

Submission to the Review of Funding for Schooling

Paper on Commissioned Research

Victorian Principals Association

Assessment of current process for targeting of schools funding to disadvantaged students – Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

1. Comments on ACER's "Assessment of current process for targeting of schools funding to disadvantaged students" research report

There is a recognition of the complexities involved in funding students under the 5 headings – low SES, ESL, Disabilities, Indigenous and Regional, Rural and Remote. It is agreed there needs to be additional funding to schools with these cohorts with a weighted formula. This needs to be fair, transparent and equitable and must address the complex needs of all these cohorts.

A basic concern is whether the centrally allocated funds actually reach the intended beneficiaries, that is, whether it has been accurately targeted by the systems. This report ignores the intrinsic problem of whether the actual support provided is sufficient, or the kind that is needed by each school to address the challenges it faces.

At all times there needs to be a much greater degree of transparency, particularly in the way in which school systems disburse government funding to assist disadvantaged students in individual schools. This needs to be more than a one line budget. NB. The concept of broadbanding needs to be abolished and replaced with a more detailed and transparent funding formula that is clearly understood across Australia.

Students with Disabilities

The establishment of a standard disabilities entitlement across Australia encourages these students to be enrolled in **all** sectors and have commensurate funding levels. As a result there should not be a subsequent diminishing of funds in government schools, as existing programs need to be sustained.

Low SES

An important aspect of the ACER study has been to highlight the proportion of funding targeted for disadvantaged students in government schools. The 4 per cent reported as expended on disadvantage factors is extremely low. Group disadvantage needs to be qualified and quantified and equitably funded according to real need.

It needs to be recognised that government schools have a much higher concentration of low SES background students; therefore increased funding is pivotal in ensuring educational success. It is acknowledged in this ACER report that this area of funding needs to be significantly increased over a 10 year period to stop residualisation.

The National Partnerships for low SES schools is a good example of targeted funding that is having a real impact on improving student learning in the recipient schools and needs to be commended and expanded over time. Transparency in the allocation of resources is imperative.

The findings in this paper highlight the need to ensure that funding allocated at the national level to support students struggling to achieve minimum standards actually reaches these students.

Assessing existing funding models for schooling in Australia – Deloitte Access Economics

2. Comments on Deloitte Access Economics' "Assessing existing funding models for schooling in Australia" research report

VPA would agree with the Deloitte assertions that models need to be based on educational policy and be aimed at delivering educational policy such as the Melbourne Declaration. Deloitte also notes that any model must be reviewed regularly and that the best models have been reviewed recently. Models must reflect educational need and be well researched and adaptable. VPA would note caution when Deloitte says that models should "incentivise private contributions". This statement is unclear and possibly unachievable in many government schools.

Feasibility of a national schooling recurrent resource standard – The Allen Consulting Group

3. Comments on The Allen Consulting Group's "Feasibility of a national schooling recurrent resource standard" research report

The Allen Model makes the point that a national recurrent resource standard is possible; however the paper involves one key issue that is not supported by any contemporary research. Differential resource funding of primary and secondary sectors has no contemporary research base and cannot be part of a modern model. VPA argues that the boundaries between these two "old" sectors are very blurred in modern times and that the early intervention and foundational needs of primary demand an equity of resource standards. This needs to be at any year level of schooling Prep to Year 12.

Allen notes the key issue of having little data on disability modelling, however VPA would not want to see this issue hold up the formation of a better resource standard model. The Allen model acknowledges various other needs factors.

The Allen model notes that a model based on limited outcomes in literacy, numeracy and perhaps retention would be too restrictive. Broader educational outcomes would drive a model that would better support a rich and diverse Melbourne Declaration curriculum.

Schooling challenges and opportunities– The Nous Group

4. Comments on The Nous Group's "Schooling challenges and opportunities" research report

The Nous Group paper outlines many of the research findings that have been in the education community for some time. It outlines that Australia has an unusual education system being that our 'tail' is an area of major concern. It clearly documents that low socio economic conditions have a direct effect on student outcomes.

The paper is clear in that it documents inequality with the Australian system and within sectors as the major issue needing to be solved. The paper also correctly points out that Australia has one of the most competitive education systems in the world for it allows many parents' the 'choice' of what school their children will attend. However if we are to have a truly competitive market in the Australian education system all schools must be on a 'level playing field' in policy implementation, universal enrolment and exclusion. The community and governments must also take into account factors due to isolation and low socio economic factors. Choice is clearly not available to many Australia families.

It is clear from reading the Nous Report that considerable work is needed in developing a whole of government approach to improving education. The paper clearly outlines that unless there is a redirection of funding within the community we will not be able to develop strategies to improve education outcomes for all Australians. Schools can only add value to the each student's development. It is clear this will be very difficult if the child has not received a stimulating and rich context.

Schools across the nation within all sectors are clearly producing good results, however there is a perception that some sectors are better than others. There is a clear need to attract students to these perceived 'poor' schools by providing excellent buildings, integrated services, high class teachers and the best leadership. If this does not occur we will have a residualisation of the Australian education community. There is a need to 'advantage' these schools to lift the lowest 10% as outlined in the paper.

If the aim of resource allocations to schools is to improve student outcomes then there should be no debate about discretionary funding to schools in low socio economic areas. It also should be said that if there is to be allocation of resources to low socio economic schools then that resource must be sufficient to make a difference.

Investment in education should, as the paper suggests, be based on maintaining current areas of focus (efforts to improve school leadership skills, teacher quality and instructional methods, however it must be vigorously pointed out that to be successful in these investments one cannot achieve success through the introduction of such strategies as the publication of the MySchool website and the 'reward based' payment system for teachers. (Refer: CSE Seminar Series 204, Michael Fullan, Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole School Reform)

Care must be taken in development of regional/ community bodies for unless ALL schools are on a 'level playing field' and there is a governance understanding between all sectors, such a concept will fail.

The 'glue' that must be developed is a trust of schools, school leaders and teachers to find the solutions. Governments need to allocate resources based on need and then allow the schools to get on with the job.

Supplementary comments

5. Other comments on the Review of Funding for Schooling commissioned research

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