

1 December 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: eewr.sen@aph.gov.au



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RE: Senate Inquiry: Teaching and Learning – Maximising our Investment in Australian Schools

Dear Secretary

Independent Schools Victoria welcomes the invitation to provide comment on the Senate Inquiry into Teaching and Learning – Maximising our Investment in Australian Schools (correspondence from Senator Bridget McKenzie of 1 October 2012 refers). We apologise for the delay in making our response.

By way of background, Independent Schools Victoria was established in 1949 and today represents, promotes the interests of, and provides services to more than 210 Member Schools. Our Member Schools educate more than 129,000 students on nearly 300 campuses across metropolitan Melbourne and in regional and rural Victoria.

With regards to the terms of reference that the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (EEWR) Committee has under consideration, Independent Schools Victoria makes the following comments and observations which are particularly shaped by the educational, social and philosophical diversity of the Independent sector:

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

There is a wide range of educational pedagogy being practiced in schools, with the best teachers utilising a range of strategies at their disposal from which to select the most appropriate to meet the educational needs of their students. As such, there is no single 'best practice' when it comes to pedagogy, but rather a suite of approaches depending on the particular educational setting. This pedagogy varies, depending on the stated philosophy of the school, the experience of the teachers and their exposure to professional learning, as well as the expectations of both the student and parent community. Rather than the effectiveness of current classroom practices, the focus for Independent Schools Victoria is whether all teachers have access to the professional learning required to maintain

currency of their teaching practice. Experience suggests that the expectation teachers will learn and embed new teaching practices in an ongoing manner after a one-off, one-day professional learning seminar is limited. Close and careful coaching in the classroom situation demonstrates how practice may be different and how it is more effective. Further, complex work is not learned by looking at it; it must be tried, modified and tried again with coaching and feedback being intrinsic parts of the process. Such an approach is often expensive and takes time, two elements which all schools, irrespective of sector, struggle to resource to an adequate level.

In addition to the above, areas that might require particular attention include:

- English as an Additional Language
- Working with students with individual needs, including those with intellectual challenges, social and emotional challenges, gifted and talented challenges, developmental challenges and those with a disability
- Collecting, analysing and using data to understand individual student progress.

Independent Schools Victoria has identified that new curricula often requires more specialist facilities. This extends, crucially, to ensuring that teachers have the opportunity to increase their level of specialisation through all stages of schooling.

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

All decisions in a school should be driven by the teaching and learning agenda. It is crucially important, therefore, that whatever the governance structure that is in place at a school, it must be clear and in support of the students' educational outcomes. The governance and operation of schools must not be weighed down with excessive regulatory burden.

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

Independent schools have a long history of family and community involvement in the education of their children.

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

Given the increasing number of students presenting with particular needs and the ongoing issues for non-systemic rural and regional schools in terms of access to ICT hardware, software and connectivity, the optimal learning environment of the future will be shaped by two distinct forces: an educational setting that must increasingly deliver customised and personalised learning; in tandem with the opportunities and developments in information technology and transfer present. As noted above, Independent Schools Victoria has

identified that new curricula often requires more specialist facilities, as well as teachers access to professional learning that leads to greater specialisation.

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

Independent Schools Victoria operates The Development Centre for the professional learning of both teaching and non-teaching staff, and works from the viewpoint that teaching is a profession requiring ongoing support and development that allows teachers to improve their knowledge and classroom pedagogy.

(f) other related matters

No comment.

This submission reflects our role as a contributor to the development of education policy and as an advocate for the membership, and education more broadly. With this in mind, Independent Schools Victoria looks forward to the development and implementation of education policy that supports innovation, is not constrained by excessive regulation, and does not limit the capacity of Independent schools to offer choice and diversity to parents.

The Committee Secretariat is most welcome to contact my office if additional information is required.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Green
Chief Executive