



Select Committee on School Funding Investment

Inquiry on the effect of reduced Commonwealth funding
for state and territory provided schools

Submission by

Christian Schools Australia (CSA)

Adventist Schools Australia (ASA)

For further discussion regarding this submission please contact:

Christian Schools Australia

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Introduction

Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) are national bodies that support and represent schools for whom religious formation is an integral part of the education process. In combination, CSA and ASA schools educate around 80,000 students across more than 180 locations nationally.

The schools are geographically, culturally and educationally diverse, although they serve predominantly middle to lower socio-economic communities. In South Australia they range in size from around 50 students on one campus, to more than 2,200 spread across three campuses.

While mainly in the metropolitan or outer suburban fringe suburbs of Adelaide a number are located across regional and rural South Australia.

The average socio-economic status (SES) score of these schools is **below the non-government school average**, reflecting the affordable-and-accessible philosophy which underpins these schools.

Member schools of CSA operate as *independent*, locally governed, religious organisations. Some are closely aligned with one or more Christian churches in their communities, while others have their heritage in a group of parents coming together to start a school.

ASA schools operate on a *systemic* basis as part of the wider Adventist Church, which educates more than 1.6 million students globally.

Recurrent Funding

CSA and ASA strongly endorse the need for an adequately resourced government school sector as a vital element in ensuring that the educational needs of all Australian students are met. Our organisations have held that position consistently since the initiation on 15 April 2010, by the then Minister for Education, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, of what was described as the first widespread review of funding for schooling since 1973. This review became known as the Gonski Review.

In submissions to that Review and subsequent ongoing discussions around funding our organisations have supported a ***nationally coordinated*** and ***sector blind*** funding approach for all schools. We welcomed the recommendations of the Gonski Review which largely reflected our funding principles including that equity, a fair go, must be at the heart of any funding approach. Our submissions to the Review argued that

- All Government funding (recurrent, capital and targeted) must be allocated in a fair and equitable manner.
- Equitable funding mechanisms must address the differential needs of students including those with disabilities, indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds and those at risk because of poverty, mental illness, extreme social dislocation or remote location.
- An allocative mechanism based on fairness and equity must provide for a level of Government support for all students.

We also emphasised that future funding must have sufficient ***certainty*** and ***predictability*** to allow appropriate school planning. This is necessary for large systems such as the State and Territory provided schools but also for non-systemic schools or schools in smaller systemic structures. The

effects are particularly evident in those schools at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum and heavily reliant upon such funding.

In focussing on the impact of uncertainty in relation to future Commonwealth funding on state and territory provided schools we encourage the Committee to not lose sight of the impact and importance of these schools. Many Christian schools, located in disadvantaged metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas without the greater scale of the larger systems, are dramatically affected by any lack of certainty of future funding.

We request that the Committee acknowledge that the continuation of certain and predictable Commonwealth funding for all schools, both State and Territory provided schools and non-government schools, is vital.

Student with Disabilities

In considering the impact on schools and students of changes in funding particular emphasis must be given to the needs of those most vulnerable within our schools, students with disabilities.

Under the arrangements negotiated with States/Territories the additional funding to students with disabilities is largely weighted towards the end of the proposed transition period. Consequently in some jurisdictions there are minimal real increases in funding across the early years of the implementation in both government and non-government sectors.

As a result, those amongst the most marginalised and disadvantaged students receive little real benefit in the early years of the new model. If the final two years are not fully funded, they will not achieve the equitable outcomes envisaged by Gonski, and anticipated for so long by Christian schools. This is not an acceptable outcome.

The implementation of consistent national definitions of disadvantage provides a natural and logical point in time to **fully fund** this aspect of the funding reforms for **all schools**. This most fundamental equity issue has faced students with disabilities, their families and schools for more than a decade.

We encourage the Committee to particularly consider the impact of funding changes on students with disabilities across all sectors and to recommend that equitable funding for students with disabilities in all schools be addressed as a matter of the highest priority.

Capital Funding

The Gonski Review process was disappointing in relation to capital funding. This was not as comprehensively addressed as other areas of funding a despite the needs in this area. Data from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training along with research released last year from ACER confirms the need. The ACER report projects the number of additional primary classes required **each year** until 2020 showing that:

- Victoria is likely to require 448 additional primary classes **each year**
- Queensland has the second highest need with an anticipated 443 classes **each year**
- New South Wales is projected to require 385 additional primary classes **each year**
- Western Australia is likely to require 351 additional primary classes **each year**

With demand for enrolments in non-government schools far outweighing government schools over the last three decades, many parents will be wanting these classes to be available in non-government schools not merely State and Territory provided schools. These needs will not be met under the present capital funding arrangements for non-government schools, with the result of increased pressure on State or Territory provided schools to ensure those places are available.

Innovative funding approaches need to be considered. In our view a wider range of options than are presently available could provide the Commonwealth with a greater 'bang for its buck' in incentivising private capital investment in community-based non-government schools. Solutions such as means-tested or capped interest subsidy schemes, tax incentivised bonds or community finance initiatives should be explored. This is an area where, if certainty can be secured in relation to recurrent funding, education stakeholders would welcome a detailed review and further reform.

We encourage the Committee to recommend that the Government establish an Expert Panel to review the imminent capital needs of schools in Australia and develop a range of appropriate, cost effective funding mechanisms

Appendix One

Equitable, Predictable, Sustainable

Christian Schools Australia and Adventist Schools Australia, together with Australian Association of Christian Schools have prepared a joint proposal for school funding entitled **Equitable, Predictable, Sustainable**. This document, available on request, contains six recommendations reproduced below:

RECOMMENDATION ONE: *All parties make a clear commitment to a needs based, sector blind, student focussed allocative mechanism consistent with the full implementation of the current approach under the Australian Education Act 2013.*

RECOMMENDATION TWO: *The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments negotiate updated transitional arrangements that would see implementation of the current funding arrangements achieved by 2021 - 2025*

RECOMMENDATION THREE: *The Commonwealth implement a fully-funded loading for students with disabilities ensuring the same quantum of additional funding for all students with the same assessed adjustment need from 2016.*

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: *The Commonwealth commit to continuing its role as a major funding contributor having a direct relationship with the non-government sector.*

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: *The Commonwealth commit to continuing its role as a leader and facilitator in developing and sustaining National educational reforms.*

RECOMMENDATION SIX: *The Commonwealth establish an Expert Panel to review the imminent capital needs of schools in Australia and develop a range of appropriate, cost effective funding mechanisms.*