# OUR FUTURE

Report of a Survey of
Australian Government Primary School Principals

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## Foreword

There is no doubt about the importance of primary school education. Success in later life depends upon getting a good start. The skills and attitudes to learning that are needed to complete secondary and further education are acquired in primary schools.

Over recent years there has been a growing disquiet among primary school principals in the government sector about the capacity of their schools to provide the quality of education that the public rightfully expects. The basis for this is not only a concern about the adequacy of resources that are needed but a sense that governments are allowing the government primary sector to fall behind. The Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) believes it has a duty to draw these concerns to the attention of the Australian public. AGPPA is an affiliate of the cross-sectoral Australian Primary Principals Association and has undertaken this project with the endorsement of this parent body.

Primary school principals are neither by nature nor experience sophisticated lobbyists. Unfortunately, however, the old saying that 'the squeaky wheel gets the most grease' is only too true. The allocation of social expenditure is necessarily a political act. So, also, is the division of expenditure in the education sector. It is important that governments hear from all sectors and interest groups before making important decisions about educational expenditure. These decisions shape our future.

The executive of AGPPA decided that it needed more comprehensive information about the views of principals regarding school resources. Therefore, as a first step, it was agreed to survey the membership.

There were two purposes to the survey. First, we wanted to find out whether schools were experiencing funding shortfalls and, if so, their impact on the schools. Second, we wanted to be able to make recommendations to Governments about how funding could be allocated so that it would maximise the benefit to students. To do this, we felt we needed advice from principals about what they believe will work.

Recognising that our Association has a vested interest in the outcome of a survey asking our own members about their views on funding, we approached Professor Max Angus at Edith Cowan University.

I would like to thank the members of AGPPA who completed the survey and took the time to comment so constructively about the issues. I believe this is the first time the national voice of the Australian primary principalship has been heard. Ultimately, this is a voice for children. We trust that it will be listened to and that the educational opportunities for our children will be enhanced.

Thomas Hardy
President
Australian Government Primary Principals Association

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### The survey

This report examines the views of government primary school principals about the adequacy of school resource levels and the future of public education. It is based on a nation-wide survey of the members of the Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA). All told, nearly 2,500 members replied. The respondents constitute nearly a half of all government primary school principals in Australia and are responsible for the education of more than a third of all Australian primary school children. On this basis alone the results deserve serious consideration.

The survey addressed not only the question of resource levels but also the policies and rules that govern how the resources are used. This approach was taken because some of the school resource problems faced by school principals may arise not because of an overall paucity of resources but because of the way in which they are disbursed and because of requirements about how they are to be used.

Before addressing the results of the survey it is important to explain the basis on which schools are currently funded and resources allocated to schools. It is a complex process. The responses of school principals to the survey reflect these current practices and principals are clearly calling for changes to them.

### The funding context

#### Systemic funding mechanisms

The Commonwealth government is the sole collector of income tax revenue, some of which it returns to the states through either general or special purpose grants. About half of each state's revenue is acquired from these two Commonwealth sources.

To assist it to determine the quantum of general purpose grants to each state, the Commonwealth government is advised by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. The decisions are made by the Premiers' Conference and funds allocated among the states using per capita relativities agreed by the Conference. The general purpose grants take account of changes in demand for services such as demand for government primary schooling. In 2001, the general purpose grants will incorporate Goods and Service Tax (GST) revenues.

In some respects the general purpose grants can be likened to the school global budgets. The grants are calculated on the basis of state needs to provide core public services such as education or transport but once the grants are received by the states, they may then be disbursed according to state priorities. For example, some of the funds notionally allocated for transport could be spent on education and vice versa.

The special purpose grants, on the other hand, are disbursed in accordance with Commonwealth legislation such as the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Bill 2000. The funds are allocated according to the priorities of the Commonwealth government and must be spent strictly in accordance with the terms of the legislation.

States raise their own revenue through various charges and taxes other than income tax such as payroll tax and stamp duty.

This means that government schools are funded from a mix of sources. The state government sources include the general revenue grants from the Commonwealth and revenue that the states raise themselves. Most of the operating costs of government schools come from these sources. This funding is supplemented by special purpose grants from the Commonwealth.

Private schools are funded differently from government schools. Commonwealth special purpose grants form the main source of government funding for private schools. The states also fund private schools from the general purpose grants that they receive as a result of the tax sharing arrangements and from revenue that they raise.

**Relative inputs of Commonwealth and state governments**

Most of the government funding of government schools comes from the states whereas most of the government funding of private schools comes from the Commonwealth. The proportions are shown in Table 1.

This distribution gives rise to allegations of partisanship, a matter that principals who responded to the survey regard as hugely important.

**Table 1.**

Government funding sources as a percentage of total sector funding, 1997

| Funding source | Proportion of total government expenditure | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Government schools | Private schools |
| Commonwealth | 12 | 68 |
| State | 88 | 32 |
| | 100 | 100 |

Sources: MCEETYA, 2000; DETYA, 1999

Of the Commonwealth special purpose grants, the private school sector received 61 per cent in 1998 (MCEETYA, 2000) even though it enrolled only 30 per cent of all students. Advocates of public schooling argue that on equity grounds there should be a pro rata distribution of Commonwealth special purpose funding between public and private sectors. The Commonwealth government rejects this argument, contending that

it has separately funded the public school sector by its general purpose grants to the states as explained above.

Establishing the relative contribution of Commonwealth and state governments to the public and private school sector is a difficult task. Tracking the changes in relativities is even more difficult. Conclusions depend on what figures are used. For example, some estimates identify the general purpose grants as Commonwealth contributions whereas others count them as state contributions. In any event, they are hard to estimate since states do not identify their expenditure as coming from general purpose grants from the Commonwealth or from state sources of revenue.

The mechanism that is meant to provide the public with an objective account of state and Commonwealth spending on schooling is the *National Report on Schooling in Australia.* This document is published by the Curriculum Corporation for the council of state and Commonwealth ministers known as the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). Usually, it first appears more than a year after the events it describes. It contains only data that the members agree to publish. This makes it difficult for school principals and members of the public to get the facts that would allow them to participate on an informed basis in debates about school funding. Although it records expenditure on schools, it is generally silent on the sufficiency of that expenditure.

**State funding of government schools**

Government schools have received the bulk of their funding over recent years in a global or 'single line' budget that incorporates the operating costs of the schools. Previously, schools had little discretion regarding spending. The budget was partitioned into categories so that particular amounts could only be spent on predetermined items according to closely administered rules set by the central office. This severely limited flexibility and the capacity of schools to respond to local priorities.

There are variations among states with regard to what is incorporated in the global budget. The largest item of school expenditure is staff salaries – up to 80 per cent of the total. Most state systems retain the funding and the powers to appoint staff.

States commonly calculate the school's global budget by incorporating a core element based on standard operating costs and the numbers of students in different year levels. A school may receive up to 40 per cent more for each student in Year 12 than for a student in Year 3. The school may also receive extra funding which is not included in the global budget for students who have special education needs or for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Victorian education department has extended school global budgeting further than other states (Education Committee, 1996).

One of the key issues raised by the principals in this survey is whether school global budget allocations are calculated so they are adequate for all the different environments in which government primary schools must operate.

## The policy context

### Local management

Until the mid 1980s, the administration of state school systems was highly centralised. School principals had little discretion over how they should allocate their resources and manage their schools. State school systems were praised for their uniform standards of provision. Parents could expect much the same schooling for their children no matter where they lived. However, thinking has changed and uniformity of provision is linked with mediocrity and failure to respond to local circumstances. School administration is now more decentralised and schools are more self-managing.

School councils have been an important mechanism used to enable local management. All state school systems now either require or recommend the establishment of school councils. Councils commonly have powers to shape school policies, approve the school's financial plan and, in certain circumstances, select or appoint staff. None of the councils in government primary schools has the powers of an independent school – mostly they are advisory bodies – and the extent of their powers varies among the states.

Not everyone thinks local management is a good idea. In some states, there has been a degree of ambivalence on the part of government with regard to the extent to which real powers have been devolved to schools. Typically, changes in state government lead to an interruption in the devolution programs and the introduction of new emphases and implementation plans.

### School choice

Following local management, a second important change in the administration of government school systems is the introduction of school choice. Many parents now expect to be able to choose the school in which their children are educated. The options are a government or private school education. If parents choose government schooling, their children may be able to attend a government school of choice providing there are vacancies.

School choice has changed the traditional model of government primary school provision. Schools are no longer confined to enrol children from within the immediate neighbourhood. As well, in conjunction with the policies arising from local management, schools may develop programs distinctively different and which are modified to suit their clientele.

### Effects of local management and school choice

Local management and school choice can shape how resources are allocated to schools and how they are managed.

First, school choice policies can have a big impact on a school's overall enrolments. Popular schools may be fully enrolled and unpopular schools under-enrolled. From a school principal's point of view, such enrolment changes can cut both ways. If a school's income is tied directly to the number of student it enrols, then the loss of students will deplete its resources. On the other hand, if enrolment is not tied to

resources, extra enrolments could mean larger classes and more work for school staff members.

Second, school choice policies can promote competition among schools for students who are easy to teach and who are likely to enhance the academic profile of the school. The policies can advantage some schools but they can also produce a dynamic that weakens schools serving poor neighbourhoods. The socio-economic status of household in which a child lives has consistently been linked to school performance. Schools in well-to-do neighbourhoods will tend to appear more successful than schools situated in poorer neighbourhoods. Parents who have the means of doing so, may withdraw their children from a school and send them to schools that they perceive to be better. The school that they have left behind may progressively have higher proportions of students who are disruptive and disinterested in academic work.

Third, schools serving high-income communities have a much greater capacity to raise funds than schools in poor neighbourhoods. Local management policies enable the growth of inequalities in education provision where schools in poor neighbourhoods are not compensated for their inability to raise income from private sources.

Finally, Commonwealth and state government choice policies have led to the growth of the private sector with the consequence that, since 1979, the government school sector has each year enrolled proportionately fewer students than the private sector. Governments have funded this growth. The choice policies have benefited many families seeking a private school education. However, government school supporters argue that these policies have diverted attention and resources from the public sector and thereby weakened the quality of public education.

These issues have been canvassed in this survey.


## Conclusion

This chapter provides the context within which the survey results will be analysed and interpreted. It is clear that government primary schools, indeed all schools, are operating in very different resource environments than schools of two decades ago. Two key questions arise. The first is whether current funding arrangements provide schools with the platform they need to equip future generations of Australians for the challenges ahead. In the event that the funding arrangements fall short of what is required, the second question follows: How might the current situation be improved? This report deals with both these important questions.

