

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools

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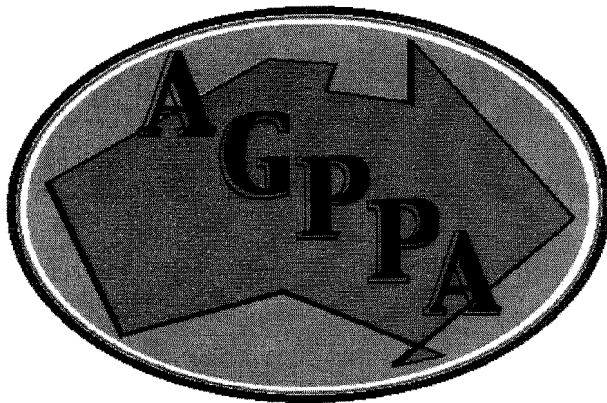
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**Australian
Government
Primary
Principals'
Association**



The Australian Government Primary Principals' Association (AGPPA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the 'Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding for Schools' being undertaken by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee. Representatives of AGPPA would be happy to meet with members of the Senate Committee to expand on this submission.

BACKGROUND

The Australian Government Primary Principals' Association represents over five thousand government primary principals across Australia. AGPPA was established in 2000 and evolved from a former organisation entitled 'Forum of State Primary Principals' that was formed in the middle nineties.

AGPPA comprises an executive made up of two representatives from each state government primary principals' association who are usually the presidents or senior executive of state organisations. AGPPA is the largest partner in the cross-sectoral Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA). In co-operating with principals from Catholic and Independent Schools Principals' Associations, AGPPA has to operate independently at times from the other sectors in advocating for appropriate resources to allow government schools to achieve the National Goals of Schooling.

The first initiative of AGPPA after its formation in July 2000, was to undertake research on the resourcing of Australian government primary schools. Funded by the state primary principals' associations, Professor Max Angus of the Edith /Cowan University in Perth was commissioned to survey all Australian government primary principals and to collate this research.

This survey was distributed to schools in November 2000 and achieved a return rate of 52% of government primary principals. The research was presented in the paper 'Our Future' which was released in February 2001.

This document has had a profound effect on attempts to investigate the true picture of the resourcing of government primary schools. Three major outcomes were:

- (a) The 'Our Future' document was supported by APPA and taken forward as the basis of a resourcing of all primary schools campaign that was organised before the 2001 Federal election and continues today.
- (b) The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) was influenced by the 'Our Future' Research to

implement a review into the resourcing of all schools. This research entitled 'Resourcing the National Goals' is completed but not yet released.

- (c) Whilst the Federal Minister David Kemp, at that time would not co-operate with the MCEETYA Review, he did provide Federal funding for a review of primary education. Professor Max Angus was engaged to conduct this review that has resulted in the publishing of Stage 1 of the report in 2002 and Stage 2 'The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools' which was recently released by Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training at the APPA Conference held in Melbourne on June 28, 2004.

ORGANISATION OF SUBMISSION

This submission will be organised into two sections. The first section will address the general funding principles for government schools and the second section will address the specific needs of government primary schools and primary education in general.

GENERAL FUNDING PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS RESPONSIBILITIES

AGPPA believes that all governments – State, Territory and the Federal - should stop blaming each other for deficiencies of funding in public education and take an honest look at the needs of all schools and the funding provided by all governments. It is time to set aside political rhetoric and to examine the educational and social needs of Australian Society. There has been only one attempt to examine the funding of schooling in Australia and that was the Peter Carmel Report commissioned in the nineteen seventies.

The only formal research on resourcing carried out in primary schools in the last century has been the Professor Max Angus 'Resourcing of Australian Primary Schools'. The MCEETYA Research 'Resourcing the National Goals' has been completed but not released.

Recommendation 1: That a major analysis of the funding of all schools be undertaken based on the Professor Max Angus Research 'The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools' and the MCEETYA Research 'Funding the National Goals'. If this analysis is not conclusive, then a major 'Commission of Inquiry' should be initiated.

FUNDING MODELS

AGPPA believes that alternative models for the funding of all schools should be examined. The Socio Economic Status (SES) Funding Model introduced by the Federal Government in 2001 to replace the Education Resource Index (ERI) for funding private schools has been the subject of great criticism.

