

# **QUALITY EDUCATION: THE CASE FOR AN EDUCATION REVOLUTION IN OUR SCHOOLS**

**AISV EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB**

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## **The Prime Minister outlined the next chapter in Australia's education revolution - the reform of school education.**

In our first Budget we allocated \$19.3 billion to education initiatives over the next four years to help deliver our commitments on:

- a national curriculum in English, maths, the sciences and history;
- a \$1.2 billion Digital Education Revolution;
- a \$2.5 billion Trades Training Centre program; and
- guaranteed funding to both government and non-government schools.

While Australian schools stand up reasonably well in international comparisons, our competitors are quickly catching up.

A 2006 OECD study shows Australia's average performance in reading literacy worsened between 2003 and 2006, primarily because of a decline in the percentage of high-performing students.

It shows that in scientific literacy, 40 percent of Australia's Indigenous students, 27 percent of students in remote schools and 23 percent of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile performed below the OECD baseline.

Australia also has relatively low levels of Year 12 completion by OECD standards.

After doubling in the 1980s and early 1990s, our retention rates have flat-lined at around 75 per cent since 1992. 30 per cent fewer Indigenous young people reach a Year 12 qualification than non-Indigenous.

When COAG meets in October and December this year, we will be working towards historic reforms to Commonwealth-State relations.

In the area of schools it's time to move beyond outdated divisions between Commonwealth and State responsibilities and between public and private provision.

Our focus must be on the basics: ensuring that all of our children emerge from school able to read and write, with basic maths and science skills and the ability to enter the workforce, vocational training or university study.

So what is to be done?

Greater accountability to parents and the public is one important area of reform.

Greater transparency for the outcomes achieved by Australian schools is another area of reform.

All Australian schools – public and private – need to do more to demonstrate the outcomes they achieve with the resources they receive from the broader community.

This is not about creating an arbitrary public league table.

It is about ensuring that all schools, all teachers and all students are focused on achieving the results we need as a nation and realising the potential also of each child.

That is why I am today announcing three central pillars of reform in schools that the Commonwealth aims to achieve through Council of Australian Governments later this year:

- one, improving the quality of teaching;
- two, making school reporting properly transparent; and
- three, lifting achievement in disadvantaged school communities.

The States and Territories are important partners in this process.

Our challenge to them is to commit to concrete, tangible reforms.

And our commitment to them is to match ambitious policy reform on the one hand, with new financial support on the other as part of our upcoming National Policy Partnership negotiations on the future of education.

Research shows that nothing at school influences student outcomes more than excellent teaching.

It has measurable impacts on cognitive, affective and behavioural development.

Studies suggest that the quality of teaching accounts for something between 30 and 60 per cent of the outcome across these areas.

I believe our teachers are our greatest economic asset.

We need to re-establish in Australia that teaching is a great profession and a great calling for the best and brightest of our university graduates.

We must insist on teaching excellence in every school.

And insist that school leadership is strengthened, particularly in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute.

Of the school-based influences on outcomes, school leadership is second only to teaching in its importance.

That is why the Government will work through COAG to start a new era in Australian school education, starting with a National Policy Partnership on Quality Teaching.

To establish new national standards to reward both principals and the best performing teachers.

To provide additional funding to encourage school systems to invest in teacher recruitment, development and excellence.

The package will also include measures to recruit the nation's most talented graduates into teaching and place them where they can make the greatest difference.

In recent years the US and the UK have implemented innovative and successful programs of this kind – the *Teach for America* and the *Teach First* programs – where highly talented graduates are given an accelerated pathway into teaching, placed into the most challenging school environments and paid at a higher rate.

They also receive mentoring and support from leading businesses and an option of employment after they complete their initial teaching assignment should they choose to leave.

These programs have given talented young graduates a taste for teaching – and many have made it their life profession as a result.

Under our new reform partnership, beginning from next year, we will work towards establishing a similar scheme in Australia.

Participation will be open to non-government as well as government schools – because we know there are disadvantaged schools across the entire education spectrum.

Currently, most teachers reach a salary ceiling at around \$75,000. If they aspire to earn more, they must leave the classroom.

We need to send a clear message to university students that teaching is a rewarding long term career.

And send a message to experienced teachers within the school system that they should keep striving for excellence.

I want our best and brightest teachers motivated and rewarded to work in our most challenging schools.

I want school principals to have the autonomy to make more staffing and salary decisions at the local level, to tackle local problems like poor literacy and numeracy.

And I want teachers spending their time doing what they do best – and that's teaching - not losing their valuable hours in paperwork or on tasks better handled by support staff.

