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8 November 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
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Parliament House
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Dear Sir/Madam

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO TEACHING AND LEARNING MAXIMISING OUR INVESTMENT IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

1. The Australian Council of Jewish Schools (ACJS) expresses gratitude to the Committee for the opportunity of making this submission.
2. Each of the registered schools that are members of the ACJS are also members of their respective Association of Independent Schools (AIS) and each school generally supports the submission of their AIS and the ISCA (Independent Schools Council of Australia).
3. The ACJS represents 18 Jewish schools throughout Australia which accommodates just under 10,000 students and also has, amongst its membership, an organisation that provides Hebrew language and Jewish studies programs to government schools.
4. ACJS Schools, also have a significant number of students who suffer defined intellectual and/or physical disabilities, for which additional funding is available, from the government, but, unfortunately, at a minimal level. In respect of defined eligible students three ACJS Schools have over 7% of such students as a part of their overall school enrolment, the highest being 15%. No school has less than 1%, and the average is 4%.
5. ACJS Schools are mostly co-educational and operate mostly at both primary and secondary levels. The "Torah True" religious Jewish schools are single gender schools (for at least all classes above Year 4) or operate single gender campuses, for reasons associated with a strict application of religious ethos. Some of the ACJS Schools operate only at a primary school level. Most of the schools conduct a preschool program as a transition to school program, and/or operate early childhood services, on a sessional or long day-care basis.

6. Each of the schools conduct programs through different structures that integrate the teaching of general studies with religious studies. Education by definition includes the teaching through formal and informal methods of core designated curriculum as defined by ACARA and the State registration authorities as well as the teaching of moral values, civics and citizenship, religion and religious teaching.
7. The activity in the main includes formal class room teaching. It however also includes extracurricular activities that occur in a form of social environment that may be conducted through youth group and may occur during or out of normal school hours.
8. The school day is extended in order to take into account the dual general and religious curriculum in a variety of delivery methods. A number of our schools conduct weekend classes and a number are associated with youth groups that meet on weekends and evenings to deliver an informal education program in line with the values and teaching of the school. Each activity as a general rule compliments the other.
9. In response to the 6 specific questions that have been raised we respond as follows:
 - (a) **the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools;**
 - (i) The current classroom practices are mostly effective, but for some less so and others not at all. Teachers and schools need to continue to focus on ways of enhancing classroom practices and engaging children in their learning. This takes time and is accompanied by a cost. Teachers need to be able to collaborate, learn from each other and from external experts. Schools and teachers need to focus on promoting thinking in their classrooms to ensure that students are getting the most out of the opportunities and resources being provided for them. The out of classroom learning through extra-curricular activities and social action is also very important to ensure a broad education that reinforces and consolidates what occurs at school, in the class room and produces competent, open-minded, compassionate knowledgeable and proud Australian citizens. Ideally, there is a link between the formal class room activity, the informal extra-curricular activities, and social actions which students participate in.
 - (ii) For those students for which traditional classroom learning was less effective or problematic, and were deficient in key critical areas, for example literacy and numeracy, a method of identification of need is in place. The deficiency in the key critical area is determined on a student by student basis. It was determined by identifying specific students at any school and at any level, whose assessment in these critical areas was considered below or at risk of being below a predetermined National Benchmark.
 - (iii) There was and is nothing in place for students who are struggling but meeting the minimum benchmark even though they are far from realising their potential. The funding mechanisms and program requirements prevent this aspect from being effectively addressed.
 - (iv) The schools that identified the students who fell below or at risk of falling below the national benchmarks received additional resourcing in what is referred to as “targeted funding”. This funding is intended and required to be applied to addressing the deficiency and improving the standard of the identified students so that that they are brought up to a standard that meets the national minimum benchmark, not however, to the point of achieving to their potential.

