

**Additional questions arising from  
Our Children Our Schools meeting  
with the Bracks Review Secretariat  
7 August 2015.**

**August 2015**

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## Introduction

Our Children Our Schools ('OCOS') thanks the Secretariat for meeting with representatives of our group and for reading our submission on the review of funding in the government education sector.

Arising from that meeting, additional questions were posed to OCOS, and consequently, this paper is being provided in addition to our original funding review submission for consideration.

We reiterate the basic funding principles OCOS would like to see in a Victorian school funding review:

- The Secretariat establishes the verifiable and real costs of government school education provision per student and age group and looks at real examples of a number of representative schools (rural, regional, urban, small, medium, large, with few experienced and more experienced teachers, with special needs groups or the lack thereof and why etc) to determine schools' current school budgets and opportunities to improve.
- "The total resources available to a child at school should be relative to the educational effort which must be made on behalf of the child. Where more teaching is needed, more resources should be provided. The curriculum, on the other hand, is a more formidable object of reform. (Teese & Polesel 2003, p. 218)<sup>1</sup>"
- The funding of schools should not be linked to NAPLAN results, it's dangerous link which was fully explained and exposed in a recent article<sup>2</sup>.
- Government schools are the "gold standard" of the schooling system for all children from all walks of life, such gold standard includes a rich curriculum of subject choices which are funded, ie. included in the free standard curriculum (physical education, music, languages, civic and core knowledge to fully participate in Australian society and cultures);
- All schools should be supported in whichever way possible to focus on teaching and learning<sup>3</sup> (associated pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) and not be distracted or prevented from concentrating on these by lack of funding, staffing, maintenance or overseeing other activities;
- When aspiring to world class education, excellence and equity funding need to match this aspiration;
- Prevention, multidisciplinary and holistic approaches to children and young people (including social, emotional, nutritional, physical, communal, language and learning needs and their academic and social wellbeing), should govern funding rationales and be integrated into schools' core business so that out of classroom dynamics are supported by out of classroom dynamics and vice versa;

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<sup>1</sup> Teese, Richard, Polesel, John, 2003, Undemocratic schooling: equity and quality in mass secondary education in Australia, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing

<sup>2</sup> [https://theconversation.com/naplan-data-and-school-funding-a-dangerous-link-46021?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+August+20+2015+-+3273&utm\\_content=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+August+20+2015+-+3273+CID\\_ad2ee3d541aef4e4605f43045f6266b0&utm\\_source=campaign\\_monitor&utm\\_term=NAPLAN%20data%20and%20school%20funding%20a%20dangerous%20link](https://theconversation.com/naplan-data-and-school-funding-a-dangerous-link-46021?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+August+20+2015+-+3273&utm_content=Latest+from+The+Conversation+for+August+20+2015+-+3273+CID_ad2ee3d541aef4e4605f43045f6266b0&utm_source=campaign_monitor&utm_term=NAPLAN%20data%20and%20school%20funding%20a%20dangerous%20link) [accessed 21.08.2015]

<sup>3</sup> Students change teachers ever year for the first 6-7 years, then every hour for the next 6-7 years so it's important to recognise teachers as one of the main sources of student success.

- School-family and school-community partnerships should be funded and achievable by all schools to support learning, whether curricular or extra-curricular;
- Proactive and planned provision of government schools across Victoria, ie. depoliticised, needs based infrastructure provision where the built and physical environment supports children's wellbeing and encourages community participation;
- Efficiency gains can only be expected when non-monetary reforms accompany monies spent – this would include things like a more rigorous employment process where more than an interview determines who is employed and reforms in teacher education so that teaching candidates are higher achieving students upon admission to tertiary institutions and are better prepared when they become graduate teachers to undertake the complexities of tasks society expects of them (classroom management, special needs etc).

An important non-monetary reform is the introduction of an Education Ombudsman for all education sectors (including early years and universities), and an arms-length government school administrative and leadership body that can independently advocate for the government school sector and organise the regions in such a way that government schools are fully supported by supra-structures, shared resources and maximised collaboration)<sup>4</sup>.

### Additional Questions

Set out below is our recollection of the additional questions posed by the Secretariat during our meeting. Our responses follow:

## 1. If there is no more money where could efficiency gains be made?

OCOS would like to see the whole education budget, making up almost 30 % of the state budget to be closely examined and searched for inner-departmental efficiencies gains as well as school related efficiency gains. OCOS will address this question in two parts: First on the overall context of efficiency within school systems (macro); and then secondly, on budget line items at local schools (micro).

### a) Inefficiencies within a school system

The current political discourse obsesses that centralisation is bad, inefficient and/or unproductive. The current policy approach is to champion autonomy (independence, self-rule) devolution (transference, decentralisation and transfer), choice and competition. OCOS contends that the current policy setting is doing a grave injustice to Victorian children, and is a misunderstanding of the use of policy around autonomy, in the sense of how it can be used to assist children attain greater learning outcomes, rather than producing exclusionary results.

For at least the last 2-3 decades in Victoria, there has been a strong autonomy agenda for government schools. Schools can only operate autonomously if principals and teachers know how to use their powers and are provided with sufficient resources to meet identified student needs. To meet student welfare needs it is much more efficient to provide a central staff resource. A Regional based directory of experts, funded centrally, would be very helpful for example.

