

Federal Review of Funding for Schooling - Waverley Public School P&C Submission

Waverley Public School is a small primary school in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. It has a great community of teachers and parents who often go above and beyond to ensure that our students are given the opportunities to excel in their education. The school has a long history of providing education in the Waverley district. Founded in January 1879, it was the first school built in the Waverley municipality. Today, Waverley municipality is considered, based on average socioeconomic ranking scales, to be one of the wealthiest districts in Australia, however, it is also home to many families living in rental accommodation, whose income relies on jobs in service industries that lack security without long term employment prospects.

58% of the 203 Waverley Public School students are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Our net recurrent income per student in 2009 was \$9,106 (~\$1.8M in total). In comparison, some non-government schools in the area received

- \$9,935 - St Anthony's School, Clovelly (13% students from non-English speaking backgrounds)
- \$17,061 - Montessori East, Bondi (7% students from non-English speaking backgrounds)
- \$22,930 - Cranbrook School, Bellevue Hill (15% students from non-English speaking backgrounds)
- \$25,383 - St Catherines, Waverley (14% students from non-English speaking backgrounds)
(*My School website, 2011*)

Waverley Public School has an active P&C group. The bulk of the support we provide to the school is "in-kind" voluntary support. This includes a once a week canteen, a uniform shop that is open twice a week, providing people to help at swimming and athletics carnivals and other school events, providing assistance with reading programs, assisting with parent-teacher communication and grounds maintenance through parent working bees. Our voluntary fundraising efforts provide ~\$20,000 - \$30,000 per annum to the school (\$100 - \$150 per student) or ~1.1% of the recurrent expenditure of the school. Our parents (many of whom work) donate over 1,000 hours per annum of their time in helping the school provide our children with the basic necessities for their education – smartboards, computers and computer lessons, language lessons – necessities that should be provided through government funding.

Due to funding pressures, many important educational programs are offered in school time by specialist groups that require payment for the provision of these services. These programs can not be funded from existing Government funding and so they are either part-funded by P&C fundraising (as mentioned above – language and computer training programs) or are required to be fully funded by levies to be paid directly by parents (e.g. computer based learning tools eg Mathletics and Reading Eggs). The school has a clearly stated policy that failure to pay this levy by parents will result in exclusion of their children from these programs. This is a significant concern to parents at Waverley Public School as these programs are increasingly being used in the provision of core elements of the school curriculum.

What is clear to the Waverley Primary School P&C is that:

- (i) Waverley Primary School is comparatively poorly funded on a per capita basis in comparison with other local schools

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(ii) P&C fundraising opportunities are already fully leveraged in their ability to provide income to the school.

(iii) existing funding arrangements are unable to provide all students access to all programs offered during class time without additional supplementation of school income by parents.

These three features represent an erosion of the basis on which the Public Education System was founded in Australia. We strongly believe this system must be restored because the need, if anything, is greater today than it has been and the cost of provision of an adequate education in today's world is becoming more difficult for individual families alone to bear. The restoration of this system, in our view, rests on the following principles.

Ensuring equity in educational outcomes

Education is the key to building a democratic, equitable and just society. It provides our children with the knowledge and ability to contribute to Australia's social and economic stability and well being.

Why the government school system is important

'What Makes School Systems Perform' (OECD 2003) concludes that strong education systems 'tend to succeed by providing good quality support for students, teachers and schools in the context of an integrated rather than differentiated school structure'.

Government school systems have a legal obligation (enshrined in state and territory legislation) to accept all students regardless of background, circumstance or educational need. It is a foundation on which fair and equitable education can be provided for all.

Independent schools and the Catholic school system do not have this obligation with access being restricted through fee structures.

No child should be disadvantaged in their education opportunities due to socio-economic circumstances and their ability to 'choose' which system they wish to be educated in.

Implications of open access

Government school systems have a

- greater proportion of students from low-income backgrounds (under \$1,000 per week) - 77% compared to 15% in catholic schools and 9% in private (Barbara Preston, *The Social Make-Up of Schools*)
- greater proportion of indigenous students - 86% compared to 9% in catholic schools and 5% in private schools. (PC RGS 2011)
- greater proportion of students with a disability (79%) (PC RGS 2011)

Year 12 completion rates have fallen from 60% (1997) to 58% (2008) for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have stayed the same for students from medium socioeconomic backgrounds and have risen from 75% to 77% for high socioeconomic students (*National Report on Schooling in Australia 2007*). Australia's position in terms of completion rates for secondary

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schooling or the vocational equivalent is now close to the bottom third of OECD countries, with early school-leavers concentrated in schools serving poorer communities. If this is allowed to continue it could contribute to a vicious circle of greater social and economic inequalities within Australian society.