# 2

## THE SURVEY

### The questionnaire

The questionnaire contains eight sections. The first two sections seek biographical details of respondents and information about their schools. Four sections, Section 4 through to Section 7, contain Likert scales. Section 3 required principals to write answers as prose while Section 8 invited those principals who so wished to make comments. The wording of the questions and frequencies of responses for all sections other than Sections 3 and 8 are shown in Appendix A.

The four sections containing Likert scales measured principals' views on aspects of their school's ethos, government funding mechanisms, the policy environment in which they work and, finally, their expectations of government schooling for the future. Each of these four sections contains twelve statements that respondents rated on a five-point scale.

Section 3, the first of the open-ended sections, asked principals to list their two highest priorities for additional resources followed by a question requesting them to explain briefly what overall difference the additional resources would make to their school.

Some respondents used the open-ended sections fully, completing several pages of notes. Quotes have been selected from these written statements to illustrate commonly expressed points of view. A number of respondents annotated the Likert scale sections, emphasising or elaborating their responses. These annotations generally indicated a clarification of meaning or expressed an intensity of feeling about the issues being examined.

Several draft versions of the survey were produced and discussed with AGPPA executive members before being issued to a small pilot group of principals. Amendments were made on the basis of this feedback.

### The sample

The questionnaires were issued through the state affiliates to members during October, 2000. In some states the questionnaires were distributed and returned electronically. Respondents retained their anonymity and did not disclose their name or identify their school.

The return rates were satisfactory for all states and territories except for Victoria where only 14 per cent of questionnaires were returned. Unfortunately, the distribution of the survey coincided with the introduction of a new Victorian industrial agreement incorporating a new school global budget funding model. With the changes at such an early stage of implementation, many principals preferred not to respond to the questionnaire. The largest number of returns came from New South Wales and the highest response rate was from the Australian Capital Territory where 82 per cent of members completed the questionnaire.

**Table 2.**

Survey return rates by state or territory.

| State or territory | Number | | | Return rate (%) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Government primary schools* | Members of AGPPA | Survey respondents | |
| NSW | 1,647 | 1,789 | 923 | 52 |
| Vic | 1,240 | 1,290 | 184 | 14 |
| Qld | 991 | 900 | 508 | 56 |
| SA | 460 | 564 | 422 | 75 |
| WA | 512 | 560 | 218 | 39 |
| Tas | 140 | 179 | 86 | 48 |
| ACT | 91 | 68 | 56 | 82 |
| NT | 68 | 78 | 55 | 70 |
| Total | 5,419 | 5,428 | 2,452 | 45 |

*Source: ABS, *Schools Australia,* 1999, Catalogue No. 4221.0

It should be noted that the membership of AGGPA includes persons in a range of school leadership roles including deputy and associate principals as well as principals. Of those who returned the questionnaire, 91 per cent described themselves as principals and 8 per cent as deputy or assistant principals. It should also be noted that an analysis of the Likert scales did not reveal any consistent differences between these categories of respondents. Hence, to simplify the reporting, respondents will be referred to as 'principals'.

AGPPA is a voluntary organisation. Not all government primary school principals elect to join it. However, as shown in Table 2, there are more members of AGPPA

than primary schools. This is explained by the rules of AGPPA that allow deputy and assistant principals to join.  For similar reasons, the term 'states' is used to describe all states and territories.

## Some caveats

In very large samples small differences tend to be statistically significant, meaning that they are larger than is expected to result from a fluke in the sampling. There were many statistically significant differences between categories of respondents in this survey. However, a difference large enough to be statistically significant may be of no practical significance.  Therefore, because of the sample size and to simplify the reporting, statistical significance of differences between different categories of respondents are not reported. Instead, the results are simply presented according to the proportions of principals surveyed who indicated a particular response.  These proportions are reported as percentages.

Some respondents occasionally did not respond to questions. Omissions averaged about one percent. There was no pattern for the omissions and they have been treated as an insignificant source of random error.

It is necessary to remind readers that the survey examines the views only of government primary school principals. We have no basis for generalising these results to other groups of school principals.

In a number of important instances it was necessary to rely on the judgment of principals rather than turn to objective indicators. For example, it was not possible to index the socio-economic status for each school to which principals referred in their responses. Instead, somewhat crude measures were used: principals were asked to estimate the proportion of students in their school's who were from low-income families. The absence of common benchmarks is a weakness. Nevertheless, the overall consistency of relationships that were found during the analysis of data, and the principals' written comments and annotations, suggest that the estimates are satisfactory for the purposes of the survey.

Taking into account these various caveats, we conclude that had we surveyed all primary school principals, or been able to use more precise benchmarks, we would have produced similar results.

## Reporting protocols

Every effort has been made to provide readers with data sources.  References to survey items are followed by the number of the item in brackets.  The only exception to this rule is in Chapter 3 where it was felt that numbering would be intrusive and less needed because of the way the results have been grouped.  Quotes from Sections 3 and 8 are followed by a four-digit identification code that was allocated to each survey respondent.

# 3

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### Introduction

In this chapter, a brief prose summary of each of the sections contained in the questionnaire is provided.  This is intended to provide a broad overview of the results of the survey.

More detailed reporting of results is contained in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 which discuss three separate but related themes that emerged from the data.  Frequencies for Sections 4 to 7 of the questionnaire are reported in Appendix A.

### Resources

Principals expressed many different concerns about the negative consequences arising from insufficient resources in government primary schools.

Literacy resources were high priorities for additional funding.  These included a wide range of needs such as guided reading materials, storage space, literacy expertise and increased staffing levels to allow for small group and one-to-one instruction.  Needs for larger, more functional classrooms were also linked to concerns about literacy standards.

The introduction of information communication technology into schools was identified as having significantly increased the recurrent costs of primary schools.  The cost of establishing networks and maintaining and upgrading computer systems were cited as common problems in schools.  Technology was also seen as requiring additional expertise and increased staff time.  Its value as a learning tool was strongly emphasised, however.

Pressure to provide curriculum breadth was linked to parental expectations and the introduction of the eight Key Learning Areas.  Many principals expressed concern that their schools were unable to provide Music and Physical Education.  They said that schools need suitable learning areas, staff with specialist skills and higher staffing levels in order to provide such programs.

Principals indicated that restricted resources has led to some students' learning needs being determined to be of a higher priority than others.  While 95 per cent of respondents indicated that the most needy students receive the help they require, many explained in handwritten responses that their schools lack the resources needed to provide programs for students in the next group of relative need.  Funding levels and

the manner in which funds are allocated to schools were given as explanations for this occurring. Many principals indicated that they find the need to rationalise resources in this way most unsatisfactory.

Twenty-six per cent of principals indicated that their school facilities are badly in need of an upgrade. The largest group of principals, 57 per cent, indicated that their school facilities are adequate. The high rate at which problems with facilities were identified in handwritten statements, however, suggests that 'adequate' may be a term that is applied fairly loosely.

The resource needs identified by respondents suggest that many school facilities, particularly old schools and those with high proportions of demountable buildings, have major design problems. Principals raised concerns about not being able to protect students from the sun, wind, rain or snow during Physical Education, school assemblies and when moving between buildings. The design problems associated with introducing computers into old classrooms are significant. More spacious and flexible learning areas are required in order to implement new outcomes-based curriculum frameworks and attain higher standards. And many schools lack an area where they can meet as a whole school, constraining the development of a sense of community.

Principals expressed views that they feel like 'poor cousins' relative to the secondary and non-government sectors. They also indicated that the low levels of funding in the government primary school sector require them to 'rob Peter to pay Paul'. They are concerned about the detrimental effect of under-funding on school programs and the time that they waste juggling the limited resources available for maximum value.

## Funding

Concerns about the level of funding for the early years and the overall level of funding were high at 87 per cent and 80 per cent respectively. Reliance on outside sources of funding was seen as a problem by 91 per cent of respondents.

Three-quarters of principals are against funding policies based on competition theories and do not accept that schools should be penalised when parents withdraw children. They are more enthusiastic about increasing taxation than requiring parents to pay fees. Nearly half support the principle of shifting funds from wealthy government schools to those in greater relative need.

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents support funding models tied to the socio-economic status of students in government schools. However, principals were divided on the question of whether per capita grants are the fairest method of funding, possibly reflecting a concern that student numbers do not take account of all aspects of a school's needs. Although only a little over a quarter of principals nationally support the incorporation of staff salaries into school grants, strong support for this was evident from Victoria, a state which has already implemented this policy.

## Policy

Government primary school principals' views about policy suggest that they recognise the importance of balancing the interests of local schools with those of the school system to which they belong.

There was overwhelming support for giving principals more discretion in regard to students who threaten the welfare of others. Ninety-three per cent of respondents indicated that they believe principals should have powers to exclude such students. On the other hand, principals generally did not support policies that would enable primary schools to determine enrolment policies locally or to enrol students on a selective basis.

Three-quarters of principals are supportive of school councils having powers to require students to wear school uniforms within a context in which parents can enrol their children in a government school of their choice.

Half of the principals surveyed believe that staff in schools should have full authority to determine how teaching and learning programs are organised. The majority of principals support the idea that government primary schools should be able to specialise and develop a distinctive identity.

## Ethos

There was a consistency about the values principals reported as reflecting the ethos of their schools.

Ninety-five per cent of principals describe their school's ethos as one that ensures the most needy students receive the help they require and that students who contribute to the well being of others are recognised. The statements about these values were rated the most highly of all items contained in the survey.

Around 90 per cent of principals attributed importance to academic performance, the development of a strong work ethic, conservation of the natural environment and respect for adults.

All these values fit somewhere into mainstream Australia. Given the high level of agreement evident among respondents, it is not surprising that 90 per cent of principals also stated that they believe government schools should reflect the values of the wider community, not just those found in local communities.

The importance of local communities was also evident. Eighty-five per cent of principals stated that participation in local community events is a feature of their schools. Three-quarters of the principals said that their schools recognise and support family religious beliefs.

Seventy per cent see their school as providing the foundations for economic success. More than half encourage students to question the social and cultural expectations placed on them.

There were two values that were not widely supported. Nearly two-thirds of principals said that they do not place considerable emphasis on winning in sporting contests. Principals were split on the role of competition in enhancing children's performance. Forty four per cent of principals see competition among students as a positive force while a third disagree with this contention.

## The future

Government primary school principals are generally pessimistic about the context in which schools will operate in the future. However, they demonstrate a degree of confidence in their capacity to maintain standards regardless; almost half the survey respondents believe that government schools will perform well on national and state surveys of student performance in the future.

Over 90 per cent of principals expect more government school children will come from families experiencing social problems than is presently the case and they do not expect government policies to address the problems likely to arise as a result of this in future. Eighty-five per cent of respondents expect that the divide between rich schools and poor schools will widen. They consider it unlikely that schools serving low-income families will be better resourced in the future and anticipate that parents will be expected to contribute at a higher level than now.