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<sup>4</sup> On the need and the current conflict of interest between administering government and other school sectors within the same structure and Department see Gonski, David, I gave a Gonski, 2015, p. 55

But does all of this mean that the education system is delivering on what it should - which of course, includes student outcomes. OCOS argues that it also must include delivery on equity, inclusion and social cohesion. Without delivery of those things, OCOS would argue, that the school system in Victoria is inefficient which on a state wide level impacts on growth and the economy. OCOS will expand on this argument below.

### **An inefficient school system adds costs to society**

Richard Teese's For the Common Weal (2014) canvassed the 1910-2010 achievements of the public high school in Victoria. OCOS would like to recognise and celebrate this achievement for the wellbeing of the Victorian community, prosperity and individuals. Teese also summed up how we set up government schools to fail systematically:

"We also set them up not to [achieve] when we installed the teacher-transfer system, when we set up selective schools (private and public) to relieve them of their most academic pupils, when we ran down federal funding of disadvantaged schools to derisory levels, when we provided supplementary funding only sufficient to offer temporary solutions and address social needs, when we wrote academic programs without testing them in poor schools, when we trained teachers as if they would only ever teach in affluent schools. (Teese 2006, p. 156)"<sup>5</sup>

A young child, for example, may struggle to fit in or keep up at school during their schooling life. The risks of disengagement and not completing school will be high - even higher for those children from a low SES background. These risks then have a multiplying factor as a child grows older.

These risks also include not being able to enjoy full employment and/or being trapped in low paid, insecure work, reliance on social security benefits and/or enduring poor health and lifestyle choices that result in an inability to fully participate in society. This cost is then borne by State and Federal Governments in the form of social security and other support payments or services.

### **Employment and educational attainment - inefficiencies within a school system are a cost to the labour market**

It is contended that it is the funding model that is most broken and this has clearly led to unfair and inequitable "defunding" of state schools and state school facilities making them less attractive to some parents. This has occurred at the same time as an increase in real terms of funding to independent schools.

The latest OECD research confirms the cost of children not having access to education. The OECD Report, Education at a Glance Interim Report, Update of Employment and Educational attainment indicators updated and released in January 2015, tells us:

"Educational attainment is frequently used as a measure of the skills available in the population and the labour force. The economies of OECD countries depend upon a

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<sup>5</sup> Teese, Richard, 2006, Condemned to Innovate In: Getting Smart: The Battle for Ideas in Education, Griffith Review, February, 11, pp. 151-159, [http://www.griffithreview.com/images/stories/edition\\_articles/ed11\\_pdfs/teese%20ed11.pdf](http://www.griffithreview.com/images/stories/edition_articles/ed11_pdfs/teese%20ed11.pdf) [accessed 20 March 2011]

sufficient supply of high-skilled workers. Due to the technological advances that have been transforming the needs of the global labour market, people with higher or specific skills are in strong demand.

Since 2000 there has been a contraction of the labour markets across most OECD countries. Employment rates have been decreasing among people with all levels of education and dropped on average about two percentage points between 2000 and 2013. Likewise, unemployment rates have been increasing in the same period at all levels of education: on average about two to four percentage points between 2000 and 2013 (Tables 2.2 and 2.4).

Yet in all OECD countries, as shown in Chart 2.1, people with high qualifications have the highest employment rates and in most countries, they also have the lowest risk of being unemployed. At the same time, people with the lowest educational qualifications are at greater risk of being unemployed or out of the labour market. Across OECD countries, employment rates are 83% for those with tertiary education, 73% for individuals with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education and 55% among people with qualifications below upper secondary education. Unemployment rates are 5.3% for individuals with tertiary education, 8.0% for those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education and 13.7% for those with qualifications below upper secondary education (Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

Favourable employment prospects confirm the great value of attaining high levels of education: on average, 13.7% of adults with low qualifications are unemployed, while among those with tertiary qualifications only 5.3% are unemployed. For adults with below upper secondary education, the highest levels of unemployment rates are found in Greece, the Slovak Republic and Spain (above 25%) and for adults with tertiary qualifications, the highest unemployment rates are found in Greece and Spain (15% or more). These findings indicate that people with low educational attainment are at high risk of hampering their labour market prospects and self-sufficiency (Table 2.3).<sup>6</sup>

Continuing to apply the policy lever of a strong autonomy agenda in Victoria hampers the ability of Victorians to attain their full potential, entrenches disadvantage, limits participation in society and hampers the ability of a person to achieve their full potential and be a fully functioning self-sufficient member of our State.

Autonomy must be limited to allow for innovation and/or flexibility in developing solutions to assist learning and/or to lift educational outcomes for children only. Collaboration and co-operation are strong partners in this approach. Not choice and competition.

OCOS believes that this cost is way too high to continue to bear, and the autonomy agenda in its current form, must be abandoned as it is highly inefficient as demonstrated by the foregoing reasons and has not delivered for Victorian children.

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<sup>6</sup> Education at a Glance Interim Report, Update of Employment and Educational attainment indicators, OECD, January 2015 pg 19. To view the full report and access the tables from this report click [here](#).

## Efficiency gains - winding back free market policies and getting the funding model right. The reduction in equity is too much to bear.

