

# CHAPTER 2

## Issues

2.1 Submissions on the whole expressed support for the findings of the Gonski review and the principles underpinning the national plan, as outlined in the Prime Minister's address to the National Press Club in September 2012. In evidence before the Committee, the Australian Education Union (AEU) stated:

The [Gonski] review established beyond any doubt an urgency for funding reform. It established that the current system is broken and failing too many of our children...[I]t showed that the current funding system is contributing to a deepening inequality in the provision of education, but more disturbingly still, a deepening inequality in educational achievement...<sup>1</sup>

2.2 All school sectors endorsed the Government's commitment to a high quality, high equity schooling system. The AEU submission noted that the bill provides a long overdue legislative platform for attaining this goal through major reform of current school funding arrangements. The bill's recognition that future funding be based on the real needs of schools and students is '...long overdue and very welcome'.<sup>2</sup> There also was general agreement that failure to reform the school education system will have ripple effects throughout the national economy for decades to come and potentially compromise Australia's political and economic ties the Asia.

2.3 While the evidence received is generally supportive of the bill, some organisations raised a number of concerns. They offered qualified support for the bill depending on the outcome of negotiations with state and territory governments and education providers, and not until details of the funding model have are finalised. The main concerns raised in evidence address the following issues:

- the definition of terms and coverage of the bill;
- the funding model proposed;
- educational disadvantage and portability;
- the level of consultation with state and territory governments and other education providers; and
- how the national plan interacts with other educational objectives.

2.4 These five areas of concern are addressed in turn.

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1 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Federal President, Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 1.

2 AEU, *Submission 10*, p. 5.

## Definitions and coverage

2.5 A number of submissions expressed a degree of concern over definitions and use of key terms in the bill, with 'equitable' and 'excellent' providing two key examples. Other submitters expressed concern over the absence of a definition for 'disability' and the lack of a set of definitions for common educational terms such as 'needs', and 'evidence-based'.<sup>3</sup> Still others argued the bill neglects the area of gifted and talented education, including the needs and concerns of gifted students.<sup>4</sup> Mission Australia argued that lack of clarity over the definition of 'equity' must be rectified given the lack of equity in the allocation of funding for schools, and suggested that the following definition provided in the Gonski review be considered for adoption:

...ensuring that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions. Equity in this sense does not mean that all students are the same or will achieve the same outcomes. Rather, it means that all students must have access to an acceptable international standard of education, regardless of where they live or the school they attend.<sup>5</sup>

2.6 The Save our Schools submission stressed that failure to clearly define 'highly equitable' could lead to ambiguity and confusion about education policy goals and outcomes and the direction for school funding:

It is educational outcomes rather than inputs which are the ultimate focus of education policy goals. Inputs to education are a means to an end, namely, the education outcomes expected for all children in modern society. Thus, any definition of equity should have regard to educational outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

2.7 The National Disability Services submission contended that the absence of a definition of disability is a significant omission from the bill because the proposed school funding reforms cannot proceed with it:

NDS is aware that work continues on the development of a nationally consistent approach to identifying school students with disability but is concerned that the forthcoming trial will take three years to complete. Children with disability should not have to wait this long for additional resources to be made available.<sup>7</sup>

2.8 Some submitters maintained that the Preamble to the bill (at a minimum) should explicitly acknowledge the important role of not-for-profit community organisations in supporting improved educational outcomes. It was argued that such organisations currently play a significant role in improving the educational outcomes

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3 National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 23*, p.4.

4 Dr Kate Tree, *Submission 31*; Ms Celine Ogg, *Submission 29*.

5 Mission Australia, *Submission 8*, p. 4.

6 *Save Our Schools, Submission 2*, p. 2. See also Australian Secondary Principals Association Ltd, *Submission 18*, p. 1.