Last year I said that Australian school students deserve a higher level of transparency concerning the overall performance of their schools.

The Government is committed to investing substantially in our schools to deliver better outcomes.

But we will not be making those investments without demanding greater accountability in return.

As I said in January 2007, we are committed to a greater quantitative effort in the funding of the school system, but beyond that qualitative performance is equally important.

I appreciate there can be debate about the most reliable indicators of school effectiveness.

But I cannot understand why public institutions such as schools should not be accountable to the community that funds their salaries and their running costs.

Right now, we do not have accurate, comprehensive information to allow rigorous analysis of what schools and students are achieving.

This must change.

Parents have a right to information to inform their family's decision making about school enrolment.

It is important, too, that this information gives parents the full picture.

Simplistic league tables don't really tell us how well a school is performing.

They don't tell us about the student population that the school started with – and its level of educational advantage.

Everyone understands why a private school on Sydney's north shore might do better than a comprehensive government high school in the outer suburbs.

But it is not unreasonable to expect that schools with a similar mix of students and similar starting points should do equally well.

What parents most want to know is what difference a school is going to make – in other words, the extent to which it is adding value to the results of their students.

Parents overseas can get this information. Australian parents – and students – deserve the same.

That is why today I announce that we will be making agreement on individual school performance reporting a condition of the new national education agreement to come into effect from 1 January 2009.

Within a year, we want to see increased information available to Australian parents.

And within three years, a report that shows not just how their child is doing, but how their child's school is performing compared to similar schools.

Knowing where there is underperformance will help us to target additional resources.

I know some will resist these changes.

There is little doubt that greater transparency will reveal some schools in Australia may be seriously underperforming and may have been struggling for some time.

Many, but not all, of these schools serve disadvantaged communities.

Many, but by no means all, of these schools are in the government school system.

We should not tolerate underperformance. It damages the students irreversibly. It fails their families. And therefore it must change.

Where it is clear that individual schools are not up to the mark, we need to be prepared to invest money and effort to lift their performance.

And where despite best efforts, these schools are not lifting their performance, the Commonwealth expects education authorities to take serious action – such as replacing the school principal, replacing senior staff, reorganising the school or even merging that school with other more effective schools.

Tough action is necessary if we are to achieve real change. And it's tough action that our reform payments will reward.

A third focus of our school reforms is to tackle underachievement in our most disadvantaged school communities.

In Australia, socioeconomic status is more strongly associated with educational achievement than it should be.

I have already referred to the OECD research which found that students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile lagged those in the highest socioeconomic quartile by 2½ years.

If Australia is to be the land genuinely of the fair go, we must do a better job in ensuring that every young Australian gets a decent education.

That is why today I announce that we will pursue a further National Policy Partnership with the States and Territories to tackle underachievement in our schools.

There is no 'one size fits all' answer to school underperformance – but we can give schools more control over their performance and more support in achieving better outcomes.

We can provide more funding and greater discretion to principals and local school communities to address their specific local conditions.

That is why, beginning next year, this National Policy Partnership will contain measures to help:

- attract high performing principals and teachers to underperforming schools;
- provide funding for intensive learning activities and additional coaching for those students who are falling behind;
- create robust networks of parents, other schools, local communities and businesses to help students in transitioning successfully to work or further education; and
- to provide incentives for individual schools to extend their reach through longer opening hours, after-school study support, sports and other activities to help keep students engaged in their studies.

To make a real difference, we anticipate that governments will need to commit to additional investments of around \$500,000 per year for an average sized school.

This funding should target areas where intensive learning support can make the greatest difference to student outcomes – like early intervention and support for children with developmental challenges.

I want to see these resources beginning to be deployed in our most disadvantaged schools within the next 12 months.

The measures that I have outlined today will involve a lot of public debate in the period ahead.

But I intend to take these measures to COAG for agreement by year's end.

In the meantime, the Deputy Prime Minister and I will be spending a lot of time talking to parents, a lot of time talking to teachers, a lot of time talking to students, business partners and unions around the country. This is serious business we are talking about here today.

The measures I have announced today are the next step in delivering on our education revolution.

They are designed to reform our school system for the better.

They are designed to bring about better teaching, better school leadership and better results for schools in disadvantaged areas.

All these changes are likely to cost money and that is where we will have a significant, significant negotiation with the States.

I know it's sometimes difficult to accept change when you're battling against the odds trying to help on the ground society's underachievers.

But I want people to understand that our reforms are essential to Australia's future – because quality education is good for our economy, good for our community and good for individuals. It will help create jobs and higher wages, and will create better opportunities for all Australians.