



SPEECH

**THE HON. BILL SHORTEN
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
MEMBER FOR MARIBYRNONG**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL AUSTRALIA

HOTEL REALM, CANBERRA

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******CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY******

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, I pay my respects to elders past and present.

And at any meeting of educators – we reflect on how important education is to closing the gap in opportunity and employment that diminishes the lives of the first Australians.

It's a great pleasure to be here today.

The last Parliamentary sitting week before a break is always a hectic time.

Similar to the last week of term in a lot of ways, though at least you know when you'll be coming back.

Regardless of all the toing-and-froing up there in the Parliament, I was determined to make time for your conference, because I respect and value the work you and your members do.

I know you meet here today as the representatives of 1000 schools, teaching almost 600,000 students.

1 out of every 6 students in Australia.

You and your members represent a great diversity of schools:

From Christian and non-denominational schools to secular, Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.

This is just one of the reasons why Australia's Independent Schools are such a central part of the community you serve.

So many alumni return throughout their lives for weddings, christenings, holy days and even to farewell old friends.

If you've taught in the sector for some time, you have probably endured more than one round of the tired old debate about whether the Commonwealth should be involved in funding schools and the follow-up argument about whether governments should fund non-government schools.

I'm not here to re-litigate either point.

The Commonwealth has been funding schools since Menzies.

And provided recurrent funding for non-government schools since Whitlam.

There is no turning back from this reality.

And seeking to mask funding cuts by talking about 'state responsibilities' is just a transparent abdication of responsibility.

This is why the historic Gonski reforms Labor introduced in Government were so important.

Gonski was a game-changer.

An opportunity to end the finger-pointing between the Commonwealth and the States.

To draw a line under the 'public vs private' debate.

A chance for a new consensus, a new sector-neutral focus on meeting the individual needs of students.

And there was another vital quality Gonski was designed to offer: certainty.

Gonski was intended to be a bipartisan agreement designed to stretch beyond the life of two parliaments.

For Catholic, Independent and public schools the agreements we negotiated meant six years of funding growth, based on student need.

And with the 'unity ticket' that was promised by the Liberals at the last election – we thought we had achieved a permanent, bi-partisan change.

Regrettably, Malcolm Turnbull – like Tony Abbott – has turned his back on Gonski and on needs-based funding.

For two budgets now, the Government has locked in \$30 billion in schools cuts.

You all know the effect this will have on your schools – many of you here today have led the campaign against these cuts.

Just as you know that dumping the Gonski reforms will lock-in existing inequality between states and amplify it over time.

The point of the Gonski reforms was to get all schools to a consistent resourcing standard over six years.

Stopping after four years, will leave schools behind.

And some states and territories will suffer more than others.

The South Australian Association of Independent Schools has pointed out Independent schools in their state will be worse off compared to schools in other states by over \$20 million in 2018.

This gap will just continue to grow over time.

\$400 per student per year is enough to make a real difference.

And it's a particularly serious problem for a smaller state where the economy is doing it tough.

Labor does not accept an Australia where the quality of your education is determined by your postcode.

We believe in every child, in every school, getting every opportunity.

And earlier this year, Kate Ellis and I rededicated Labor to sector-neutral school funding, based on need.

Our new policy, called *Your Child, Our Future*, delivers on the final two years of the Gonski agreements – and it goes above and beyond.

It is a fully-costed, fully-funded, \$37 billion investment over the next decade.

Our funding formula will see the money directed to where it is needed most.

Small schools, rural and regional schools and schools in disadvantaged communities.

Our focus is on student need – from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who need extra assistance, to children with disability.

Your Child, Our Future doesn't just close out the final two years of Gonski – it is a ten-year guarantee of certainty for Australian schools.

Our policy will deliver:

- A strong focus on every child's needs;

- More individual attention for students;
- Better trained teachers – and more of them;
- More targeted resources and better equipped classrooms
- More support for students with special learning needs.

And we've set ambitious benchmarks for judging this investment:

- By 2020, we will ensure 95 per cent Year 12 completion.
- By 2025, Australia will be among the top 5 countries in reading, maths and science.

We hear so much about 'innovation' these days.

But we cannot be an innovation nation, without education.

A love of science and technology and a thirst for discovery doesn't just begin at school – it depends on our schools.

In the year 2000, only one country outperformed Australia in reading and maths.

In 2006 only two countries outperformed us in science.

Today, 16 countries outperform Australia in maths.

Nine countries outperform us in reading and seven countries outperform us in science.

At the Beijing Olympics in 2008 we finished 6th in the medal tally, in London 2012 we slipped to tenth.

And there was a national outcry.

People were demanding enquiries, investigations, new coaches, new academies – an entire review of what was working and what wasn't.

We need to bring a greater urgency, a greater sense of shared national purpose and pride to elevating education.

Achieving this will require stronger and deeper co-operation between government and peak bodies like yours.

Political parties can't just demand this.

We need to demonstrate our good faith, our preparedness to back our words with actions.

Which is why today, I am pleased to announce that a new Labor Government will provide \$82 million to Independent schools associations and Catholic education commissions for the duration of the original six-year Gonski agreements.

This funding will ensure you can continue your important work.

It will honour the agreement you made in good faith at the beginning of the Gonski reforms, by reversing the cuts the Government made to this program in 2014.

This will be called the Teaching and Learning Support Program – because that is exactly what it is.

We know it's already allowed you to:

- Provide better coaching for teachers
- Establishing centres of excellence for the teaching of STEM
- Employing School Leadership Consultants – to work with principals to make sure schools have a school improvement agenda in place to lift student outcomes
- Supporting schools to implement the Australian Curriculum;
- Best practice professional development to support Indigenous Independent Schools

Of course, we will expect transparency and accountability for this funding – with clear links to improved teaching and learning.

I have every confidence in your ability to meet and exceed these standards.

In Labor's *Your Child. Our Future* policy we said we wanted to see more evidence-based programs like targeted teaching.

Today we are asking you to partner with us in achieving that.

Experts tell us targeted teaching is one of the most efficient and effective ways to lift student results.

Government and non-government schools are already harnessing data to make sure students don't miss out.

So lessons meet the needs of everyone in the class - and students of all abilities are engaged.

We want to see more schools use this powerful tool to lift student results.

Labor's investment in the Teaching and Learning Support Program you will be able to share in the expertise that already exists – and learn what works from other schools.

Friends

As you might remember, I spent about 80 days or 1,920 hours as Minister for Education.

This is not exactly an 'era'. I admit.

But in that time I applied the lesson that's guided me my whole working life: the best way to achieve progress is through consensus.

Improving outcomes, delivering a better deal for every child and every teacher in every school will always be easier if we work from a foundation of co-operation, rather than conflict.

We will be a better nation when government is better at listening to the people on the frontline of education.

One of the really unfair developments of the past few decades is that while the responsibilities of Australia's teachers and principals continue to increase...the respect educators are afforded within our society has not kept pace.

One of the easiest lines for lazy politicians to say when confronted with a complex problem is:

"We'll just get them to teach that in schools. Leave it to the teachers."

Teachers and principals in this country have been left to do a lot of things.

You're expected to look after the welfare of the child, the emotional wellbeing of the child.

You're expected to cope in many cases with inadequate resources.

You're expected to cope with less than the pay than you deserve.

A Shorten Labor Government, will do more to make sure the position and the respect of teaching gets the proper, long overdue support in terms of the estimations of the community.

Australia cannot thrive without its teachers and its educators.

Our policies, our priorities and the way we engage with groups like yours will be governed by this understanding of your value, and our respect for your work.

Thank you

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