

SUBMISSION

to

**Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee**

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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Introduction :

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) is the peak body representing all Catholic schools in Queensland. It has delegated authority in the areas of :

- Funding
- Advocacy, negotiation and agreements with government
- Research and collection of statistical, financial and educational data relevant to the Commission's prime functions

QCEC is responsible for all Commonwealth funding and the majority of State funding being provided to Catholic school authorities in Queensland.

The Queensland Catholic system comprises 280 schools which are the responsibility of 24 different authorities. The largest authority is Brisbane Catholic Education (Archdiocese of Brisbane) which is responsible for 130 schools. There are 197 primary schools, 67 secondary schools and 16 composite schools and these are spread over a wide range of geographical locations and include students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. (The mean SES score for the Queensland Catholic system is 100).

The Catholic system is a system that operates in parallel to the government school sector and in one instance is the sole provider of education. QCEC is committed to providing education in partnership with the government and independent sectors as a service to the community as a whole.

QCEC takes responsibility for the receipt, distribution on a needs basis, accountability and reporting of most government funding.

Catholic schools in Queensland educate over 108,000 students staffed by 6812 full time equivalent teachers and 2717 non teaching staff.

Model of Funding :

Any model of funding for schools must acknowledge the three sources available to a greater or lesser extent for all schools – the Australian Government, the State Government and the local community. For Catholic schools this includes parents, parish communities and various fund raising activities.

A feature of the operation of Catholic schools in Queensland is that the Australian Government funding is paid to the QCEC which then redistributes it on a needs basis. This is the only way that schools specializing in educating special needs students and schools in remote and isolated communities can provide the quality of education required to address their substantial needs.

Funding for the Catholic sector for the next quadrennium is based on the aggregation of schools' socio-economic status scores. This has resulted in

moving towards funding of 58% of the Average Government Schools Recurrent Cost (AGSRC). The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) has set 60% of AGSRC as the target for Australian Government funding of Catholic schools with the State Government contributing a further 25% and the local community 15% on average across the system.

The retention of the AGSRC as the most appropriate basis for funding calculations is strongly supported.

There are two areas of Australian Government funding that require urgent attention. These are the funding of students with disabilities (SWD) and capital funding.

Students with Disabilities :

There has been a significant increase in the number of students and the level of disabilities of the students enrolled in Queensland Catholic schools in recent years. This has meant that limited resources have had to be stretched further than ever before in an attempt to meet the needs of these students.

Catholic education authorities acknowledge their responsibility to provide for these students in the most appropriate setting and the QCEC within its funding formulae similarly acknowledge the resource implications. The new Disability Discrimination Standards will mean that even more pressure will be placed on these limited resources.

QCEC proposes that funding for SWD's be on the basis of a percentage of the costs of SWD in Government schools, similar to the way in which systems receive General Recurrent Grants by reference to a percentage of the AGSRC.

Capital Funding :

The orderly and planned development of any school system requires significant capital funds to establish and maintain schools so that a genuine right to choice in schooling can be exercised.

All parents contribute to the repayment of loans that are taken out by schools to provide basic and essential capital infrastructure in addition to tuition fees and charges.

Catholic schools require additional Australian Government support to upgrade existing older stock, build new schools in growth areas, provide modern technology, provide specialist facilities for vocational education and training and capital costs for access to students with disabilities. Particular issues in Queensland that have exacerbated the Commission's difficulty in meeting demand from existing funds are :

- 50% of schools are in areas where building costs are higher than Brisbane.

- Population growth in Queensland is the highest in Australia.
- Building costs have escalated by 35% over the last 3 years while funds over the same time have increased by only 8.2%.

Providing appropriate teacher accommodation in the more remote schools has proved to be difficult over the years.