

PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**“We have a chance to do more than
end the era of the public-private debate...”**

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS NATIONAL FORUM
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[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OMITTED]

Friends, welcome to Canberra. I love your conference logo – the whole world in your hands. It's so true.

You teach our children. You build our future. The whole world is in your hands. No pressure!

Timing is everything – and you do meet in interesting times. This year will bring the biggest decisions on school education in the life of this Government.

Of course, you know that we are all working together through an exhaustive and consultative process as we prepare those decisions.
And as we work through those issues together, there's a balance to strike.

When you are talking about something as important as our children's future, our nation's future, you take the time to get it right – and we are.

The current system of schools funding is tremendously complex, and that means that even changes to simplify it have complex elements. So this does take time.

I've worked hard in Government to maintain a close and continuing partnership with your sector .

But keeping that discussion open and real can mean we stay at the table longer to get better outcomes together.

Equally, I know you need to plan for the years to come.

I also know that you're looking ahead right now to budget for your schools in 2014 and beyond.

So all this does take time, but I know that this needs resolution soon.

These days of preparation will over the next few weeks lead to days of decision and action.

Given all that, I'm not here today to tell you exactly what our decisions will be.

Instead, I want to tell you why those decisions are so important to me and how we will keep working together to achieve change.

Everyone should be clear about my purpose in commissioning the Independent Review of school funding.

This Labor Government has doubled federal education funding.

This Labor Government has driven change in schools harder and faster than any before.

This Labor Government commissioned the Independent Panel to deliver further detailed advice.

Their Report is an opportunity, one we deliberately created to give Australian children a better education.

To give our children better schools. To build on Labor's achievements in education for our children in the past five years.

Because Australia doesn't just need "a Gonski response". Australia needs a plan for continuing improvement in our schools.

My goal is not simply "to reform school funding".

My only interest in school funding is using school funding to drive improvement in school performance, to get all of our children a higher quality education.

And yes, reform is a good word, one which describes much of what Australian Governments must do, one which describes some of the most important aspects of my own agenda in office.

But in truth, it's not a word which is underused in Australian politics.

Our plans for schools are about improvement, not just change.

Australia doesn't just need "a reform to the school funding system".

Australia needs a plan for school improvement, a plan which gives schools the resources you need to get better results for the kids you teach.

So those are the plans which we are preparing now. And they will be good news for independent schools. You know that, because you know me.

For a long time, my highest goal in politics was to be Education Minister and to make a difference in schools – 2007 brought me that opportunity and you saw what I did with it.

Above all – you saw that as Minister, I made a difference for every school. For Australia's sake, I had to.

When I became Education Minister in 2007, school standards in this country were slipping.

By 2009, international tests like PISA, the Program for International Schools Assessments, showed we had been falling behind.

Our top students weren't doing as well as they had – and the gap between the top and bottom performing students was growing.

Worst of all? We weren't even measuring our results nationally.

At the end of 2007, I couldn't have told you which were the schools that needed the most help.

That was just unacceptable to me.

Our kids were falling behind. Our economy was missing out. Other countries were sprinting past us in the education race.

And we didn't even have the stopwatch to tell us how fast we had to run to catch up.

So Federal Labor got stuck in.

We conducted new tests and published new information – for every school.

NAPLAN: annual, nationwide measures of how our students perform in the core skills of reading, writing and maths.

The My School website: rich, comparative information about NAPLAN results and school communities, giving parents and students the information they need to work with you.

We strengthened support for the basics – for every school. Specialist literacy and numeracy teachers, homework clubs, personalised learning plans and stronger links with parents and the local community.

Paid for through the \$540 million Literacy and Numeracy national partnership and the \$1.5 billion Low SES School Communities national partnership.

We lifted teacher quality – for every school. The first ever professional standards for teachers and principals, ongoing opportunities for professional development and programs to attract top graduates to the profession.

Agreement to a performance and development framework for every teacher – which will include an annual performance appraisal, clear feedback and support throughout their career. Paid for through the \$500 million Teacher Quality National Partnership.

We began giving principals more powers to lead their schools. An area in which we can all learn much from your sector's success.

More powers in the hands of school principals and the local community through our Empowering Local Schools scheme.

Almost 1000 schools will have more say in staffing, budget, governance and maintenance over the next two years.

We started developing a new national curriculum – for every school. Every Australian student should benefit from the same high quality teaching and learning, no matter where they live.

We invested in new facilities – for every school. We have delivered computers to every high school in the country – more than 900,000 of them – and now every student from years 9 to 12 has access to digital learning.

We have built new classrooms, libraries, science labs and school halls through our hugely successful Building the Education Revolution program.

I am sure when they built the Library at Alexandria there was someone who wrote an editorial questioning the cost. Funnily enough, if so, the editorial hasn't been preserved for posterity, but the memory of that library has been.

The bottom line?

Under Labor, federal education funding doubled in four years. And we didn't do it by division, we did it by addition. Every school benefitted.

This wasn't something I could do alone or the Government could do alone.

In all these changes, independent schools have been more than just engaged and co-operative.

You've supported the national education agenda – in many areas, you've led the way.

Precisely because I've pursued ambitious plans to lift standards in all schools, I've needed the support of leaders in all schools to get it done.

Many of the changes we've pursued have been controversial – most of them have been opposed in sections of the Parliament – some of them have been criticised in sections of the profession.

So I am incredibly proud of the way that as we've gone through this big journey of change, independent school leaders have been a partner with us, with me, in every step of the way.

