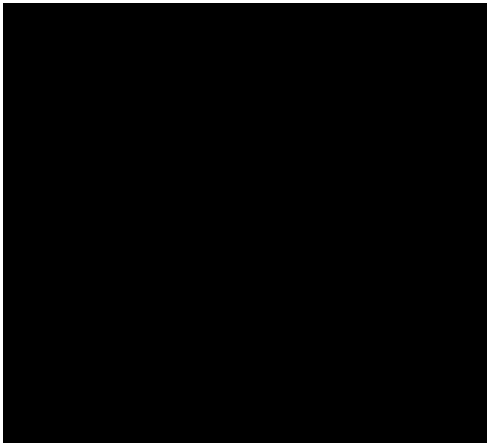


Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Submission to the Review

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August 2023



We are happy to provide any further information to the Panel in relation to matters raised in this submission.

We welcome this Review to inform progress towards a better and fairer education system. We welcome also the quality of the Consultation Paper prepared by the Expert Panel and, in particular, its opening statements about the transformative power of education for individuals and for the international competitiveness and prosperity of the nation as a whole.

The Consultation paper also acknowledges key problems in the Australian school system, particularly in relation to increasing levels of inequity and to the supply and quality of teaching. These two problems are interrelated.

In its final report, it would be helpful in our view for the Panel to be explicit about the values and principles that underpin its policy advice to the Australian Government. These are largely implicit in the Consultations paper.

Context

This Review is taking place in the context of growing teacher shortage and financial pressures on many families with school-age children. Governments have a greater responsibility than ever to provide a school system with the level and range of resources needed to equip all children and young people to deal with the social, political and economic challenges they will inherit, including climate change and the aftermath of the ongoing pandemic.

The purpose of a school system is to provide the organisational and planning structures, processes and strategies to ensure all schools have adequate and appropriate resources necessary to enable teachers and students to do their work of teaching and learning.

There is growing consensus that our school system is not fit for this purpose. But there is a risk of governments being pressured towards solutions in the absence of a clear understanding of how this system actually powers the movements of money, students and teachers.

Our submission is based on our background and past experience at national and state/territory level. It responds, in particular, to issues which are the subject of Chapter 4 – *Our current and future teachers*; and Chapter 6: *Funding transparency and accountability*.

We have also taken up the invitation from the Panel to provide “other feedback informed by our professional background”; and have put forward proposals for changes to schools funding arrangements which are fundamental to achieving a better and fairer education system.

We note, for example, that the Review will not examine the calculation of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). The Australian Government has acknowledged the need to get every school up to 100 per cent of its fair funding level. It makes good sense, in our view, to continue to use the existing Schools Resource Standard (SRS) until this commitment is met. In the meantime, there is a need for the Panel to give consideration to a better and fairer mechanism.

It is not realistic, in our view, to attempt to deal with questions relating to our current and future teachers in a resources vacuum; or without understanding the implications of current funding arrangements for the supply, quality and distribution of teachers. These are issues which go beyond funding transparency and accountability, important as these conditions are.

We hope that the Expert Panel will consider a proposal for what would be, in our view, a better, fairer and more direct measure of the resources schools need to support all their students to gain the full benefits of schooling.

Australia's education system performs well for many but not for all

The complex effects of economic change, patterns of affluence in society generally and in specific communities, changing real estate values, trends in the birth rate and in patterns of immigration and settlement influence the social composition of schools and school systems. These factors predispose some schools to being 'strong' in the market while others are 'weak'. Schools in rural and remote areas, for example, and particularly those serving students from communities characterised by poverty, are generally hard to staff even when the overall supply of teachers is adequate. In some areas of the country, the market forces which affect schooling are now almost inextricably entwined with the operation of the real estate market. Parents with the capacity to buy or rent housing near to, or to transport their children to, their preferred schools have more options than those who lack these means.

Irrespective of what kind of government and school system a country develops, it is only realistic to accept that there will be competition by some to make decisions in their own best interests and, in particular, to advance the interests of their own children. It is the responsibility of democratic governments to take actions to counter any resultant damage to other people's children and to adopt policies that are conducive to co-operation rather than competition on what will always be an uneven playing field.