7 National Disability Services, *Submission 16*, p. 3.

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of children and young people through 'deep school-community partnerships'.<sup>8</sup> The Not-For-Profit Community Organisations Alliance submission, for example, argued that not-for-profit community organisations '...are currently engaged in a range of partnerships with schools which are contributing to the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of children and young people across Australia', and thus should be acknowledged in the bill.<sup>9</sup>

2.9 Other organisations drew attention to the absence of any specific mention in the bill of 'parent engagement', with parents apparently being lumped together with 'broader community' and 'other partners' referred to in the Preamble. The Australian Parents Council submission expressed its disappointment at the lack of acknowledgment of parent engagement, given that the Gonski review identified family and community engagement as one of the five key reform strategies required to achieve greater equity and improved educational outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

### **School funding**

2.10 As previously mentioned, evidence to the inquiry overwhelmingly supports the findings of the Gonski review which demonstrated that current arrangements for funding, accountability and transparency of schools are inequitable and not capable of supporting quality outcomes for all students. This is well illustrated by the Smith Family submission which stated:

The current funding arrangements for school are complex, inconsistent and ineffective. There have been historical and piecemeal changes over 40 years which have created multiple funding models for schools and an overall framework that lacks a coherent rational basis. Current arrangements cannot address the long tail of educational disadvantage and they lack sufficiently robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms to drive the necessary improvements.<sup>11</sup>

2.11 It was widely acknowledged in submissions that the bill does not provide any detail on the new funding model for Australian schools, and that its main purpose is to provide a broad funding framework based on the funding model recommended in the Gonski review. The Independent Schools Council of Australia told the Committee that the level of indexation that is to apply to hundreds of schools currently outside the funding model proposed by the Gonski review is yet to be determined. Indexation reflects education costs which in 2013 were running at approximately eight per cent. The committee was told that indexation would need to be maintained at eight per cent for schools to keep the real value of their money.<sup>12</sup> There is concern that when these

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8 The Smith Family, *Submission 14*, p. 10.

9 Not-For-Profit Community Organisations Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

10 Australian Parents Council Inc, *Submission 24*.

11 The Smith Family, *Submission 14*, pp 6–7.

12 Mr David Robertson, Executive Director, Independent Schools Queensland, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 11.

schools are brought into the model: '...they are not going to attract the full educational indexation over the coming years in order to bring them into that model'.<sup>13</sup>

2.12 Organisations representing the public school sector submitted that the current national investment in school education is inequitable. Public education caters for the majority of students from disadvantaged backgrounds including those who have special needs, live in transient families and have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Yet according to the Australian Council of State School Organisations submission, the proportion of total government schools funding which is spent on public schools declined from 77.1 per cent in 20013 to 68.6 per cent in 2009, compared to an OECD average of 85.8 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

2.13 While there is general support for the proposition that future funding arrangements be based on the real needs of schools and school students, concern was expressed from some quarters about the lack of detail in the bill and the uncertainty this has created across the entire schools sector. This concern is summarised by the AEU submission:

We are concerned that the Bill does not provide any details on the quantum of funding required for its implementation, the balance between Commonwealth and State/Territory contributions, the formula for determining how it will be allocated or future plans for indexation given that Gonski has recommended abolition of the inequitable AGSRC.<sup>15</sup>

2.14 The lack of detail in the bill with regards to specific funding arrangements or the administrative implications for schools is of particular concern to the independent school sector, whose funding arrangements expire at the end of 2013. The Christian Schools Australia submission stressed that lack of certainty around funding is impacting Christian Schools as they seek to make plans for future growth to accommodate an expected growth in need for non-government schools over the next decade.<sup>16</sup>

2.15 The Independent Schools Council of Australia submission captured these concerns by stating:

The uncertainty surrounding future funding arrangements for independent schools is making it increasingly difficult for schools to undertake important financial and administrative planning. The parents and potential parents of students in non-government schools are also impacted as the current funding uncertainty means it is difficult for parents to determine their capacity to make a long-term financial/educational commitment for their children's school education.<sup>17</sup>

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13 Mr Barry Wallett, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 10.

