

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools**

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# AIST

**The Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania**  
**ABN No: 20 083 450 700**



25<sup>th</sup> June 2004

The Secretary  
Senate Employment, workplace Relations and Education References Committee  
Suite SG52  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

## **INQUIRY INTO COMMONWEALTH FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS**

### **Introduction**

The Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania (AIST) is a non-profit organisation to serve Tasmanian independent schools through representation, promotion and leadership in the advancement of education.

The Association comprises 33 member schools from the Independent and Catholic sectors and it is a member association of the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA).

Student enrolment at non-Catholic member schools in 2003 was 8,000 students representing 95.4% of total independent school enrolments. In addition there were 4,000 students at Catholic member schools. The total of 12,000 students at member schools accounted for 14.6% of total school enrolments in Tasmania.

### **Student Enrolments in Tasmanian Schools**

In Tasmania, independent school full time enrolments in 2003 were 8,389, an increase of 5.0% over 2002. They accounted for 10.2% of total school enrolments in Tasmania. The independent sector had 13.2% of total secondary enrolments, 13.9% of total Year 11 and 12 enrolments and 7.9% of total primary enrolments.

AIST believes that the growth in enrolments in the independent schools sector reflected a wider demand by Australian parents for choice in the schooling of their children. Research undertaken by the Independent Schools Council of Australia showed there was a range of reasons parents chose an independent school. Factors parents cite as important in school choice are teacher quality, disciplinary code, values that reflect those taught at home, responsiveness to the individual needs of their child and whether the school is a safe, stable environment.

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Recent trends in sector enrolment shares are shown in the following table:

**Table: Tasmania - Percent of full time Student Enrolments per Sector**

Level/Sector	1991	1996	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>All Levels</b>						
<b>Government</b>	76.7	74.6	75.2	74.9	74.7	74.2
<b>Catholic</b>	14.6	15.8	15.3	15.5	15.6	15.6
<b>Independent</b>	7.9	9.6	9.5	9.7	9.7	10.2
<b>Primary</b>						
<b>Government</b>	77.7	76.5	77.9	77.7	77.8	77.7
<b>Catholic</b>	15.2	15.9	14.6	14.8	14.6	14.4
<b>Independent</b>	7.0	7.6	7.5	7.6	7.5	7.9
<b>Secondary</b>						
<b>Government</b>	75.3	72.2	71.7	71.2	70.6	69.8
<b>Catholic</b>	13.9	15.7	16.1	16.4	16.9	17.1
<b>Independent</b>	10.8	12.2	12.2	12.4	12.5	13.2