There are a number of contributing ills in education policy in Victoria that are noteworthy of contributing to inefficiencies, and they are:

**Autonomy has also resulted in increasing parent payments** to cover essential items. This increases inequity; inequity where some communities of parents do not have the capacity to pay (which results in residualisation), and in those communities where parents do have the capacity to pay, inequity is increased where schools resources are greater than the next. The Victorian Auditor General undertook detailed work investigating the additional school costs to families. This policy lever is spurred on by the autonomy agenda, that allows schools to set their own school parent payment policies. Interestingly that report found that no schools were complying with their own policies that were set in any event, and some had not been ratified by School Council, amongst other findings, in their recent Additional Costs for School Families report released in February 2015<sup>7</sup>. Devolving administrative tasks to schools without the matching funding and administrative staff can compel Principals to make hard decisions about cutting spending on student learning .

OCOS believes that the autonomy agenda which has been a policy focus in education settings over the past 20 years, has neglected to ensure that there are the necessary checks and balances in the system, which has in turn produced inequitable results, lacks transparency and accountability and has cost the community dearly.

Examples arising as a direct consequence of the autonomy agenda has been the cost to the community of IBAC enquiries, which are funded by the tax payer. The latest enquiry into the Education Department was entirely necessary due to a lack of checks and balances in the system. Government must ask to what extent should it continue to fund strong and stringent checks and balances in the system to ensure honesty, integrity and accountability in the Department. As can be seen from the foregoing, there is a high price to pay for the laissez faire doctrine in the current climate of autonomy and devolution.

The removal of barriers to quality education cannot be understated, and OCOS would argue that having a full autonomy agenda (including a devolved school model and competition) is not only deleterious to equity but that it is inefficient and counter-productive for the foregoing reasons as set out above.

- **The current School funding model** is unjust, betrays the principles of the GONSKI report and in simple terms means that Victorian, children, on average are receiving approximately \$2000 less than their interstate counterparts.

OECD Education Working Paper No. 74, authored by Mihaly Fazekas, was commissioned to conduct a literature review of school funding formulas across OECD countries in 2002. The paper overview states:

" This study provides a literature review on school funding formulas across OECD countries. It looks at three salient questions from a comparative perspective: i)

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<sup>7</sup> Victorian Auditor General, Additional school costs for families, February 2015.  
<http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150211-School-costs/20150211-School-costs.pdf>

What kind of school formula funding schemes exist and how are they used, particularly for promoting the needs of socially disadvantaged pupils?; ii) How do school formula funding regimes perform according to equity and efficiency standards?; iii) What are the unresolved issues? Formula funding of schools, as opposed to administrative discretion and bidding, relies on a mathematical formula containing a number of variables (e.g. number of pupils), each of which has attached to it a cash amount to determine school budgets. Across OECD countries there are four main groups of variables in such formulas: i) student number and grade level-based; ii) needs-based; iii) curriculum or educational programme-based and; iv) school characteristics-based. Sometimes output and outcome-related variables are also used. The performance of formula funding compared to alternative funding regimes is dependent on the details of the formula and on the wider education policy environment. Formula funding systems typically advance transparency and accountability at low administrative costs and in combination with matching complementary policy tools they can also contribute to equity and efficiency. Currently, there are several ongoing debates across OECD countries: First, there is an inherent tradeoff between transparency/simplicity and sensitivity to local conditions/complexity. Second, knowing how much educating to a given standard costs is problematic and subject to heated debates. The main reason for this is that the causal relationship between education costs and student performance is largely unknown and even the identified impacts appear to be relatively small. Third, even though resources are allocated according to need estimation, they might not be devoted to these needs. Fourth, it is still undecided whether the introduction of school formula funding regimes has changed actual school funding practice<sup>8</sup>.

The reviewer in the working paper noted that there are 15 or more criteria for evaluating funding models, however, the following list have attracted significant scholarly attention:

- i) Equity;
- ii) adequacy (effectiveness);
- iii) efficiency;
- iv) transparency;
- v) accountability; and
- vi) administrative costs.

The most telling findings can be seen from page 14 onward of the report. They are too many to mention here, but it is notable that political ideology all too often drives school funding reforms, and may not always be in the best interests of equity<sup>9</sup>.

- OCOS commends Trevor Cobbold's paper titled: "Choice or Equity in Education"<sup>10</sup> for a more succinct and telling overview of the problems inequitable Australian funding models produce. His conclusions are in line with the Gonski recommendations, which

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<sup>8</sup> Mihaly Fazekes OECD Education Working Papers School Funding Formulas: Review of Main Characteristics and Impacts, [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/school-funding-formulas\\_5k993xw27cd3-en#page14](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/school-funding-formulas_5k993xw27cd3-en#page14)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid pp 24 at clause 7.1

<sup>10</sup> Choice or Equity in Education, Trevor Cobbold, August 2008. <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/Research/choice-or-equity-in-education>

also state a need for a well researched nationally co-ordinated funding review. Trevor Cobbold goes further however and calls for the need for a national equity strategy as part of an comprehensive review of system planning .

OCOS would agree with the above findings.

- In conclusion, OCOS strongly urges the secretariat to familiarise themselves with the above research, as it highlights the impact of underfunding state schools and students. In Australia, we are certainly all too familiar with the rising levels of inequality that have flowed, as a consequence of inadequate funding models as highlighted not only in OECD research findings, but also in other findings as completed by other researchers over the years, such as Cobbold, Shepherd and Bonnor.