Louise Watson in her paper 'A Critique of the Federal Government's Recent Changes to Private Schools Funding' puts forward the argument that there are the following flaws in SES-based model:

- The scheme does not take into account private incomes from sources other than tuition fees
- The SES index appears biased towards students from country areas

- The disproportionately high funding increases awarded to high-SES schools resulting from Federal government policy decisions
- The decision to maintain real funding levels of schools disadvantaged by the SES changes ensuring their current funding levels under ERI

Research by the Australian Education Union indicates that barely half of the private schools (catholic and independent) are funded at their SES level because they are funding maintained according to government policy at their previous funding levels. The extent of this overfunding in 2005 is estimated to be over \$500 million.

Government schools are funded under the Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC). This measure establishes the cost of educating a primary school age student at \$6000 whilst a secondary school student is estimated to cost \$8000 to educate. Of these figures, the Federal Government funds government primary schools at 6.8% of \$6000 and a government secondary student at 10% of \$8000. Non-government students are funded at a minimum rate of 13.7% of \$6000 and \$8000 respectively and up to 80%, depending on the SES status of particular schools.

There are three main issues in this scenario. Firstly, government primary principals would question the \$2000 differential supposedly required to educate a primary and a secondary student. Secondly, the 1.1% difference between government and primary secondary schools is an anomaly that has existed for a long time. Thirdly, and probably most significantly, the percentage difference between government and non-government schools is totally unfair. Whatever the exchange of rhetoric between State/Territory and Federal Governments these are glaring anomalies that could be fixed with political will and a sense of fairness.

The MCEETYA Research 'Resourcing the National Goals', although not published, has established a 'benchmark' level of funding for schools to achieve the National Goals of Schooling. Schools that were examined in this study that achieved the national goals and that did not have to accommodate factors such as significant numbers of indigenous or non-English speaking children and were of average SES status, did so at 85% of the average cost for all schools. It is obvious that schools require differential funding to meet their particular needs.

Recommendation 2: AGPPA believes that alternate funding models should be closely examined so that a fair and equitable distribution of educational funding resources can be guaranteed for all schools. It is recommended that a benchmark funding level for the achievements of the National Goals be examined as a basis for funding schools appropriately. This 'benchmark' funding level has been established in the MCEETYA Research 'Resourcing the National Goals. AGPPA believes that this research should be released as a matter of urgency so that a well informed debate can occur.

ACCOUNTBILITY PROCESSES

AGPPA believes that all educational systems and schools should be accountable for standards of achievement and the financial management arrangements for all systems and schools. Government primary principals have been transparent in their reporting of students' progress to parents through portfolios, interviews and overall

comprehensive reporting mechanisms. Extensive reporting in government schools also occurs in financial and administrative management of schools.

At a government and systemic level, the funding allocations to schools must be made more transparent. Professor Max Angus in his research 'The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools' argues that under the current arrangements it is possible to have only limited financial accountability and almost no educational accountability for the allocation and use of resources. If schools are to be benchmarked on learning outcomes, they should also be benchmarked on resources at their disposal to achieve the outcomes. Further, he contends that funding for government and non-government schools should be on the public record.

Recommendation 3: That government and non-government systems and schools should have transparent reporting systems that reveal an accurate and fair picture of the financial situation of all schools and their resource capacity to achieve the National Goals of Schooling.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SCHOOLS

AGPPA believes that the proliferation of new schools should be curtailed as they constitute an inefficient use of educational funding.

Unlike situation in many other countries many other countries, the Australian Government in recent years has supported the creation of hundreds of new schools mostly based on religious or ethnic points of view and philosophy. Most of these schools have been established in areas where they have drawn enrolments from existing schools whether they be government or non-government and often in areas where the student population is stable or declining. The Australian Education Union submission to this inquiry points out that increasingly, money is being wasted opening new private schools which threaten the viability of nearby public and in some cases, private schools rather than upgrading the resources of existing schools.

Recommendation 4: That a review of the establishment process of new schools be undertaken with consideration being given to the demographics of the geographical area and the viability of all schools in that area.

PART B: SPECIFIC NEEDS OF GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

AGGPA supports the statements made by Professor Max Angus in his research 'The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools' that in no state or school system was there evidence that primary schools generally had sufficient resources to meet the National Goals of Schooling. The picture that emerged from this study was that primary schools were fully stretched in terms of resourcing.

At the Annual General Meetings of both the Australian Government Primary Principals' Association and the Australian Primary Principals' Association, the following recommendations based on the research paper 'The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools' by Professor Max Angus were supported by principals from the Government, Catholic and Independent primary schools sectors. Some of these recommendations overlap with recommendations in PART A of this submission.

RESOURCING OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

TRANSPARENT FUNDING SYSTEMS

Recommendation 1: AGPPA seeks transparent funding systems that clearly demonstrate the level of funding and spending on primary education at both National and State levels.

