



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR ELECTORATE LOBBYING TEAMS.

These are an attempt to provide back up information. While electorate teams cannot be expected to be across all the nuts and bolts of schools funding, be assured that the MP probably isn't either. Here are some responses to the Union's case you can expect from Coalition MPs, together with suggested come-backs.

A “Public schools are a state, not a federal, responsibility”.

There are no documents which have been produced to substantiate this.

Federal governments on both sides of politics have provided funds and set goals for public schools since the seventies. The Schools Commission Act 1973, Section 13 (4) stated:

“There is a primary obligation, in relation to education, for governments to provide and maintain government school systems that are of the highest standard and are open, without fees or religious tests, to all children.”

This was quietly abolished by the Howard government when it abolished the Schools Council in 1999.

Also, if public schools are a state responsibility, then how is it possible for the federal government to set conditions on federal funding in the way Nelson did on March 11th?

We believe that a funding system in which only 30% of federal government funds goes to 70% of the students is unfair.

B “But you're not taking the state contributions into account in that 30%”

True, but we've come to talk about what *your* government is doing, not funding from other sources. If the government were to make available figures on the *total* funds available to private schools (including fees and other private income), the extent of the bias in favour of already well-off schools would be even more apparent.

The effect of current federal government funding is to widen the gap between the richest and poorest schools.

C “But Minister Nelson’s package of March 11 delivers \$9.8 bn to public schools over the next four years – an increase of \$1.9 bn”

That “increase” is not new money. It’s actually indexation to cover increases in school costs. Only \$400 m of Minister Nelson’s overall \$31.3 bn package is a real increase (or new money).

Of this additional \$400 m, only \$4 m (1 %!) goes to public schools, which have 70% of students.

D “Federal government grants to public schools have risen by 58% since 1996, 38% ahead of inflation”

Federal grants to all schools, public and private, are indexed to increases in the AGSRC (average government schools recurrent costs – ie, what it actually costs the states and territories to run their schools). Unlike the CPI (inflation), it measures cost increases relevant to schools. At present, school costs are rising more rapidly than inflation. It is less than honest to take the difference between inflation and the AGSRC and call it an “increase”.

E “But last year’s federal budget delivered an extra 5.5% to public schools while the states and territories’ budgets increased spending by only 2.1%”

The state and territory figure does not include salary outcomes during the budget year. And federal increases, because they result from increases in the AGSRC, logically cannot exceed the average increases by the states and territories.

F “But no independent school receives more than 70% of what public schools get. And wealthier ones get only a fraction of this”

The per capita figure for public school students includes all costs – buildings, payroll taxes, etc. This is not the case for private school students. In other words the figures do not compare the same things.

When you add fee income per student of \$15,000 + to this, plus other income such as bequests and investments, the result is that some wealthy schools operate with twice or even three times the resources available to public schools. *Is it really government policy to use public funds to gold-plate already well-off schools?*

G “But the government’s SES funding system is based on students’ socio-economic circumstances and so addresses need. Surely you’re not against helping needy students”

We support funding based on genuine need. There are two points to make here. First, SES takes into account, **not the actual circumstances of individual students and their families**, but of their *neighbourhoods* (strictly, the 200 or so households which make up the CCD - Census Collectors District - in which they live). The extent to which the circumstances of the particular student’s family are typical of the average for the CCD will vary. For example take a CCD in a remote area consisting of a couple of affluent grazier families, a publican, a garage mechanic and an aboriginal settlement of a couple of hundred people. Guess whether this CCD would score a high or low SES, and guess which families send their kids off to boarding school in the city?

Second, it needs to be understood that only about half (1230 non government schools) are actually paid on their SES and 1200 are not. These 1200 are paid *more* than their SES would qualify them for as a result of the government’s “no losers” policy. This has cost an estimated extra \$275m to \$370m over the past four years.

H “But parents should have the right to choose”

This policy does not support parent choice.

There is no obligation on schools to use the increased funding to reduce fees. In fact, private school fees have actually gone up since this funding system was introduced. Some schools use the money for further capital investment – more playing fields, equestrian centres and rifle ranges.

The choice that most people want – to send their children to well-resourced government schools – is the choice that is undermined by this policy.

I “But private school parents are taxpayers too”

Agreed. But opting for a private education should not mean an expectation of taxpayer support. Taxes are not tagged to be returned to particular taxpayers. They go into a general pool to be used for the public good. They should not be used by the federal government to fund a system of education in competition with the public systems run by the states.

See Also ...

“AEU Response to the Australian Government’s ‘School Funding – the Facts’.”

For further information see: www.aefederal.org.au/Debates/index2.html