OCOS believes that moving towards an equitable schools funding model is essential to improving teaching and learning, engagement, school retention, public confidence in the state system and increasing enrolments. OCOS would argue that any trade-offs that involve a lack of equity, transparency, accountability and adequacy are a far too high price to pay given the current state of public education in Victoria, and are highly inefficient, inhibits growth and economic prosperity, and it is a high cost that cannot continue to be borne.

- Finally, Government cannot continue to ignore the elephant in the room, of the continued funding to the non-government school sector, either to the extent that it currently is, or to receive any government funding at all. This aspect was touched on in our previous submission, under redistribution of funds, but is extended upon here to include the ending of public subsidisation to non-government sector schools if there is no more money in the bucket of funds for the purposes of educating our children.

### **Choice and competition**

This policy setting has seen many local state schools forced to compete for enrolments against each other. As we have seen during election campaigns, schools will vie for million dollar upgrades and facilities, to attract students at the expense of neighbouring schools.

OCOS believes that there is room for neighbouring schools to work more collaboratively together to share resources with each other, and with the community. This would be an efficient and sound use of taxpayer money and ensure that all members of the community have access to facilities

The theory behind the implementation of the choice and competition agendas, was that via competition, outcomes would increase. OCOS notes that the implementation of this policy has been a spectacular failure, and governments have been very slow to act to redress this issue, in the face of mounting and obvious evidence of the policy lever's failures and harmful impacts on education outcomes for Victorian children.

Trevor Cobbold in his paper; *Fighting for Equity in Education*<sup>11</sup>, summarises the damage that free market policies, such as choice and competition have had on our school system. In reviewing the OECD research, PISA in Focus briefing, Cobbold notes that PISA international

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<sup>11</sup> Fighting for Equity in Education, Trevor Cobbold, September 2014. <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/choice-and-competition/oecd-says-that-competition-in-education-has-failed>

test data shows that more competition has failed to improve student results and has increased social segregation between schools:

" Across countries and economies, performance is unrelated to whether or not schools have to compete for students. Competition among schools is related to greater socio-economic segregation among students."

Cobbold notes, that the theory behind choice and competition is that competition creates incentives for schools to raise the quality of education. But the reality of the situation is that the choice and competition agendas, have given more advantage to the already advantaged, and entrenched disadvantage to those who were already disadvantaged thereby increasing social segregation. Cobbold highlights the PISA in Focus report<sup>12</sup>:

"The latest PISA results show that, on average across countries, school competition is not related to better mathematics performance among students. In systems where almost all 15-year-olds attend schools that compete for enrolment, average performance is similar to that in systems where school competition is the exception. Within school systems, there is no performance difference between schools that compete with other schools for students and those that do not, after taking into account students' socio-economic status."

In conclusion, Cobbold notes:

"The failure of market-based policies demands an overhaul of Australian education policy. Resources should be directed to where they are most needed – reducing disadvantage in education rather than supporting privilege. This requires that the Gonski funding plan be fully implemented.

Policy change should also promote greater collaboration between schools. Competition between schools restricts the spread best practice teaching and learning as successful schools want to retain their advantages over competitors. Collaboration between schools offers much better prospects for improving results than more competition as advocated by the Federal Government and the Opposition."<sup>13</sup>

As demonstrated above, the aforementioned free market policies are doing a grave injustice to Victorian children. To say that these policies are inefficient, would be the understatement of the century.

## **b) Where can efficiency gains be made?**

OCOS believes efficiency gains could be made, not only by reviewing budget line items, but reviewing systems, and reintroducing some aspects of centralisation to gain economies of scale - i.e. purchasing some things in bulk for example does reduce costs. Some schools already do this, but it should be strongly encouraged. Also, having a devolved model duplicates or replicates services, which is wasteful and inefficient.

Examples are that in every school, there will be the following administrative and support staff:

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<sup>12</sup> PISA In Focus, OECD, July 2015, <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid;

- \* Administration assistant(s)
- \* Receptionist(s)
- \* Business Manager and/or assistants
- \* Nurse (possibly)
- \* OHSC staff (where services are provided)

The most expensive items in a school budget are as follows:

1. Salaries and allowances (including casual/relief teachers);
2. Property and Maintenance (including cleaning, building services, urgent works and planned maintenance);
3. LSL and salaries for OHSC;
4. Water and electricity;
5. Inspections (Fire, electrical, air cons etc);
6. Furniture and equipment;
7. Consumables, photocopying and printing (including cost of computer and photocopier leases and software where applicable);

## **Room for improvement - exploration of new options for efficiency gains**

### **Administration**

The exploration of models similar to that which are used in the early childhood education sector could be explored - such as cluster management where the regional offices could take on more of a role in providing administrative services for schools to avoid duplications or even on a LGA basis (municipal council area). This would avoid duplication of services and waste.

### **Water and electricity costs**

Electricity and gas costs are a huge burden for poorly maintained state schools with 60 year old buildings, poor ventilation, leaking rooves and poor or no insulation. The Department should be assisting schools to become more sustainable and resource savvy. Utilising water saving techniques like harvesting rainwater for toilet flushing and the like can result in huge cost savings. The same can be said for sustainable and efficient building design, and or solar electricity programs will not only help schools reduce their electricity bills, but also reduce reliance on the grid system.

### **Paper and photocopying**

These costs can be huge. Looking at ways to reduce reliance on paper and/or buying paper in bulk can make huge savings. Many secondary schools are asking students to pay for photocopying. This can be difficult for students from less well off backgrounds. Also schools should be encouraged to continue to make use of electronic means of communicating with parents. This could be via email and phone apps, and/or school systems such as Compass and the like. This would be a huge cost saving of paper, printing and consumables.

