

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-10**

Outcome **2**

DEEWR Question No. EW0113_10

Senator Hanson-Young provided in writing:

Question

School accountability

Do private schools have the same accountability standards as public schools? Please outline the accountability standards for private schools in receipt of government funding.

Answer

(a) School performance and transparency requirements

The *Schools Assistance Act 2008*, the legislation under which Commonwealth funding for non-government schools is provided for the 2009-2012 quadrennium, includes a set of reporting requirements for non-government schools focused on ensuring good reporting to government, parents and the community. The requirements arise from the National Education Agreement (NEA) made by COAG, and parallel those of government schools. There are five basic requirements:

1. National Testing

All schools are required to participate in certain national assessments: NAPLAN (full cohort, annual literacy and numeracy testing); the triennial NAP sample studies in science, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology; and the two international assessments, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

2. National Reporting

All schools and system authorities must participate in preparing national reports on the outcomes of schooling. This enables reporting to the community by Education Ministers on progress towards the National Goals for Schooling and in respect of the agreed COAG outcomes and performance measures.

3. (National) Individual School Information

All schools are required to provide individual school information on the school's context, capacity (including school income) and outcomes, to enable nationally-comparable information about each school to be made publicly available. This information will be published by the newly-established Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

4. Reporting to Parents

Requires that student reports to parents use plain language, give an accurate assessment of progress, and include assessment of achievement against national standards and relative to the student's peer group.

5. Publication of Information Relating to Schools (School Annual Reports)

Aimed at parents and the community, schools must publish an annual report which includes, contextual information about the school; key outcomes; information on satisfaction; and income by funding source.

(b) Financial accountability requirements

Funding provided by the Commonwealth to non-government schools is subject to a funding agreement with the school's approved authority. Under this agreement, all recurrent grant funding provided to non-government schools by the Commonwealth must be acquitted by 30 June in the year following the program year for which the funding was provided, as having been spent, or committed to be spent, for the purpose it was granted.

Non-government schools, both independent and systemic, are required to have a qualified accountant (e.g. Registered Company Auditor, Certified Practising Accountant, Chartered Accountant or member of the National Institute of Accountants) confirm via the Schools Service Point that general recurrent grant funding provided to the school by the Commonwealth has been spent, or committed to be spent, for the purpose it was granted. This must be done by 30 June in the year following the program year for which the funding was provided.

Where a school is unable to adequately account for grant funds paid to it, the school or system may be required to repay any un-acquitted amounts to the Commonwealth.

With regard to financial accountability, the Commonwealth provides funding to public schools via the states and territories and these schools are accountable to their respective state and territory governments. Under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, the states and territories must expend funding provided by the Commonwealth for education within the education sector. Each state and territory Treasurer is required to provide a report within six months of the end of every financial year, disclosing gross state or territory expenditure in the education sector. This report must also provide a detailed explanation for any discrepancy between the amounts received and expended.