



*everyone's family*

**The Smith Family's submission to the  
NSW Government's  
*Great Teaching, Inspired Learning*  
Discussion paper**

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**Contact person:**

Theresa Collignon

General Manager - NSW & ACT

Level1, 239 Church St, Parramatta, 2150

Ph 02 9895 1201

Email: [Theresa.Collignon@thesmithfamily.com.au](mailto:Theresa.Collignon@thesmithfamily.com.au)

## 1. Background on The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national, independent charity committed to increasing the educational participation and achievement of Australian children and young people in need. Our belief is that every child deserves a chance and our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need, by providing long-term support for their participation in education.

The Smith Family provides holistic and long-term support for children and young people, from pre-school, through primary and secondary school and on to tertiary studies. We understand, and aim to positively enhance, the multiple influences on the wellbeing of children and young people, including their:

- Personal characteristics/attributes
- Family
- Peers
- Learning and care institutions, eg schools, early learning and care centres
- Community and society.

In 2011-12, The Smith Family worked in 97 communities and supported over 106,000 children, young people and parents/carers nationally. This included:

- Over 34,000 young people on an educational scholarship.
- Close to 39,000 children, young people and parents/carers through our *Learning for life* suite of programs. These programs include early literacy and numeracy programs (*Let's Read* and *Let's Count*), a peer mentoring reading program (*Student 2 Student*), primary and secondary after school support (*Learning Clubs*) and an on-line mentoring program for high school students to support their career and post-school plans (*i-Track*).
- A further close to 33,000 children, young people and parents/carers supported through a range of government funded programs such as the Commonwealth Government's *Communities for Children* and *Partnership Brokers* initiatives.
- Fourteen percent of the young people we support identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In New South Wales, The Smith Family:

- Works in 33 communities.
- Supports around 10,000 children and young people annually on an educational scholarship, 17.5% of whom identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.
- Many more children, young people and parents/carers are also supported through a range of programs aimed to support educational participation. These programs include early literacy and numeracy programs, a peer mentoring reading program, primary and secondary after school support and a series of career and post-school options programs to support career and post-school plans (including university experience days and careers days with corporate partners).

The Smith Family has identified three long-term high level outcomes as the focus of its work with disadvantaged children and young people. They are to:

- Increase school attendance to greater than or equal to 90%.
- Increase the proportion of Year 10 students who advance to Year 12 or equivalent.
- Increase the proportion of young people in education, training and/or work.

These are complementary to the educational and transitional goals identified by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The range of programs and support we offer across the life course of children and young people, targeting different stages of their development, as well as providing supports to their families and communities, are all focused on supporting children and young people to achieve these outcomes. A more detailed outcomes framework is included at Attachment A.

This submission draws on The Smith Family's long history of both delivering programs to children, young people and their families, and undertaking research, evaluation and policy development in this area. Given The Smith Family's broad systems approach, this submission will first identify some of the broader issues and approaches which can help to contribute to 'inspired learning', before turning to some more micro issues.

## **2. Context for this discussion paper: The educational challenge facing NSW and Australia**

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy discussions regarding how 'inspired learning' can be the hallmark of the educational experience of all children and young people in NSW. It would urge that policy discussions acknowledge that a comprehensive perspective is required to achieve this goal, rather than assuming a focus on 'great teaching' alone will be sufficient. The Smith Family would also argue that these policy discussions should also take into account the significant educational challenges currently facing the state, and indeed the nation as a whole.

### *Australia's future prosperity*

The key to NSW and indeed Australia's economic and social wellbeing, now and into the future, is a highly educated population. This is the foundation for ensuring we are able to meet the challenges and opportunities of a highly volatile global economy. As the Productivity Commission has recently noted:

*A well-performing schooling system is fundamental to Australia's future....It is essential to foster the skills, innovativeness and adaptability needed to prosper in competitive global markets and to encourage more people to enter and remain in the workforce. Just as importantly, a well performing schooling system can promote equality of opportunity, facilitate a cohesive and inclusive society, and provide personal enrichment for individuals (Productivity Commission, 2012).*

As the delivery of the schooling system lies within the responsibility of state governments, they have a particularly important role in ensuring Australia's future wellbeing. The emphasis of the Productivity Commission on the 'schooling system' is important context for this current policy discussion – teacher quality is an important component, but it is but one component which needs to be conceptually and practically integrated into systems thinking and strategies.