### Profile of Independent Schools in Tasmania

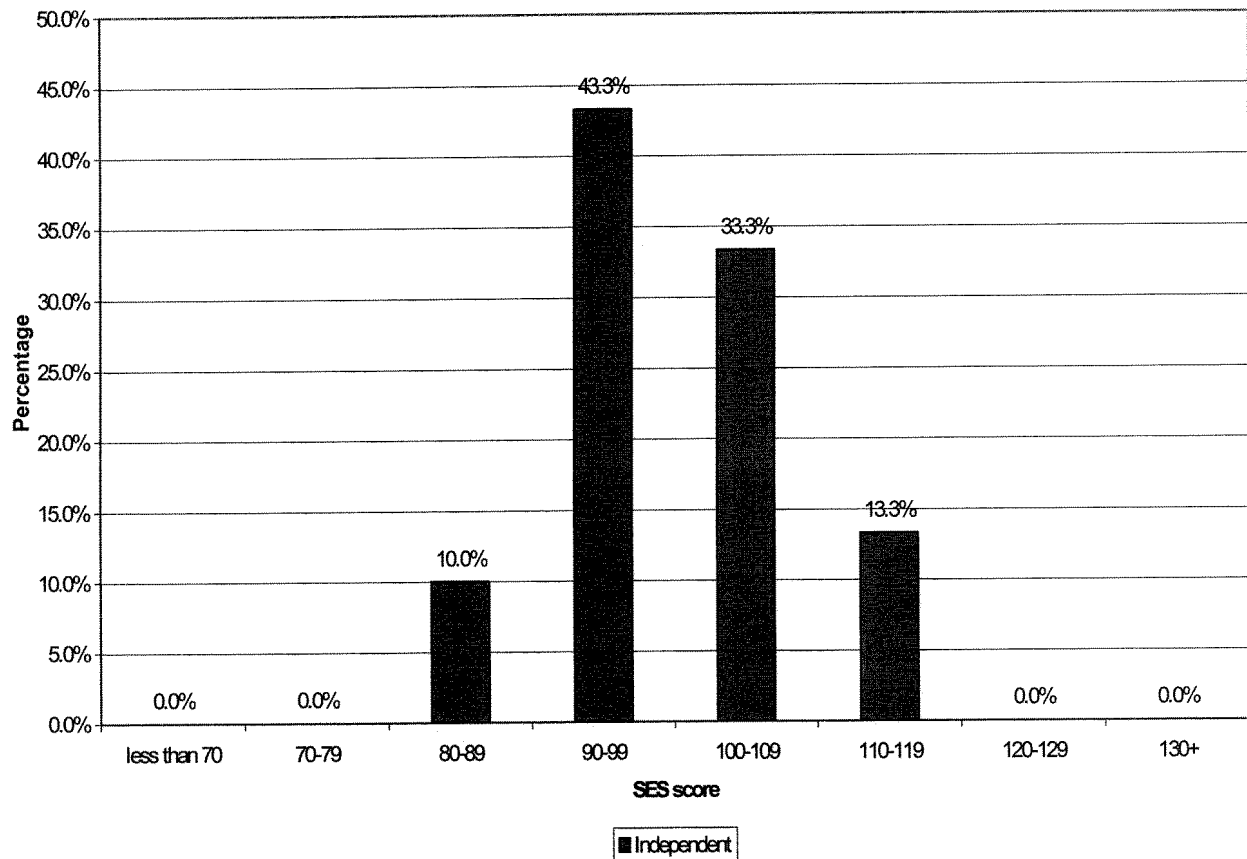
Tasmania's independent schools are a small but diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Some independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Tasmanian independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with larger and smaller Christian denominations, for example, Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist, Uniting Church and Presbyterian schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Tasmanian Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered by the Schools Registration Board. Most independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, five independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as a system by Christian Schools Tasmania.

Independent schools in Tasmania serve communities of parents from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, with most schools having SES scores in the middle to low range. As the following graph shows, schools in the independent sector serve families with a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Distribution of Independent Schools by SES score - TAS



The graph shows that a relatively small number of independent schools serve a high socio-economic demographic, (no Tasmanian independent schools have SES scores of 120 or above and only four have SES scores above 110). The majority of independent schools have SES scores in the low to middle range.

### The Important Role of Independent Schools

School education is an important public good. Governments, both nationally and at state and territory level, have a responsibility to provide each Australian child – no matter what their family background or what school they attend – with a reasonable level of funding for their schooling. All school students deserve government support for their education irrespective of the school they attend.

Non-government schools are important providers of education for the children of Australia and should be recognised for their contribution to the economic wellbeing of the nation.

Governments must recognise that a substantial proportion of Australia's system of school education, like the public systems of health and transport, is delivered by private (not-for-profit) providers. Government schools funding models must recognise the validity of diversity in schooling provision.

## **Funding for independent schools: a partnership**

Independent schools in Tasmania are funded from three sources: private (mainly from the parents and families of the students), the Australian government, and the state government. The private contribution made by parents and the school community represents on average by far the most significant source of funding for independent schools. Schools are reliant for their operation on stable and predictable funding from the three sources. A reduction in a school's funding from one or both government sources will require a greater contribution by parents and the school community.

Every child at a non-government school receives far less public funding than they would at a government school. Parents make up the difference in fees, having already contributed to the cost of education by payment of State and Commonwealth taxes.

It is estimated that parents in Tasmania will be contributing over \$360 million from their after-tax income towards the schooling of young Tasmanians in the next four years.

If we are to achieve the advances in education to which we aspire for all our children, parent contributions should be recognised and encouraged, not criticised or penalised.

## **Australian Government funding of independent schools**

AIST supports a basic entitlement supplemented by a needs-based approach as the most equitable, efficient and effective mechanism for delivering government funding for independent schools.