Three-quarters of principals believe that local communities will become more influential in school decision making than they are now. On the other hand, less than 60 per cent expect important decisions to be made at the school level.

There is an expectation that government schools themselves will change in ways that make it harder for staff who work in them. The differences between government and private schools are expected to grow in a context in which government schools have a smaller proportion of the total share of student places and there is greater diversity among government schools.

Given this scenario, it is not surprising that only 15 per cent of respondents are optimistic about seeing an improvement in teachers' working conditions.

## Consistency and variation in responses

Overall, there was considerable consistency among the views of principals. They tended to have an attachment to common values underpinning their school's ethos irrespective of where they lived or in what state system they worked. The same is true of their prognosis for public education.

The items examining particular education policies yielded some differences. One simple way of explaining these differences would be to state that attitudes seemed to be strongly influenced by recent past experience. For example, Victorian principals were considerably more positively disposed towards global budgets that incorporated a staffing component than principals from other states, especially New South Wales.

Another second explanation of the consistency is that principals tended to favour policies that benefited their own school. For example, principals with relatively large enrolments of children from low-income families were more inclined than other principals to support differential funding policies based on socio-economic status. To take another example, principals of remote schools were less supportive of policies that required them to raise funds from private sources than were other principals.

These findings will be considered in more detail in the following three chapters.

# 4

## CHANGED NEEDS

### Introduction

The main source of data for this chapter is Section 3 of the questionnaire in which respondents were invited to identify their resource needs and explain what difference the resources would make to their school. Not surprisingly, principals identified a wide range of resources. In doing so, many made the point that their need for additional resources arose because the environment in which they work is fundamentally changing. The current configuration of resources that would have enabled them to provide what was once considered a sound education is no longer sufficient.

It is not just a matter of *more* resources. What principals want is the capacity to respond effectively to their changing environment. They alluded to three broad categories of change: societal change, curriculum change and the implications of these changes for school facilities.

Where possible the issues will be described by using the verbatim statements of principals.

### Societal changes

Principals' comments tended to focus on three societal changes they believe are having an impact on schools: increasing student welfare needs, increasing parental expectations and the integration of special needs students into mainstream primary schools.

#### Student welfare

Many principals made comparative statements about society based on their experiences with children over extended periods of time. While some of these drew attention to the characteristics of particular communities, some of which experience extreme problems, other reflected more general changes in society, for example, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse and the breakdown of traditional family structures.

Principals reported that they now enrol increasing numbers of entry-level students with poor social skills. These children place huge new pressures on schools and have serious resource implications.

> We have increasing numbers of students starting school with poor social skills.
> This problem delays learning and often results in disruptive behaviour. [1020]

The link between student welfare problems and disruptive behaviour was often made.

> More and more children are just being maintained in a 'holding pattern'; they are
> not being effectively helped. Student welfare and behaviour management are major
> concerns and growing as families are less able to cope. [2304]

There was a sense that other agencies should do more to assist schools with these students.

> At times it seems that the school has become the only place making a difference to
> childrens' and families' lives. Multi-agency approaches to supporting school
> communities need to be a reality. [5115]

It is very difficult for principals facing high levels of disruptive student behaviour.

> The failure of governments and departments to support principals as they
> implement policies cause government schools to be perceived to be unable to cope
> with behaviour, bullying and staff inefficiencies. We are required to adhere to a
> long, step-by-step set of procedures that can fall apart because of one error or
> omission made over a long period of time. [2514]

Changes in society and the pressures these place on schools raise questions about the role of schools in society.

> Governments now treat public schools as welfare burdens. They are no longer
> seen as nurturing talent to secure our nation's future in the world. [4867]

Student welfare issues present principals with real difficulties. The sense that they are not supported increases the pressures they are under. It is within this context that such a high proportion of principals (94 per cent) said that they want powers to exclude students who threaten the welfare of others [6.1].

Ninety-one per cent of principals predict that government schools will enrol progressively more children from families experiencing social problems [7.2]. As this trend continues, the character of government schooling will change. Principals are aware that it will become increasingly difficult for government schools to arrest the shift in enrolments from government to private schools if government schools are cast as schools for students lacking social skills and the motivation to participate in school work.


**Parental expectations**

Parents' expectations of schools have increased. Most principals acknowledged the importance of meeting these demands but they also expressed frustration at their capacity to do so.

> My office is in a demountable that also serves as a staff room. It has no air
> conditioning, minimal heating and leaks during heavy rain. Every conversation,
> whether person-to-person or on the phone, is audible to anyone and everyone in the
> staffroom, the foyer and the office. [2596]

Many principals said that they would like to have interview and meeting rooms available so that teachers could have private discussions with parents and parents could

meet with specialist staff members, such as school psychologists, in circumstances that promote respect and ensure confidentiality.

Without adequate time and facilities, problems with community relations are likely to arise.

> Work overload isolates teachers from their school's community. Values are not shared. The overloaded teachers become defensive. Community mistrust of the school develops. [2546]

A venue where all members of a school's community can gather was seen as essential. The requirements for this varied according to the size of the school and the climate. Where climatic conditions permit, a school community may be content with gathering outdoors provided shade is available, however, many principals said that weather conditions do require an enclosed structure.

> At present, parents cannot be accommodated at assemblies. A multi-purpose hall in lieu of two demountable classrooms would assist us to build a strong sense of community. [1031]

Without a suitable place to meet it is very difficult to celebrate or develop a community identity.

Principals reported parents shopping around to find attributes of schools they consider important. Prospective parents ask about the schools' programs, particularly Music, Physical Education and Performing Arts. They also want literacy programs and extra support for students with learning difficulties. Parents expect schools to be physically comfortable places for their children, hence, their expectations that children be protected from the sun, rain, wind and snow. They also expect air conditioning in learning areas and acoustic separation from noisy activities. They are quick to comment on the aesthetics of the buildings and outdoor areas.

Parents want the full range of programs that they believe will benefit their children.

> This is a relatively high achieving school with few children below average. However, the school still needs learning support if it is to meet parents' desired outcomes. Catering for very high achieving students requires support to ensure that they perform to their optimum. [4003]

Parents no longer accept what is offered without question. They have their own ideas about their children's needs and have become more confident about raising issues with professional staff members.

> As a principal for eleven years, I have seen the expectations of government and the community treble. There is increasing questioning by parents who want to know what teacher and which class their children will be placed in, how government grants are to be spent and to tell us how we should report on student progress. [2579]

Parents want a high quality education for their children. They want to be able to communicate these expectations to principals and, if they are not satisfied, expect schools to take action to address their concerns.

**Mainstreaming**

In their written comments, principals acknowledged the benefits for students with special needs attending primary schools but expressed concern about the added demands.

> Successful inclusion is a moral issue but we are struggling. Resources are needed to manage the growing number of special needs children now included in mainstream classes. Few question the educational worth of this, however, the ad hoc growth in mainstreaming has placed enormous pressures on the capacity of teachers to fulfil their responsibilities to the so-called 'normal' student. [4060]

The additional costs for infrastructure are a common concern. Ensuring mobility around the school can be a major expense for schools designed before disability access standards were in place.

Providing adequately for children with special needs is particularly difficult when children with a range of different needs are clustered together.

> We need increased funding to cater for the full range of students. Some classes of 30 children have three students with an intellectual impairment and six with severe learning difficulties. [4165]

It is worth noting that mainstream schools were not the only ones experiencing difficulty catering adequately for students with special needs. Principals of special schools also identified programs that are not adequately funded.

## Curriculum changes

The shift towards outcomes approaches to teaching and learning has resulted in a new orientation in the dynamic between teacher and learner. It is a radical change based on expectations that teachers can and will deliver more. Three aspects of these changes are discussed: the new national outcomes-based curriculum frameworks, the introduction of information communication technologies into schools and the emphasis on literacy.

**National frameworks**

Teachers have been presented with new curriculum frameworks to inform them about what they are required to teach children. These new frameworks require teachers to account for their instructional programs in terms of students' learning outcomes. The frameworks also introduce an expectation that teachers acquire the competencies necessary for sophisticated education measurement.

For many teachers and principals, a mandated curriculum defined by outcomes serves to bring their frustration into focus.

> I am sick of hearing that outcomes are all that matter. Without adequate resources I cannot improve outcomes for students. [2153]

They face real difficulties in responding meaningfully to the changes. Outcomes-based schooling effectively represents a paradigm shift in education; the impact of this in the classroom is huge.

> I would like to see smaller class sizes. This would provide opportunities for more explicit teaching with small groups of children. Greater interaction between teacher and student is needed. [5030]

In many schools, the barriers to change are significant.

> Currently, classrooms are linear and very small, consequently traditional teaching practices are the norm. We need greater flexibility to align teaching with current best practice. Collaborative planning and accommodating the individual learning styles of children are not practical. [6221]

The breadth of the new curriculum frameworks is defined in terms of eight Key Learning Areas. Changes have raised the status of some subjects previously seen as 'options'. As a result, primary schools are much more conscious that Music, the Arts, Science and Physical Education need to be taught competently and systematically.

Many primary school teachers feel that they cannot teach all eight Key Learning Areas to the standard required. They argue that the old Jack-of-all-trades primary school classroom teacher now needs the support of specialist teaching expertise and appropriate facilities.

Accountability requirements have also changed.

> We are being held accountable to everyone. The curriculum has spiralled. New demands for assessment and reporting are mandatory and very few resources have been provided for these new duties. [2566]

This expectation of rigour in student assessments places schools under far greater pressure than previously. Nurturing students through their childhood years is no longer considered to be adequate; schools must demonstrate student learning.

## Information communication technologies

Information communication technology has created a huge additional expense for primary schools. In many cases computers were given to schools or purchased from technology grants. Having accepted the 'gifts', the schools are expected to take responsibility for the costs they bring with them.

> We estimate the recurrent costs for maintaining the IT program to be in excess of $20,000 per annum. With a total curriculum budget of not much more than that, we're scratching to see where it will come from. [5006]

Maintenance is just one cost. Developing staff competence can also be very expensive. The cost of installing computer networks can be prohibitive in old school buildings.

For many schools, it is not possible to absorb extra costs if there are other financial imperatives.

> Constant computer problems mean that computers often remain idle for months at a time. [2803]

Country schools also have the added burden of the cost of transporting equipment to the nearest repairer. One principal said that the minimum cost of transporting each computer to the nearest service facility is $160.

Many principals made suggestions about how to increase access to affordable expertise. Additional staffing allocations to individual schools or departmental appointees shared among schools were the most common suggestions.

Down-time is a concern given the benefits that new technologies can provide to instruction.

> Technology is an area of strength for children who are not so comfortable with the traditional literacies. We are trying to build on this strength as a way of improving literacy outcomes. [4191]

Schools are at varying stages of introducing technology. Those at an early stage face problems such as increasing the electricity supply to the school and the need to develop staff skills. Once technology is implemented into schools, new problems are faced.