### *Not all young Australians are achieving positive outcomes*

Despite recent educational reforms, significant numbers of young Australians are not achieving key educational outcomes and making positive transitions to further education, training and employment. This is at a time when the educational performance of a number of our neighbours has improved. The Productivity Commission recently noted that Australia's schooling system 'is serving many, but not all students well' (Productivity Commission, 2012, p 41). Data which highlights the educational challenge facing Australia includes:

- Year 12 completion rates are significantly lower for Australian students from low SES than for students from high SES – 56% compared to 75% (DEEWR, 2011).
- Thirty one percent of Indigenous Year 5 students are below the national minimum standard for reading, compared to only 5% of non-Indigenous students (ACARA, 2011).

The 2010 COAG Reform Council Report highlights some of the educational challenges particularly facing NSW:

- Between 2008 and 2010 NSW experienced a decline in NAPLAN Yr 9 reading results and in Yr 3, 7 and 9 numeracy results.
- Between 2003 and 2009, mathematical literacy for NSW students fell significantly, as measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).
- Between 2008 and 2010 there were decreases in the proportion of Year 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Yr 9 who were at or above the NAPLAN minimum reading, writing and numeracy standards. (COAG Reform Council, 2011)

Of particular concern to The Smith Family is the fact that the relationship between student background and educational outcomes is more pronounced in Australia than in other comparable, high performing OECD countries and the performance gap between Australia's low SES and high SES students is wider than the OECD average. As the Productivity Commission has noted:

*Australia does not perform as well as comparable countries in giving students equal opportunity to realise their educational potential, irrespective of their background or ability. The resulting educational disadvantage is particularly evident among Australian students who are Indigenous, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, have a disability or other special needs, or reside in a rural or remote area (Productivity Commission, 2012, p 41).*

The COAG Reform Council (2011) has also highlighted that this is an issue in NSW. Analysis of NAPLAN data shows that at an aggregate level the performance of students whose parents' highest education was Year 11 or below is significantly below (around 17% for Year 9 students), the performance of students whose parents had completed a degree or higher qualification.

The individual and collective impact on NSW and Australia of not addressing this situation is significant. Young people with poor educational outcomes are more likely to experience unemployment and poorer health outcomes, and rely more heavily on income support payments. This creates additional economic and social costs for individuals and the community as a whole.

### **3. Factors influencing student outcomes**

Any efforts aimed at achieving the goal of 'inspired learning' for all children and young people in NSW must be cognisant of the multiple factors which influence student outcomes. Professor John Hattie's meta-analysis is one of the most frequently referenced studies with regards to student achievement and is cited by the Discussion Paper. It examines six factors (the child, home, school, teacher, curriculum and approaches to teaching) and assesses their contributions to achievement. While there are acknowledged inherent strengths and limitations to a meta-analysis, Professor Hattie's work offers important insights on the range of factors which impact on outcomes. This work is supported by the ecological framework for children's development (first articulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1974) which underpins the work of The Smith Family.

A synthesis of Professor Hattie's research noted that:

*The child or student brings to school factors that influence achievement (from preschool, home, and genetics) as well as a set of personal dispositions that can have marked effect on the outcomes of schooling. The home can either nurture and support achievement of students, or it can be harmful and destructive. Hattie also suggests that positive expectations from the parents can be critical to the success of children....In regards to the school, his research suggests that the most powerful effects relate to features within the school, such as the climate of the classroom, peer influences, and the lack of disruptive students in the classroom. There are a number of*

*teacher contributions to student learning, such as teacher expectations; teachers' conception of teaching; and teacher openness. Hattie argues that the most critical aspect contributed by the teacher is the quality of their teaching as perceived by the students (Victorian DEECD, 2010).*

The Discussion paper acknowledges the 'in-school' dimension of teaching, without acknowledging the broader range of factors that Professor Hattie's work notes impact on student outcomes or the relative weight of those factors. Professor Hattie notes that students account for 'about 50% of the variance of achievement', while 'teachers account for about 30% of the variance. It is what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation' (Hattie, 2003). Without taking into account the broader range of factors which impact, policy initiatives, including those aimed at improving teacher quality, may fail to achieve the maximum impact possible. A consideration for this discussion paper should also include how can teachers, schools and the education system as a whole better support the 'out of school' determinants of educational performance.

