

Review of needs-based funding requirements 2019–public submission

Western Australia Department of Education

Stakeholder type: Approved system authority

Jurisdiction: Western Australia

Summary

The Western Australian Department of Education (Department) welcomes the review of the needs-based funding requirements and notes the iterative process with the Commonwealth Department of Education and National School Resourcing Board (Board).

The Department acknowledges the Australian Government recognises that a needs-based funding arrangement is not required to mirror the School Resourcing Standard (SRS) and thus, supports full flexibility in terms of the approved system authority to determine how funds provided by the SRS are utilised. From the Department's perspective, flexibility should not be levelled. Although we support requests for evidence to show what levels of per capita allocations and loadings actually appear to work in terms of resulting in more equivalent student outcomes, the determination of the levels of funding for student per capita allocations and loadings, including weightings must be left to the approved system authority.

The flexibility allowed by subsection 78(5) of the Australian Education Act 2013 provides reasonable prescription by the Australian Government. The Department would support the Australian Government to establishing good-practice principles for a needs-based funding arrangement but is of the opinion that the current level of prescription is reasonable and the right balance in the context of jurisdictional responsibilities. A key element of any guidance and assessing compliance is the satisfaction that the approved system authority has a fair, responsive, flexible and transparent arrangement to distribute funds.

The Department is fully transparent in terms of its needs-based funding requirements and does not have an issue with the current level of transparency. Careful consideration would need to be given to any additional transparency requirements to determine whether it would be beneficial to the approved system authority and the general public.

The Department considers the needs-based funding arrangements that it has made publicly available are acceptable and does not have any issues with providing further information, if it was considered useful for the general public.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this review.

Submission

The Western Australian Department of Education (Department) welcomes the review of the needs-based funding requirements and notes the iterative process with the Commonwealth Department of Education and National School Resourcing Board (Board).

Focus Question 1

The Department acknowledges the Australian Government recognises that a needs-based funding arrangement is not required to mirror the School Resourcing Standard (SRS) and thus, supports full flexibility in terms of the approved system authority to determine how funds provided by the SRS are distributed to schools. It is important the flexibility provides for approved system authorities to determine their own budget framework and methodology of distributing funds through its own needs-based funding model. Although the integrity of a needs-based funding model requires that a significant majority of funding is allocated through the model, the

approved system authority should retain funding to manage costs, which for efficiency and economy are better managed at a system level.

From the Department's perspective, flexibility should not be levelled. Although, we support requests for evidence to show what levels of per capita allocations and loadings actually appear to work in terms of resulting in more equivalent student outcomes, the determination of the levels of funding for student per capita allocations and loadings, including weightings, must be left to the approved system authority.

It is essential that approved system authorities respond to the differences in the circumstances of individual schools and their students. We must be able to act quickly on suggested improvements and/or refinements. Thus, it is essential the capacity for assessing and controlling the design and use of its funding model sits with the approved system authority.

Focus Questions 2, 3 and 4

The flexibility allowed by subsection 78(5) of the *Australian Education Act 2013* provides reasonable prescription by the Australian Government. The Department would support the Australian Government establishing good-practice principles for a needs-based funding arrangement but is of the opinion that the current level of prescription is reasonable and the right balance in the context of jurisdictional responsibilities. A key element of any guidance and assessing compliance is the satisfaction that the approved system authority has a fair, responsive, flexible and transparent arrangement to distribute funds.

Focus Question 5

The Department is fully transparent in terms of its needs-based funding requirements and does not have an issue with the current level of transparency. Careful consideration would need to be given to any additional transparency requirements to determine whether it would be beneficial to the approved system authority and the general public.

The provision of funding to Western Australian public schools through its Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM) is fair, responsive, flexible and transparent, which includes funding for:

- each student enrolled in a school, with different amounts depending on the year level of the student;
- school characteristics, such as where a school is located and the size of the school;
- equity allocations for:
 - Aboriginal students;
 - students from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds;
 - students with English as an additional language;
- students with disability to address their specific learning needs
- targeted initiatives in schools providing specific services and programs;
- specialist schools (e.g. Agricultural Colleges, Remote Schools);
- transition funds; and
- school costs incurred centrally (e.g. workers compensation insurance, school maintenance and all leave costs associated with school staff).

With the control at the school level, public school principals make decisions about where and how they use funds. They determine how much of their budget is spent on salaries and how much is spent on the programs and services their students need. This allows them to be much more responsive to the needs of students.

School principals understand how the SCFM works and what it means for schools. Each public school principal is required to endorse a funding agreement in consultation with the school's Board/Council, which outlines their accountability expectations for managing the funding to the school.

The Department does not consider it appropriate to provide details of the distribution of Commonwealth Government funding to each school, broken down on a base per student amount and specific student and school loadings because it can easily result in confusion with the public school SCFM allocations.

Focus Question 6

The Department considers the needs-based funding arrangements that are publicly available are acceptable and does not have any issues with providing further information, if it was considered useful for the general public.

The Department's internet site provides the public with information and stories of how schools manage their finances. Funding allocations through the Student-centred Funding model (SCFM) provided for each school are available at the Department's Schools online internet site.

The recent evaluation of the SCFM prepared by the Nous Group and the Centre for International Research on Education Systems is available in the public domain on the Department's website.

The Department does not consider it appropriate to provide details of the distribution of Commonwealth Government funding to each school, broken down on a base per student amount and specific student and school loadings. However, each public school in Western Australia is required to prepare and publish an annual School Report, which includes details of its annual funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this review.