



8 Galali Pl
Aranda
ACT 2614
25th March 2011

Review Secretariat
Location C16MT4,
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Email: schoolsfundingreview@deewr.gov.au

RE: Response from Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) to the Review of Funding for Schools
Emerging Issues Paper | December 2010
www.deewr.gov.au/fundingreview

AAPAE broadly supports the aim of the Review to identify arrangements that will achieve a funding system which is “transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all Australian students.”

AAPAE would like the Review to uphold the rights of parents and students to make decisions about where and how they experience those “excellent education outcomes”, and the role of government funding as the support structure for the essence of education which is about the relationships within their learning communities.

Trevor Cobbold, (The Canberra Times Sat 12th March 2001) a strong advocate of government schools and spokesperson for Save our Schools has noted that the funding review is turning into a “battle royale between the sectors and he has never seen the invective in the public-private school debate reach such a level.” Many of us find the statistics re funding, as the emerging issues noted, complex and confusing. They are very effectively used and misused to divide and conquer.

AAPAE encourages the Review to recognize the importance of government funding in sustaining a diversity of schools and learning communities and to find ways to defuse the public/private divide which has hovered over education in Australia for so long. Funding from different tiers of government has contributed to the historic divide in Australia and AAPAE would love to see a resolution of this issue as well.

Equity of Educational Outcomes

Andrew Scott Associate Professor in Politics at Deakin University (5th Mar 2011) wrote

The landmark new book by British researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, highlights the Nordic nations' achievements in early childhood development. It shows how increases in socio-economic equality starting in the earliest years of life promote positive health outcomes for all members of society. The Nordic countries' successes for children result from their strong investment in public child care, provision of substantial paid parental leave and effective regulation of working hours. These policies promote secure and appropriate jobs in terms of

work/family balance, boost women's labour force participation and reduce joblessness among families with children.

AAPAE recognizes that improving the lives of many in our society requires fundamental shifts in our priorities. We would encourage the government to seriously consider this in the context of overall funding for schools and education. We also agree with the aim of “ensuring the funding that is available is equitably distributed among schools”.

All schools need to be funded so that all our children have the opportunity to a full life of learning. The schools associated with AAPAE are usually small with enrolments from 20 – 200. As part of the Independent sector, though very different from the elite schools which are the subject of so much media attention, our schools have relied on a mix of government funding and parental contributions through fees and fund raising and most importantly the work of parents as unpaid volunteers. Most schools make every effort to keep the fee structure as affordable as possible, but the very existence of fees (even low fees) is still a barrier for some families who actively seek the educational philosophies on which they are based. We hope to reduce those barriers as much as possible to enable parents and students to choose learning places where they and their children are able to participate in ways not available to them in other schools.

AAPAE agrees that “equity should ensure that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions” and the recognition that not all students will achieve the same outcomes,” but rather that they will not be prevented from achieving their maximum potential because of their background or family circumstances.” AAPAE supports the view that funding be “directed to where it is needed most so that students are supported to overcome barriers to achievement, regardless of their background or where they go to school.” However, we do not support the implication in this statement that it is an either /or situation. We support the funding of all children and additional funding for those who are disadvantaged in our society and have particular needs.

It is clear that governments and bureaucracies prefer a homogenous funding system but we propose that our society could sustain diverse ways to fund education. Consistent with the presence of diversity within our group we have at least two possible suggestions for the Review to consider.

1. That Schools of Special Character be integrated and receive full public funding. There are precedents for this in New Zealand, Denmark and Finland.
2. For those families and schools who wish to remain fully independent that there be equitable distribution of funds which gives each child portable funds and, where there is particular need, be provided with extra funding.

Recurrent funding;

AAPAE agrees with the calls to reduce the complexity of funding systems. The constant claims in the public debate that many Independent schools receive more funding than government schools, and in some cases, more than that to which they are entitled under the present SES system, begs the Review to find a way that is fair and just and free of the perception as well as the reality that one sector is favoured over the other.

The present SES and AGSRC systems have meant that some of AAPAE schools fall into the Funding Maintained and or Guaranteed category Any reductions will make these communities financially vulnerable and put great pressure on parents to increase their contributions even more and limit access for low income families.

If we are to have an SES system of some kind then it needs to be based on a real socioeconomic profile of a school community and its capacity to support the school, not a generic one. Given the

capacity in our economy we need to ensure that the amount of funding is consistent with OECD levels or better and that the processes of distribution are just, fair, equitable. We would also welcome more certainty around funding by an increase in the timeframes for funding cycles so that school communities can concentrate on the essence of their work with their learning communities.