Thus, while the role of teachers and what they do in the classroom is important in improving educational outcomes, a much broader perspective is required if young people in NSW are to be 'inspired learners'. As the Productivity Commission noted 'given the varied and complex ways in which these factors can influence students' educational experiences, schools workforce policy is just one part of a wider suite of responses needed to address educational disadvantage' (Productivity Commission, 2012 p 254). While The Smith Family understands that this Discussion Paper is focused on teaching and teachers, the ultimate goal is improved outcomes for children and young people, so such policy discussions need to sit within a much broader systems framework which reflects available evidence and good practice.

#### **4. Hearing directly from young people**

##### *Making a difference*

The Smith Family welcomes the efforts taken by this policy process to include the direct voices and experiences of young people themselves, who are after all the major 'participants' in NSW's schooling system and have much to gain if their educational experience can be enhanced. The Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW, in partnership with a range of government and non-government organisations, including The Smith Family, has recently concluded the four year *Making a difference* research project which explored young people's experiences of economic adversity. The study involved interviews with close to 100 economically disadvantaged young people living in eight communities across Australia, (including in NSW), as well as interviews with 13 parents/carers and 24 service providers. These in-depth interviews took place over an 18 month period. The research explored the lived experiences of these young people and sought to bring their voices to discussions regarding poverty and disadvantage. It had a particular focus on locational and educational disadvantage and the interplay between the quality of home, neighbourhood and school environments, and disadvantage.

The findings from the report highlight that Australia still has some way to go if we are to realise the agreed goals for all young Australians articulated in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and signed off by both the Commonwealth and all State and Territory governments (MCEETYA, 2008). *Making a difference* found that young people:

- Chose schools and subjects where costs were lower, in order to place as small a financial burden on their families as possible. This included them opting to not do subjects they were naturally interested in or gifted at, because of costs. For some, this resulted in less engagement in school, decreased self esteem and wellbeing, and more limited future opportunities.

- Chose not to go on school excursions or camps, despite the learning and peer engagement opportunities they provided, because of costs.
- Didn't participate in sports or extracurricular activities because of costs.
- Adapted their preferences re schools, subjects and extracurricular activities.
- Who regularly missed out on the experiences and activities accessible to their peers, narrowed their interests and desires as a way of protecting themselves and their parents from having to say 'no'.

The young people who participated in the *Making a difference* research connected their own well-being deeply with that of their families. Feeling recognised and respected as part of these units, including within the school context, was very important for them. Families too found it easier to have faith in investing in their children's education (both financially and emotionally) when schools communicated respect for them as people and as citizens. This has significant implications not only for how individual teachers interact with students and families but also how schools and the system as a whole works with families from more difficult circumstances. Unless a strengths-based approach is taken, which aims to foster mutually respectful relationships, then it is highly unlikely that 'inspired learning' will occur. Working in such a way needs to be seen as a core competency for all teachers.

Many young people in the *Making a difference* project felt that their parents had no power as advocates, that their skills and knowledge were not validated in the school system, and that when they advocated on their behalf, they were not listened to. Importantly, where teachers made efforts to provide learning experiences that promoted intellectual quality, build respectful relationships, including with families, these were visible to and appreciated by students. Young people valued approachability in school personnel and spoke highly of those who would take the time to discuss personal, learning and career trajectories and strategies with them. This perhaps picks up some of what Hattie has found is important for teachers – ie what 'they do and care about...is very powerful in this learning equation.'

The *Making a difference* research also found that:

- Where schools and community facilities were not well maintained, young people took that as a reflection on the level of respect in which they were held.
- Where learning environments were poorly maintained, young people were less likely to articulate a strong sense of themselves as learners or to sense they were valued by the school or school personnel.

The communities where many of the young people lived were characterised by a scarcity of services and opportunities such as sport and recreational facilities, public spaces, quality housing, good transport, and access to adequate and secure employment. Local infrastructure and services provided by councils, state and federal governments shape the local dynamics which impact on young people's learning. These are part of the critical fabric which is needed to complement what is happening in schools. In areas where there are shortfalls in these areas of provision, *Making a difference* found that there is an undue burden placed on schools which are the main and sometimes only site where social policy interacts directly and universally with the lives of children and young people. Without an adequate base of broad community resources and supports within a community, the impact of 'great teaching' is unlikely to achieve its potential maximum impact.