- (v) The review and need criteria to ascertain a qualifying student in this criteria is an annual assessment that sees students move into and out of programs designed to increase or maintain the students ability to meet the minimum National Standard. Once the student meets the standard under this funding criteria model the funding ceases at year end. There is not an opportunity to consolidate or to see the student moving toward their potential, irrespective of the success of the program. Students once funding ceases and the additional program falls away, will as a rule return to struggling in the classroom, and are likely in one or two years to again have fallen below the designated standard. It is this funding and educational cycle that ACJS perceives as a contributing factor for the absence of a significant long term improvement in the standards of literacy and numeracy amongst the students at our schools that are in need.
- (vi) Another aspect for not seeing a long term improvement is that although funding in this program was and is being indexed annually, the value was and is insufficient to truly allow for the development of alternate learning methods. The funding level was such that the supplementary programs that were introduced are limited due to cost, to the reinforcement of existing programs through remedial type lessons, still in a standard classroom format. At that level of funding, students who found traditional classroom learning difficult did not truly have their needs met and could not truly meet their potential.
- (vii) Toward the latter part of the two thousands, it was realized the value of funding was not sufficient to allow real impact using the “targeted funding” methodology, given the extent of the need when applied across all schools on a student by student basis. In 2009 National Partnerships were introduced that added very significant funding to the educational need in this area.
- (viii) Targeted funding is being maintained as it was. It continues to be indexed and students at every school that did not meet National Benchmarks or were at risk of not achieving National Benchmarks are continuing to be funded through the “targeted” funding program at this time, in addition to, the students who are at schools that qualified for the new National Partnership funding.
- (ix) The National Partnership Funding was introduced as a 4 year program that would allow schools the opportunity to address poor performance in key critical areas, with significant additional resourcing. The identification of need was changed, from that of an individual student assessment with relation to national benchmarks, to the identification of a correlation of cause of poor performance in a concentrated situation. The 4 year aspect allowed better long term programming and an element of certainty. There is however a risk in that the National Partnership funding is broken into three funding components. A seed component, an implementation program component, and a reward component. The reward component only is paid if the desired and pre determined outcome is achieved. A school could be significantly “out of pocket” if a program did not achieve the desired results in the specified time. Learning and engagement are very specific. The reasons that they are not occurring in the first instance are complex. It is the right program that needs to be in place. This sometimes requires a form of trial and error technique.

- (x) The National Partnerships designed to provide much needed additional resourcing so that students could better realise their potential was provided to schools based on the schools ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage) score. According to ACARA, “ICSEA measures the influences that students’ family backgrounds have, on their educational outcomes at school, specifically the factors that are more or less likely to foster learning in children. It does this by measuring key demographic factors that are more highly correlated with educational outcomes in literacy and numeracy”.
- (xi) The funding criteria fails to provide for students whose individual family background may meet the criteria identified in the funding, but who attend a school where the majority of parent’s family backgrounds are different. This applies to many schools where the choice of school is not related to SES factors, and SES factors do not play a role in domiciliary location. These students’ needs are not addressed.
- (xii) The criterion fails to provide for students for which traditional classroom teaching may not work, yet their parents do not fall into the family background need criteria that qualifies for funding, or were not part of a concentration of students from the defined need background at one school.
- (xiii) The present funding methodology in circumstances where the concentration of family background that tends to influence student outcomes less favourably is absent, or that there are other factors that impact on disadvantage and poor outcome, the funding fails to allow for students to have issues addressed and to have the best opportunity to realise their potential. The present funding addresses pockets of disadvantage leaving many students struggling, and demonstrating the absence of overall effectiveness outside the pre determined correlating family background factors.
- (xiv) ACJS acknowledges that family background does play a part in educational outcomes. Studies have shown that in some circumstances it accounts for up to 33% of the likely outcome. In other circumstances it accounts for between 10% to 12% only. ACJS are of the view that there are significant other circumstances that should be taken into account when determining educational advantage. The National Partnership criterion does not take that it account and leaves a significant number of students needs, unaddressed.

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

- (i) Independent schools have their own governance and make their own decisions about how resources generally are used to target learning needs. This is the ideal situation.
- (ii) The governance requirements that surround funding, and in particular targeted funding or National Partnership Funding used to address a defined or identified particular need is relatively restricted and removes a considerable amount of flexibility. There are restrictions that are being strengthened around differentials in what is defined as capital expenditure and what is defined as recurrent expenditure. Students, for which the classroom setting does provide the best outcome so that they can reach their potential, need imaginative and unique approaches to engage them. Each student’s engagement level is unique. In some cases equipment is identified that might aid learning. If this equipment was not identified in the planning of the program that formed the basis of the

application, the resource to obtain that equipment is either not available for 12 months when a new application can be made, if the student still qualifies, or is simply not available at all if a part of a 4 year program. Application forms seek specific expenditure in the two areas.

