

### Context:

Flinders Christian Community College is an independent, coeducational, inter-denominational low fee Christian school with approximately 2150 students in Prep to Year 12 on three campuses located at:

Tyabb- Mornington Peninsula - metropolitan periphery commenced in 1983	SES 101
Carrum Downs low SES metropolitan near Frankston North, commenced in 2002	SES 98.6
Latrobe City Regional – Traralgon, Gippsland, commenced in 2004	SES 94

Overall the College has an SES of 99.

Over the past 20 years, Flinders has grown rapidly, but there have been frequent lags in the past in the provision of government funded infrastructure. The facilities at all 3 campuses are modest and flexible in design and fit for purpose.

Because we are one school, we have missed out on capital establishment funding. Although we were operating 3 schools in significantly different SES areas, we were only eligible for one lot of BER funding when in reality we should really have qualified for 3. Given our track record with efficiency in building construction, we have the capacity to produce 1.5 x the investment.

The same disadvantage occurred with Trade Training Funding. We were only eligible for one application.

One of the issues associated with operating a regional campus of a metropolitan school is that we do not receive many of the additional loadings applied to regional school, but incur all the additional costs. In practice, these costs are subsidised by the other campuses.

I have been Principal for 20 years and have seen the school develop into a leader in innovative education pedagogy and practice.

At Flinders our mission is to provide excellent Christian education that encourages, challenges and inspires each student to learn, to develop in character, to build a relationship with Jesus Christ and to prepare them to take a purposeful place in society.

The framework for school planning is known as Flinders by Design based on the principles of backward design. The vision and mission inform the policies and practices.

Flinders has adopted a philosophy of restorative practice across our 3 campuses. We have committed resources to pastoral care and student welfare - the number of enrolments of SWD has risen sharply in recent years, but many of these students sit just below the previous funding thresholds and remain unfunded. The need in this area is great. I recently enrolled a young man who is 14 years old. He had been homeschooled for 4 years after dropping out of his primary school after many unfortunate school experiences. The student requires a full time assistance when he is at school. We trialled his enrolment last year and noted his capacity to learn and so I have employed a part-time teacher to work with him rather than an integration aide because of his special learning needs.

He has:

- Extremely severe Childhood Apraxia of Speech
- Severe Anxiety Disorder
- Motor dyspraxia
- Dysgraphia
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

Flinders is committed to serving the learning needs of our communities and our values and learning philosophy are attractive, especially to families with SWD.

We have used our collective resources to advance our professional learning community, build teacher capacity and enable innovation in curriculum design.

Technology has been a vital part of our learning environment for many years. We use Moodle as a learning management system which we call *ourFlinders* accessible by students and their parents Prep- Year 12.

We have used our strength in technology applications to develop our own Flinders by Design Reporting System: accessible, continuous electronic reports accessed from home or school which enables us to report on habits of mind or learning dispositions as well as progress in learning.

#### **Proportion of income derived from government funding**

- Particular importance of Australian Government funding

2013

My School data:

- 45.5% Aust Govt funding,
- 9.2% State Govt funding,
- 45.3% Fees and private income

2012

- \$6321.20 Aust Govt per student in 2012,
- \$1277.39 State Govt,
- \$6294.61 Fees,
- Total = \$13893.20

## **Flinders' view of the new funding model**

1. The Gonski model meets many of the underlying philosophical goals of a good funding model (but not necessarily all)
2. Improve the operation of the Gonski model, rather than replace it
3. Any funding model should be applied consistently and equitably to all schools regardless of State or territory, and should be sector-blind

## **Flinders' opinion of the operations of the new funding model**

### **1. Stability and Predictability of Funding**

The fundamental requirement of any funding model is stability and predictability of funding.

Our Board has responsibilities in the area of financial management – they must be able to provide assurance of financial viability and stability and government funding is the key factor.

We project our financial position for 5 years and prepare budgets 2 years in advance to meet our statutory obligations, including the declarations that form part of the annual financial statement approval processes.

Flinders needs to be strategic with educational, financial and infrastructure needs, so we need know for at least a 3 year (preferably 5 year) period what funding we will receive. It has been very concerning and at times stressful for the Finance Department over the past 6-9 months trying to prepare budgets and plan forward.

Flinders cannot increase fees especially at Latrobe City where the majority of families are struggling to meet their fee commitments already. This is also apparent at Carrum Downs and to a lesser extent Tyabb campus.

### **Funding calculators**

Governments should be giving to schools clear and simple funding calculators that remove ambiguity and unknowns. Last year ISV did its best to assist us to understand how the funding was thought to be calculated.

The funding information was received from Government very late in the year after all the 2014 budgets had been prepared. The Flinders Board needs funding information by August of the preceding year at the latest.

Further, but insufficient information was provided to Flinders in January 2014 by the Commonwealth Department of Education. Critical information essential to preparing forward projections has not been made available despite considerable time spent trying to discover the basis for the funding calculations by the Head of Finance.

From Flinders perspective, we ask that the Committee recommend that the Government release to individual schools all the data and assumptions that underpin their funding calculations. I am aware of many colleagues who have been unnecessarily stressed by the lack of clarity around funding.



## 2. SWD

The additional funding to Students with Disabilities is largely weighted towards the end of the 6 year transition period.

