



STEINER EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCHOOL FUNDING INVESTMENT

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

Email: schoolfundinginvestment.sen@aph.gov.au



This submission has been prepared on behalf of Steiner Education Australia member schools by:

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Background

Steiner Education Australia (SEA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding Investment as we believe the current funding arrangements do not provide the ability for schools to be strategic in terms of forward planning, program design, providing extra support for students or the confidence to invest capital in additional learning spaces.

SEA is the peak national body comprising 41 Member Schools and 11 Associate Members across Australia. We represent over 8,000 students and their families, in all States and Territories of Australia. We are part of the 900 non-systemic independent schools in Australia that are funded according to individual funding arrangements.

Steiner education is an internationally recognised educational movement. Steiner Education Australia is also affiliated with the European Council of Steiner/Waldorf Education and the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Waldorf Schools in New Zealand. There are over 1300 Steiner/Waldorf schools and 2000 Early Childhood centres worldwide. Our schools are diverse and relatively small, with approximately 25% of our schools in capital cities and 75% in regional or remote areas. Many of our regional and remote schools are subject to a low to average SES score, thus are highly sensitive to funding changes with strong ripple effects through the social and economic outcomes for those local communities. Further, new government schools cater generally for growth corridors and are unlikely to open smaller schools. Thus Steiner schools tend to be a strong socio economic support factor in small communities.

Steiner schools are inclusive and co-educational and many have significant proportions of students with disabilities or high needs with numbers increasing every year. Parents choose to enrol their children for the Steiner philosophy and pedagogical practice that differentiates our schools from other types of schooling, contributing after tax dollars to support their choice their child's education.

Our schools are also members of their respective State or Territory Associations of Independent Schools and Steiner Education Australia supports their views on school funding as well as the Independent School Council of Australia.



Comments

As our member schools are diverse in terms of geographic location, school size and jurisdiction, and under different state funding arrangements, their responses to individual funding situations are varied.

For example, 3 new Steiner schools opened in 2013 and they report that overall funding, especially the small school funding loading has greatly assisted their schools in their founding stages, though it tapers off as student numbers increase. Rural schools less than 150 students also report their funding has given them certain stability yet they are uncertain what the funding impact will be when their enrolment numbers increase.

Larger schools who found themselves outside the funding model are quite disadvantaged as they receive no extra support for students with disabilities yet were recipients of small amounts under the targeted programs. All schools report there is not enough funding to cover the costs of supporting students with additional needs and there is continued disappointment in the way that students with disability have been funded, as it is not equitable across sectors or schools.

Impacts of any reduced funding would mean all schools significantly increasing fees to parents, resulting in some school closures as many parents already struggle to pay school fees. Schools must manage timely fee collection and the difficulties and resources required for this will increase if funding is reduced. One school reported, "*We are walking a very fine line keeping fee increases to the minimum to alleviate the financial burden to parents*".

Overall schools report that the funding model is complicated. Simplicity and transparency is important in order to provide greater surety for planning education programs. Schools desperately need *advance* advice of funding levels for future years, in order to determine staffing levels, as well as all other budgetary aspects. Effective education of children requires levels of stability and consistency rather than disruptive change.

CPI increases do not keep up with costs of running schools. Most schools have had to increase fees to parents significantly more than CPI to meet actual school expenditure, thereby impacting on parents' capacity to pay tuition costs. Compliance demands on schools from registration and funding authorities continue. Coupled with increasing curriculum



demands, pastoral care needs and the growing identification of children with learning needs, compliance contributes to the significantly growing resourcing demands on our schools.