



# **Education Funding and the 2010 Election**

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Anybody with an interest in the education of our children and the future of our public schools should take careful note of what the parties are promising at the federal election.

Already it is clear that there are significant differences on the most important issue: the future funding of our schools.

Unfortunately, the Coalition's first major announcement on education in May was that it would cut \$3.1 billion worth of programs. Those cuts include \$968 million for new trades training centres in secondary schools and \$700 million for computers in schools.

The effect of that will be that 120,000 secondary students across Australia who have not yet received laptop computers through the Labor Government's program will miss out on them.

In addition, 900 secondary schools will miss out on either getting their own centre for undertaking trades training or receiving funding to set up a centre in combination with other local schools.

Those cuts are disappointing considering the importance of education, not only for individuals and families, but for the future economic and social prosperity of our country. All students should have access to computers, not just those whose families can afford them.

In addition, not everyone will go on to further study after school, and trades training is a good way to keep many children engaged and allow them to develop important skills.

During its term of office, the largest education initiative of the Labor Government has been the \$16.2 billion program of school rebuilding – the largest one-off commitment ever to education by the Commonwealth. This contrasts sharply with the Coalition's school infrastructure program of only \$1.2 billion whilst in office.

There have obviously been some issues with the rapid rollout of the Labor Government's program but overall the response from teachers and school communities has been very positive.

In another blow to supporters of public education, an Abbott Government would keep the current federal funding system, first introduced under John Howard, which heavily favours private schools.

The Opposition Education spokesman, Christopher Pyne, told the Christian Schools National Policy Forum in May that the Howard Government was a great friend of the private school sector and, if elected, a new Coalition Government will *“take up the reins where the Howard Government left off”*. That is despite the fact the federal funding system has been widely criticised as inequitable and unsustainable, delivering up to \$7,000 a year per private school student compared to \$1,000 a year per public school student. In addition, deals struck by the Howard Government mean half of all private schools receive more funding than they would be entitled to if the funding formula was correctly applied.

Teachers are disappointed that Labor kept this system in place, especially considering the primary obligation of all governments is to adequately and appropriately fund our public schools. However, Labor has begun a review of this system, with recommendations on a new funding model expected next year.

This review of schools funding represents one of the most important chapters in the history of schools funding in Australia. It presents an opportunity to argue for a new funding system beyond 2012, based on the right of every family to have access to a well resourced, high quality public school in their local community and the primary obligation of governments to adequately and appropriately fund it. The Greens have called for a new fairer funding model, including a significant investment in public education so that public schools set the standard for education in Australia.