



# INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

## High Funding, Low Accountability

In considering the accountability of private schools, it was found:<sup>1</sup>

First, that regulation of private schools in Australia is comparatively benign. Second, Australian accountability regimes for public funding of private schools is inconsistent with broad international practice. Internationally, higher levels of funding are usually accompanied by stronger government regulation.

This is despite the fact that Australia funds private schools at a higher level than most other countries.

## Accountability in other Countries

*“...most countries that heavily subsidise private schools also hold them to extensive government regulation and oversight...”<sup>2</sup>*

The kinds of areas for which private schools are held accountable in other countries include:

- Curriculum
- Teaching and Student Achievement
- Student Admissions and Discipline
- Teacher Qualifications, Salary and Employment Conditions

- Tuition, Fees and Finance
- Values

Basic standards, timetables, representation on boards, and record keeping are also variously included as part of the regulatory processes.

## Criticism Ignored

The lack of proper accountability has not gone unnoticed by The Auditors-General of both New South Wales and Victoria, though no action has resulted from their observations.

The Victorian Auditor General in 2000 considered that:

*...the current (accountability) guidelines were developed at a time when the volume of funds distributed were smaller and accountability regimes less tight than is expected today. Greater emphasis is (now) placed on funding agreed program outputs, regardless of whether the programs are delivered within or outside the public sector.<sup>3</sup>*

The Auditor General of NSW, when reporting in 2003 on school accountability and improvement models:

*... expressed reservations about accountability in the private schools sector. To date, these (accountability) provisions have not been imposed by the Government on private schools even when public funds are provided to such schools.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> This Fact Sheet is based on Proposals for Improved Accountability for Government Funding to Private Schools, by Dr. Chris Aulich & Hon. Terry Aulich available at

[www.aefederal.org.au/Debates/Aulichgovtfund.pdf](http://www.aefederal.org.au/Debates/Aulichgovtfund.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CEP 1999 Lessons from other countries about private school aid at [www.ctredpol.org/](http://www.ctredpol.org/)

<sup>3</sup> Auditor General Victoria 2000:4

<sup>4</sup> Audit Office of NSW 1999:3

## Improving Accountability

The following is a table from the Aulich paper which summarises the suggested improved accountability measures:

<i>Suggested Improvements to Accountability Regime</i>	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Suggested Improvements</b>
capital funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend to ensure ownership of capital works is vested in government, especially in cases of change of purpose, bankruptcy or property sale.</li> </ul>
salaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make recurrent funding contingent upon salaries to principals and administrative staff being in line with equivalents in government schools.</li> </ul>
powers of expulsion and entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require expulsion procedures be equivalent to those applying in government schools, especially in relation to final expulsion approval.</li> <li>Require clear written reasons to be given for refusal or inability to accept enrolments of applying students.</li> </ul>
common curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Schools Advisory Council be established in part to articulate a basic framework for curriculum development.</li> </ul>
teacher registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require all teachers to be professionally trained and registered in their appropriate jurisdiction.</li> <li>In reporting requirements, the number of teachers currently untrained should be made public.</li> </ul>
representation on School Boards or Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State or federal governments should be permitted to appoint one representative on each School Board or Council.</li> </ul>
record keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make all records publicly available.</li> <li>Require all records to be a comprehensive picture of the school's performance to show, for example, where recurrent funding has released expenditure for other school priorities (eg promotion, sports facilities).</li> <li>Require schools to notify any cases where public moneys have not been acquitted in a timely or appropriate manner eg diverted to other purposes or placed in an investment account.</li> </ul>
inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspect at least 10% of all private schools including all new schools.</li> <li>Make inspections reports publicly available (eg DEST website).</li> </ul>
democratic, non discriminatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require public reporting of all complaints about a school, especially the school's responses to such complaints.</li> <li>Remove any exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation relating to staff or students.</li> </ul>
opting out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private schools unable or unwilling to fulfil the requirements in this table should be permitted to opt-out of the funding regime and information such as opting out should be made publicly available (eg DEST website).</li> </ul>
outcomes contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide funding for agreed educational outcomes such as acceptable student-teacher ratios.</li> </ul>

*For more detailed information on these and other issues see the other Fact Sheets in this series at:*

<http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Debates/schoolscampaign.html>

*Authorised and printed by P Byrne, Federal President, AEU, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank VIC 3006*