14 ACSSO, *Submission 17*, p. 2.

15 AEU, *Submission 10*, p. 13

16 Christian Schools Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 3

17 Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 5*, p. 8

2.16 Organisations representing families who live in rural and remote Australia expressed concern about the lack of equity experienced by distance education students and families and the new funding model to be used for rural schools.<sup>18</sup> One submitter argued:

...it is extremely important to the future of rural and remote communities that the funding models for rural schools and boarding schools are structured and quantified so as to allow rural and remote students to achieve their potential in learning. In order to do so, funding will need to be sufficiently targeted so as not just to maintain the status quo, but to actively reduce the currently entrenched disparity in educational outcomes...<sup>19</sup>

2.17 Other organisations, while fully supporting the structure and vision set out in the bill, argued that the bill should be delayed until the funding arrangements and other reform measures have been discussed, negotiated and agreed with the relevant parties.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Christian Schools Australia Ltd argued that if funding details were not available by the end of March 2013, the Government should introduce into the Parliament legislation that would extend the current funding arrangements for a further 12 months: '...because, quite frankly, at the end of this year the money simply runs out, and I am sure no-one...wants to see schools unable to pay the wages in January 2014'.<sup>21</sup> The National Catholic Education Commission likewise submitted: 'The Bill in its current form lacks the necessary substance, and the appropriate language, to do justice to the Government's policy intent'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Educational disadvantage and portability**

2.18 One aspect of the bill that received favourable comment in submissions is the provision of additional recurrent funding in circumstances of educational disadvantage, which includes having a disability, being an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander, having a low socio-economic status, not being proficient in English and the size and location of a student's school. The relationship between inequality and educational disadvantage was highlighted in evidence from the AEU:

What we have seen is a deepening inequality...over the last 15 years such that we now have one of the most segregated schooling systems in the world...As a result of that, we have incredible concentrations of disadvantage in our schools. What we see now is an over-representation of disadvantage in government schools and an under-representation of disadvantage in non-government schools...<sup>23</sup>

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18 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc), *Submission 7*, p. 2.

19 Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

20 Independent Education Union of Australia, *Submission 11*, p. 4.

21 Mr Stephen O'Doherty, Chief Executive Office, Christian Schools Australia Ltd, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 25.

22 National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 23*, p.6.

23 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Federal President, Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 8.

2.19 Organisations representing children and young people with disabilities commended the government for highlighting disability in the new funding framework. The committee was told by one disability organisation that discrimination and exclusion is a regular part of the educational experience of students with disability, who also face an entrenched culture of low expectations in Australian education. Students with disability are frequently forced to attend school part-time, deprived of normal school experiences and suspended or expelled in high numbers. The result is comparatively poor educational outcomes for students with disability.<sup>24</sup>

2.20 The bill was also viewed as an important companion piece of legislation to other reform proposals to improve opportunities for people with disability (including the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Disability Strategy). According to the Children with Disability Australia submission:

The Bill provides a vital opportunity to articulate the attitude and cultural change which is critical to ensuring the recognition of educational rights of students with disability. It also provides a formal means to a society in which students with disability are valued members of a school community rather than just an additional cost or modification.<sup>25</sup>

2.21 One issue raised in evidence to the inquiry was the provision of portable funding, or vouchers, for students with disability. Opinions were sharply divided on the issue. Organisations representing Christian schools provided strongly worded support for portable funding:

...portable funding for students with disabilities needs to be the No. 1 issue for Australian governments to tackle this year for 2014. It has been far too long that those students have been disadvantaged compared to their brothers and sisters in not being able to have a choice of a school...We would put [portability] above anything else we have said today as our No. 1 request of government around the country.<sup>26</sup>

2.22 Other organisations, including the AEU and disability groups, raised serious concerns about the effect of portability and its value for money in the education system. It was argued that problems within the education system as they relate to students with disability cannot be solved by attaching money to an individual in the form of a voucher. Australian Federation of Disability Organisations gave a clear example to illustrate the weaknesses of portable funding:

...how would a voucher help a kid and his family who need a lift installed to go to a second floor of a school building? How would a voucher help somebody with the modification of the school curriculum to make it more

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24 Ms Stephanie Gotlib, Executive Officer, Children with Disability Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 33.

25 Children with Disability Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

26 Mr Stephen Doherty, Chief Executive Officer, Christians Schools Australia Ltd, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 25.

