve the expectations held for them.

The existing funding arrangements have evolved over many years, are based on assumptions that may never have applied and certainly now no longer apply, contain inconsistencies, contain inconsistent thresholds for resourcing, do not reflect actual data (i.e. land area, ICSEA rating), indicate omissions and for the most part, fail any reasonable test of transparency.

Expressed political will exists for a principle that facilitates opening schools to a competitive market and allowing community choice to guide school sustainability and funding. The potential to create a two tiered and inherently marginalised majority dispels such a principle.

The Commonwealth Government has become the principal source of funding for non-government schools and the States and Territory governments provide the bulk of the funding for government schools. This division has led to unhelpful tensions between school sectors and diverted attention from the needs of schools in all sectors.

There is agreement that funding according to student need is the fundamental principle underpinning a long awaited review of school resourcing. The principle though is difficult to put into practice. There is general acceptance in the profession, in government and in the wider community, that such needs based funding is possible to achieve at some level by measuring the needs of students attending a school and employing a range of determinants associated with socio-economic circumstance.

The Terms of Reference below are addressed in the response which follows.

- a) *the implementation of needs-based funding arrangements, from 1 January 2014, for all schools and school systems, including:*
- i. *Commonwealth funding, methods for the distribution of funds, funding arrangements and agreements with states and territories, as well as related accountability and transparency measures, The division of responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States,*
 - ii. *funding arrangements for individual schools,*
 - iii. *the extent to which schools can anticipate their total future funding and links to educational programs in future years,*
 - iv. *the consequential equity of educational opportunity between states and territories, schools and students,*
 - v. *progress towards the Schooling Resource Standard, and*
 - vi. *the implementation of schools reforms,*

QASSP Response to Section (a)

1. Ensure Complementarity Between Commonwealth and State Funding

It is important that a new funding model establishes proper complementarity between Commonwealth and State funding of schools. To merely adjust the Commonwealth's funding arrangements without reference to those of the States and Territories would leave Australian schools with a broken system.

This complementarity can only be achieved by consensus among Australian governments. At present, the States and Territories fund schools at different levels. For example, states differ in the amount of financial assistance they provide non-government schools. Costs of provision also differ widely from state to state for demographic and other reasons. Hence, even in a national funding model it is likely that the per student amounts of funding will differ systematically on a state and territory basis for reasons that are justifiable and for other less valid reasons that mostly relate to historical precedent.

2. Provide Funding Directly to Schools

Direct funding to schools according to need should be the core funding principle.

The problem with measures of socio-economic advantage/disadvantage, as the core to direct funding, is that they draw on national census data. These data are inexact and subject to manipulation analysis and assume that students from all families living in a census district share the same level of advantage/disadvantage. In fact, in key respects, they are very often quite different.

Particularly, data do not reflect the aspirations of parents, their valuing of school success and their willingness to work with the school to ensure their child's success. This belief is supported by the meta-research by Professor John Hattie. This research indicates that up to one third of student success can be attributed to home and family factors. Considering such aspirational intent should form an essential element in funding if education is truly valued as the key to developing social, economic and cultural capital.

3. Consider Costs Associated with School Alignment to an Education System.

Where the school is part of an education system, the costs of maintaining the system must not be attributed to the school in a manner that negatively impacts on its funding allocation. All systemic funding arrangements must be transparent. Transparency should underpin any funding model.

4. Amalgamate Commonwealth and State Funding into a Global per Student Entitlement.

The current arrangements whereby the Commonwealth and the States share responsibility for the funding of schools yet have separate and diverse arrangements contribute to the inconsistency, lack of transparency, capacity for exploitation and incomprehensibility of Australian school financing.

5. Full Disclosure of Funding From All Sectors.

Currently, a large proportion of government educational funding is used to provide the systemic infrastructure required to support large government and non-government school systems. The efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided with this funding are seldom subject to external scrutiny. Hence, the possibility exists that some of the funding might be more effectively used if it were disbursed directly among schools. Greater transparency would facilitate such decision making.

6. Report Income Where Schools Augment Government Funding

Schools should continue to levy fees and accept donations from private sources. Schools that attract private funding should not be penalized for doing so but schools that cannot raise funds from fees or community contributions should not be disadvantaged as a result.

7. Adjust Funding when a School's Enrolment Profile Changes Significantly

Each year a substantial number of students move from some schools. In some areas this transience is significant. Each quarter the income of the schools should be adjusted to take account the impact of significant movement.

Schools experiencing enrolment growth should not have to absorb the pressures of growth at the expense of sound pedagogy and practices, especially those where resourcing pressures occur.

8. Authority to Disperse School Funds Resides at the Level of the School.

School principals should be fully in charge of allocating the funds allocated to their school, taking into account guidelines and recommendations issued by education authorities. They have a deeper understanding than central officials of the needs of students attending their school, the complexities of their individual communities and the capabilities of their staff members and should be expected to deploy all their resources to best effect.