> The students and staff have developed skills in a 'lab' situation. We now want to put computers into classrooms so that the skills can be developed in class and applied across all Key Learning Areas. [2064]

Using computers in classrooms creates additional cost burdens. Standard classrooms are too small. They are also expensive to wire for additional electricity supplies and network cables. Many schools are just coming to terms with the estimating the additional expenditure required. Acquiring the equipment is in a sense just the tip of the iceberg of costs; it is the hidden recurrent costs that can be really expensive.

## Literacy

Literacy provides a foundation for subsequent academic progress. It, therefore, is the most important focus of the early years of schooling.

Principals are very aware of the extra demands that schools face in the area of literacy. These were evident in survey responses in a direct sense because the resources available were not adequate *or* because resources had been allocated to early literacy and these had drawn resources away from other areas. The finding that 87 per cent of principals believe that there is not enough funding allocated to the early years of schooling should be interpreted in this light [5.4].

Additional resources that principals requested started with basic requirements for teaching literacy.

> Text resources are badly needed to match students to appropriate levels. With only 90 children in the school and resources that are very old and outdated it takes a long time to update teaching materials. [2493]

These requests often reflected current views about best practice.

> We need funds to purchase multiple copies of readers plus 'big books' plus tapes to be able to accomplish guided reading outcomes. [2539]

Lack of storage space is a major problem for many schools.

> We need room to move instead of shuffling resources, teachers and students around in incredibly overcrowded spaces. It is very difficult to find a space for small group activities with teacher aides or parent helpers. [4123]

Literacy programs also need suitable spaces. These are lacking in many schools.

> We need teaching spaces for small groups. We have already converted the front entrance to a teaching space. There are no spaces for Reading Recovery, small group remediation or extension programs. [2911]

Despite the emphasis on literacy in the wider community, many primary schools do not have adequate library facilities.

> Our school library is an eight foot by eight foot book repository. [5068]

Many principals expressed concern about the personal dilemma they face: knowing how important early literacy is, feeling confident that student outcomes *could* be improved but lacking the resources to make the improvements.

> During the third term, we conducted literacy tests across all year levels. Sixty to 80 per cent of the students from Years 2 to 6 were found to be reading two to three years below for their age. The results indicate a need to review our current curriculum and the resources we have available. [4714]

Literacy is a key learning strategy for all students. Its importance in the early years is widely recognised. Literacy is a priority for most schools and governments. Despite this, many schools are identifying multiple resource obstacles to effective literacy programs.

## The implications of societal and curriculum changes for facilities

School principals were asked to rate the quality of their facilities [2.3]. Fifteen per cent reported that they were excellent and 59 per cent indicated that they were adequate. Twenty-six per cent of respondents reported that their school facilities were badly in need of an upgrade.

The frequency with which problems with school facilities were raised in Section 3 raises questions about what government primary school principals consider the word 'adequate' to mean. Many requested fairly basic kinds of improvements, for example, toilets, protection from the weather, a space for the school community to meet, an administration area, classrooms big enough to fit computers in, spaces for teaching small groups of children or where a teachers can work one-on-one with failing students.

### Classrooms

Old school buildings in their original state are like chalk to the cheese of modern purpose-designed facilities. The large number of old government primary school buildings is a huge liability.

> This school was built in 1916. The rooms are too small. We lack wet areas, space for computers and withdrawal areas. Increased space is needed to create an environment more conducive to learning. It would enable us to establish learning centres, for example. The activities in classrooms are currently limited because of the physical structure of the rooms. We need more opportunities for 'hands on' and group activities. [4981]

Such limitations are not restricted to the oldest, heritage schools.

> Our facilities were built in the 1960s. They prohibit team teaching and technology use. [5232]

A huge problem for many schools is the high proportion of demountable buildings.

> Our demountables are hot in summer, cold in winter and they leak. There is no way of combining classes for cooperative learning sessions. There are no withdrawal areas and there is a lack of space for computers and storage. [2412]

War stories about demountables were plentiful. They are a particular problem for lessons that require running water and in climatic extremes. It is not practical to report the full range of concerns raised about the extent to which schools must rely on demountable structures and the problems this creates.

The kinds of architectural changes needed to support instruction are outside the reach of most government primary schools.

> We want to redesign our 50 year old classrooms, the smallest ever built, by making three classrooms into two. [3158]

The purpose of redesigning classrooms in this way is to create spaces that enable teachers to more carefully tailor instruction to cater for individual attainment levels and learning styles. Schools need appropriate, linked spaces to enable teachers to work with small groups or individual students while ensuring that the rest of the class is gainfully occupied. Old demountable buildings and lines of box-like classrooms do not readily translate into effective work environments.


## Grounds

Many principals want children to be able to play or be taught outside but with some protection from the elements. Concern about the need for shade was very common.

> Australians are now aware that the risk of skin cancer is increased with exposure to the sun yet shade facilities are very limited at our school. [2188]

The lack of well-designed outdoor facilities was a major concern.

> There is insufficient area for 370 children to play. Tempers become frayed. [2849]

Many schools lack suitable facilities to enable children to socialise outdoors while being adequately supervised.

> Most behaviour problems start in the playground. Children are often angry, upset and frustrated on return to class. Children who come to school without social or play skills need direction in the playground. [2428]

There were many requests for level, grassed playing fields. Without such spaces it is not possible for children to learn team sports.

Principals were concerned about the aesthetics of their school grounds. Some felt that more attractive surroundings and play equipment would encourage non-attending students onto school premises. Others were concerned about the disadvantage suffered when competing with non-government schools with sites that are better planned and more aesthetically pleasing. While the reasons principals gave for needing better-

planned outdoor areas differed according to local circumstances, the needs they articulated were similar. Schools need outdoor play facilities that take account of safety and supervision issues while creating a sense of harmony between the built and natural environments.

## Conclusion

Changes impacting on primary schools are coming from every direction. Schools are faced with a situation in which everyone wants more; governments, educators and parents have all raised their expectations of primary schools. The survey shows that primary school principals clearly want to meet these expectations.

Teachers need different kinds of classrooms because the methods of instruction have changed. The expectation that all children will become literate means that failing students must have access to effective remedial strategies. Supporting students with learning difficulties has become part of the core business of primary schools. There is no longer a requirement that a child must fit into an available program. Instead, teachers are expected to adjust their programs to accommodate all children's learning needs. Community expectations of government primary schools are now very high.

The comments that have been selected from the questionnaire responses should not be construed as a 'must-have' catalogue. The comments illustrate the breadth of the pressures for change felt by principals. While the scope is daunting there is a positive message: in identifying their resource needs, government primary principals have shown that they are intensely focused on their core business – student learning.

# 5

## THE AMOUNT OF FUNDING

### Introduction

Chapter 4 focused on the demands for change confronting government primary schools. This chapter examines the extent to which these many new demands are creating funding shortfalls for government primary schools. Once again, this evidence is based largely on principals' verbatim statements drawn from Sections 3 and 8 of the questionnaire. The statements should be considered in conjunction with the fact that four-fifths of principals believe that their schools are under funded in terms of what they are expected to achieve [5.9].

Principals made three kinds of comments about the level of funding. First, principals talked about taking resources from one area of need in order to allocate funds to another area of need. This has been described in the section headed, 'Robbing Peter to pay Paul'. Second, principals used external reference points as a way of expressing their sense of injustice. The basis on which they made comparisons with both secondary and private schooling is explained. Third, the methods through which additional funding can be obtained are described in the section headed, 'Top ups'.

The final section in this chapter, headed 'Value for money', is about principals' efforts to connect available funds to areas of greatest need. Despite a culture of frugality that permeates most government primary schools, there was evidence of some wastage because of the manner in which funds are disbursed.

### Robbing Peter to pay Paul

Principals used terms such as 'cobbling', 'scraping' and 'hustling' to describe their budget processes. They claim that the level of resources allocated is not adequate for their schools' needs.

> Global grants have not increased in real terms for years, however, costs have gone up: utilities, consumables and casual teacher salaries. Each year, less money can be devoted to educational programs. [2727]

The result of this is that many schools can fund only their highest priorities.

> We spend all our lives robbing Peter to pay Paul. We are always broke. The lack of resources stops innovation as it cannot be cost neutral. [7058]

The full implications of this are that, at times, real cuts to programs will be made.

> Our school finance committee has been aware in recent years of a shortfall in real terms of approximately $6,000 per annum. This means that, this year, we had to forfeit our Music program. The year before we made technology reductions. [2029]

It was more common for some groups of students to miss out on additional support even though this is needed.

> Our learning support team can only target the highest priority needs in Literacy because of the limited time available. We cannot begin to address Numeracy needs or consider special programs for gifted and talented children. [2007]

Many principals described situations in which the school provides for the lowest group of students at the expense of the next lowest group. This may be explained by the basis on which funding is allocated.

> Additional flexible staffing would be used to target students in the lower levels of achievement. The lowest level already attracts support. [5412]

The picture of gaps in school programs comes through in many principals' statements. These accounts give new meaning to the claim by 95 per cent of principals that they 'ensure that the most needy students receive the help they require' [Item 4.1] On its own, this could be interpreted as a motherhood statement. In conjunction with the principals' written statements, however, it appears that the most needy may be the only group that is adequately catered for and this is because targeted funds are often tied to this group.

Many principals indicated that they find themselves facing uncomfortable moral dilemmas.

> At the moment we cannot provide essential remediation to about 10 per cent of students. [2020]

The volume of principals' accounts about the way in which they rationalise the resources available to them is alarming. It was this evidence that the authors found most persuasive of claims that funding shortfalls have reached crisis point.


## External reference points

Principals know that their own assessments of school need tend to be ignored. Not wanting to be written off as whingers, respondents sought to establish objective reference points or benchmarks for funding. These were often other schools that they had previously taught at or visited and were often in the same local area as their current school. Principals made comparisons between funding inputs and outputs on different bases.


### Inputs

When making comparisons about 'inputs' they tended to focus on government secondary schools. The comparisons with secondary education were concerned with the different funding formulae.

> I moved from a secondary district high school to a primary school; the differences are huge. Primary schools are the poor cousins. [6166]

The extent of the difference is significant.

> A secondary school with a similar enrolment to our primary school enjoys a grant allocation which is nearly twice ours. The situation is not fair. [4078]

The additional funds are not limited to recurrent costs.

> How does a high school receive two million dollars for an upgrade? It never happens to primary or junior primary schools. [5040]

This comment raises questions about the imbalance and whether it can still be justified.