You have never said go slower or don't go as hard, every stage of the journey you have urged us on, because you want to see the best for the kids you teach at every stage of their education.

Programs like the National Partnership for Low SES School Communities and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership helped more than 1 in 5 independent schools.

Two hundred and twenty five independent schools in communities around the country got extra help to address the needs of struggling students.

Even though it has meant a lot of work for you, new requirements, new demands on your staff and on your parents, you've always been there for the big changes that go with the extra resources.

Your sincere and complete support for progress in Australian schools has been vital to the success of our approach. And it has been a success.

Take that National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy. And in year 3 Reading, 70 per cent of all schools funded under the program improved.

In Year 5 Numeracy, 75 per cent of schools funded under the program improved.

Or take our investments in indigenous education under our great national project to Close the Gap.

Between 2008 and 2011, the proportion of indigenous students achieving at or above the national minimum standard significantly increased in Reading in Years 3 and 7, and in Numeracy in Years 3 and 5.

And NAPLAN results from 2008 to 2011 show that Australian school students are now making good progress across the board and results are lifting across the country.

For example, Year 3 students have shown statistically significant improvements in reading, grammar and punctuation.

And Year 5 students have shown statistically significant improvements in numeracy.

These things were achieved by Australian students, teachers, principals and schools, because the Australian Government helped all of them.

Not some schools, all schools. Not some kids, all kids.

That's my record as Minister and Prime Minister: I've never looked at a big independent school in an established suburb and thought "that's not fair".

I look at a big independent school in an established suburb and think "that's a great example".

I've never looked at a new independent school in a coastal town and thought "why aren't those kids at the public school".

I look at a new independent school in a coastal town and think "I'm glad this Government is giving those kids the support and standards they need".

You know that I've supported you and your schools because you've seen me do it: when I've been with you in your classrooms and your staffrooms, delivering the new computers and opening the new libraries.

I've spoken about BER's huge importance to you. Consider the scale of our program in its historical context.

Think back to that first, famous Menzies science laboratories program which gave so many independent schools a historic boost.

A genuine new frontier in Australian policy, it was an investment in your schools which, in today's dollars, would be valued in the hundreds of millions.

Our Building the Education Revolution program made an investment in your schools worth easily ten times as much. So I'm proud of the partnership and the friendship we share.

It's common to discuss all these questions of public support for the schooling of individuals in the specific context of education.

But I actually think this is a much bigger question of the relationship between citizen and nation.

I believe Government support for a child's education is one of the entitlements of citizenship.

No matter how rich or poor your parents are or where you go to school, our nation should provide a basic degree of support to your education: because you are Australian, because you are part of the whole.

Now naturally, one way this idea of an education entitlement derived from citizenship takes concrete form is in school funding.

There should be Australian Government support to educate every Australian child – in the poorest and most remote school – at the best known and best resourced school.

That's why our funding model will recognise the diversity and uniqueness of Australian schools and will support the choices parents make about the best school for their child.

That's why our plans will deliver funding security for your schools. All students, regardless of school, will be funded on a consistent basis for the first time.

Every independent school in Australia will see their funding increase under our plan.

This plan will lift school standards, not school fees. And this universal commitment, this idea of a citizen's entitlement to education, is not just how I see the funding question – it is how I see the work on school standards as well.

As Prime Minister of this country, I feel a deep responsibility to ensure every child in Australia has the education they deserve.

I feel accountable to every Australian parent and child to do everything I can to make sure their school is a great school.

And not just to seventy per cent of them – to a hundred per cent of them. We govern for all and when I worry about standards and work to improve them I do that for all.

But of course, in the end, while I'm the Prime Minister – you're the principals.

I can take the national lead and make the case for change, Government can increase resources and make detailed plans – but only you can lead the teachers and teach the kids.

That's why I've worked so hard to work with you – and why your partnership with Government is so important to us.

In the end, our plans to improve Australia's schools are all about helping you improve Australia's schools.

So we'll support principals, lift teacher quality, expand parent information, increase funding: because that all helps you.

The key to the success of our plan to improve every Australian school is the plans you make to improve your school.

That is why these coming weeks of decision and action on school standards are so important to me.

Because we have a chance to do more than just end the era of the public-private debate: we can start the era of the school standards debate too.

Every student will matter. We will have the best teachers in every classroom. School principals will be outstanding leaders.

All students will study the same curriculum. Every school will be a digital school.

Parents and the community will know more about their local school. Decisions will be made locally. Schools will become community hubs.

Every Australian school will have the money it needs to do a great job. Struggling schools will get extra help. Put it another way.

I never forget Unley High, a great school then and now, where so much of my success in life began, but where other kids sat at the back of the room and did "make work" and were left behind.

It's thinking about the needs of the kids both at the front and the the back of the room that drives me on to improve Australian education. And I know the kids who struggle aren't only in Unley High.

They're at Saint Spyridon College at Unley – a terrific Greek Orthodox primary school, got a lot of green in NAPLAN 2011 – one of your members.

And there are kids with real need at St Monica's up in Walkerville, and there are kids who need help at Scotch, too – there are.

There are world-beating independent, Catholic and public schools in every part of Australia.

There are independent, Catholic and public schools in every part of Australia which need more Government help.

There are kids with real needs, in every Australian school. There are kids with real gifts, in every Australian school.

Our vast and diverse nation defies every stereotype and cliché and our thinking about the future of education should never be governed by anything but the real best interests of every child.

They are why we are going to get this done.