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accessible for that student and other students around their learning and learning outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

2.23 The committee was told there is no guarantee that a student with disability who possesses a voucher will have access to a school of their choice. Families are regularly rejected by schools in the private, independent and religious sectors. It was also suggested that the voucher system does not give parents any more negotiating ability:

It does not matter whether you bring \$20,000 or \$30,000 with you if the school does not have the capacity or the desire to have those kids there. They may have the issue where other parents do not want their kids' education to be compromised because of the stigma of having a child with disability in the class.<sup>28</sup>

2.24 It was suggested that some schools, including mainstream and special schools, have such low expectations of students with disability that parents who seek extra literacy support for their child, for example, will often be told: 'Why do you want your child to read? What is the point?-because they have a disability'.<sup>29</sup>

2.25 On the issue of portability, the committee was reassured by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) that a student with a disability should attract the same loading regardless of which school they attend, government or non-government: 'That consistent philosophy is something that is important in terms of the work that we are doing in government at the moment'.<sup>30</sup> However, the department conceded that the issue was complex and a number of issues had not yet been resolved, especially regarding the amount of loading. While the new school funding model is based on available data, there is no nationally consistent dataset for students with disability. On a positive note, the committee was told that state ministers have agreed to national definitions of adjustment in relation to students with disability:

We have trialled those definitions twice and we are actually undertaking the first part of the national data collection this year. Therefore, it is unlikely that we will be able to use that full dataset for the total model. There are arrangements that we have put in place that we will be discussing or have been discussing with jurisdictions about still having a temporary loading for students with a disability.<sup>31</sup>

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27 Mr Stephen Gianni, National Policy Officer, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 34.

28 Mr Alan Blackwood, Policy Officer, Children with Disability Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 33.

29 Mr Alan Blackwood, Policy Officer, Children with Disability Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 38.

30 Mr Tony Cook, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 49.

31 Mr Tony Cook, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 49.

2.26 Submissions from disability organisations focused on two additional funding-related issues as they affect students with disability. First, existing disability support programs and funding eligibility criteria are designed to supplement the normal operations and practices of schools, not to deliver improved outcomes and value for money. Part of the problem is that many students with a need for funded educational support cannot access it due to strict diagnostic criteria governing access to funding. There are also limitations to the Disability Standards for Education (DSE), which provide the current default position for schools working with students with disability. While the DSE are recognised as extremely important, one submitter observed that they need to be seen for what they: 'a marker of actionable discrimination. The DSE are not a guide as to how to provide quality inclusive education'<sup>32</sup>

2.27 The Children with Disability Australia submission stated:

A student-by-student approach has been taken rather than a systemic approach, and so the capacity of schools to routinely deliver effective programs for students with disability has not increased. Across the country, the ability of schools to deliver inclusive education is very patchy, and driven largely by attitudes and experience of school teachers.<sup>33</sup>

2.28 The second issue relates to the relationship between the proposed funding system, which places students with disability in a category of disadvantage, and the systemic or structural deficiencies with the funding system currently in place for students with disability. The National Disability Strategy Implementation Reference Group submission argued that the systemic improvements to education required by students with disability should be at the centre of education reform:

To achieve the key goals of the education reform the funding system must address the systemic barriers for students with disability that are entrenched across education systems...and not rely solely on loadings to address the equity and excellence issues. Funding reform requires addressing the key barriers at a systems level in addition to the individual student level. There needs to be investment in improving school capacity and infrastructure as well as resourcing individual students in order for students with disability to be fully included.<sup>34</sup>

2.29 Some organisations expressed the view that the national plan does not adequately address the needs of schools with a high concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the Australian Federation of Graduate Women submission:

Poverty, which is often combined with a lack of fluency in English, impedes young people's educational achievements and undermines attempts to improve productivity through education. As a matter of urgency, these schools need funding for professional support staff including nurses,

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32 Children with Disability Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 7.