> Governments seek equity in regards to groups of students like the disabled and indigenous students. Why should this not be the case for young children? Why is a fourteen year old worth more than a five year old? I am tired on being the poor relation and crossing my fingers hoping that the school fair will raise enough for us to survive. [7058]

## Outputs

When making comparisons about 'outputs' principals drew attention to independent schools. They said that they feel like 'poor cousins'.

> I believe we look extremely shabby in comparison. [2554]

This is brought home to principals when prospective parents approach them to see what their school has on offer. During these discussions they are given information about how parents perceive their school relative to other schools in a neighbourhood. Principals reported parent comments about the lack of programs, particularly the old 'options' like Music and Sport, and the standard of school facilities. Principals also complained about the differences in the regulatory frameworks between sectors.

> It is difficult for us to compete when we are restricted by a rigid staffing formula, we cannot choose specialist staff and the school grounds look run down. [2036]

Some principals argued that the way in which rules and expectations are applied differently to government and private schools is unfair and claimed that they impact on what they can achieve.

## Top ups

Principals referred to two methods of funding the gap between allocations and needs: parent contributions and targeted grants.

## Parent contributions

In some schools, parent contributions make a huge difference to the level of funding available for programs.

> My school is in a middle class area where parents support the school annually to the extent of $45,000 through fund raising and small fees.  The money the government gives the school pays only for its administration.  [2890]

Contributions from parents can attract a bonus in some state systems.  This doubles the value of parental contributions.

> My school has numerous facilities provided on a 50/50 basis.  Parents have raised $77,000 over three years.  This amount was then matched from Departmental funding sources.  [2653]

Another avenue through which parents can attract resources to schools is through political pressure.

> Refurbishment, redesign and maintenance of older schools seems to depend on the political skills and knowledge of the local community.  [3158]

For schools in safe seats, however, even a local community with political nous may not be able to deliver.

The benefits of parental contributions are likely to extend beyond the funds that are raised.  Parents can assist schools to form communities that create a strong sense belonging and a purpose for instructional programs.  However, it needs to be recognised that significant variations exist in the capacities of local communities to contribute both financially and in other ways.

## Special purpose grants

The reality is that many schools do not have active parent support and so must rely on the staff to secure additional funding.  In most cases, they do this by applying for special purpose grants.  Some schools do this very successfully and can find that funds attract more funds.  For others it involves scrambling for not much.

> We have been told that the funds available for integration, Reading Recovery and support teachers are a finite resource with increasing applications from schools. [2512]

The costs associated with attracting such funds can be problematic.

> Applications to secure resources and the accountability required have the effect of diminishing the actual time devoted to programs.  [2361]

Considerable wastage can be associated with distributing funds through such methods.  Most of these grants are made available because it is recognised that there are groups of students whose needs are not being met.  Yet, staff must do more than demonstrate that students have needs, they must also compete with other schools to obtain funds.

> The hoops, bars and whistles keep on getting higher and louder.  I'm heartily sick of bureaucrats and others who are so far removed from my community.  They place unrealistic expectations and pressures on us.  [2884]

Another obstacle results from the narrowness of data-driven eligibility requirements for some targeted funds.

> Student outcomes in Literacy are improving because of programs such as Reading Recovery. Once school data indicates that a program is succeeding, it is taken from the school. [4921]

It is not surprising that some principals expressed a strong preference for untied funds. Such problems as long delays before schools are notified of a successful application and the requirements that separate accounts be kept create additional problems.

> Decisions on special funding are slow and often not to deadlines. Allocations often require a replication of work already done rather than drawing on data that is available. [4151]

The concern was not so much about genuine accountability as the 'busy work' and duplication required when administering small sums.

## Value for money

This section does not directly discuss the *level* of funding provided to government primary schools in the same way that the previous sections in this chapter have. Rather, it looks at the way parsimony can compound the negative consequences of low levels of funding.

The first section, titled 'Dislocation', deals with wastage that occurs when systems fail to ensure that resource allocations complement each other and take account of the yearly cycle of activity in schools.

The second section, 'Central controls', draws attention to the inefficiencies that result from some methods of disbursement.

### Dislocation

Principals drew attention to a range of inefficiencies that result from a failure to ensure that resources allocated can be integrated at the school level. One example is the way in which funding formulae can operate in isolation.

> Classes are formed according to one formula and accommodation on the old formula. [6084]

It is common for schools to be allocated an additional teacher without an additional classroom. This can be justified because classroom space allocations are so constrained that they can, in an official sense, be over formula even though they haven't got enough space. A new teacher must be moved into a music, art or store room because this is deemed to be 'surplus'.

The same kind of problem was described in regard to office and support staff.

> Ad hoc delivery has meant that ineffective use is made of additional resources. Specialist and aide time have been allocated but we do not have work spaces for them. Additional administration support staff has been allocated but no office space and equipment. [4093]

These kinds of inefficiencies lead to a sense of despondency when resources are so short. They also undermine confidence that bureaucracies understand the demands that

school administrators face in their work. Even the regularity of the school year can be ignored.

> The Department tends to release its initiatives at the end of the year, after schools have completed their budget consultation process. This then requires us to reallocate resources and under-fund activities to provide the State priorities. [4151]

This kind of problem raises questions about the adequacy of communication between central officials and principals. Some principals feel antagonistic towards systems that place expectations on them without taking account of their capacity to deliver.

> The practice of just announcing 'good looking' programs that only last two years is ridiculous. [4131]

Many principals raised concerns about the manner in which state systems pay careful attention to representation but directly undermine their own rhetoric through their actions. Understandably, this leads to distrust and a sense that putting on a brave face is seen as more important than educational outcomes. For principals, however, educational outcomes are not an abstraction; they work towards them in very practical ways every day of the school year.

## Central controls

Concerns about system constraints were almost as extensive as concerns about low levels of funding. Many principals argued that they need greater flexibility.

> We have limited flexibility to be responsive to our students and community needs. We know what we want to do; I would like to be able to get on with it. [7018]

A preference for untied grants over allocations for special purposes was commonly stated. In expressing this preference, principals were echoing the position adopted by state treasurers who take a similar view when arguing over the return of income tax revenues at the Premier's Conference.

There are potential benefits for systems, also. It would not be necessary to impose uniformity on a vast array of different schools.

> We are frequently denied cost-neutral initiatives because we are told 'it will establish a precedent and if every school gets this it will be too expensive'. [5217]

There are many benefits from a school perspective of loosening the controls on what often amount to very small amounts of money. Even when principals stated in Section 3 of the questionnaire that they need a particular resource which was described in some detail, a suffix would sometimes be added to say that the equivalent in dollars and cents would be better still.

> Money would allow us to buy at the point of need without the paperwork. [2470]

Savings could be made be reducing the administration costs of disbursement.

**Conclusion**

Most Australian government primary school principals report that their schools are under-funded. Many examples were provided of instances where the quality of educational provision fell short of mounting community expectations. Principals, generally, are critical of the basis on which their funds are allocated. In their view, too often the funding processes produce inefficiency and inequitable outcomes.

# 6

## MARKET APPROACHES

### Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, Commonwealth and state policies have enabled increasing numbers of parents to send their children to the school of their choice. These policies have introduced a competitive dynamic into the Australian school systems. This is a relatively new phenomenon for most government primary school principals for whom market pressures have previously been a minor concern.

In this chapter, the survey results that relate to market approaches to funding are reported. First, principals' views about market approaches are reported. Second, an overview of some variations that exist among the states in their application of such approaches is provided. Third, principals' accounts about how they are unfairly disadvantaged by market approaches are reported. In the fourth and fifth sections, school enrolment profiles are considered in relation to some characteristics of schools and principals' views about funding.

### Principals' views of market approaches

There is very little support among government primary school principals for the idea that school funding should be allocated within a competitive framework. Principals believe that government policies should not be fostering competition between the public and private sectors. Further, government schools should not have to rely on privates sources of funds. Only 7 per cent of principals believe that competition policies improve educational standards whereas three-quarters disagree with the claim, a third strongly so [5.8]. Eighty-four per cent of principals think it is unfair that schools should be financially penalised when parents withdraw their children from a school [5.5]. In their view, it is the governments' job to make sure that funds are distributed fairly and matched to student learning needs. The market, they believe, is not an appropriate mechanism for distributing school education resources.

On the other hand, three-quarters of the principals believe that parents should be able to send their children to a government school of their choice [6.1]. However, they want choice without the negative consequences of competition. They fear that government funding policies are transforming government school systems for the worse.

## State policy contexts

In a federal system, a dominant philosophical orientation like that of competition policy influences each state in different ways and to different degrees. For example, states have different sets of rules about the enrolment of students in the immediate neighbourhood. Some states have gazetted zones and strict rules about the entitlements of parents who reside in the zone. Other states have liberalised these rules. The kinds of variations across states can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

Variation among states in relation to selected market conditions.

| State | Selected market conditions (%) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Residential intake zone in school [2.6] | Support Parental choice [6.11] | Support global staffing [5.6] |
| SA | 23 | 79 | 55 |
| Vic | 24 | 93 | 71 |
| Qld | 25 | 84 | 21 |
| NT | 25 | 85 | 42 |
| WA | 67 | 81 | 21 |
| NSW | 74 | 59 | 8 |
| Tas | 77 | 69 | 44 |
| ACT | 87 | 93 | 29 |

Taking the two largest states as examples, it is obvious that government primary school principals are operating in different policy contexts and that these are shaping their views.

Table 3 is intended as a caution when making generalisations about what might actually be going on given that our data set is national; we have not factored into our analyses detailed information on the funding policies in each state.

## The application of market models

While many state government school systems have adopted the rhetorical language of parental choice, the schools themselves lack the kind of flexibilities they need to be

genuinely responsive to parents' expectations and students' needs. In some ways, they are not as well situated as private schools to operate in a market environment.

Under market conditions, where funding is tied directly to student enrolments, it is imperative that principals manage student load with maximum efficiency. The negative consequences of an enrolment decline are quickly felt. Once staff are appointed, schools require full classes in order to retain the funding required to pay salaries. Private schools can establish enrolment ceilings and, if there is sufficient demand, maintain waiting lists so that they can fill vacancies as quickly as possible.

Government school principals in most states find it difficult to operate this way. They have less control over the enrolment process, particularly when an intake zone is in place. It is more difficult to maintain waiting lists and pointless in under-enrolled schools.

In that regard, over 70 per cent of principals indicated that they had the infrastructure to increase enrolments, nearly a quarter significantly so [2.9]. Twenty-two per cent of principals report that their enrolments are declining [2.8]. Over half expect that their own performance will be assessed on how well they position their school in the market place [7.5]. Clearly, the introduction of choice and competition policies is putting primary principals under pressure.