It is one thing for Australia to aspire to a school system which celebrates cultural diversity, and expresses religious, ethnic and other social traditions and loyalties. But diversity should not be confused with disparity in a class-stratified school system where choice and competition lead to gross resource gaps among schools.

Rather than giving priority to mitigating the effects of social, economic and demographic factors which feed into stratification of schools, Australian governments have adopted schools planning and funding policies which intensify them. As well as damaging the most vulnerable students, these policies have produced broader negative effects -- stagnating achievement levels, widening resource inequities, inflated costs and, in particular, the maldistribution of teachers among schools.

Commonwealth-state relationships. On the one hand, the Consultation paper states that "the Commonwealth, state and territory governments share responsibility for school

education and have traditionally worked together to determine priorities and develop the architecture, funding mechanisms and resources required to meet shared goals”. On the other hand, the paper acknowledges that “we don’t have a clear picture of how funding is allocated or spent”.

These statements in the Consultation Paper provide an unduly scant acknowledgment that it is the ‘fog’ created by the vagaries of the Australian federal system which has allowed inequity to flourish and grow. Cumulative political decisions, largely taken by the Commonwealth, have created and entrenched a gross imbalance in their respective share of responsibility for the public funding of public and private schools between the two levels of government.

As a consequence, recurrent funding to the private school sector from the Commonwealth alone has reached a level where it exceeds the sector’s total teaching staff salary bill.

The Australian Government has recently taken a necessary step to ensure that funding is being used for the purpose intended and to reduce integrity risks. In the recent Budget, it announced the implementation of safeguards to strengthen policy and financial assurance and compliance oversight in the non-government school sector (Education Portfolio Statements, p.16). This is a step forward – a long overdue recognition of the need to reform what have been highly fungible funding arrangements.

Improving the supply, quality and distribution of teaching is a key to building a better and fairer system for the future. And the Commonwealth is now a large, de facto employer of teachers, with the vast majority of teachers in the non-government school sector on its payroll. These two realities need to be linked more explicitly in future development of a fairer and better school system. They represent an opportunity and, in our view, an obligation for the Commonwealth to play a key role – in consultation with states and territories -- in improving the supply, quality and distribution of teaching across the school system as a whole.

A better and fairer funding standard

The current mix of funding mechanisms for schools in Australia are a proxy for the process required to establish the resources actually needed in real schools, recognising that schools are complex organisations and that teaching lies at their heart. The concept of a funding standard which applies to all schools regardless of sector should be retained, but it is time to move to a form of resource standard more directly and tightly focused on teaching and on each school’s related staffing entitlement.

We urge the Expert Panel to give consideration to the following proposals for future reform:

- ***That the Commonwealth take the initiative to work with states and territories to replace the current flawed arrangements for resourcing schools with a funding standard and a related funding mechanism designed to strengthen the supply, quality and distribution of teaching across the school system as a whole.***

- ***That the current Schools Resource Standard be replaced by a 'Teaching Resource Standard' in recognition of the fact that investment in teaching is the most direct lever available to government for influencing the quality of schooling.***
- ***That a Teaching Resource Standard be designed to capture the contemporary realities of teachers' work and bring together all of the elements that are fundamental to quality teaching, from supply (including the recruitment and initial education of teachers) to the distribution of teachers among schools and to the range of conditions that are most conducive to teachers achieving their best through all stages of their careers.***

Conclusion

In its advice to the Australian Government, we encourage the Expert Panel to consider including reference to the introduction of a Teaching Resource Standard as a constructive and practicable means to demonstrate: commitment to the teaching profession; recognition that teaching is an intellectually demanding profession that involves highly complex tasks; and shared responsibility for creating the pay and conditions necessary to make teaching an attractive and rewarding career in order to recruit and retain quality entrants.

For further information: For the information of the Panel, the concept of a resource standard based on teaching is described in greater detail in our attached submission to the NSW Gallop Inquiry, *Valuing the Teaching Profession*, 2020.