### **School Management - Principals**

It is not unheard of these days to have two Assistant Principals and a Principal in a school over 700 students. Consideration could be given to a Principal leading a number of schools within a small cluster, leaving the AP to undertake the day to day running of a school. This model is working successfully already in some recent regeneration projects in the Keysborough area. It

also replicates in part the successful cluster management model in the early childhood settings as well.

OCOS would strongly recommend that DET uncouple Principal salaries from enrolments. Vested interests may often dictate large enrolments for small schools which result in some schools being over-subscribed.

### **School builds**

School builds should be viewed as not only educationally necessary but job-creating (both during the build and ongoing), community-building, local economy-stimulating infrastructure projects. The case should be made to Treasury, very strongly, along these lines. Everyone wins.

## **2. Size of school (small schools vs big schools )**

A variety of school sizes is needed. Some students are suited to small schools, others to large. However, there is a need to share resources so all students (regardless of the school they go to) get the same educational outcome. For example providing students with opportunities to visit another local school to use their resources, or to undertake a specific VCE subject that may not be offered at their secondary school. Virtual classrooms have been successfully trialled in some schools and this could be a way of allowing students from small schools full access to learning opportunities. We need to be clever with the way schools co-operate.

Many international studies have shown that large schools do not necessarily operate more efficiently and are less suitable for younger children. OECD research<sup>14</sup> backs up this claim that closing small schools does not necessarily produce efficiencies and can cost hugely in terms of damage to the social fabric of a community who has lost its school, equity and social outcomes for children.

The proponents of the large school argument claim that better access to a more broader curriculum will be provided. The OECD research debunks this myth, as where at page 10 & 11 of the OECD Education Working Papers it is stated:

"One of the most consistent claims in the literature on school size is that larger schools provide students with a broader range of subjects to choose from, including specialised courses, and that this improves student outcomes (Barnett et al., 2002; Bradley and Taylor, 1998; Cotton, 1996; Iatarola et al., 2008; McVicar, 2000; Meyer, 2000; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2009). By providing students with a varied curriculum (e.g. advanced courses in mathematics, sciences, or foreign languages), students are able to specialise in those subjects in which they perform best, and this should ultimately lead to better results. Students would not just reach higher levels of achievement, but also benefit from the possibility of taking specialised courses for further education (e.g. tertiary education). However, not all scholars agree on this beneficial effect of size on curriculum variety. A small school that focuses on a few core and high quality courses can also achieve high student outcomes, and much of the material covered in specialised courses in large schools can also be taught at regular courses in small schools (Slate and Jones, 2005). Moreover, increases in size do not simply entail a broader range of subjects available. A closer examination of the research indicates that there is no reliable relationship between school size and curriculum quality, and that

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<sup>14</sup> OECD Education Working Papers: School size policies - a literature review

the strength of this relationship decreases as schools become larger, i.e. there are decreasing marginal returns to school size on this specific matter (Corbett and Mulcahy, 2006). In fact, Monk (1987) , studying New York State schools found that scale economies can be exhausted and that increases in school size were related to broader curriculum only in schools up to 400 students".

And further, at page 10 & 11:

"A broader curriculum does not necessarily benefit all students equally. In fact, only a few students are likely to take advantage of additional courses (Slate and Jones, 2005) and a more varied curriculum is likely to benefit students already achieving better results (Meyer, 2000). Smaller schools with a narrower curriculum emphasising core academic outcomes may help achieve more equitable results for all students. (Nguyen et al., 2007) "<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the OECD report notes in conclusion that<sup>16</sup>:

"One of the arguments that has appeared more consistently throughout this paper is that there is no 'one-size-fits 'all' solution in school size policies. Even if consolidation may improve school quality and efficiently in some contexts, it is unfeasible in others, mostly due to geographical isolation. Other alternative forms of organisation have proven effective in counteracting the disadvantages of small remote schools, without having to remove the school institution of its community. School clusters and school federations, and other more informal forms of cooperation, have allowed smaller schools to obtain specialised teachers and courses, to organise larger groups of students for certain classes, and also to create a wider professional community for teachers and principals. For those cases where interaction with other nearby schools is unfeasible, information and communication technologies provide an innovative tool to combat isolation, and positive experiences of their implementation show that they could be a useful tool for very remotely located schools.

Any decision on changes in school size must e made carefully, and it needs to be exhaustive in including all of the mechanisms and variables that mediate size effects. In that respect, existing studies have insufficiently reflected on the possible interaction effects between size and other school and context related variables. Grade level and social class have proved to be two strong mediators of size effects. This indicates that policy-makers need to carefully consider which student populations will benefit or suffer from different schools sizes. Changes in size policies should be conducted through an open and transparent process that permits the participation of the affected communities, and that clearly presents the arguments for changes in the school structure."

OCOS would agree with the OECD findings in this regard, and strongly advocate for small schools to remain and be respected as critical to keeping local communities strong.

We would also encourage the DET to further explore collaboration opportunities as suggested above via clusters and resource sharing which will allow small schools to remain viable.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid pp 10 & 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid page 44.