## When enrolments decline

Small schools experience major difficulties when staffing entitlements are determined by a formula based on a quantum of enrolments equating to a full-time teacher. Small changes can cut a school's overall resource level significantly; the departure of a single child may necessitate the departure of a full-time teacher. Principals of small schools expressed concerns that the withdrawal of a teacher can have a huge impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

> As enrolments decline the numbers of teaching staff also decline. While an enrolment of 150 students in Year 1–7 entitles the school to 7 teachers, an enrolment of 149 means that there will only be 6 teachers. This places a strain on the relationship between the school and the community who see composite classes as a retrograde step. [4150]

In this case, a market-oriented school with sufficient powers would carry the extra teacher in order to maintain its viability. The decline that is almost inevitable once parents prejudices against composite classes are ignored *may* then be averted.

## When enrolments rise

It is no surprise that declining enrolments cause problems for schools. However, principals also reported experiencing difficulties arising from high demand.

> Our school is full to capacity but the Department expects us to continue to take enrolments from our catchment area. We do not have sufficient outdoor areas to enable children to all go out to lunch at one time. [4151]

The same dynamic that works against schools with declining enrolments works against them when they gain ad hoc enrolments. Students must be grouped for instruction. The groups need to be accommodated and taught. If the principal can

manage the flow of enrolments, then these can be matched to the available accommodation and staff in ways that create efficiencies for the school.

This kind of planning is not possible, however, when decisions about capital works to extend the available accommodation are made outside the school.

> We have a waiting list of 25-30 children wanting to enter preschool. These students will have to find other placements and are likely to remain there. A new private school will offer these facilities next year. [4186]

Without the facilities needed to take extra enrolments government schools cannot easily respond to demand.

> Growth in government schools is restricted. In our case, we had to refuse 37 children the opportunity to enrol as we did not have the rooms or the ability to form additional classes based on non-local enrolments. Of these 37 children, about half have chosen to enrol in non-government schools. [2418]

The reality of government schools is that they are required to take eligible applicants and cope with any disruption that may ensue.

> The total population of the school has not changed but we need to change groupings each semester because classes go oversize. At the beginning of the year we had 49 Year 7 students. We currently have 63 Year 7 students. [4199]

The lack of control over enrolment patterns in one of the defining features of government schools. This lack of control leads to inefficiencies that per capita funding formulae do not easily accommodate.

## 'Rich' and 'poor' schools

Depending on the ways in which funding is tied to school enrolments, school resource levels can vary widely. Popular schools do well in a competitive environment. Once they are fully enrolled they are able to determine which students they will enrol when vacancies occur. Schools with declining enrolments find themselves in a difficult situation and may be stuck, unfairly, with the label of a 'failing school' even though the reasons for the decline in enrolments may be largely outside the school's control. Overseas experience suggests that schools perceived to be 'failing' are more likely to be found in low-income neighbourhoods.

There is evidence in this survey that enrolment trends may be related to the characteristics of a school. Table 4 shows that schools with a higher proportion of students from low-income families were more likely to experience declining and unstable enrolment patterns. Nearly half of schools with declining enrolments were serving low-income neighbourhoods. The converse was also evident; schools with fewer students from low-income families were more likely to be experiencing enrolment increases.

**Table 4.**

Relationship between predicted enrolment trend [2.8] and estimated family income for school intake [2.12].

| Principal's prediction of enrolment trend | Predicted enrolment trend | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Increasing | Stable | Declining | No trend |
| Less than 10% | 27 | 18 | 17 | 14 |
| 10-30% | 38 | 39 | 34 | 31 |
| More than 30% | 35 | 43 | 49 | 55 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | n=820 | n=865 | n=171 | n=528 |

The evidence in Table 4 is of considerable public importance and deserves further investigation. It is possible that school choice policies are gradually changing the socio-economic profile of students attending government schools in poorer neighbourhoods and making teaching and learning more difficult for those who remain. It is also possible that government schools in prosperous neighbourhoods are benefiting from these policies.

Principals of schools with smaller proportions of low-income families are more likely to report that their facilities are excellent and principals of schools with greater proportions of low-income families are more likely to report that their facilities are badly in need of an upgrade. Table 5 provides a breakdown of principals' reports about school facilities in relation to family income.

**Table 5.**

Relationship between estimated family income for school intake [2.12] and the reported condition of school facilities [2.3].

| Principal's ratings of proportion of low-income families | Condition of school facilities | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Excellent | Adequate | Badly needs upgrade |
| Less than 10% | 27 | 20 | 19 |
| 10-30% | 38 | 39 | 32 |
| More than 30% | 35 | 41 | 49 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | n=384 | n=1373 | n=617 |

Nearly 90 per cent of principals expect the gap between rich and poor schools to widen over the next decade [7.10]. Only 7 per cent of principals think that schools serving low-income neighbourhoods will be better resourced over that period [7.12]. It would be a disaster for public education and for the communities that government schools have traditionally served if this is allowed to happen.

## Principals' views about funding models

It is obviously in the public interest that school funding is matched to learning needs. For this to happen, allocations must be tailored so that they take into account the differential needs of schools and schools must be able to use the allocated funds flexibly. This not as easy to accomplish as should be the case. There is pressure on governments to fund government schools equally and to specify how the allocations to schools are to be spent.

Almost every principal agreed that it was part of their school's ethos to ensure that the most needy students received the help that they required. Two-thirds believe that operating grants should be linked to the socio-economic status (SES) of students in government schools. There is overall support for the principle of differential funding though there is also some dissent.

Table 6 shows the degree of support for SES-based funding according to the socio-economic make up of each school's intake. It is clear that principals are much more likely to favour differential funding if they are in schools serving low-income neighbourhoods.

**Table 6.**

Relationship between principals' attitude to SES funding models [5.1] and estimated family income for school intake [2.12].

| Principal's views on SES funding models | Proportions of low-income families | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Less than 10% | 10–30% | More than 30% |
| Oppose | 39 | 21 | 9 |
| Unsure | 14 | 15 | 6 |
| Support | 46 | 64 | 85 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | n=494 | n=873 | n=999 |

Differential funding policies based on socio-economic status are also more likely to be supported by principals of schools with relatively larger proportions of students achieving below literacy benchmarks. This is a very strong relationship as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.**

Relationship between principals' attitude to SES funding models [5.1] and school performance on literacy benchmarks [2.10].

| Principal's views on SES funding models | School performance on literacy benchmarks | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Above | Near | Below |
| Oppose | 30 | 16 | 9 |
| Unsure | 13 | 12 | 6 |
| Support | 57 | 72 | 85 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | n=838 | n=1003 | n=464 |

   States vary in the way in which they differentially fund schools. The survey was not designed to unravel the detail of these policies and conclude whether principals believe the existing weightings in the funding formulae are of sufficient magnitude. The anecdotal evidence suggests that principals believe they are not. However, there is strong overall support among primary school principals for SES-based funding.


**Conclusion**

   Government primary school principals are operating in an increasingly market-oriented environment. They are aware that enrolments are growing faster in the private sector than in their school sector and a large majority of principals expect that the enrolment shift will continue. They believe that the redistribution of student load across sectors is being encouraged by governments and achieved through their funding policies.  Principals feel powerless to stop it. The principals are not anti-choice per se; they accept the right of parents to choose within the government sector.  However, the negative consequences of these policies is being felt particularly by the school communities that can least afford it – those with high proportions of families on low incomes.

# 7

## ACTIONS

### What is at stake?

Both sides of government at state and Commonwealth levels recognise the importance of education. Though the wording may differ, party platforms make it clear that funding education is an investment in the future; it is a crucial means of improving the quality of life and of positioning the nation in an increasingly global world. At a more pragmatic level, political parties recognise that education is important because polls show that education is a key issue in federal and state elections.

In the judgment of primary school principals more than two-thirds of Australia's children are in primary schools that are under-resourced, some seriously so. Yet primary schools provide the foundations for later learning. The nation depends on its primary schools.

Are the funds available to make the improvements sought by principals? Aungles, Karmel and Wu (2000) raise doubts in their recent analysis of social expenditure. They point out that Australia's ageing population combined with the rapidly escalating costs of health care will demand greater real expenditure and will thereby limit increases in education expenditures over the longer term. Education must compete as a priority area with health and social security.

Under these circumstances, governments will find it difficult to find the quantum of funds that were committed during the 1970s to address the resource needs of Australian schools at that time. However, it is worth noting that the first national survey of school resources was undertaken in 1970 under the auspices of the States through the Australian Education Council (now constituted as MCEETYA). Its report was initially dismissed as 'impossibly unrealistic and visionary' (Manning, 1970). What seemed impossible in 1970 was realised three years later following the intervention of the Commonwealth government and the formation of the Schools Commission.

Setting aside the issue of funding increases, governments can act to ensure that existing resources are used effectively and distributed fairly. This is much more difficult than it should be because of the divisions of responsibility between Commonwealth and state governments for funding government and private schools. The survey indicates that the divisions between sectors and levels of government are having a debilitating impact on at least one group of schools: government primary schools. Passing the problem off as the responsibility of the states is not an adequate response.

Principals of government primary schools present a sobering picture of the future for their sector. In their responses to the survey, they also project a sense of powerlessness to change that future. The 'problem' highlighted by the principals is unlikely to be fixed by some special purpose program providing a relatively small amount of funding for additional resources to be distributed on a competitive basis. Topping up won't work. The 'problem', as Australian primary school principals see it, is complex and deep-seated and the solution must involve a review of government funding policies.

## What actions might be taken?

Arising from the foregoing analysis of responses, four courses of action are proposed:

1. Establishing resource standards
2. A national review of resource needs
3. Independent monitoring of school funding and
4. Regulation of competition.

### 1. Establishing resource standards

In the mid-1980s, a decade after its foundation, the Commonwealth Schools Commission published resource standards for all Australian schools (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984a). These standards related to factors such as class size, the number of specialist teachers per school, time allocated to teachers for planning, equipment and so on. It was the intention of the Schools Commission that governments would progressively reach the standards over a number of budget cycles. Eventually, all schools were to be brought up to a common standard.

At about the same time, there was a sea change in thinking about school resourcing; the emphasis shifted from school inputs to student learning outcomes. This change reflected the view that increases in government resource levels could only be justified if they led to better student outcomes. Soon afterwards, the Schools Commission, which had focused primarily on raising the level of inputs, was abolished. The setting of government school resource standards became a state matter again. Interest in explicit resource standards lapsed.

Today, resource standards are implicit. In regard to facilities and technical infrastructure, there are in effect two implicit standards, one for new schools and one for older schools. The higher standard can be recognised in the resources available in new schools. It is a game of catch-up for older schools. In regard to staffing and other operating costs, these are allocated by formulae based on enrolments and other factors.

Since the 1980s, in the absence of explicit resource standards, it appears that government school resource levels have not kept pace with expectations of what schools should teach and how they should go about it. The evidence from the survey suggests that some schools can meet those expectations, for example, schools that receive significant contributions from parents and those that are able to attract multiple competitive grant funds. This leaves a large group of schools without much prospect of filling the gap.