Given these indicators, it is vital that government school systems are adequately funded. The level of funding provided by governments determines class size, teaching time, and the school's capacity to provide intensive teaching in smaller groups and specialist assistance to under-achieving students. Its level of funding also affects the school's physical environment and its materials and equipment for teaching and learning.

Funding to ensure equity in educational outcomes

Current system

The Current funding scheme is entrenching inequities especially when current commonwealth funding decisions are based on incomplete financial pictures.

Commonwealth general recurrent funding has increased for both government and non-government school systems over the past years, however this increase has favoured non-government schools.

	2001		2008	
	Funding	# students	Funding	# students
Government	\$1.25m	2,248,219	\$1.89m	2,273,253
Non-government	\$3.10m	1,019,922	\$5.28m	1,171,221

(National Report on Schooling in Australia 2001 (Table 3.9, Table 4) and 2008 (Table 2.7, Table 5))

In the same period non-government schools increased their fees by 60% on average, from \$2,830 - \$4,540 per student. (*Schools Funding Futures*, J F McMorrow, 2010)

There is greater pressure on parents to raise money through fund raising activities to enable schools to purchase equipment for learning (e.g. smartboards) and for general maintenance and infrastructure. It is becoming harder to do this as more and more families now have both parents in the workforce so they can provide for their families. They are unable to donate their time and, in schools with a large proportion of students from low-income families, to make monetary donations.

Donations to independent schools are tax deductible. Similar arrangements should also be made for public schools to allow individual as well as corporate donations. Along with appropriate government funding this could help lessen the heavy burden placed on parents to provide resources for basic student needs.

Future funding systems

1. We strongly support the view that any new funding scheme should be transparent and uncomplicated.

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2. We believe that "financial sustainability" is a self evident truth of modern Australian life and by definition we support this.

3. We have qualified support for the promotion of excellence in educational outcomes for all Australian students. Though a subtle distinction, our view is this is better expressed by the statement "All Australian students must benefit from the promotion of excellence in educational outcomes"

4. We believe there is a strong link between funding arrangements and improved educational outcomes. It is important then to point out that in establishing mechanisms to ensure schools are providing quality education, it is essential to remember that holding schools accountable for achieving outcomes in the absence of adequate and appropriate resources leads to a cycle of blame and frustration. This undermines confidence in the school system generally, particularly in those schools responsible for serving students from the poorest communities.

5. We agree that families and parents are key driving forces behind the need to provide quality education outcomes for their children. The capacity for parents to contribute to the life of the school is, in our experience, leveraged as far as current arrangements will allow. Compared to when the Public Education system was established (i) parents are far better educated, thus raising the expectation on the system to deliver for their children, (ii) families are "time poor", limiting their ability to engage directly with the school system and (iii) the ability for even middle income families to meet the increasing costs of education is substantially threatened. Nonetheless the end users of the system have much to contribute in the process of allocation of funds within any one school.

6. We believe the allocation of funding should be based on the needs of students and the differing workloads schools are faced with to meet those needs. The funding process must be as mechanistically simple as possible to avoid waste.

8. Aging infrastructure, demands for new technology, adjustment to the changing demands placed on our education system all contribute to growths in cost. A key need we see that should drive growth in costs is the need to invest in teacher training at all levels, particularly in the area of technology usage and how it affects curriculum delivery.

9. There is a place of voluntary and private contributions and other income sources in school funding arrangements. However, we believe that these contributions should be used to fund the 'extras' (garden beds, playground equipment etc) rather than the basics of education (computers, smartboards, core elements of curriculum programs etc). Very significant changes in the capacity of and resources to public schools for this purpose would be necessary to diversify their income streams in this way. For this approach to be sustainable, a long term view would be necessary. Such diversification would also be limited by the economic capacity of the school community to support any particular school.

We hope that the Review Panel will take into consideration the importance of government school systems in ensuring quality education is provided to all Australian children and are able to develop funding arrangements that will ensure this role is continued to the benefit of Australian society.