



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL *good works*

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Senate Select Committee on School Funding
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Submitted via electronic upload

Submission to the Inquiry into School Funding

The St Vincent de Paul Society (the Society) is a respected lay Catholic charitable organisation operating in 149 countries around the world. In Australia, we operate in every state and territory, with more than 60,000 members, volunteers, and employees. Our people are deeply committed to our work of social assistance and social justice, and we run a wide variety of programs around Australia. Our work seeks to provide help for those who are marginalised by structures of exclusion and injustice, and our programs seek to assist (among other groups) people who are homeless and insecurely housed, disadvantaged children and young people, migrants and refugees, people living with mental illness, and people experiencing poverty.

On 4 February 2014 the Select Committee on School Funding invited the Society to make a submission on its terms of reference. The Society has consulted, and welcomes the opportunity to make this contribution.

1. The right to education

The Society believes that every Australian has the right to “a place to learn”.¹ This right is enshrined in Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which states that primary education must be free to all, and binds parties to a progressive realisation of free and accessible secondary and higher education. As a signatory to this Convention, the Australian government has a duty to its citizens to both increase the accessibility, and decrease the cost, of educational opportunities.

The Society believes that education plays a critical role in the training and development of Australians, preparing them for participation in a modern economy. This might be called the instrumental value of education. However, we believe that there is also intrinsic value in all education that cannot simply be measured in economic output: the value in broadening people’s minds, their understanding of the world, and giving them greater self-confidence and empowerment.²

2. The 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling

The 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling (“the Review”), popularly known as the Gonski review, was a thorough and rigorous look at our current school funding models, with recommendations on how to improve them.

The key recommendation of the Review was that a new school resourcing standard be created, with money allocated per student, with additional loadings for extra educational needs. This amount of money is intended to reflect the resources required for the student to

¹ See, for example, St Vincent de Paul, http://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/169073_Two_Australias_Report_on_Poverty.pdf.
²<http://theconversation.com/single-mothers-need-education-not-welfare-cuts-12803>

achieve high educational outcomes, and can be sourced from both state and federal government, and privately.³

3. The Society's position

The Society has consistently supported the reforms proposed by the Review.⁴ The Society supports Term of Reference (a): needs-based funding arrangements for all schools and school systems.

We believe that everyone in Australia should receive the level of support they need to lead a happy, healthy and productive life. For this reason, we support adequate income supplements for people currently out of the workforce, as well as flexible working environments that allow people to balance work with family and other responsibilities.

Alongside adequate income, health, and housing, the Society believes that access to education is a basic human right that all people are entitled to. This includes a strong and fair primary and secondary education funding model. Education is common right, not a consumer product.

The public nature of this funding model is especially crucial given the inability of many families to afford private education. The price of private education is increasing above wages and above the Consumer Price Index. For example, in a 12 month period ending in 2013 education costs increased by 5.6%, and since 1990 education has increased 164% more than CPI has.⁵ For this reason, the Society supports the Review's recommendations. We recommend that this Inquiry adopt them, and that the needs-based funding arrangements from 1 January 2014 be continued into the future. In line with the review, we believe that:

- 1) Equality is the paramount concern of education funding. Whatever the ultimate method of funding allocation between commonwealth, state, and private sources; education resources should be allocated on the basis of need, such that every child is given the tools for a chance at a good quality education.
- 2) Any differences in outcomes should not be the result of differences in wealth, health, disability, location, or any other status that is outside the child's control.
- 3) Funding need not be prescriptively applied, but can be used depending on the particular needs of the school and of the child, and the desires of the parental community. Teachers should be able to spend their energy teaching, rather than feeling that they are fighting for restricted funding all the time.
- 4) High quality, well-resourced, public education should be available to all children.
- 5) If parents choose to opt out of the government system, and send their children to a non-government school, that is their choice. However, in most cases, it is reasonable that these parents will pay a private contribution to their child's education.

³The Gonski Report (2011) at <http://www.appa.asn.au/content/gonski-report/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf>, page xvi.

⁴Eg St Vincent de Paul, Budget Night Speech (2013) at http://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/National/Articles_and_speeches/Budget_Night_Statement_to_the_Press_Gallery/.

⁵St Vincent de Paul, Relative Price Index December Quarter (2013) at http://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/180040_The_Relative_Price_Index_December_quarter_2013_Second_Release.pdf, page 34.

- 6) Funding arrangements should be transparent, and should be reviewed frequently to ensure that the best outcomes for students are being met.
- 7) Reviews of school funding should be rigorous and evidence-based. They should put the rights of the child first.

The Society is a strong supporter of equal access to education, and we support the current move to create a new school resourcing standard. Education is the key pathway out of poverty, and we must do everything we can to ensure that children's rights to good quality schooling are not impacted by markers of disadvantage outside their control.

The Gonski Review found a clear correlation between class and educational attainment. The St Vincent de Paul Society completely rejects the ideological position that a child's socio-economic background should mean that they are denied the right to the highest level of education and opportunity. No child should have less chance of getting into university than any other child. Every child in Australia should have the same opportunity. No parent should be made to feel that the amount they pay for their child's education determines that child's opportunities for the future.

Maintaining the current level of inequality in education resources is a recipe for entrenching social exclusion and perpetuating privilege. The social and economic costs of exclusion will always be higher than a proper and equitable investment in education. This should be the cornerstone of a fair and socially just Australia. We are all the poorer as a nation in the absence of this goal.

Dr John Falzon
Chief Executive Officer
19 March 2014