Targeted and Needs-based funding, including funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;

AAPAE supports extra funding where there are targeted and special needs to reduce the large achievement gaps between rich and poor, and to enable our indigenous people the opportunities to “close the gap”.

Support for Students with Special Needs and Students with Disability;

AAPAE also supports extra funding directed to students with special needs and disabilities and welcomes any support which enables such students to attend AAPAE schools if the students and their parents wish to participate in such an education.

Governance and Leadership

AAPAE notes with some irony that there has been an acknowledgement that the relationship with a learning community is at the heart of “achieving stronger educational outcomes” and that funding alone does not automatically achieve this. The governance of our AAPAE schools has been inclusive and dependent on the full participation of all in the community including students in decisionmaking. We certainly welcome any funding arrangements which recognize, support and enable this to continue in our schools and become a reality in all schools. We encourage the Review to support the autonomy of schools in philosophy, educational policies, management, and allocation of resources and in the processes of accountability.

Community and Family Engagement.

AAPAE schools and Learning Communities are based and dependent on principles of the central role of parents, students and the community in education, and the partnership which must happen with all those involved in the life of the student and the school. Government funding is a tangible sign that the whole of the community supports, values and enables the education of its people.

Accountability and Regulation

The development of “strings attached” funding through increases in requirements in recent quadrennial funding rounds have increased the pressures on the philosophies of our parents, students, teachers and members of the school communities.

In Finland, the leading country in successive OECD PISA Evaluations of 15 year olds, the evaluation of the learning outcomes of schools and students is encouraging and supportive by nature. The aim is to produce information that helps both schools and students develop. There is no national testing of learning outcomes, school ranking lists or inspection systems. Students have equal opportunities, they study less than in other countries, there is no streaming or selective process, there is individual support for learning and *a student-oriented, active conception of learning* which focuses on students' activity and interaction with the teacher, other students and the learning environment.

Finnish society favours and appreciates education, teachers are valued as highly qualified and competent professionals and, though there is a national curriculum, the schools have independence and autonomy in provision and content. There is an extensive regional network, which is flexible, empowered, with emphasis on co-operation and building partnerships. Basic

education is FREE.

We urge the Review to encourage the Government to consider that whole countries such as Finland have chosen a path which has enabled them to perform successfully and that our choices reflect a culture similar to theirs. The parents, students and staff in schools affiliated with AAPAE and like-minded schools internationally, are choosing something different from the majority and gradually these fundamental differences are being eroded by the requirements linked to funding.

We request that in our democratic society with its tradition of educational diversity, this basic freedom be respected and valued. **We urge the Review to encourage Government to demonstrate a commitment to a healthy democracy which acknowledges and values diverse minorities and supports them with the people's money.**

Richard Wilkinson, Professor Emeritus at University of Nottingham Medical School and Honorary Professor at University College London spoke with Margaret Throsby on Thursday 3rd Sept 2009 about his research which focuses on social inequalities, their causes and the social determinants of health. His research supports the view that more equal societies do better and are happier. One of the underlying tenets for creating a more equal society is the emphasis on a co-operative spirit. I was interested to note that Professor Wilkinson commented that neither competition nor cooperation is hardwired and we can choose which will be our basic value and learn this from our earliest experiences. It is inevitable that different processes and systems will evolve according to this choice.

The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) appear to strongly support and promote educational progress through competition and comparison. Standardised testing, comparative reporting, ranking of schools and/or individuals, prescribed, one size-fits-all curricula through a mandated National Curriculum and decision-making by authorities all contribute to, and promote this choice, and, we accept, appear consistent with majority opinion in Australia.

The parents, students and staffs of many of the schools affiliated with AAPAE seek a different choice: the freedom supported by funding to emphasise and enable educational, social equality and democratic participation within a communal and cooperative spirit framework. For this we need different strategies, consistent with these aims, for example:

- Self-assessment, collaborative and co-operative assessment with parents, teachers and peers
- Accountability to self, parents, teachers, peers and school community
- No ranking of schools as this inevitably leads to comparative and ultimately competitive leagues tables and these are inadequate means of rating a child's academic performance, narrow and misleading in the information they provide to parents and the community.
- Diverse, natural, self-initiated, negotiated and emergent curricula, informed by the best of state, national and international curricula.
- Participation in decision-making by ALL in the community

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,
Cecelia Bradley
President, AAPAE

Background to Finland success in PISA Survey - <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/artikkelit/pisa-tutkimus/index.html?lang=en>

Wilkinson, R and Pickett, K. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane 2009