

## **Victorian Student Representative Council**

### **Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment**

### **Inquiry into the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017**

May 2017

## **About VicSRC**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body representing students in Victoria. The VicSRC's vision is a world where all children and young people have access to education that is student-led, student driven and student focussed. The organisation exists to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET).

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### **VicSRC Vision**

A world where all students have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused.

### **VicSRC Mission**

The VicSRC is the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria. We strive for a world where all learners have access to education that is student-led, student-driven and student-focused. We exist to empower all student voices to be valued in every aspect of education.

The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). The VicSRC provides resources, events, teacher professional development, and support to principals, teachers and students.

### **Commentary**

All students have a right to access high-quality teaching, facilities and resources. Needs-based funding is key to helping achieve this. Targeted measures also have a role to play in addressing disadvantage and inequity across school communities.

High-quality facilities and human resources are key assets for schools. Access to high-quality facilities not only supports teachers in their work, but can also encourage students to hold high expectations of learning outcomes and take pride in their school environment. However, even with current needs-based funding programs,<sup>i</sup> resources within schools still vary a great deal.

Inequity in resource provision has a substantial impact on student outcomes across the country. Students in disadvantaged areas still have less access to resources and quality facilities, and significant inequity still exists between the public and private sectors within the Victorian education system. Students identify inequality as a key issue of concern to them, and would like to see all young people receive a high quality education.<sup>ii</sup>

Research tells us that socio-economic status continues to have a strong impact on education results. Tracking academic outcomes for students with similar capabilities has shown that students in disadvantaged schools are making significantly less progress than students in more advantaged schools.<sup>iii</sup>

Adequate funding is also essential in making sure teachers are supported in the profession. At present, not all schools can attract and retain quality staff, which has an impact on students' opportunities and outcomes. Students do best when schools have sufficient funding to give teachers appropriate workloads, offer them appropriate support structures, enable them to provide individual attention to students, and facilitate their professional development.

A comprehensive needs-based funding approach is the best way to provide good quality facilities for all students. As the Gonski Report (2011) recommended, government funding should be given to schools according to their needs. The funding given to each school should be determined by the challenges it faces, given its existing facilities and the needs of the students it teaches. Positive discrimination should be applied so that schools that need the most help are prioritised to receive it.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Targets**

- Schools and education are viewed as an investment, not an expense. This should be a bi-partisan issue and not a political football.
- Needs-based funding methods continue to underpin funding arrangements for education to ensure that all students have access to a quality education regardless of ability, socio-economic status, location or other indicators of disadvantage.
- Positive discrimination measures are adopted in funding frameworks, to ensure that schools with the highest needs are prioritised.
- Students are involved in decision-making processes relating to the allocation of resources. This can happen in a range of ways, such as student forums through which students can learn more about facilities and share their ideas on improvements, through to student representation on school councils and their finance subcommittees, and student representation on the state-wide School Policy and Funding Advisory Council.
- There is increased transparency and openness around funding and the allocation of resources to ensure that funding is fair, transparent and easy to understand for students and the community.

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<sup>i</sup> In its *Education State: Schools policy*, the Victorian Government committed both to funding its obligations under the Gonski agreement and providing substantial extra funding to schools on a needs basis.

<sup>ii</sup> Over a number of years, Victorian school students elected to the VicSRC have chosen issues of inequality in facilities and funding as a key concern. In 2015 they voted the issue as one of eight key issues of concern to them.

<sup>iii</sup> Gross, P., Sonnemann, J., Chisholm, C., Nelson, L., 2016, *Widening gaps: what NAPLAN tells us about student progress*, Grattan Institute.

<sup>iv</sup> David Gonski AC, Ken Boston AO, Kathryn Greiner AO, Carmen Lawrence, Bill Scales AO, Peter Tannock AM, *Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011, p.64,100.