

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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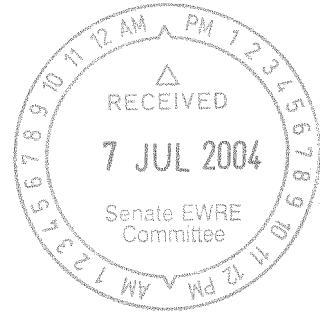
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In reply please quote:
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The Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace relations and Education Reference Committee
Suite SG 52
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

NCEC Submission to Senate Inquiry into Schools Funding

Attached is a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Schools Funding prepared by the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC).

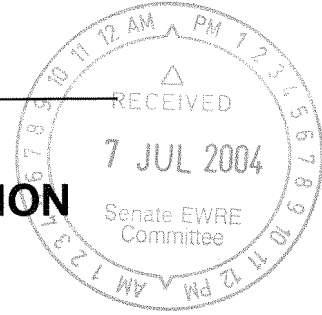
The Commission appreciates the opportunity to have input into this Inquiry. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the NCEC Secretariat.

Yours sincerely

Mgr Tom Doyle
Chairman, NCEC

7 July, 2004

Enc:



NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION (NCEC)

Submission to the SENATE INQUIRY INTO COMMONWEALTH FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

1. NCEC Funding Principles

- 1.1 The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) supports quality education of all students in Australian schools, both government and non-government. The NCEC believes that Catholic schools are serving the public purpose of education and are partners in the Australian education enterprise.
- 1.2 The NCEC's guiding principles (No. 9, National Catholic Education Commission School Funding Policy, 1987) for the advocacy of funding for all schools are that:
- *Every citizen has the right to freedom of choice in education;*
 - *All children have a right to share equitably in the public expenditure on education, irrespective of the school chosen by parents;*
 - *The distribution of public funds must take into account the general educational needs of every child, especially those children who are disadvantaged educationally by social, economic, geographic, cultural, physical and other factors and*
 - *The distribution of public funds must express the general state of the economy, the resources available to the schools under consideration and to the parents' economic state.*

2. Profile of Catholic Schools

- 2.1 Catholic schools in Australia educate some 660,000 students in 1700 schools with approximately 50 000 staff.
- 2.2 One in every five Australian school students attends a Catholic school.
- 2.3 Catholic Schools are marked by common religious beliefs and values, and a commitment to democratic principles and civic norms.

- 2.4 Catholic schools strive to meet the MCEETYA goals enshrined in the *Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia* and to implement Government policies and programs. Curricula established by State Government authorities are followed and all schools participate in national literacy and numeracy benchmark assessments and report the results to parents and government.
- 2.5 Most Catholic Schools are administered by system authorities which take responsibility for the receipt, distribution, accountability and reporting of Government funding.
- 2.6 The comprehensive nature of Catholic education is underscored by its geographic coverage across Australia and its socio-economic coverage across income groups.
- 2.7 Catholic social teaching commits Catholic educators to respecting the essential dignity of each person and to taking special care of the poor and marginalised in society. To this end Catholic systems monitor enrolments and fee policies to minimize barriers to participation.

3. Funding the Catholic Sector

- 3.1 NCEC acknowledges that funding for the Catholic Sector comes from three separate sources – the Australian Government, the State Governments and other sources within the Catholic Community (eg parents, parishes and other fund raising efforts).
- 3.2 Funding for the Catholic Sector for the next quadrennium is based on the aggregation of schools' Socio Economic Status scores. This has resulted in increased funding for all states and territories except the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory and moves towards overall funding of 58% of the Average Government Schools Recurrent Cost (AGSRC).
- 3.3 The NCEC has set 60% of AGSRC as its target for Commonwealth General Recurrent Grants to the State and Territory Catholic Systems with an expectation that the State/Territory Governments would provide 25% and the remaining 15% could be met by fees and other sources of funding within the Catholic community.

4. Students with Disabilities

- 4.1 Students with disabilities form a special category which requires very specific funding. Currently, parents enrol some 16, 000 students with a disability (SWD) in Catholic schools in Australia. This enrolment represents approximately 2.3% of all enrolments in Catholic schools.
- 4.2 Although Catholic schools have a responsibility to meet the learning needs of these students, they are unable with current funding levels to

provide the same levels of resources as are available to government schools.

- 4.3 NCEC believes students with disabilities should receive funding according to the nature of their disability irrespective of the school they attend.
- 4.4 There is evidence of Catholic families not enrolling their children with disabilities in Catholic schools due to the comparatively low levels of funding. This is not only a loss to the diversity of the Catholic sector but results in a disproportionate number of SWDs in Government schools.
- 4.5 NCEC is seeking funding for Catholic systems in respect of these students as a percentage of the costs of SWDs in government schools, similar to the way in which the systems receive General Recurrent Grants by reference to the percentage of AGSRC.

5. Capital Funding (Buildings and other Infrastructure)

- 5.1 The establishment and maintenance of any system of schooling entails the outlay of substantial capital funds so that a genuine right to choice in schooling can be exercised. Catholic schools require additional Government support to:
 - upgrade older stock
 - build new schools to keep pace with the demand
 - provide modern technology
 - provide specialist facilities for vocational education and training.
 - capital costs of access for students with Disabilities.

In summary

The NCEC supports:

- Commonwealth funding for students in Catholic schools at 60% of AGSRC
- Funding for students with disabilities at a percentage of the costs of students with disabilities in government schools.
- Additional capital funding to maintain and improve the facilities in Catholic schools.