### 3. Why are parents choosing non-government schools?

There are a variety of reasons. Historically in Victoria, and particularly in Melbourne, parents have long shared notes with friends on which school their children attend. It seems to be a status symbol and worthy, of comparison, by some parents. This does not happen in other States and Territories in Australia to the extent that it happens in Victoria. But also, historically Victoria has under-provisioned for public education.

Parents may also choose non-government schools because:

- a. Impact of advertising. Many private schools have huge marketing budgets and marketing teams and take out space in local and state newspapers;
- b. Gross underfunding of maintenance of state school buildings and unattractive and crumbling facilities has sent a negative message to parents about the quality of the school and its ability to provide a first rate learning program for their children;
- c. Successive Governments have been poor at championing and showcasing public education stories of achievement and success;
- d. Public education being residualised due to the competition and choice agendas;
- e. Private schools, with expansive grounds and state of the art facilities - set up in competition to public schools. An impact study should be undertaken showing any deleterious impacts on surrounding/local public schools before private schools are opened;
- f. Parental guilt - some parents think that by spending lots of money on their children they are given them access to a better education;
- g. Parents are worried the Government isn't spending money on public schools and their kids will be in second rate buildings with second rate equipment/technology and not receive a good education;
- f. Social engineering - some parents want their children to mix with only a certain "class" of person;
- g. Wishing to choose a religious based education for their child;
- h. Choosing a non-government school by default because of a lack of public school provision in the local area;
- i. Not enough public schools aspire to and offer language immersion and deliver it well;
- j. Social and friendship/ peer relationships which make one school look better or popular;
- k. Stigma or social pressure to spend on your child's education in order to prove parents value it even when NAPLAN/evidence tells you otherwise; and
- l. Systemic neglect of recognising the importance of school choice within schools, not just between schools.

### 4. Experienced teachers cost more and therefore stay in same schools more...incentives?

Experienced teachers must be seen as a resource. They should be shared around schools where top quality educators are needed the most.

Performance pay, doesn't have to be the nasty model linked to salaries. For example a school can develop a plan to lift the entire school's performance, involving teachers, the school leadership and the school community. Upon achieving milestones or improvements in performance set against agreed targets, incentives can be paid to teachers.

Underperformance of teachers is a separate issue, and has been confused, under the plans of the previous State Government, with incentives. The two concepts are totally separate and un-related issues. Under-performance of teachers has nothing to do with recognising and rewarding either high performing teachers, or achieving milestones set against targets.

More skilled and experienced teachers could be given additional incentives to teach in low SES or difficult settings in a range of ways, financial incentives, sabbaticals, etc..... or be offered teaching rounds so that teachers can be rotated through a number of different schools over a set or finite period. More experienced teachers should continue to mentor new teachers and share their skills and experience but schools must have the resources to provide the time for this to happen.

It is also important that the DET consciously focuses on raising the status of teachers to ensure that teachers are attracted to the profession, rather than choosing the profession. Teachers should now attain under-graduate and post-graduate qualifications before entering a classroom.

The DET would also be well served to attract teachers from mature aged populations as well, who have greater life experience, greater emotional depth and stability and other life skills that would benefit children in the education setting.

Government must invest in up skilling all teachers so regardless of experience they are all excellent at what they do. Make sure teachers are more than ready to teach. And then keep them in the system so they won't go to the private schools. We want experienced teachers in the system!

## 5. More money for less attractive schools?

Research also shows that it is not always shiny and new infrastructure that attracts parents to a school. As an example the Misbehaving Economist conducted a study that showed what was important to parents is often how their child will be supported at school in their learning and the values the school embraces. Academic outcomes was not necessarily number one on the list. Link to the study is [here](#).

Not necessarily attractive schools, but schools that are in poor SES etc, and require the best, most dedicated, most skilled and resourceful teachers and support staff. The Government should focus on making government schools more attractive to parents. Just spending money on them without identifying the problem won't work. There needs to be strategic approach to turn a school into an attractive school and keep it there.

It is important to ensure that schools have modern, safe and clean infrastructure that ensures that children are in the best possible learning environment. It is also unacceptable to continue to over-subscribe schools - by cramming students into overcrowded schools.

There is an argument for more money for schools with visibly inadequate facilities. Some primary schools have been fairly untouched since the 1950's. Some schools can be surrounded by full and capped schools but very under enrolled not due to quality of teaching outcomes but the facilities. School not big enough to field sporting teams but also can't do sport properly as not one level playing field - all sloping and asphalt surfaces cracked etc.) Spending on a less attractive school would increase financial efficiency via resultant increased enrolment.

Centralised donations could also be one aspect of injecting funds into the system as well either through independent donors or through philanthropic means.

## **6. Stages of schooling? Same money or different money for different ages?**

Yes, younger children use more resources, and at different stages also use more resources. It is important to keep class sizes small in the foundation years, and consequently this structure will be more expensive, but a necessary investment in a child's future education. The same might be said for children as they grow older. Children in secondary schools would require different resources to meet different learning goals, such as ICT, which may cost more and should be funded adequately by government.

