

THE INSIDE STORY

Research is an important pillar of the AEU’s work in representing teachers and promoting professionalism. Its research papers—both in-house and commissioned—sit at the cutting edge of public education and social analysis. **Janine Ogier** reports.

A LAND OF PLENTY

LOUISE WATSON

THE TOTAL OPERATING RESOURCES OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA—A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

Research finding: It’s proven

Private schools are rich and don’t need handouts from Australian government coffers.

Dr Louise Watson, associate professor in the Lifelong Learning Network at the University of Canberra, published research in June comparing the resource levels of public and non-Catholic independent schools.

The independent research, funded in part by an industry partnership with the AEU, found that private schools were over-resourced in comparison with public schools.

RICH MAN, POOR MAN

DAVID HAYWARD & ALEXIS ESPOSTO

AN UNFAIR GO? GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOL EDUCATION

Research finding: It’s confirmed

Australia’s rich schools are getting even richer and non-government schools are becoming dependent on the public purse.

Analysis by associate professor David Hayward and economist Alexis Esposto, from the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University, into funding trends since 1992 showed the biggest beneficiaries have been non-government schools and it is the wealthiest schools that have done the best.

Their independent report entitled *An unfair go? Government funding of*

government and non-government school education was commissioned by the AEU and released in July. The funding trends appear to have been accentuated rather than alleviated by the new socioeconomic-status funding formulae, Hayward and Esposto say.

They are concerned at the lack of transparency in school funding and the absence of standard reporting mechanisms. If you don’t know how the \$23 billion education budget is being spent it is difficult to hold politicians accountable for the way they do things, Esposto says.

To solve glaring problems with official data, the researchers propose that MCEETYA form a new subcommittee to gather timely and accurate school funding data.

But their main recommendations invite a turnaround in principles for funding schools. Esposto says a funding

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benchmark needs to be set for government schools so all students have the same educational opportunities as those who attend the wealthier non-government schools.

For more information:
www.aeufederal.org.au

FAMILY MATTERS

BARBARA PRESTON

THE SOCIAL MAKE-UP OF SCHOOLS

Research finding: It's corroborated

At both primary and secondary levels government schools have a larger proportion of students from low-income families than Catholic and non-government schools.

Independent researcher Barbara Preston's report *The social make-up of schools* was commissioned by the AEU and published in December 2003 using data from the 2003 census.

It's widely recognised that matters such as family income, Indigenous status and family type have an impact on the qualitative and quantitative educational needs of students.

non-government schools have a large proportion, with Catholic schools in between.

A majority of primary school students in all family income ranges attend government schools, the data showed. However, 80 per cent of primary students with low family incomes attend government schools compared with fewer than 60 per cent of those in high-income families.

At the secondary level the difference between the income groups is even more marked.

Nationally, around 90 per cent of Indigenous students with very

Nationally, around 90 per cent of Indigenous students with very low family incomes attend government schools.

Preston assessed the social make-up of schools in the government, Catholic and non-government sectors to help inform the policies of school authorities, governments and others.

The statistics show that government schools have a lower proportion of students from high-income families, non-Catholic

low family incomes attend government schools.

The data also showed that students in one-parent families are much more likely to attend government schools if the family income is low.

For more information:
www.aefederal.org.au/Debates/bprestonsch.pdf ►

Over 1,000 private schools were surveyed about their tuition fees and that information was combined in a database with details of Australian Government grants and state and territory government grants.

It is the first time the income data has been published together and will provide a factual basis for the debate about appropriate levels of public funding for private schools.

"We have got the most accurate estimate ever of the operating resources of private schools in Australia," Watson says.

As the Coalition government's policy justification for funding private schools is on a "needs" basis, the information is critical in the assessment of whether the Coalition is achieving its policy goals, says Watson.

In the heated debate over the Howard government's funding for private schools there's now evidence to back up arguments that private schools don't "need" the money.

For more information:
www.canberra.edu.au/lifelong



IT'S APPLES AND PEARS

TREVOR COBBOLD

ESTIMATES OF FUTURE FUNDING OF NON-GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Research finding: It's flawed

The use of inaccurate methodologies to estimate future school funding hides the increasing advantage non-government schools have over government schools.

Public policy issues consultant Trevor Cobbold has reviewed the methodologies used by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science

All national measures of government school funding are based on expenditure, while non-government school funding is reported in both income and expenditure terms.

Cobbold concluded that the estimates of future funding of non-government schools by the Senate Committee and DEST are flawed because they are based on income rather than expenditure. They underestimate private sector funding because they do not include borrowing by private schools.

Cobbold also found that the social composition of enrolments means government schools face

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and Training (DEST) to estimate future school funding.

His report *Estimates of future funding of non-government and government schools* was commissioned by the AEU and published in November 2003.

Cobbold reported that the existence of several different measures has created confusion about trends and comparisons in school funding, which bedevils public debate and makes it difficult to establish common ground in comparing levels of expenditure by different school systems and sectors.

A basic issue in comparing funding is whether to use income or expenditure data, Cobbold says.

higher costs in providing equitable student outcomes. So the funding levels of the two sectors need to be weighted for these differential costs in order to compare the effective resource levels.

According to Cobbold's research, by 2003–2004 non-government schools will have increased their advantage in total funding over government schools from about 7 to 8 per cent in 2000–2001 to 12 to 17 per cent.

His estimates are based on expenditure data and are significantly different to those of DEST.

For more information:
www.aeufederal.org.au/Debates/estfundnonggov.pdf

THE PRIVATE PUSH

JANE NICHOLLS

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS 1996–2004

Research finding: It's true

The Coalition government has deliberately acted to facilitate the expansion of the Australian private school sector.

In her research, education policy consultant Jane Nicholls aimed to analyse and critique the implementation and administration of programs providing financial support to non-government schools.

Her research paper, *Australian Government funding programs for private schools 1996–2004* which was commissioned by the AEU, was published in March.

She found that the Howard government has pursued a policy designed to smooth the way for the establishment of new private schools and to enable enrolments in existing ones to grow.

This has been accomplished by formally deregulating the sector, by setting in place a funding mechanism designed to provide additional financial support to private schools, and by easing administrative controls and procedures, she says.

Issues she identified include:

- ambiguity in the “not-for profit” requirement
- weak accountability and transparency provisions
- easy availability of recurrent grants
- inadequate assessment of eligibility for establishment grants
- inappropriate allocation of emergency financial assistance
- capital grants providing lavish funding.

Not only do many private schools receive substantial funding, but they don't have to account for expenditure or meet stringent eligibility criteria, Nicholls says.

For more information: www.aeufederal.org.au/Debates/jnicholsfund2004.pdf ■

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