

Education Standards Institute

standards, equity, diversity and choice

A submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees for inquiry and report; Teaching and learning – maximising our investment in Australian schools.

- (a) the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools;

As I've argued in a number of books and numerous articles and comment pieces over the last 30 years or so, pedagogy in Australian classrooms, compared to more successful countries overseas, is substandard, flawed and ineffective. As a result of adopting failed education experiments like Outcomes Based Education, constructivism, open classrooms and inquiry-based learning children are not realizing their full potential and teachers are overworked and ineffective.

- (b) the structure and governance of school administration local and central and its impact on teaching and learning;

Stronger performing education systems, measured by international tests like PISA and TIMSS, are characterized by autonomy, diversity, competition and choice in education. Allowing schools to be autonomous and giving them the flexibility to best set their own course and to best reflect the needs and aspirations of their local communities is crucial if standards are to improve. Such a model is in opposition to current approaches where governments are micromanaging schools and imposing unfair and restrictive compliance costs and undermining their autonomy.

- (c) the influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education;

Parents are their children's first teachers and are crucial to learning; especially during the early years of childhood. At the same time, the argument that demography is destiny and that home background, measured by parent's occupation and education, is the main factor determining whether children succeed or not is untrue. Schools and individual teachers, plus the ability and motivation of the child, are more important than socioeconomic status in influencing performance.

- (d) the adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment;

Teachers, and schools, have not been given the tools to create an optimal learning environment. Teacher training is substandard and, as a result, many beginning teachers lack the knowledge and skills to be effective. In areas like discipline and behaviour management schools, especially government schools, do not have the flexibility and freedom to implement

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effective practice.

- (e) factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system; and

Many of the undergraduates entering teacher training have poor literacy and numeracy skills and more needs to be done to ensure that their skills are strengthened and improved. One way would be to evaluate teacher training and to make it more rigorous, relevant and effective. Much of what passes as teacher training courses and professional development does little to properly prepare teachers for the classroom or to make them more effective practitioners. Ways need to be found to better deal with under-performing teachers and to better reward successful teachers.

- (f) other related matters.

While Australia's education system, compared to overseas systems, is reasonably successful, much more can be done to strengthen results and improve outcomes. We only need to look at the many Catholic, independent and selective government schools that achieve world's best results to see what needs to be done. Instead of adopting a centralised, statist and bureaucratic model, best represented by the Commonwealth government's education revolution/national crusade, more market driven approaches need to be adopted.

A more detailed and comprehensive account of the above can be found in: *Australia's Education Revolution: How Kevin Rudd Won and Lost the Education Wars* and *Dumbing Down: Outcomes Based and Politically Correct – the Impact of the Culture Wars on Our Schools*.

If needed, I'd be more than happy to appear in person before the Committee to further detail my answers to the terms of reference.

Yours sincerely,
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