

The future funding for Australian schools?

The Australian Education Bill Amendments 2017 put in place legislation to determine how schools will be funded from 2018. The ASPA submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017 highlighted several areas that feature prominently in the broader debate.

Gonski 2.0 adopts the principles of the SRS as proposed in the Review of Funding for Schooling (December 2011) and this is a positive step; at last we have an agreed model! The remaining discussion on the quantum of the funding should not detract from the agreed model. Whilst everyone would like to see the full Gonski funding, the essential element is that the future funding is targeted to where it is needed the most.

Public education caters for all students, diversity is our reality placing a heavy demand on human, physical and financial resources. Funding must recognise the breadth and depth of diversity and ensure that funding is sufficient to provide equal opportunity for all. The Gonski Report concluded that too many children were missing out on the education they needed due to insufficient resourcing, and this must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Schools need the additional funding "sooner rather than later." The transition to 'their' relevant share of the SRS by 2027 is far too long. Under the 10-year timeframe a child starting Kindergarten in 2018 in an underfunded disadvantaged school deserves a greater level of resourcing for their education before they complete Primary school. The same can be said for many Year 6 students today as they prepare for six years of schooling in disadvantaged and underfunded secondary education settings.

While we welcome the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, led by Mr David Gonski AC, we do so with trepidation. This has been commissioned to build the evidence base that will ensure that the additional funding provided by the Australian Government is spent on proven initiatives that make a difference to student outcomes. The concern is that there are fundamental differences between schools: the response for the 9500 schools in Australia should reflect the different challenges faced by school leaders and their community rather than prescriptive 'one size fits all' initiatives to "implement" in a school. Initiatives must be tailored to meet the needs of the school and community and this highlights the essential nature of good leadership and school community governance. Measures of

“improved performance” must be more than improved NAPLAN, PISA and TIMSS results. Research on how to best measure “value add” in all schools must be prioritised.

It must be understood that every school in Australia is a “government funded school” therefore accountability must be the same for all schools and any measures of improved performance must be developed in consultation with the profession.

While the Bill is specific in terms of federal funding, there is no compulsion for states and territories to ensure each student receives their full SRS entitlement. If this Bill is about addressing inequity then every student, in every school, across Australia must receive their full entitlement.

Good leadership is the key to achieving educational excellence in Australian Schools. Without school leaders with the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities to identify and implement appropriate initiatives the impact of additional funding will be diminished.

Current and aspiring school leaders, federal and state policy makers, and education stakeholders must understand how policy, research and practice come together to transform schools and school systems. Principals need to know what works and why it works; practice and policy must be informed by high quality contemporary research. It is essential that both the policy makers and the educators work together to ensure they implement the “right” responses.

It is time to invest in our school leaders if we are to make a real difference in outcomes for our students.

Rob Nairn

Executive Director/President

Australian Secondary Principals' Association.