

Chapter 1

Conduct of the inquiry

Introduction

1.1 On 12 December 2013, the Senate established the Select Committee on School Funding. The initial reporting date was 13 May 2014. On 27 March 2014, the Senate agreed to an extension of time to report until 26 June 2014.¹

Conduct of the inquiry

1.2 The committee advertised the inquiry on its website and in *The Australian*, and invited submissions from interested organisations and individuals. The committee received 445 submissions, as listed in Appendix 1.

1.3 The committee also received approximately 3000 submissions through an electronic form on the Australian Education Union website. These submissions included specific information about schools and represented the views of individual parents, teachers, and principals.

1.4 A private briefing was held with the Commonwealth Department of Education on 18 February 2014. On 13 March 2014 the committee agreed to make public the transcript from this briefing.²

1.5 The committee held public hearings in all states (with the exception the Northern Territory) in order to facilitate the gathering of evidence from as many state-based organisations and individuals as possible. A full list of public hearings and witnesses who gave evidence is included in Appendix 2.

1.6 It was the committee's hope that by travelling to each state, it would allow state government education departments to participate in the committee's inquiry. However, many state and territory governments declined to participate in the inquiry. South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory were the only state and territory governments which did not decline the invitation to appear at public hearings.

Notes on references

1.7 References to submissions in this report are to individual submissions received by the committee and published on the committee's website. References to the committee Hansards are to the official transcripts.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 27 March 2014, p. 746.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 13 March 2014, p. 3.

Structure of the report

1.8 The committee was established to inquire into 'the development and implementation of national school funding arrangements and school reform' with a particular reference to:

- the implementation of needs-based funding arrangements;
- how funding arrangements will meet the needs of all schools and individual students;
- the Government's proposed changes to the *Australian Education Act 2013*;
- the economic impacts of school education policy;
- the Government's consideration of advice, from various sources, on education policy; and
- any related matters.³

1.9 The report's initial chapters provide background details, setting the context for the inquiry:

- Chapters 2 and 3 provide an historical overview and detailed information on schools, students numbers and school funding in Australia;
- Chapter 4 considers the economic impacts of school education policy;

1.10 The report then outlines the previous government's reforms to school funding, including the *Australian Education Act 2013* in Chapter 5. Analysis on the changes to school funding arrangements of the current government is contained in Chapter 6.

1.11 Chapter 7 provides a comparative assessment of the funding arrangements under the previous government and those introduced under the Students First policy of the current government. The effect of the changes on students with specific education needs, accountability and transparency, equity of educational opportunity, and implementation of school reforms relating to teaching and learning quality are examined in Chapter 8. Finally, the committee makes a series of recommendations to improve school funding arrangements in Chapter 9.

Acknowledgements

1.12 The committee thanks the many organisations and individuals that made written submissions, and those who gave evidence at the public hearings.

1.13 In particular, the committee thanks the staff and students of the Immaculate Heart of Mary School and the Darlington Primary School in Adelaide, who hosted the committee's site visits and public hearings on 30 April.

3 Terms of reference:

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/School_Funding/School_Funding/Terms_of_Reference.



From the left: Senator Penny Wright (Deputy Chair), Mr Stephen Palethorpe (Committee Secretary), Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins (Chair), and Senator Deborah O'Neill. The committee conducted a public hearing and site visit at the Darlington Primary School, Adelaide on 30 April 2014.