

11 April 2018

Senator Richard Di Natale
Leader, Australian Greens
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Senate
Parliament House
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Re: School Funding

Dear Senator Di Natale

I read with interest your speech to the National Press Club on 4 April 2018, and the media release issued by your colleague Senator Hanson-Young on 3 April 2018 ('Education inequality shows needs-based funding isn't enough').

I appreciate your party's commitment to a properly funded education system for all Australian students.

Those who work in Independent schools share your belief that a quality education is a fundamental right of all school students.

I'm concerned, however, that your speech and Senator Hanson-Young's media release repeat claims that are based on a misunderstanding about how Independent schools are funded.

In particular, in your speech you stated that the Greens were 'the only party that says not one cent should flow from Treasury to Trinity's boat shed'.

Making a similar point, Senator Hanson-Young's release refers to 'wealthy' schools that 'demand public money for upgrading a sports field or constructing a rowing shed'.

The fact is that no Independent schools make such demands on the public purse. Independent schools receive very little government funding for capital works, which are overwhelmingly funded by parents and other school fund raising efforts.

The 2016, Independent schools in Victoria received just \$18 million in government grants for capital works. Two thirds of this funding went to schools enrolling students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This money is used for urgent work on essential facilities, like class rooms.

The claim that government funding for Independent schools is used to pay for facilities like rowing sheds is, unfortunately, an enduring myth.



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Instead, this funding, allocated on the basis of student need, goes towards recurrent expenditure, largely teacher salaries. The 'wealthiest' schools in fact receive the least government recurrent funding, which comes with strict rules which mean it can not be used for capital works.

Another enduring myth, alluded to in Senator Hanson-Young's release, is that Independent schools are the preserve of a privileged few.

The reality is that close to half of the 218 Independent schools in Victoria enrol students from communities in the lower socio-economic bands. These schools receive half of the total government funding that goes to Independent schools in the state.

Victorian Independent schools enrol some 145,000 students from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. More than half of these students come from families on low to medium incomes. They reflect the wide diversity of Australian society. These schools are themselves widely diverse, operating under more than 20 religious, secular and philosophical approaches to education.

In recent years the largest growth in our sector has been among low-fee schools. These schools do not fit a stereotype; in fact, their diversity is one of their defining characteristics. This diversity meets the differing expectations of parents and the individual needs of their children.

Unlike other sectors in non-government education, ISV does not presume to tell parents how they should vote. Instead, we respect their diversity – and our obligations as an organisation registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. At the same time, we are aware of independent research which indicates a significant proportion of parents who chose Independent schools have voted for your party. Again, this research challenges another stereotype that's often attached to Independent education.

Once again, I want to acknowledge your sincere interest in these matters.

I also want you to know that I and members of my staff are available to talk to you or your staff at any time you would like to discuss these and other education issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Green
Chief Executive

Cc: Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, E: senator.hanson-young@aph.gov.au