## APPENDIX 1 INDIVIDUAL GROUP COMMENTS

### BEAUMARIS GROUP

#### **If there is no more money where could efficiency gains be made**

I'm not sure if OCOS should be answering questions about essentially cutting resources to public education. The question should go on to ask where else could resources come from/

If we do comment on this I would say:

- Instead of cutting how about looking to find new resources. How good would it be for example for every teacher to receive 1 class off a week to enable them to catch up on all the other things they currently do in their own time. How could this work? Well with the aging population and regular surveys showing local people are happy to volunteer. Wouldn't it be great for each school to be able to draw from a pool of highly experienced and often qualified people to volunteer in a child facing setting. Yes there are risks to such a scheme but also huge rewards.
- Systemise school buildings maintenance/refurbishment so every school knows when their turn comes. This will reduce principals need for chasing funding etc.
- Current processes of the Dept seem to suck the blood out of anyone involved. Principals and teachers complain regularly on how the systems they work in are so clunky.

#### **Size of school (small schools vs big schools )**

Each local community will have different dynamics going on. There should not be a one size fits all to this question. The key element to this within Melbourne Metro is not to lose ANY FURTHER school sites in this growing city.

#### **Why are parents choosing non-government schools?**

- One of the emerging factors is the cumulative effect the huge advertising the private school sector is having on parents. Advertising works. It changes people's views and is well known to get people to buy things they don't need even against scientific fact. Just look at vitamins and other products.
- Also over the past 5 years parents in many middle class area's now feel if they do not send their children to a private secondary school they are letting them down. The current secondary school enrolment of private schools is now 48% which creates a huge playground peer group putting pressure on parents to follow the rest. This is one of the biggest problems facing the public education system. It will take generations to reduce this statistic.
- The extent of Federal funding that has been going into private schools in the past 15 years has enabled many of these schools to build beautiful buildings, grounds and provide amazing equipment. When parents tour schools the public schools they literally look like they are from another generation compared to the refurbished private schools. It is a huge problem.

#### **Experienced teachers cost more and therefore stay in same schools more...incentives?**

One of the advantages of the Public Education sector compared to private schools is their potential to provide teachers with opportunities in near-by schools. A healthy system would see teacher move more regularly and not lose the goodwill they have built up in a school but rather bring that

with them through evidence based portfolio's with feedback from Principals, colleagues, parents and students.

**More money for less attractive schools?**

Let's be very clear here. All public schools are less attractive compared to the private schools. The last thing the public education system needs is pick and choosing schools that should be upgraded. What needs to be done is all schools assessed by a suitably qualified organisation and placed on an orderly queue to have their buildings maintained, refurbished or replaced. On any measure the current system is completely broken and the jungle rules. Basically the group the shouts loudest gets attention. And wow what attention they get!! The year leading up to an election is filled with politicians announcing small packages of funding in marginal seats. This is no way to run a system. The politics of school funding must be taken out of the public education system that is under so much threat. Both sides of politics must agree to do this. Argue at the state level on education. Do not take it down into the schools.

**Stages of schooling? Same money or different money for different ages?**

I think this is a bad question. Funding levels are going to be different based on each school. Many public primary schools for example are very healthy with many receiving BER funding, strong turn ups at working bees and other voluntary assistance. Primary parent bodies are also very active and engaged with their kids in fete's and other fund raising activity. When you get to secondary schools teenagers don't want their parents around and fund raising becomes harder but some schools have very effective alumni who raise money.

## KEYSBOROUGH SOUTH ACTION GROUP

### **Size of school** (small schools vs big schools )

- Primary Schools should be no more than 650 children to ensure smaller class sizes.
  - Ensuring Students with background of low-income and low-achieving are targeted;
  - There is adequate classroom space and outdoor space (rather than portables)
  - There is an adequate supply of qualified teachers

### **Why are parents choosing non-government schools?**

- IBAC enquiry corruption, Principle reputation,
- Racism, perception their child will have less attention if placed with higher ratio of CALD or special needs students
- Uncertainly after mergers in local area

## REOPEN OUR SCHOOLS (Banyule)

- Primary schools not to be bigger than 400 children;
- Secondary schools not to be bigger than 800 children;
- Small schools must be retained as part of the patchwork of options available to parents, especially in low SES areas;
- Very important to have clear guidelines about the size of land and numbers of students and an acceptable ratio with a margin of students to land - unacceptable to have overcrowded schools;
- Collaboration and co-operation must be key features of the school system, not competition and choice;
- Any new school infrastructure, such as halls, stadiums etc should be accessed by whole school communities as shared resources and not used to compete for enrolments;
- Maintenance funding to be targeted via the DET and rolled out consistently across metropolitan and regional Victoria to ensure education facilities are modern, safe and appropriate (ensure a consistent pipeline free of pork-barrelling);
- Cease funding to non-core programs. Continuing to fund SRI is inefficient, expensive and time wasting in an already overcrowded curriculum. Cancelling funding to that program would save money;
- No more school closures/sell offs in suburban Melbourne, unless the DET has demonstrated it has either tried numerous strategies to lift enrolments or simply deems the school to be a low enrolment school;
- Government should ensure that the practice of private schools (and government schools for that matter) 'moving on' children that are difficult or whom don't meet the requisite standard be stopped;
- Government should do MUCH more to support and champion public education, as the education system of CHOICE for Victorian parents;
- When new housing estates are built by developers, as part of the planning process, ensure that a condition of the development is that social infrastructure is also included. Things like schools and public transport routes etc;
- Stop the non-government sector using public money for advertising campaigns;
- Implement GONSKI in full!