As well as identifying some of the areas where further effort is required if all children and young people are to realise their potential, the *Making a difference* research highlighted a number of solutions, directly informed by the young people themselves, including:

- The importance in high poverty contexts of affordable opportunity structures for children and young people (sports clubs, arts based programs, work opportunities etc). These opportunity structures need to be responsive to local dynamics and actively promote diverse social networks. Rich learning experiences in schools and out of schools (including creative enrichment, mentoring, recreational, etc) that enable young people to mix widely, at low or no cost to families, are critically important so young people experiencing economic adversity *'can participate on an equal footing'*.
- Schools need to be responsive and respectful of complex family circumstances, and be attentive to intergenerational experiences of blocked opportunities within families and communities.
- Strong school-community partnerships can bring a range of resources and opportunities together and provide a key platform for supporting the improved wellbeing of children and young people.
- Place-based responses are critical, as are well maintained and resourced local environments, secure affordable housing, integrated educational provision, and infrastructure that connects people to strong labour markets.

The Smith Family would argue that it is this broader understanding of factors impacting on educational outcomes and the need for comprehensive and integrated responses which include, but are far from limited to, improvements in teacher quality, which will best enable NSW to have young people who are 'inspired learners'.

## **5. New forms of school-community partnerships**

The *Making a difference* research, combined with growing international evidence and The Smith Family's experience piloting school-community partnerships across Australia, confirms that new forms of school-community partnerships are a core platform for fostering 'inspired learning', particularly in areas of significant disadvantage. Schools in disadvantaged communities cannot be expected to bear the sole responsibility for the educational outcomes of the children and young people in their care, given the resources available to them and the general shortfall in services and infrastructure provision that their communities experience. Nor can individual teachers alone be expected to bear that burden.

*School-Community Partnerships* are also known in Australia as extended service schools, full-service schools, or community schools. In these different incarnations they represent a comprehensive partnership model that has been extensively trialed and evaluated, particularly in the UK. In Victoria, this type of partnership has been described as 'schools delivering extended services to the community, either on site at the school or off site at a nearby venue. These activities are delivered before, during and after school hours through genuine partnerships with external agencies.' These may include before or after-school programs, adult learning opportunities or community use of school facilities. Similarly the United States' Coalition for Community Schools describes this type of partnership as both a place and a set of partnerships between school and community. It has an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health, social services and community development. By extending the school day and week, it reaches families and community residents.

A recent Foundation for Young Australians literature review (Black et al 2010) outlined a number of ways that effective extended service school models have been shown to benefit young people. They:

- Enable earlier identification of children and young people's needs and quicker access to services.
- Increase their engagement and participation in school.

- Improve their educational outcomes.
- Improve their self-confidence and well-being.
- Create a more positive school environment.
- Improve family engagement in the school.
- Build community connectedness and capacity.
- Widen schools' external contacts, networks and partnerships and enhance social capital.

Thus there are gains for individuals, families, institutions, systems and communities in such approaches, with more 'inspired learning' being a key outcome.

It is clear that as well as improvements in student outcomes, school-community partnerships can serve as a mechanism for developing stronger service delivery between schools and other service departments, such as public housing or health services (University of Ballarat 2011). A recent essay on school-community collaborations by the Australian Council for Educational Research found that:

*Governments, too, benefit from schools connecting more strongly with business and community groups. These kinds of relationships can help grow local economies and potentially reduce the costs of service provision through less duplication of services and shared responsibility (Lonsdale et al, 2012).*

A number of school-community partnership approaches are currently being implemented around Australia, such as the Extended School Hub pilots being run by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and in which as a non-government agency, The Smith Family is playing a lead role. At their best, these approaches:

- Acknowledge the multiple factors that influence educational outcomes for children and young people.
- Emphasise that the role of schools is to prepare young people for life and to create a foundation of *learning to learn*, rather than preparing them for a specific and potentially time-limited career.
- Have a strong focus on relationships, both at the individual level and also between agencies and institutions at a systems level.
- Have a strong focus on the voice of young people themselves within the planning, design and implementation stages.
- Have clearly defined outcomes which are seen as the collective responsibility of a range of parties and accountability processes which allow for ongoing improvement.
- Move well beyond 'joined up' service delivery to fundamental paradigm shifts which centre on the young-person and take account of the multiple life contexts and identities of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In The Smith Family's view, supporting schools in disadvantaged communities to leverage the resources, skills and support from beyond the school system, which would enable them to play a bigger role in enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people, presents significant challenges. It sees the school-community partnership model as providing an opportunity to respond to these challenges.