Defining the standards is a difficult task. It involves more than simply producing an inventory of facilities or a staffing formula. The resource standards framed by the

Schools Commission in 1984 now seem crude and disconnected from teaching and learning. The starting point for a new set of standards should be an analysis of how the curriculum for the twenty-first century is designed and how it should be delivered to achieve the outcomes for which there is broad public and professional consensus. For example, extensive research into literacy teaching now provides a basis for determining how schools should be resourced to meet benchmarks acceptable to the community.  It is one thing to exhort teachers to employ 'best practice' but schools need the infrastructure to adopt it.

The task of setting standards raises the question of relativities. The principals who participated in the survey, concerned that their claims might be seen as ambit, suggested that high schools and independent schools be taken as reference points. This is a remarkable turnaround because, until recently, government schools have provided the benchmarks for school resource levels.

There is no doubt that government high schools are funded at a higher level than government primary schools.  It can be argued that, historically, government primary schools have been highly cost-efficient organisations relative to their secondary cousins.

Comparisons with independent schools are problematic. First, there is considerable variation within the sector. Second, the recent growth within this sector, and the funding that has enabled it, accounts for a relatively high proportion of new, purpose-built buildings. Third, the tendency to cater for students K-12 on one campus provides opportunities for secondary places to subsidise primary places.  These and other differences between the sectors mean that it is not reasonable to directly compare dollar inputs.

The issue of relativities, which primary principals feel strongly about, would be of much less consequence if school resource levels were based on standards derived from an analysis of how to achieve learning outcomes than on historical precedent or the capacity of interest groups to lobby governments.

## 2.  A national review of school resource needs

The evidence produced by the survey indicates that there is a problem with current resource standards that needs further investigation. A substantial number of school principals believe that they do not have the resources to provide the kind of education that is expected of them. The environment in which they work is getting tougher, the curriculum is changing and in older schools facilities are becoming obsolete. A survey is a good way of gauging opinions and gathering certain kinds of facts. However, more detailed work is needed to fully explicate the nature and scale of the problem.

A comprehensive review of school resource needs would best be undertaken with the cooperation of state and Commonwealth authorities. If standards can be agreed upon, then it would be possible to find out how many Australian schools fall below the benchmark and where they are located. This must surely be a matter of public interest. It would be appropriate to invite the private school sector to participate in the review. Although this survey was confined to government school principals, it is likely that principals from low-fee private schools serving low-income neighbourhoods would be operating in similarly demanding circumstances to their government school colleagues.

The problem of primary school resourcing appears to be national in scope. Patterns of responses to the survey items were similar across states. A national review of standards need not cut across state rights.

## 3. Independent monitoring of school funding

Two of the issues that surfaced in the survey are 'fairness' and 'trust'. Primary school principals feel that their needs are not being addressed, that current funding arrangements are unfair and that the facts are unduly hard to establish. They do not know whom to trust.

The steady increase of Commonwealth funding for private schools has created a perception of one sector being favoured by the Commonwealth at the expense of the other. To put it more bluntly, some see private schools as receiving public funding that should be directed to needy government schools. In response to this perception, the Commonwealth argues that government schools are funded by it from general purpose grants to the states and that it is the responsibility of state governments to see that needy government schools are given larger allocations from state treasuries. Whether this perception has a basis in fact or not, it is there.

The claims and counter-claims about the adequacy of Commonwealth and state funding of government schooling are almost impossible for the layperson to assess. The facts are difficult to establish because schools are funded on complex bases. This makes it difficult to arrive at any conclusion as to whether the allocations to government schools are 'fair'. The Hansard reports of the passage of the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Bill 2000 through the legislation committee and then the houses of parliament during August and September 2000 bear this out.

The problem is compounded by the dual responsibilities of state ministers; they are ministers for public and private schools. They are expected to be impartial stewards. However, under their stewardship, the state education systems have lost a significant share of enrolments while the private school sector has grown and increased its level of state funding. The leaders of state education systems, the directors general, are required to promote the government's position and take direction from their ministers. In effect, they have become 'deputy ministers'. Their lobbying of the government is conducted in private or with considerable subtlety. It might be possible, depending on the Commonwealth/State political alignment, for a state director general of education to publicly criticise a Commonwealth funding policy. However, the director general would risk dismissal if he or she were to criticise a state government funding policy or outcome. In some states, regulations even prohibit teachers and principals from publicly criticising education policies and practices. This has left the teacher unions and parent associations as the principal lobbyists for government schooling.

A little over a decade ago, issues of this kind were resolved at a national level by the Commonwealth Schools Commission. This was a Commonwealth statutory body, able to promote public debate, canvass policy options and represent the interests of public and private sectors. The Schools Commission published statistical reports on school resource expenditure and commented on the needs of schools (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1984b). Since its abolition, its work has been undertaken by policy officers in state departments and the Commonwealth Department of Education and Youth Affairs (DETYA). These officers are accountable to their department heads and

ministers. The peak policy forum is the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). It meets in camera. There is a need for a more transparent and independent monitoring of funding.

## 4. Regulation of competition

The rationale for government funding policies that encourage competition among schools needs clarification and wider debate. Most principals do not believe that competition leads to higher standards of student learning. Indeed, most do not approve of using competition to motivate students.

If there is to be competition, principals believe there should be a 'level playing field'. In their view, government schools are at a disadvantage in the market place compared to their private school counterparts. However, there is also intra-sectoral competition. As parents are given more choice within the government school sector, schools will compete with others from within the sector. The competition is eroding collaboration between schools and producing inequalities. Governments need to do something about it. At the very least there needs to be an agreed code of conduct in regard to competition among schools.

## Allocating responsibility

Who might take responsibility for the action proposed in this report?

Governments have promoted the setting of professional standards of teaching and benchmarks of student achievement. These standards place pressures on schools. Resource standards lapsed with the termination of the Schools Commission and have not been restored because they would place pressure on governments. Many of the survey respondents believe that such pressure would be in the public interest.

Without specifically saying so, what primary principals would like to see is an educational equivalent of Allan Fels, the chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, a person who has the independent means to investigate allegations of unfair practice.

It is easy to understand why a government would not want to create a rod for its own back. Explicit standards and independent monitoring would take much of the politics out of school building upgrades and enterprise bargaining.

On the other hand, education is not only a crucially important social institution, it is also a huge industry. According to the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, the annual financial outlay for the Australian school education sector is over $25 billion. Governments quite properly have emphasised better measurement of outcomes in their accountability frameworks and huge amounts of energy and resources are going into the collection of data. However, there is a need for balance. Just as there should be a need for thorough monitoring of student learning outcomes there also should be a monitoring of resource levels.

There are various ways of providing non-partisan monitoring with a sufficient capacity to do the job well. Governments could set up such a mechanism as happened with the formation of the Schools Commission, a statutory body reporting to

parliament. If governments are unwilling to act, then a consortium of professional associations could do the job providing it received the cooperation of government bodies. The main criterion is that it is able to operate independently of government and special interest groups.

## Conclusion

Some readers may be inclined to regard the results of this survey as an expression of self-interest from a section of the education industry. This would be a mistake. It is true that in drawing attention to the state of public primary school education principals are not neutral players. Members of every sector of the public service could find ways of improving services that require more resources. However, the difference is that the survey results show that principals are not only concerned about the levels of resources but are gravely concerned about the future of public education.

There are five-and-a-half thousand government primary schools. Because of the sheer size of the primary school sector, the identification of a systemic shortfall in resources has the potential to place a huge financial burden on governments.  They must also deal with resource demands from other worthy interest groups: nurses, police, farmers and so on.

Once a problem is thought to be intractable there is a natural tendency to divert attention from it or even deny it. This is more likely to be the case when the nature of the problem is not clearly specified and when responsibility for addressing it is shared by different levels of government and by local communities. It can be expedient for governments, therefore, to seek to gain kudos by addressing the most obvious signs of need while the rest of the system slowly spirals downward.

The nature and extent of the problem identified by principals warrant the intervention of governments. This report calls for action that addresses the unhelpful division between Commonwealth and state responsibilities for school funding and which directs government funding to where it is needed most. The future of public education depends on it.

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# APPENDIX A

## Section 1 – Biographical details

Please indicate with a TICK ( ✔ ) in the right hand column which of the following best describes you in your current situation.

| | | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | My position in the school is: | no response | 0.3 |
| | | principal | 90.9 |
| | | deputy or assistant principal | 8.0 |
| | | other | 0.8 |
| 1.2 | I have been in my current position in this school for: | no response | 0.5 |
| | | less than a year | 19.8 |
| | | between 1 year and 5 years | 43.4 |
| | | more than 5 years | 36.3 |
| 1.3 | In my current role, my duties include: | no response | 1.7 |
| | | scheduled teaching duties | 30.5 |
| | | limited teaching | 19.7 |
| | | no classroom teaching | 48.1 |
| 1.4 | My gender is: | no response | 1.2 |
| | | male | 60.5 |
| | | female | 38.3 |
| 1.5 | My age is in the range: | no response | 1.1 |
| | | under 45 years | 27.7 |
| | | between 45 and 55 years | 58.1 |
| | | over 55 years | 13.0 |

n=2452 for all items

Note: the figures between the lines in the right hand column add up to 100%

## Section 2 – School details

Please indicate with a TICK (✔) in the right hand column which of the following best describes your school and its context.

| | | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2.1 | My school is in the following state or territory: | no response | 0.0 |
| | | ACT | 2.3 |
| | | NSW | 37.6 |
| | | Vic | 7.5 |
| | | Qld | 20.7 |
| | | SA | 17.2 |
| | | WA | 8.9 |
| | | Tas | 3.5 |
| | | NT | 2.2 |
| 2.2 | The school consists of the following year levels: | no response | 0.4 |
| | | K or P–2 or 3 | 2.4 |
| | | K or P–6 or 7 | 85.2 |
| | | K or P–12 | 4.6 |
| | | other | 7.3 |
| 2.3 | The facilities at this school are: | no response | 0.9 |
| | | excellent | 15.8 |
| | | adequate | 57.3 |
| | | badly in need of an upgrade | 25.7 |
| | | other | 0.3 |
| 2.4 | The number of students enrolled at the last census was: | no response | 0.4 |
| | | less than 50 students | 12.7 |
| | | between 51 and 250 students | 31.5 |
| | | between 251 and 600 students | 42.5 |
| | | more than 600 students | 12.9 |
| 2.5 | My school is located: | no response | 1.1 |
| | | in or near a city centre | 16.0 |
| | | in a suburban area | 35.0 |
| | | in a regional centre | 13.1 |
| | | in country town | 25.9 |
| | | in a remote region | 8.8 |
| 2.6 | Does your school have a residential intake zone? (If 'No', go to Item 2.8) | no response | 3.4 |
| | | Yes | 50.3 |
| | | No | 46.3 |

| 2.7 | Intake from the residential zone provides: | no response | 42.7 |
| | | all or nearly all enrolments | 38.1 |
| | | more than half of enrolments | 15.1 |
| | | less than half of enrolments | 4.1 |
| 2.8 | Enrolments over the last two years have: | no response | 1.5 |
| | | shown an upward trend | 33.9 |
| | | been stable | 35.6 |
| | | been unstable, trend not evident | 7.0 |
| | | been declining | 22.0 |
| 2.9 | In considering the school's accommodation and infrastructure alone, then enrolments could: | no response | 2.2 |
| | | be significantly increased | 22.7 |
| | | be increased marginally | 48.2 |
| | | not be increased at all | 26.8 |
| 2.10 | The performance of the school on literacy benchmark tests is: | No response | 4.7 |
| | | above the benchmark | 34.7 |
| | | near the benchmark | 41.5 |
| | | below the benchmark | 19.0 |
| 2.11 | The proportion of students who have special learning needs is: | no response | 2.1 |
| | | less than 5% | 20.9 |
| | | 5-30% | 63.2 |
| | | more than 30% | 13.8 |
| 2.12 | The proportion of students enrolled from families on very low incomes is: | no response | 2.2 |
| | | less than 10% | 20.4 |
| | | 10-30% | 36.1 |
| | | more than 30% | 41.4 |
| 2.13 | Is there a separate program for gifted and/or talented students? | no response | 2.6 |
| | | Yes | 32.7 |
| | | No | 64.8 |

Percentages

| NR | SD | Dis | Uns | Ag | SA |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

| | | NR | SD | Dis | Uns | Ag | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.1 | We ensure that the most needy students receive the help they require. | 1.6 | 0.7 | 1.2 | 1.7 | 40.9 | 53.8 |
| 4.2 | Family religious beliefs are recognised and supported in the school. | 2.1 | 1.3 | 5.8 | 13.0 | 55.3 | 22.5 |
| 4.3 | Participation in local community events is a feature of the school. | 1.5 | 0.5 | 7.5 | 5.9 | 50.0 | 34.6 |
| 4.4 | We place great emphasis on developing a strong work ethic in all our students. | 1.5 | 0.4 | 1.8 | 4.5 | 47.7 | 44.0 |
| 4.5 | We celebrate outstanding academic performance by individual students at every opportunity. | 1.2 | 0.4 | 1.8 | 2.4 | 35.8 | 58.5 |
| 4.6 | We recognise students who contribute to the well being of other members of the school community. | 1.3 | 0.2 | 1.1 | 2.7 | 36.9 | 57.8 |
| 4.7 | We insist that children respect adult authority. | 2.4 | 0.8 | 2.7 | 4.6 | 40.6 | 49.0 |
| 4.8 | We actively encourage students to question the social and cultural expectations placed on them. | 1.7 | 1.0 | 16.1 | 27.0 | 44.2 | 10.1 |
| 4.9 | Competition among students to achieve high levels of performance is regarded as a positive force. | 1.6 | 4.7 | 29.1 | 20.5 | 37.1 | 7.0 |
| 4.10 | The importance of conserving the natural environment is emphasised in the school. | 1.2 | 0.4 | 2.7 | 6.0 | 49.0 | 40.7 |
| 4.11 | We see the school as providing the foundations for later economic success in life. | 1.6 | 1.3 | 11.8 | 14.8 | 48.2 | 22.3 |
| 4.12 | We place considerable emphasis on winning in sporting contests. | 1.4 | 12.2 | 51.8 | 10.0 | 21.1 | 3.6 |

NR=no response  SD=strongly disagree  Dis=Disagree  Uns=Unsure  Ag=Agree  SD=Strongly Agree

## Section 5 – Your views about funding

| Please indicate with a TICK ( ✔ ) the extent to which the following statements reflect your own point of view. | | Percentages | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | NR | SD | Dis | Uns | Ag | SA |
| 5.1 | Operating grants should be linked to the socio-economic status of the students in a government school. | 1.4 | 4.1 | 15.4 | 11.0 | 35.4 | 32.7 |

| | | NR | SD | Dis | Uns | Ag | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.2 | The fairest way to fund government schools is on the basis of per capita grants. | 2.3 | 10.9 | 28.7 | 17.6 | 27.7 | 12.8 |
| 5.3 | Funds should be shifted from wealthy government schools to assist needy government schools. | 1.1 | 7.9 | 27.4 | 16.8 | 20.8 | 25.9 |
| 5.4 | Currently, there is not enough funding allocated to the early years of schooling. | 1.1 | 1.1 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 34.1 | 53.2 |
| 5.5 | Government schools should not be financially penalised when parents withdraw their children. | 0.9 | 1.4 | 4.8 | 9.1 | 31.1 | 52.6 |
| 5.6 | Staff salaries should be incorporated into global funding allocations to government schools. | 1.3 | 36.1 | 20.4 | 15.3 | 14.9 | 12.0 |
| 5.7 | Parents who can afford to should be required to pay fees to government schools. | 0.9 | 19.5 | 27.0 | 10.6 | 24.7 | 17.3 |
| 5.8 | Funding policies which promote competition have the effect of improving educational standards. | 0.8 | 34.5 | 40.6 | 16.6 | 5.9 | 1.6 |
| 5.9 | My school is under-funded in terms of what it is expected to achieve. | 1.0 | 2.3 | 10.4 | 6.2 | 38.5 | 41.5 |
| 5.10 | Government schools should not be expected to rely on private sources of funding. | 1.0 | 2.1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 28.0 | 63.2 |
| 5.11 | If necessary, taxation should be increased to pay for improvements to public education. | 1.0 | 7.9 | 18.6 | 15.5 | 30.1 | 27.0 |
| 5.12 | All government schools should be allowed to develop distinctive identities in order to attract students. | 1.0 | 4.6 | 15.9 | 18.2 | 41.8 | 18.4 |

NR=no response   SD=strongly disagree   Dis=Disagree   Uns=Unsure   Ag=Agree SD=Strongly Agree

## Section 6 – Your views about policy

| Please indicate with a TICK (✔) the extent to which the following statements should apply to government schools. | | Percentages | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | NR | SD | Dis | Uns | Ag | SA |
| 6.1 | Principals should have powers to exclude students who threaten the welfare of other students or staff. | 1.2 | 0.9 | 2.2 | 1.5 | 28.6 | 65.6 |
| 6.2 | A school council should be able to set the level of fees for a particular school. | 1.6 | 6.7 | 15.1 | 14.1 | 41.8 | 20.7 |
| 6.3 | Schools need to be able to provide incentives to attract academically able students. | 1.7 | 13.5 | 33.6 | 20.6 | 22.6 | 8.0 |
| 6.4 | A school council should have the authority to require students to wear school uniforms. | 1.4 | 3.9 | 12.7 | 7.7 | 41.4 | 32.9 |
| 6.5 | Staff in schools need to have full authority to organise teaching and learning programs in the ways they choose. | 1.5 | 4.7 | 31.0 | 11.3 | 34.5 | 16.9 |
| 6.6 | All schools should be able to specialise in ways that will attract students from a wide area. | 1.6 | 3.3 | 20.3 | 17.3 | 44.6 | 13.0 |
| 6.7 | Policies regarding student selection and enrolment should be made at the level of the local school community. | 1.8 | 11.5 | 33.4 | 14.4 | 29.2 | 9.7 |
| 6.8 | Schools should be able to advertise student vacancies throughout their state. | 1.6 | 14.8 | 32.7 | 23.4 | 22.0 | 5.4 |
| 6.9 | Every government school should be authorised to fill staff vacancies by advertising nationally. | 1.4 | 10.7 | 26.0 | 17.9 | 29.1 | 14.8 |
| 6.10 | Government schools must reflect the values of the wider community, not just those found in the school's local area. | 1.2 | 0.4 | 3.1 | 4.9 | 59.0 | 31.3 |
| 6.11 | Parents should be able to send their children to government schools of their choice. | 1.5 | 3.1 | 12.9 | 9.6 | 48.2 | 24.7 |
| 6.12 | There should be a performance bonus added to the salaries of outstanding teachers and administrators. | 1.4 | 15.9 | 22.8 | 14.7 | 23.6 | 21.6 |

NR=no response  SD=strongly disagree  Dis=Disagree  Uns=Unsure  Ag=Agree  SD=Strongly Agree

## Section 7 – Your expectations for the future

| | Please indicate with a TICK (✔) what you expect to see in the year 2010 based on current trends. (Please note change in labels on scale.) | Percentages | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | NR | Hun | unL | Uns | SL | HL |
| | Important decisions will be made in the school rather than at the central office. | 0.9 | 1.4 | 21.4 | 18.1 | 37.8 | 20.3 |
| 7.2 | Government schools will have more children from families experiencing social problems than they do now. | 0.8 | 0.2 | 1.8 | 6.3 | 42.7 | 48.3 |
| 7.3 | Gov't schools will perform well relative to other school sectors on national and state surveys of student performance. | 1.1 | 1.7 | 15.0 | 33.4 | 37.2 | 11.7 |
| 7.4 | It will cost parents more to send their children to government schools. | 0.9 | 0.8 | 7.3 | 14.4 | 52.7 | 23.9 |
| 7.5 | The performance of principals will be assessed by how well they position their school in the market place. | 1.1 | 2.6 | 9.7 | 29.8 | 45.8 | 11.1 |
| 7.6 | The government school sector will have a smaller share of total school enrolments. | 0.9 | 0.7 | 9.3 | 19.8 | 48.2 | 21.2 |
| 7.7 | There will be a greater diversity of school types among government schools. | 0.9 | 0.4 | 6.6 | 19.6 | 57.8 | 14.7 |
| 7.8 | Local communities will have more say about what happens in schools. | 1.0 | 0.4 | 6.8 | 18.2 | 52.7 | 20.9 |
| 7.9 | There will be fewer differences between government and private schools. | 1.0 | 16.7 | 45.5 | 18.6 | 14.5 | 3.8 |
| 7.10 | Schools serving low-income communities will be relatively better resourced than now. | 1.2 | 5.4 | 42.3 | 32.5 | 15.9 | 2.6 |
| 7.11 | The divide between rich schools and poor schools will have widened. | 0.8 | 0.7 | 2.9 | 10.0 | 40.7 | 44.7 |
| 7.12 | Teachers will have better working conditions. | 0.8 | 6.4 | 46.5 | 32.1 | 12.3 | 1.9 |

NR=no response  Hun=Highly unlikely  unL=unLikely  Uns=Unsure  SL=Somewhat Likely  HL=Highly Likely