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03 NOV 2014

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MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: ETHNIC SCHOOLS BOARD

29 October 2014

Hon Jennifer Rankine MP
Minister for Education and Child Development
Level 1 Education Centre
31 Flinders Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 17 October 2014 inviting me, as Chairman of the Ethnic Schools Board (ESB), to contribute to the next level of consultation on the review of boards and committees.

I have placed the needs of ethnic schools and your protection as Minister as my highest priorities in considering my further response.

Ethnic Schools receive more than \$1.5 million of government funding annually. South Australian taxpayers are entitled to be assured that this amount of money is being used in quality programs, conducted by well organised ethnic schools where the safety and well-being of students and teaching personnel are protected.

At the time of the development of the Child Development and Well Being Bill the Ethnic Schools Board recommended that ethnic schools should not be included with mainstream schools and centres to be included in the work of the Education and Early Childhood Registration and Standards Board. The reasons for that decision were that ethnic schools deliver only one learning area, through the work of mainly volunteers in classes that operate for 2-3 hours per week. The regulation and registration of ethnic schools through the registration process conducted by the Ethnic Schools Board was considered a viable alternative of monitoring.

The Ethnic Schools Board conducts 20-23 registration visits per year in addition to visits to new schools seeking provisional registration. The ESB is currently working with nine communities wanting to establish new schools. The Executive Officer of the Board attends a majority of visits usually together with another Board member. The Board is fortunate that most of its members have firsthand experience of ethnic schools. Six of the ten appointed Board members also work in mainstream education. They therefore create an informed and experienced registration team.

The proposal to possibly move the registration function to The Ethnic Schools Association of SA Inc (ESA) would place this important responsibility in the hands of a group where only two persons have any experience of conducting the registration process and where only one of those is an educator. In addition the entire office staff of ESA is new this year, with two of the three members having only taken up their positions

since July 2014. My understanding is that they are struggling to put office procedures into order as well as addressing ambitious plans for reform and high profile activities in the coming year. I seriously question whether ESA has the capacity to undertake this task with the rigour that is required in addition to all of the other tasks it is undertaking. The registration task not being undertaken well could mean that child protection and other compliance matters will be at risk. I therefore reject the proposal that the registration function should be relocated to ESA. I strongly advocate that this function remain with the ESB.

Under the Statement of Collaboration between DECD, ESA and the Board signed in October 2007 ethnic schools are recognised as complementary providers of Languages education. Currently ethnic schools conduct classes in 52 different languages. If we remove from that number the nine languages taught in the mainstream and the three additional community languages that are addressed through national curriculum, then ethnic schools still contribute a further 40 languages to increase the language access and choice for children and young people in South Australia.

Ethnic schools are preparing 120 students for SACE in 2014. The largest numbers are from the Vietnamese, Sudanese and Russian communities. This shows one example of the importance of ethnic schools in the broader languages education picture. In the current international climate, where countries are increasingly involved in addressing global problems, we can never accurately predict which languages and cultural experiences will be the most useful for Australia in the future. Therefore it is important to have access to as wide a range of languages as possible. Ethnic schools provide a strong contribution to the availability of an extensive range of languages. They do so at a relatively low cost, and not withstanding that, they are very low maintenance and save the government substantially. In addition, the Ethnic Schools Board contributes significantly to the quality of ethnic schools which deliver these programs.

Throughout its existence the ESB has worked effectively with successive waves of migrants. The Board has been able to coordinate its resources and adapt these to the different circumstances of each group. Demise or subsuming of the ESB would lose this extensive knowledge and experience.

If the ESB in total or in part was to be moved to the South Australia Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (SAMEAC) the agenda of the ESB would struggle against other more urgent and pressing demands which could certainly form the work of a combined ESB/ Multicultural Education Committee (MEC). Addressing these demands under the proposed merger would cost the twenty five years of ESB work and the ESB identity without a really viable alternative to address this loss. This comment does not negate the need for projects such as language and multicultural policies for South Australia, nor the possible alignment of DECD first language and development programs with ethnic school programs. They should occur without the loss of ESB budget or focus. The development of state policies for languages and multiculturalism could be a task led by MEC. The coordination of first language maintenance and development providers, both in-hours and out-of-hours, could be led by the ESB.

If there must be a merged ESB/MEC, then I propose that such a group remains located with ONGSS, together with the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities. There will be some distinct similarities in the work of both groups which could provide mutual support.

The ESB experience of ONGSS support in the area of financial management has been very positive. The ONGSS Corporate Team has successfully assisted with ESB funding over the last two years. Under ONGSS guidance a number of audits have taken place and ESB has been able to improve its data and processes. All of this augurs well for the future and will enable the ESB to review and further streamline its processes.

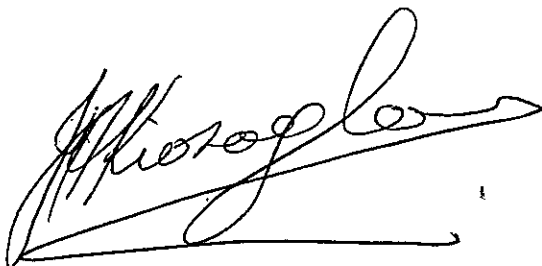
Politically I recommend that ESB remains with the Minister for Education. While the creation of ethnic schools to maintain and develop background languages is a key strategy in meeting South Australia's commitment to multiculturalism, the nature of the work of ethnic schools is broader. It contributes strongly to educational outcomes for the State, not only through achievements in the areas of language and culture but also in the transfer of skills between one language and another and in the development of a positive identity which is so crucial for success in life in general.

I believe that reviewing ethnic schools and thereby the work of the Ethnic Schools Board will show the distance ethnic schools have travelled in the recent years. I suggest that such a review be carried out by a totally independent body rather than by one which could be considered to have a pre-conceived agenda.

Finally, in the event of a merged ESB/MEC, I would be prepared to accept the appointment of Chairman for whatever period of time you determine. Within this time frame I would identify a suitable candidate for your consideration to succeed me, allowing time for this person to be subsequently appointed and inducted.

I would be happy to meet with you or your adviser to discuss and elaborate on the contents of this response, should you so require.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John A Kiosoglous', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John A Kiosoglous MBE, KSA, AE
CHAIRMAN, ETHNIC SCHOOLS BOARD