The Smith Family would also argue that Non Government Organisations (NGOs) can and do play a key role in facilitating deep and long-term school-community relationships which ultimately contribute to improving the wellbeing of children and young people. Such a role is often necessary because as the Australian Council of Educational Research found:

*These kinds of collaborations are not easy to build or sustain. Not all school-community partnerships run smoothly. Finding potential partners and resources, knowing who might have the professional expertise to advise and guide program development, gathering information about an area of identified need, knowing how to monitor and evaluate the impact of a collaboration all take time and require different kinds of knowledge and skills (Lonsdale et al, 2012).*

The rationale and evidence for the role of NGOs in these newer and deeper school-community partnerships includes:

- Creating and maintaining effective cross-sectoral partnerships that help address educational inequity is not easy (Department for Victorian Communities, 2007).
- Building and sustaining the effective partnerships required in disadvantaged communities requires a complex mix of skills.
- Facilitating deep and long-term relationships which contribute to improving the wellbeing of children and young people is a 'core competency' of many NGOs.
- Having NGOs as facilitator/lead agency reduces the burden of partnership development and management on school staff and enables complementarity with school staff's core educational skills.
- NGOs can bring a range of business, community and council groups to support educational initiatives in disadvantaged communities.
- Credible intermediaries can address school leaders' concerns regarding the match between what a school needs and what potential partners may offer. They can also help mediate the cultural barriers between sectors (Victorian Department of Education, 2009).
- The effectiveness and value of NGOs taking on a key facilitation role has been demonstrated by the evaluation of initiatives such as the Commonwealth Government's *Communities for Children* program (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009).

The Smith Family would therefore urge that policy deliberations regarding how to ensure all young people within NSW are 'inspired learners' consider the importance of new and stronger School-Community Partnerships, including with a key facilitating role for NGOs, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The model The Smith Family is advocating leverages community assets through the development of school - community - business partnerships to bring community resources into the school. These partnerships are focused on fostering educational and wellbeing outcomes for students through a model that provides enrichment and development opportunities and removes barriers to learning.

The premise underpinning the school-community partnership model is that they promote a range of new collaborations and integrated relationships that enable the school to act as the catalyst for cultural change in the community, bringing students, their families, school staff and the local community together to adopt shared responsibility for improved outcomes. It includes a systems approach which is essential for enhancing educational outcomes. Collective action through school and community partnerships can help to strengthen efforts by governments to address educational disadvantage (Black 2008), and hence maximise the investments made in schooling.

Significantly such models enable school principals and senior school staff to be freed up to focus on educational and pedagogical leadership, aimed at promoting student learning. They allow a range of new resources, complementary skills and expertise to be brought to the school to help them achieve that goal. The role of principals identified by the Discussion Paper is very compatible with the school-partnership model promoted by The Smith Family. The Smith Family would argue that such models can support principals in disadvantaged communities to be both more effective in terms of achieving

improved student outcomes and more efficient. The Smith Family would urge that the lessons to date of such school-community partnerships inform the new *Connected Communities* policy initiative. It would also urge that how such approaches can be scaled to more disadvantaged communities in NSW be explored.

## **6. Parent/family engagement in supporting ‘inspired learning’**

There is significant evidence of the importance of parent/family engagement in supporting young people’s educational outcomes. This includes but is not limited to, the work of Professor John Hattie, the *Making a difference* research, the Productivity Commission, as well as the practical experience of organisations such as The Smith Family in supporting young people’s educational outcomes. Professor Bill Lucas from the University of Winchester has written that ‘parent engagement in the educational development of their children, improves attainment more than any other single factor’ (Lucas, 2010).

The Productivity Commission (2012) however, found that schools commonly report great difficulties in engaging parents and carers of disadvantaged students to support their children’s education (p 21). Of even greater relevance to this Discussion Paper, is the fact that a quarter of primary school early career teachers and close to a third of secondary school early career teachers found their pre-service training not helpful at all in equipping them to ‘work effectively with parents/guardians’ (p. 263) . Many schools clearly need additional support if they are to adequately and appropriately engage parents. In addition, improved pre-service training in this area is also required. This training may require skills that are outside of those usually found within the education faculties of universities, to include for example, those from social work or community work backgrounds. Consideration might also be given to how to include Non-Government Organisations, who work extensively with families, in providing pre-service training in this area, particularly those with experience in engaging more difficult to reach parents/carers.

