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## SMH article grossly inaccurate and deliberately misleading

The article published in the Sydney Morning Herald, “Taxpayers fund private school orchestra pits and swimming pools”, contains assertions about independent schools’ use of government funds that are grossly inaccurate and appears to have been designed to deliberately mislead readers.

Following a request from the writer of the article, AISNSW provided a number of comments that clearly refuted the suggestion that any of the schools named have used government recurrent funding for purposes other than for what it is intended. These comments were not included or reflected in the article.

The claim that recurrent funds have been used by schools to ‘offset’ the cost of capital projects planned by the schools has no basis in fact whatsoever and is either a fundamental misunderstanding or deliberate misinterpretation of how schools are able to use such funding.

Independent schools must account for the use of funds provided by state and federal governments and provide annual audited statements to demonstrate that they have been used for the provision of education. This includes the payment of teacher salaries, curriculum-related and general school running costs which usually represent 70 per cent or more of a school’s running costs.

The recurrent funding provided to the schools in question is a relatively small proportion of their overall income. To suggest that these funds are used to offset building costs simply doesn’t make sense when the schools undertake separate fundraising activities for this purpose. The payment of school fees by parents represents a significantly higher proportion of the income received by these schools

Other aspects of the article that are either erroneous or just plain wrong include:

- The suggestion that the schools named receive separate dedicated capital funding from the government.

**FACT: none of the schools mentioned in the article have received funding under either the Federal or NSW government’s capital funding programs during the period mentioned (2009 to 2014).**

- Conflating government funding provided under the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program with general capital works funding.

**FACT: the BER Program was an economic stimulus program designed to avoid Australia falling into recession during the global financial crisis. Its objectives were very different to other capital works programs and the independent schools sector was also shown to have used BER funds extremely efficiently. Using figures from MySchool that include funding allocated under this program is misleading.**

- The comment by the NSW Greens MP, David Shoebridge, that funding for independent schools somehow impacts on the funding allocated to government schools.

**FACT: funding formulas and allocations for government and non-government schools are entirely separate, with no relationship between the two. An increase in funding to non-government schools does not correspond to a decrease in funding for government schools, and vice versa.**

- The implication in the article that the schools identified are receiving high levels of government funding.

**FACT: To be accurate, any valid assessment of the government funding received by schools must be based on the amount of funding provided per student. MySchool data shows that, compared to the annual average of \$17,000 per secondary school student in a New South Wales government school, the schools mentioned in the article received:**

- Trinity Grammar School – an average of \$5,267 per student over 2012-14
- Redlands - \$2,761 per student (ave. 2012-2014)
- The King's School - \$4,803 per student (ave. 2012-2014)
- St Catherine's School - \$4,874 per student (ave. 2012-2014)

It is clear from the above figures that students attending independent schools around Australia save the taxpayer billions of dollars annually.

The article also fails to acknowledge that funds raised for capital projects by Independent school communities represent the efforts of parents who are investing in their children's education, as well as long term planning and investment strategies by schools. The majority of Independent schools receive either very little or no government funding at all for capital purposes and must maintain, refurbish and upgrade their facilities from privately raised funds.

These significant investments by parents, in addition to the fees that they choose to pay out of their after-tax income for the education of their children, saves the taxpayer massive amounts of money and should be encouraged. These capital projects also generate jobs and boost local economies.

Recurrent funding from governments is the base funding that every Australian student is entitled to as a right of citizenship, with students in well-resourced schools attracting considerably lower levels of government funding than other students. The current and previous funding systems both reflect a needs-based approach to school funding and any suggestion to the contrary demonstrates a lack of understanding of how school funding in Australia operates.

The only conclusion to be drawn from the article and its sensationalist headline is that it has deliberately set out to mislead readers by presenting an unbalanced and inaccurate view of the nature of schools funding. The inaccuracies and half-truths contained throughout the article only serve to fuel unnecessarily divisive and unproductive debates about school funding.

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