From Flinders perspective, we have received minimal real increases in funding for SWD in 2014 as far as we can determine. As a result, SWD at Flinders receive little real benefit in the early years of the new model. This is not a desirable outcome.

Numbers of SWD are more concentrated at our Traralgon (regional) campus. This campus is already disadvantaged because it is regional and the operational costs associated with operating a regional campus are significantly higher per capita than a metropolitan campus.

It has been difficult to unpack the actual amount allocated for SWDs received in our 2014 lump funding amount. Based on information we have been able to glean from ISV and other sources, we have tried to work backwards to calculate the amount we think was allocated to SWD, but the formula does not appear to be simple.

Operationally, we do not think we have received any significant increase in funding for SWDs in 2014. This is consistent with the transitional implementation of funding for SWD.

The government should provide a tool to allow schools to determine funding back to SWDs.

Without the assistance of ISV and the targeted funding program, it is now incumbent on schools like Flinders to develop their own policies and procedures for assessing and categorising SWD to be able to complete the census in August. Clearly, inconsistencies will arise between schools as there is no standard benchmark.

In the future, I anticipate that schools will be reporting an increase in the number of SWDs. It is essential that the government provide specific information around the documentation required and classification levels of SWDs and ensure consistent and national application of funding.

Will this mean that the pot of funding allocated to SWD will increase to meet the real needs?  
or

The pot will remain the same and the per capita funding will decrease resulting in no net improvement of funding for SDW?

From Flinders perspective, we ask that the Committee recommend Funding for SWDs be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- This could involve removing funding for students with disability from the pool of general recurrent funding and allocate it as a sector-based targeted program, eg Christian School Sector.

or

- In Victoria, ISV has previously managed the funding of SWD for its members with a high degree of competence and fairness

I also note that NDIS will do little to improve the educational outcomes for SWD because education is explicitly excluded from NDIS for school students.

#### Calculation:

TOTAL SWD Numbers		29	
Ave SRS /Student	x	11,152	
multiplication Factor	x	1.86	
Students with Disability funding	=	601,530	if fully funded - notional

school proportion is then calculated by taking the SWD funding multiplied \$601k by the actual % we receive of total notional funding

Students with Disability funding		601,530
Notional Funding Entitlement	/	21,463,533
School % ratio	=	2.80%

Total Commonwealth funding - actual		14,918,171
multiplied by School % ratio	x	2.80%

school receives	=	418,092
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### 3. Low SES Loading

There are two sub-loadings within the Low SES loading: a higher loading for the bottom 25 percent (or quartile) of students ('Q1') and a lower loading for the second quartile ('Q2'). In turn, these loadings are higher for secondary school students than for primary school students. So, in effect, there are four Low SES loadings.

I would request the committee reexamine the assumptions underpinning the application of this loading.

The Marginal Loading starts at only \$1434 per annum for the first Q1 student and rises to a peak at \$7837 for the 75th Q1 student. For large schools with a higher number of students making up Q1, the funding received under this model seems disproportionate to a smaller school with fewer students in Q1 which would have to provide a similar service. ie economies of scale should be applicable to the larger school.

The most significant determinant of a student's performance beyond their innate ability is the teacher. Flinders recommends a focus on improving the quality of teachers. This is an intentional focus at our school.

There is also a concern that the current funding model may encourage the concentration of disadvantage.

Flinders suggest that a higher base funding be applied to a defined minimum number of Q1 students and then a flat amount is allocated per student thereafter in conjunction with an increased focus on improving teacher quality.

The same arguments may apply to Indigenous loading, but this is not particularly relevant to Flinders as our indigenous enrolment is very small, given our demographic.



#### **4. Impact of the reforms on individual non systemic schools**

At the beginning of 2014, Flinders was advised that its SES had changed from 98 to 99. This had an immediate negative impact on the 2014 budget given the budget had been set 4 months prior.

A greater concern would be a demographic change in a school community leading to a drop in the school's SES score for 2014 and beyond. This would have resulted in a substantial and immediate increase in funding for 2014 under the former funding model. While this will affect the *capacity to contribute* calculation for the SRS under the new arrangements, the slow transition means that only a fraction of the increase is received in the short term, yet 'real' school costs have increased.

These types of effects will not be felt at the level of the individual schools in a government or non government system, because of the system's capacity to reallocate resources based on need.

For this reason the Government should consider *individual school impacts* in the case of non-systemic schools like Flinders when making decisions impacting the transitional or other arrangements. 'Sector' or system based modelling, such as that which seemed to underpin much of the reform process decisions, is inadequate.

Non Government schools are individually funded and it is the impact on each school that must be analysed.

#### **5. Commitment to full implementation**

Flinders is concerned about the possibility the funding reforms may only be partially implemented and we may find ourselves in a worse position. These reforms have resulted from a rigorous review process and we support the full implementation.

#### **6. Capital funding**

The Gonski review did not address capital funding for schools.

For a relatively young school like Flinders that is still developing infrastructure at all 3 campuses, this is a significant issue.

The Commonwealth Department of Education has suggested the need for around 1,500 new schools by 2020 to accommodate projected enrolments. Our 3 campuses have capacity for further growth. It would be economical to provide capital funding to Non Government schools to allow development of existing schools/campuses, and the development of future schools/campuses to assist with accommodating some of this growth.

The government could consider innovative ways to provide capital funding to schools to meet the increase in enrolments.