As identified above, one of the outcomes of school-community partnerships is that they can strengthen relationships between schools and parents, which in turn can contribute to improved educational outcomes. Non-government organisations have a particularly strong history of working with families to enhance relationships on multiple levels and supporting them to do so. As a recent external evaluation of the *Girls @ the Centre* program run by The Smith Family at Centralian Middle School in Alice Springs shows, the program has very positively impacted on family engagement in the school and, in turn, on the school attendance rates of participants, the majority of whom are of Aboriginal background (Lea and Driscoll, 2012). This program, facilitated by a NGO but operating within the school community, has supported the achievement of improved educational outcomes for participants, and is an example of initiatives that can help support ‘inspired learning’.

Principals and in turn other teaching and ancillary staff within schools need however, to be supported to work with NGOs in increasingly deeper and stronger collaborations if all young people are to become ‘inspired learners’. Developing and maintaining such collaborations should now be seen as a core competency of school leadership teams and in turn other staff across the school system.

## **7. Staffing in schools**

In addition to the broader systems changes that are identified above, the way schools are staffed are also a key part in supporting all young people to be ‘inspired learners’. The recently completed Productivity Commission inquiry into the schools’ workforce provides some important insights in this regard.

A brief summary of some of the key issues raised by Productivity Commission which particularly relate to disadvantaged students includes the following:

- Disadvantaged students may need better than average experiences to be able to perform at high levels and overcome their difficulties (p. 255).
- Specialist and support staff play an important complementary role alongside teaching staff (p.256).
- Teachers sometimes have difficulty recognising and responding to the range of factors affecting student outcomes and can also have low expectations of what disadvantaged students can achieve (p 21). The practice of maintaining high aspirations of disadvantaged students is perhaps the most important attribute of all staff who work with them (p. 256).
- Recruiting and retaining suitably qualified teachers, leaders and support staff is more difficult for schools whose students are more likely to be in disadvantaged circumstances (p 257).
- The diverse composition of Australia's student population makes it fundamental that all teachers have a sound awareness of the learning challenges that can confront disadvantaged students.

The Smith Family would argue that models such as School-Community partnerships which bring additional skills, expertise and resources to schools, particularly when facilitated by an NGO, can play a significant role in supporting school staff to be better able to support disadvantaged students. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting enhanced engagement with parents/families, strengthening the focus on high aspirations for students, as well as providing specialist expertise to deal with individual student needs. Such partnerships The Smith Family would argue, can not only improve educational outcomes for children and young people, but can also, over time, contribute to easing the recruitment and retention challenges facing some schools in NSW. This is partly because the responsibility for student outcomes and wellbeing is shared by a broader group of individuals and organisations and a range of additional resources are made available to support a common agenda.

The Smith Family acknowledges the efforts of teachers, principals and other school staff across NSW in supporting the educational and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people. It notes however the challenges facing the workforce which need to be addressed if NSW is to achieve its goal of 'inspired learners'. As the Productivity Commission noted, there is increasing complexity and diversity in the student population and this requires all teachers to be able to meet student needs. The Smith Family's own experience supports the Commission's view that:

*A mixed workforce composition which promotes professional collaborations among the various types of staff — teachers, specialists, school leaders, non-teaching support staff and community workers — is vital, so that all staff are working towards the same shared goals for their students. Schools which successfully address disadvantage are also characterised by leaders who foster a highly collegial spirit among all staff (p. 276).*

The Smith Family's experience with extended school hubs, indicate that such staff do not necessarily have to be employed by the school to be effective, and often there is benefit in them being employed by a 'third party' such as an NGO, so long as there is clarity about shared goals and a way of tracking progress.

## **8. Enhancing school leadership and expanding school autonomy**

The NSW government is currently working to enhance school leadership and expand school autonomy. The Smith Family's experience in schools across Australia affirms the essential role played by principals and we would argue that it is critical that they be given sufficient time and resources to

adequately play the educational leadership role that is required of them. Initiatives such as school-community partnerships where NGOs act as facilitators to bring additional resources to the school are based in part on the premise that educational outcomes will only be enhanced if principals are able to genuinely undertake educational leadership within a collaborative and shared accountability framework. An important corollary of that is that to be successful they must not be unduly burdened by administrative and financial responsibilities.