33 Children with Disability Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

34 National Disability Strategy Implementation Reference Group, *Submission 32*, p. 8.



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accredited counsellors, social workers and community liaison staff who can assist students and their families.<sup>35</sup>

### **Consultation with education partners**

2.30 The Independent Schools Council of Australia is concerned that despite the Government's timeline imperatives, there is little evidence of any substantive progress in negotiations with state and territory governments to flesh out the more complex and critical aspects of the Gonski review. It submitted that the school communities of the 1100 independent schools have ongoing concerns with the apparent lack of progress and continuing uncertainty, '...particularly as the Review is now entering its fourth year without any tangible outcomes in sight'.<sup>36</sup> These concerns were echoed by a South Australian and Queensland member organisations which expressed concern that the absence of detail on funding and the lack of transparency regarding consultation is undermining the independent school sector's confidence in the reform process and creating a high degree of cynicism across school communities. Their submissions argued that all school communities should have had an opportunity to comment on proposed changes and receive details on the following areas before the bill was introduced in the Parliament:

- the level of prescription in the National Plan and its requirements;
- the level of funding to be received by each school, indexing arrangements and mechanisms for distribution (including arrangements for direct funding);
- the timing of payments to schools;
- additional programs to support students with special needs;
- funding for capital works programs;
- indexation and transition arrangements for schools; and
- compliance and accountability requirements.<sup>37</sup>

2.31 The Christian Schools Australia submission urged the Government to extend the existing consultative arrangements to encompass a more representative range of stakeholder groups, including Christian schools.<sup>38</sup> This view is supported by the Australian Association of Christian Schools submission which argued that any final decisions regarding funding agreements between the Government and schools must be the subject of wide and inclusive consultations with all peak bodies in the non-government sector.<sup>39</sup> It went further in suggesting that consultations have been

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35 Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

36 Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 5*, p. 10.

37 Association of Independent Schools of SA, *Submission 27*, p. 2; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

38 Christian Schools Australia, *Submission 3*, p. 3.

39 Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 13*, pp 3–4.

restricted to the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia which have been required to enter into confidentiality agreements:

We simply do not know what the Government is considering by way of detail. We simply don't know whether the arrangements will be fair and equitable. We simply don't know what conditions may be attached to Funding Agreements.<sup>40</sup>

2.32 Other disability organisations, such as South Australian based Novita Children's Services, submitted that for the Government to determine appropriate funding loadings for categories of school children with special needs, consultation should extend beyond the education sector to include the collective knowledge of leading children's disability service providers.<sup>41</sup>

2.33 The Foundation for Young Australian submission focused on the role of students in education policy, arguing that students are key stakeholders of the education system. This stems from the Foundation's belief that young people have the potential to positively influence education outcomes for themselves, their schools, their communities and the system:

Student consultation is fundamental to the development of effective education policy and improving learning outcomes. Not only do students have unique perspectives as the producers of education outcomes, but their involvement also increases the chance of policy buy-in.<sup>42</sup>

2.34 The submission drew attention to the fact that students continue to be an untapped resource in educational policy. This partially explains why their perspectives on education are often at odds with the goals and reform levers identified in the bill. It recommended that students should no longer be treated as passive recipients of reform, but embraced as genuine partners in educational improvement and consulted in the implementation of the national plan.<sup>43</sup>

### **Interaction with other education goals**

2.35 A number of submissions expressed concern that the bill does not mention the agreements, commitments and understanding captured in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians which was signed by the Australian Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 2008. The declaration identified two main goals for the period 2008-18: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.<sup>44</sup> It was argued that the Declaration should be directly referenced in the bill

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40 Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 13*, p. 6.

41 Novita Children's Services, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

42 The Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission 26*, p. 20.

43 The Foundation for Young Australians, *Submission 26*, p. 4.

44 Christian Schools Australia Ltd, *Submission 3*, p. 5.

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because it enjoys wide political and community support and would ensure greater public confidence in the bill.<sup>45</sup> The Smith Family submission went further and argued that in addition to the Melbourne Declaration, the Preamble should reflect a more comprehensive view of the purpose of school education drawing on Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Australia is a signatory.<sup>46</sup>

2.36 Mission Australia submitted that the bill's definition of school should extend to a broader range of education providers which fall under the general heading of 'alternative education', including second chance education, re-engagement programs, flexi schools or flexible learning options, community based programs and non-traditional or unconventional programs:

It is estimated that there are up to 33,000 young people currently enrolled in over 400 programs in 1200 locations across Australia. A further 4,100 young people are on waiting lists. Alternative education is important for young people who may otherwise fall through the gaps in a mainstream education setting.<sup>47</sup>