- (iii) The State Governed curriculum and the requirement to follow that curriculum over a number of years has changed. Arithmetic in years past, used to be theoretical numbers. Today arithmetic and mathematics is placed into a context where language is a fundamental aspect. With this requirement, a student that has a language disadvantage, because, English is not necessarily the first language or there is a more in depth comprehension issue, but the student is clear on numbers and arithmetic, then the student with the present restrictive requirements will gradually fall behind in both areas as the language factors will withhold maintenance of effort in the numeric field.
- (iv) The question is vexed, but it is not a one system suits all answer. Mathematics needs to become more relevant and real to the students. Some students are able to work at abstract levels and don't need to know the relevance or a practical context of say algebra. Most students, however, struggle to place abstract mathematics into their world and to see any point in what they are learning. Putting situations into words and getting students to solve mathematical problems related to real contexts help to engage most students. The inevitable result of this is that more words need to be used in describing the situations and the language requirements by necessity increases. The present curriculum often limits alternative teaching methods. A less prescriptive approach should be considered.

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

- (i) This is considerable. John Hattie has researched factors affecting student outcomes and, while the most impactful is what the teacher does in the classroom, he has concluded that the attitude of family members and the support they give to their children during their schooling is of considerable importance in the education of students.
- (ii) The greater ability a school has to engage with parents and the students in a learning environment the best opportunities are in fact present.
- (iii) Present funding requirements restrict the expenditure to be applied directly to students. There are cases where assistance and guidance might be better applied to a parent to help engage them, to engage and work with the school to provide the best outcome for their children. In many cases with changing educational objectives, parents do not necessarily have the skills to assist as required. To assist a child with a learning or comprehension issue is a specialised area for which many parents require guidance.
- (iv) Many of our schools particularly in Hebrew Language, or religious practise and Jewish history, provide adult education programs, so that joint learning and study at home can enhance competency in the language in the classroom for the student. This is a practical outcome and demonstrates the value of family in education. The assistance for a student that is falling behind usually requires a specialised and individual approach. Funding should be able to be available at a schools discretion to consider that approach. It is not available at present due to defined direct student centric requirements.

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

- (i) This continues to change and to challenge schools. Today's environment is an online one for our students with students finding ways of learning that teachers are largely unfamiliar. We have in many cases teachers that are struggling to keep up with the technology changes while at the same time ensuring that the technology used enhances learning, rather than simply changing the tools being used to teach.
- (ii) Although Government is acting to address and tries to maintain this area, the designated funding available does not reach most schools and most teachers. The area is complex and the impacts wide reaching. To make available the funding to a few, fails to see the technology implemented widely.
- (iii) This is an area where funding to enable time release is required to enable teachers to become not only familiar with the technology and its application, but to consider and develop implementation programs into the curriculum that suits the environment where the program is being delivered.
- (iv) It is also an area where pre-teaching courses could better adapt and prepare teaches not only how to enhance current technology in the curriculum but to identify new technology as it becomes available at ever increasing pace and incorporating it into the classroom.

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

- (i) In some areas of teaching, e.g. PDHPE and Visual Art, there is an oversupply of teachers, while in Mathematics and Science and specialised languages such as Asian languages and the Hebrew language, there is a considerable undersupply. There has not been enough focus on pre-teacher training, nor is there enough time provided for practicums.
- (ii) There should be a separately-funded requirement for schools to put considerable resources into mentor new teachers and to reduce their teaching load in the first year. Again Independent schools have more opportunity and flexibility to provide a career progression for highly achieving teachers, and to support new teachers. Funding remains a serious issue in these cases, especially in lower fee schools.
- (iii) Professional development of teachers remains critical in an ongoing way and should be a priority in every school, both for external professional development and internal professional development, where teachers are given time to work together and share their expertise, along with observing lessons and providing feedback.

(f) other related matters.

- (i) Teaching and learning will not be enhanced through the use of national tests. National tests will only narrow the curriculum and encourage competition and league table scrutiny. The countries who are achieving highly in education have shown that testing is not the answer.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit our thoughts and trust that you find them useful.
We would be happy to elaborate on any aspect.

Yours ~~S~~incerely

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