## NORTHERN MALLEE SCHOOL COUNCIL PRESIDENTS' GROUP

- Reduce capacity to attract, retain and up skill staff;
- Funding needs to take into account of distance and remoteness when it comes to continuing education for staff and maintaining currency with systemic initiatives;
- VAGO report regarding schedule outcome, rural vs. metropolitan;
- VAGO report, which talks about the hidden costs of education, which led to schools unable to recoup extracurricular costs;
- Students attending extracurricular activities have increased costs due to distance, accommodation and travel;

## APPENDIX 2 ACADEMIC ARTICLES AND/OR REFERENCES

### Richard Teese (2012) In: I just want to go to school, p. 56-57

#### **Social disadvantage and state government funding approaches: what should be the priorities?**

Since 2008, it has been possible to study at a national level the extent to which students differ in achievement and schools differ in performance. The most disturbing findings from NAPLAN are that children whose parents did not complete school are on average about two years behind children whose parents are university-educated, and that indigenous children are still further behind. These gaps do not contract over stages of schooling. They tend to widen. Our schools are not strong enough to compress social differences in achievement and they struggle to improve outcomes significantly for indigenous children. While we can expect that children beginning school will be at different points of readiness, we might also expect that schools correct for these differences and enable all children to reach good standards in basic literacy and numeracy. But this is not the case. By Year 3, a very strong relationship can be observed between average achievement in NAPLAN and the social profile of a school.

If we are to value every child in school, we need to be able to explain why achievement gaps persist over stages of schooling and indeed expand. The purpose of school is not to mirror divisions in society, but to respect and cultivate the moral being of every child. Even before children start school, there are discernible differences in cognitive growth, speech development and social skills, and these 'pre-school' differences widen in the first four years of life. But they widen still further as children progress through school. For we make progressively greater cognitive demands at higher levels of schooling, while the capacity of parents to support children's learning tends to decline. We ask more and more, but we do not provide enough support to counter the declining relative value of parents' cultural resources.

An important example is algebra. Many parents are unable to help their children with algebra, and this transfers the burden of teaching to teachers and fellow students. But if an appropriate level of support is not forthcoming—individual attention, pedagogical emphasis and approach, peer support, good materials—children will fall behind and rarely catch up. That this routinely happens is borne out by studies showing a deterioration in the academic confidence of students in doing mathematics in the early years of high school as well as falling interest.

Social inequalities in achievement arise because schools do not adequately adjust to cultural and economic differences between children, while making progressively greater demands on children's intellectual and social development. This failure to adjust should not be viewed as due simply to poorly performing schools. It is true that there are marked performance differences between schools, but much of this variation is associated with the social characteristics of individual students and the social profile of students as a group. The need for adjustment is a requirement, not only on individual schools, but on the school system as a whole. School systems have a geography. They contain sites with very high concentrations of children in difficulty and experiencing multiple disadvantage and schools serving mainly prosperous and educated families and having few children who are failing. The adjustments through which school overcomes family disadvantage have to occur in the sites where disadvantage is concentrated, though adjustment to individual differences is required at all sites in a school system.

Since the mid-1970s, we have sought to make systemic adjustments to the performance of schools through targeted equity funding. Needs-based funding has been a running theme of education policy at a national level, but interpreted and applied in different ways and by no means consistently with other policies, above all expanding “choice”. States and Territories operate equity policies, partly to allocate Commonwealth funding for equity, but partly also to adjust staffing formulas and provide more of their own resources to needier schools. How this is done varies by jurisdiction. However, the impact of equity adjustments to core funding appears to be very limited, to judge by the persistence of sharp social inequalities in achievement.

One factor which appears to work against policies of providing more staff to poorer schools is the hierarchical allocation of teaching resources by stage of schooling. Typically secondary schools receive a much greater staff allocation than primary schools (and this is also true in some of the largest non-government systems in Australia). To quote from a recent study, “In 2005, for every dollar expended on each secondary student in the government sector, 80 cents were expended on each primary student. In the non-government sector, the ratio was \$1: 66c” (in Angus, Olney and Ainley 2007: 1).

The reason for this difference in relative funding is the need to offer small specialist classes in the upper secondary years—classes that are more expensive to run. Other reasons include the faculty or discipline-based organization of secondary schools and the arguably more complex social and emotional needs of adolescents as compared to younger children.

Over the long term, the discrepancy between primary and secondary school funding has been reduced, but it is still large. There is growing national pressure from school principals to increase funding for primary schools. Their challenges include the increasingly complex behavioural and health issues that young children present, the greater emphasis today on performance outcomes, and the need for all children to be well-prepared for transition to secondary school.

State governments are placed in a difficult situation with respect to these competing claims, especially in a context of cut-backs in education spending. What considerations should guide their thinking? They should aim to ensure that all children make satisfactory progress in each broad stage of schooling so as to benefit fully from the opportunity and be ready for the next stage. They should ensure that all schools have adequate and suitable staffing to achieve this goal, and that teachers have enough release time for intensive work with individual students as well as for their own professional learning. Equity funding should be concentrated in the most disadvantaged schools rather than thinly dispersed over a large number of schools. Smaller and poorer secondary schools should be compensated for the higher costs they incur in

running small, specialist classes. Finally a major effort needs to be made to train teachers to work in disadvantaged settings. This will help ensure that each dollar spent will be well spent.

#### References

Angus, M., Olney, H. and Ainley, J. (2007) *In the Balance. The Future of Australia’s Primary Schools* (Kaleen, ACT: Australian Primary Principals’ Association)

**Professor Richard Teese, Director of the Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES), University of Melbourne**