2.37 The Save Our Schools submission expressed concerns that one of the reform directions included in the bill, empowered school leadership, would undermine collaboration between schools and the spread of best practice in teaching and learning. Drawing upon analyses of school autonomy in New Zealand and Great Britain, the submission concluded that greater school autonomy and school self-management, together with the move towards publication of school results and school league tables, 'encourages schools to see themselves as isolated silos rather than as part of a system working together to achieve particular education goals'.<sup>48</sup>

### **Committee view**

2.38 The committee welcomes the broad in-principle support for the legislative framework established by the bill, reflected in submissions representing the government and independent school sectors. It also welcomes the support for the Government's proposal to link school funding with implementation of a new national plan.

2.39 The committee reinforces the Government's commitment to improving student achievement by targeting resources to where they are most needed, for example schools with disadvantaged students with particular educational needs. The committee acknowledges the qualified support offered by some organisations on the grounds that many details regarding implementation of the new school funding model, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms, are yet to be finalised.<sup>49</sup>

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45 National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 23*, p. 2.

46 The Smith Family, *Submission 14*, p. 9.

47 Mission Australia, *Submission 8*, p. 2.

48 Save Our Schools, *Submission 2*, p. 5.

49 For example, see Christian Schools Australia Ltd, *Submission 3*.

2.40 The committee, however, reiterates the fundamental point that the main purpose of the Gonksi review was to devise a new funding model for a needs-based system; it was not meant to address educational policy development more broadly, which state and territory education authorities are actively engaged in.

2.41 The committee is of the view that concerns raised in evidence from the independent school sector about the risk of receiving less overall funding and the level of anxiety this allegedly has created, while genuinely held, were overstated and contradicted by evidence from DEEWR and other education providers. The committee is confident that when the new funding model is finalised, with all the variations in levels of growth taken into account, no school will receive less money in 2014 than they did in 2013. In fact, it is more than likely that every school will receive increased funding on a year by year basis.<sup>50</sup>

2.42 Concerns about the level of indexation for independent schools also have to be assessed in light of the significant cuts to education budgets undertaken by the New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland state government and the effect this will have on indexation over coming years. The committee accepts the concerns of some organisations that state governments are playing politics with school education by slashing their education budgets while publicly calling for an increase in school funding.

2.43 On the issue of portability or portable vouchers, the committee is concerned by some of the evidence it received from national disability organisations. The committee accepts that there are strong arguments on both sides of the debate regarding portable vouchers, but it was surprised to hear about the attitude of some schools towards students with disability and their families, which probably reflects an underlying systemic bias. The committee has formally requested that DEEWR provide it with a considered response to the concerns raised in evidence by national disability organisations.

2.44 The committee is strongly of the view that the bill represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve the performance of schools and student outcomes. Delays will have a detrimental effect not only across the school sector, but on productivity levels and Australia's long-term economic performance. The committee agrees with the Australian Council of State School Organisations which stated:

...research has clearly shown that a higher level of education means higher earnings, better health and a longer life. By default...the social and financial ramifications of educational failure for Australia will be enormous. Those without the skills to participate socially and economically will generate higher costs in areas such as health, income support, child welfare, social security and the penal system.<sup>51</sup>

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50 Mr Tony Cook, Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 54.

51 Mr Peter Garrigan, President, Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2013, p. 19.

2.45 The committee shares the concerns of organisations that failure to pass the bill, or attempts to delay its passage through the Parliament, could see schools losing up to an estimated \$5.4 billion in funding over the next five years if there is no change in the way schools are funded.<sup>52</sup>

2.46 The committee rejects outright the continued opposition to the Gonski review by the Coalition and, recently, the Victoria and Queensland state governments who are publicly threatening to walk away from this fundamental reform for blatant political reasons. The committee reiterates the importance of all states and territories coming on board to support the Government's proposed national plan.

### **Recommendation 1**

**2.47 The committee recommends that the bill be passed.**

**Senator Gavin Marshall**

**Chair, Legislation**

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52 AEU, *Submission 10*, pp 10–11.