9. Provide at least Four Years Advanced Notice Prior to of Adjustments to the Funding Allocative Mechanisms Taking effect.

Increasingly, schools need certainty regarding their income so that they can attract and employ high quality staff for a substantial period of time. This need will become more evident when increased autonomy is devolved to schools.

- b) *how funding arrangements will meet the needs of all schools and individual students, including: Indigenous students, students with disability, small schools, remote schools, students with limited English, and students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds;*

QASSP Response to Section (b)

10. Establish Open, Transparent and Responsive Funding Review Systems

It can be assumed that over a period of time anomalous differences in the level of funding would be rectified through proper political processes providing the new funding arrangements are made transparent.

Funding formula should include consideration of needs of all schools and individual students, including: Indigenous students, students with disability, small schools, remote schools, students with limited English, and students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The shared responsibility of federal and state governments for funding contributes to the complexity of the school funding system. However the complexity is further exacerbated by differences among state funding policies for government and non-government schools, differences among systems in how they fund their schools and various industrial agreements governing salary and conditions.

The complexity partly explains the lack of transparency concerning the level of funding allocated to individual schools: it is difficult to explain why one school receives more funding than another. However, education authorities have been reluctant to reveal the amounts in

case disclosure precipitates unhelpful public debate regarding the equity of the funding system.

QASSP believes from the rigour of informed public and professional debate a thorough and transparent funding model would address inequities within the divergent range of current funding models.

11. Fund Primary and Secondary Students Equally, Irrespective of Year Level.

The current practice of funding secondary students at a higher level than primary students is based on historical precedent and specious argument. The new model should fund primary and secondary students at the same base rate since the progress of secondary students is contingent on the foundations laid in the primary years. This does not preclude the consideration of other funding factors listed. Governments should set targets and introduce adjustments progressively over the next quadrennial cycle.

To add substance to this notion and to add context, as Year 6 students walk out of Primary schools this year to become the first cohort of Year 7 secondary students in Queensland, they will suddenly and significantly attract more resourcing than they would have in their primary settings, both in terms of per-capita funding and in terms of the human resources to support their learning. QASSP believes that excellent primary education provides the basis of improved secondary schooling outcomes. If we get it right early, Australian children will have a brighter future. It is important that, during the formative years of primary school, all Australian children acquire the academic and social foundations for success in later life.

12. Consider School Size

The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools project (which was conducted in June 2004) found that most of the variation among schools in per student expenditure is determined by school size. System authorities seek to achieve economies of scale by weighting the per student allocations so that large schools get less funding for each student than small schools.

The new funding model should build into the formula a school size factor. However, such would still require consideration of what kinds of weighting should be assigned to the size of the school enrolment.

13. Tie Recurrent Funding to Student Need without Reference to School Sector.

The principle that funding is tied to need has been agreed by all Australian governments but is not fully implemented. The old sectarian divisions between government and nongovernment schools should no longer apply in a truly egalitarian and sustainable funding system.

- c) *the Government's proposed changes to the Australian Education Act 2013, related legislative instruments and their consequences;*

QASSP Response to Section (c)

14. Publicly Report on all Sources of Income and Expenditure per Student Annually

Government and non-government schools should be required to complete an annual financial questionnaire. The summary of this information should be publicly available.

- d) *the economic impacts of school education policy;*

QASSP Response to Section (d)

15. Additional Funding for Educational Needs

The principles defining any new funding model should ensure that resources are distributed according to need. The model however should not be seen as cost neutral. Recent research reported in the Gonski Review of Educational Funding explicitly highlights a critical and long overdue need for significantly increased investment in Education in Australia.

16. Fund Sufficiently for all Students to Reach the National Goals of Schooling.

It is widely accepted that education policy and practice should be based as far as possible on sound evidence. This principle should be applied to the calculation of the level of funding provided to schools, recognising that some students require an exceptionally high level of support if they are to have the opportunity to reach nationally acceptable educational standards.

Consideration should be included reflecting international research on per capita funding in national economic terms. To match international student achievement testing in areas such as PISA and TIMMS funding should level the playing field.

- e) *the Government's consideration of expert findings, research, public consultation and reports in the development and implementation of school policy, including the selection of experts to provide advice on education policy; and*

QASSP Response to Section (e)

17. Establish a Small Independent Body to Continually Monitor and Review Funding

The funding model should be developed and trialled over a specified number of years. There should be wide consultation with stakeholders, including the Queensland Association of State School Principals through its National body the Australian Primary Principals Association. The implementation of the SES funding model by Commonwealth education officials during 1996-1999 should serve as a model for development and consultation.

Because of the long-standing political sensitivities around school funding, the Australian government should establish a small, independent group with oversight for the development and implementation of the model. The members should serve as ombudsmen able to recommend to the Government actions that would correct anomalies and ensure compliance.