As the Productivity Commission has noted: 'being able to pursue many of the policy directions that will support disadvantaged students requires some level of school autonomy' (p. 276). This potentially enables schools to more appropriately target the needs of the students in their school community and inject the level of flexibility and innovation that is required to achieve this.

However, the evidence on the merit of school autonomy remains mixed, and therefore monitoring of both the potentially positive and negative implications of this policy is essential. The Productivity Commission has thoughtfully identified both the potential benefits and the potential challenges, particularly for disadvantaged students:

*Increased autonomy could, in several respects, work against the interests of disadvantaged students..it could become more difficult for disadvantaged schools to compete for high-quality staff in school-level negotiations. Complementary strategies to steer high-quality teachers and leaders to disadvantaged schools, and appropriate resourcing, are therefore also necessary (p.277).*

Importantly for the consideration of this Discussion Paper, the Productivity Commission has identified the conditions under which school autonomy could be effective:

*To be effective, greater autonomy needs to be matched with systems for accountability. In the context of educational disadvantage, this would imply that school leaders need to set goals for their school, measure and assess their progress, and be held accountable for outcomes.... In addition to academic outcomes and attendance rates, other indicators to measure a school's progress towards overcoming educational disadvantage could be used, including whether students have a positive attitude towards school, how strongly students feel connected to their school, and the strength of their parents' involvement (p.277).*

The Smith Family strongly supports this view. Greater autonomy must only take place within a systems wide accountability framework so that progress and the educational outcomes being achieved by children and young people can be tracked. To do otherwise would mean that it is highly unlikely that all children and young people in NSW become 'inspired learners'.

## **9. Conclusion**

This Discussion Paper has been released at a time of significant public discussion regarding education. The data shows that while NSW and indeed Australia's school system is among the better performing in the world,

*This overall result is not as strong as it has been in the past and masks a wide degree of variability within our education system. That variability relates to educational outcomes, and to equity – that is, the degree to which people from all backgrounds are able to realise their potential in school (Nous, 2011).*

This summary is evidence that we have some way to go before all young people in NSW are 'inspired learners'. In the interests of NSW's social and economic future, it is essential that this be addressed. The Smith Family would argue that this first requires a systemic focus on educational reform, rather than just a focus on 'teacher quality'. As part of the former, stronger school community partnerships including with an important role for NGOs, should be seen as having a significant part to play in supporting children and young people to become 'inspired learners', with the ultimate outcome being improved educational and wellbeing outcomes for all young people from NSW.

The Smith Family would be happy to expand further on any of the issues raised in this submission.

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**Attachment A: The Smith Family’s Outcomes framework**

**YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN FURTHER STUDY OR WORK**

**ATTAIN YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT**

**STAY ENGAGED WITH LEARNING**

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY)	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (SCHOOL LEVEL)	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (COMMUNITY LEVEL)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• Improved confidence (self/efficacy)</li> <li>• Improved motivation and aspiration</li> <li>• Enhanced networks and relationships</li> <li>• Enhanced access to support</li> <li>• Improved disposition to engaging with learning</li> <li>• Improved knowledge, understanding</li> <li>• Improved skills</li> <li>• Improved or sustained School Attendance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased access to community resources</li> <li>• Increased community use of school resources</li> <li>• <i>Increased parent engagement in school activities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved service collaboration and integration</li> <li>• Enhanced cross sectoral partnerships</li> </ul>
<p>#% students and parents reporting increased skill levels                      #% students test results show increased skill levels                      #% students or parents reporting increased confidence, motivation or aspiration.                      % Improved or sustained school attendance                      #% students/parents/teachers reporting improved school engagement.                      #% students reporting increased contact with supportive adults                      #% parents reporting that they are able to get support to keep their child engaged in school                      #% parents and carers reporting that they are able and motivated to be engaged with education and/or the workforce</p>	<p># activities being undertaken through the school.                      # agencies delivering services in the school                      # and quality of partnerships</p>	<p># and quality of partnerships                      #% partner agencies reporting satisfaction with integrated service delivery co-ordination.</p>
<p>Scholarship and support (KIKASS,G@C)                      S2s, iTrack, Learning Clubs, Creative Enrichment, Careers/Post school options workshops,                      Let’s Count, Let’s Read, Tech Packs, Financial Literacy parent engagement</p>	<p>Extended School Hubs (Wyndham, Swan, Gippsland)</p>	<p>Communities for Children                      Partnership Brokers                      Community Action Leaders</p>