AIST believes that every child has a right to have their school education supported by a basic entitlement to Australian Government and state and territory funding. Additional funding beyond this basic entitlement should be allocated on a needs basis.

AIST supports the submission by ISCA that the combined basic entitlement should be equivalent to at least 25 per cent of the cost of educating students in government schools, this being a reasonable recognition of the contribution of parents as taxpayers as well as the community's obligation to all young people.

The current system of allocating general recurrent grants for non-government schools from the Australian Government (the SES model) provides a reasonable measure of the capacity of school communities to contribute to the costs of schooling.

## **Tasmanian State government funding of independent schools**

In Tasmania the State Government uses a modified and less favourable definition of AGSRC as a basis for recurrent funding to non-government schools. The State government has no funding maintenance or funding guarantee provision, and no longer provides special purpose grants to non-government schools such as grants to support special needs students including those with disabilities, IT, languages or international education. New student bus services will not be approved for students to travel to and from non-government schools.

A significant reason openly stated by the Tasmanian State Government for these policy changes is to offset the benefit of Australian government reforms to funding of non-government schools.

For example, the recent State budget 2004-2005 ignored AIST's highest priority for grants to independent schools, targeted specifically to assistance with the additional costs to schools of meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The annual funding requested of \$80,000 was modest in comparison to similar funding provided by some other ALP State Governments. In Queensland, for example, we understand that the Beattie Government has increased targeted funding for students with disabilities at non-government schools to approx. \$9.8 million in 2003-2004.

This modest request was rejected despite inclusion in the education budget of \$6.4 million allocated to providing assistance for children with challenging behaviour or disabilities attending government schools in Tasmania.

### **Students with Disabilities**

AIST believes that schools in all sectors are struggling to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The community's expectation for the education of such students demands improved teacher and support staff expertise and increased human and capital resources.

In light of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1992, independent schools must endeavour to enrol and support students with disabilities who seek enrolment. It is unreasonable that the considerable cost burden of support for these students should fall arbitrarily on the families of other students at an individual non-government school rather than society as a whole.

Whilst it is appreciated that a disability support services component is included the State government's recurrent funding for non-government schools, it represents less than 2% of the grant per student and is currently averaging approx. \$22 per student.

Many of our independent schools have enrolments less than 100 students. For smaller schools, the total of support services component in their recurrent grants often cannot meet the cost of support services for the one, two or more of their students with disabilities.

Australian government targeted funding falls considerably short of the additional costs to schools to:

- Obtain assessment, transport, therapy, specialise equipment etc.;
- Provide one on one teachers' aides for students with challenging behaviour for the times the students need to be withdrawn from classes;
- Provide opportunities for specific training of teachers of students with disabilities and teachers' aides;and
- Meet the costs of adapting or adding facilities for students with disabilities.

If independent schools cannot meet the needs of students with disabilities without undue hardship, there is a risk that many of these students will inevitably enter the government school system. There would be a growing perception in the government school system that the independent sector is handing all its problems back to them. Such a perception could seriously harm the efforts we are all making in education toward cross-sectoral co-operation.

AIST therefore recommends substantial increases in grants to non-government schools, targeted specifically to assistance with additional costs to schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

### **Capital Funding**

The current level of capital funding for independent schools by the Australian Government through its capital programme is based on historical sector allocations which have not taken appropriate account of the additional capital demands placed on the sector as a result of enrolment growth.

Tasmania until recently had experienced long term economic and population stagnation but this has turned around in the past two years. Increasing enrolments have placed additional demands on schools to replace aging facilities not designed for today's education requirements. The majority of Tasmania's independent schools have too small a resource base to finance the necessary building projects from parent contributions or debt finance.

The Australian Government's Capital Grants Programme allocates around \$620,000 per annum for projects in Tasmanian independent schools. This is inadequate to meet the increasing needs to bring facilities up to standard.

The independent schools share of Australian Government Capital Grants to Tasmania is well below its share of enrolments. The sector receives less than 8% of the financial assistance granted to Tasmania under this programme, whereas its enrolment share is more than 10%.

### **Accountability arrangements for Commonwealth, state and territory funding**

AIST strongly supports the ISCA submission in relation to accountability by independent schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

TONY CREHAN (Executive Director)