Professor Angus puts forward the view that the resource allocation must be made not only comprehensible to school principals but also transparent to other school staff members and the public. The most transparent reporting system would be common across sectors and levels of government and provide in the public domain, information on per capita funding at a school level.

Recommendation 2: Primary school principals should have greater control and authority of resources in primary schools. In particular, AGPPA believes that all schools should have one line budgets and systems need to create flexible human resource policies for schools to operate to benefit all students.

Principals surveyed in the Angus Research reported that some of the resourcing formulae used by educational systems are considered to be arcane or lacking in logic. One example is staffing entitlements. A school may have a total enrolment that drops by only a few students but there is no graduated reduction in the staffing establishment. Instead a full-time teaching position is lost.

Another criticism by Principals concerned special needs funding. Some students were classified as ineligible for funding support by external consultants yet were more demanding than other funded students with special needs.

Recommendation 3: A full and immediate review of the SES Model for funding schools, to better address that sufficiency of resourcing all schools to ensure they can meet the national goals. In particular, AGPPA believes that a resourcing benchmark should be investigated as an option for directing funding towards need.

This recommendation has been canvassed previously in this paper.

INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS

Recommendation 4: Evidence based learning programs should be funded and implemented in all schools for all students with needs. This will include pressure by governments to ensure educational systems and universities form active partnerships to research and promote these programs.

The Angus Research points to instructional systems for literacy and numeracy such as Reading Recovery that are confined to small numbers of students and cuts out in the early years of schooling. Whilst there may be start up grants to establish these programs, schools are expected to continue the funding in later years from their own sources. Generally, schools with the most need have the least capacity to find the extra funding.

Recommendation 5: A focus for primary schools should be on evidence based teaching related to Literacy and Numeracy as the foundation to learning for life.

In terms of the allocation of teaching/learning time for students, the teaching of literacy is the dominant learning area with more than a third of the school week devoted to Literacy. Numeracy is next in importance. Together these two learning areas account for fifty percent of the week. The greatest difficulty is covering the other six or more learning areas in the remaining half of the week.

Recommendation 6: A greater consistency of resourcing linked to the SES Review is needed to ensure students with learning difficulties and needs, can be adequately met within the funding structure.

The evidence to the Angus study suggests that the allocations of additional resources for students with special needs, including the needs of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, should be more explicit. The weightings currently employed to take account of these groups appear to be insufficient.

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Recommendation 7: A nationally consistent curriculum needs to be developed.

AGPPA supports a nationally consistent curriculum that outlines broad guidelines to be followed in each state and territory. With national testing regimes being put in place, there is a need for consistent curricula in each state so that accurate and valid national assessment judgements can be made.

Recommendation 8: A review of the resourcing of each of the eight learning areas is necessary to ensure that student learning in each area meets the national goals. In particular the development of appropriate facilities and expertise support.

Angus generalises that it would seem that there has been a failure to recognise that the adoption of outcomes frameworks and pedagogies, coupled with individual performance testing, requires pedagogies that are more expensive to operate than whole-class teaching, yet most schools are resourced according to models that assume whole-class teaching to be the norm.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO ADDRESS STUDENT NEEDS

Recommendation 9: A review of funding for all schools should assess the need for a more equitable funding level between primary schools and secondary schools.

Professor Max Angus in his Stage 1 Report 'A Study into the Resourcing of Australian Primary Schools' concluded that a major funding differential has existed between primary and secondary schools for well over a century. This situation had developed because the initial government secondary schools established at the turn of last century had been funded at a higher level than primary schools in order to compete with the privately funded 'grammar schools'. This funding pattern has continued for many reasons until the early nineteen nineties when a narrowing of the funding differential occurred.

The report said that even though the differential between primary and secondary may be shrinking, both levels of education may need additional resources because of changes in the population of students entering and continuing at school.

AGPPA's position is not to take funding away from secondary schools but to increase funding to meet the needs of primary schools.

Recommendation 10: A review of the resourcing standard for all schools be used as a benchmark with adjustments for students and schools with special needs.

This issue has been discussed earlier in this submission. AGPPA supports an examination of this option for funding all schools.

CONCLUSION

The Australian government Principals' Association and the Australian Primary Principals' Association have, as a result of motions at the Annual General Meetings of both associations in Melbourne on June 27 2004, called on all Government :

- Provide equitable funding to all students
- Establish a resourcing standard for all schools
- Review the curriculum offerings to establish a consistent curriculum
- Provide an increase of \$1.295bn. for primary education.

John McMillan
President
Australian Government Primary Principals Association
15 July, 2004

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