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# A new direction

Australians are calling for a genuine commitment to public education.

**H**aving put education centre stage, it is now time for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard to give true meaning to the 'Education Revolution'.

After a decade of systematic and unrelenting attack on public education by the Howard government, Prime Minister Rudd has an opportunity to genuinely govern in the national interest by embracing the value of public education and what it can do for each individual child and the nation as a whole.

As teachers and educators we wholeheartedly agree with the Prime Minister that "education is the engine room of equity, opportunity and the economy". However, to give this sentiment effect, it requires a substantial investment in public education.

Prime Minister Rudd must redress the national disgrace which sees Australia ranked third last against other OECD countries in its public expenditure on education.

Having acknowledged that the "Commonwealth has a prime obligation to adequately and properly fund government schools", Prime Minister Rudd must ensure that Australian governments invest in our free, secular and universally accessible public schools.

Prime Minister Rudd is well aware that public schools nationwide are underfunded by at least \$2.9 billion per annum. He also knows this figure understates the true level of underfunding, as it excludes the

costs associated with special education, quality teaching and capital.

The immediate allocation of additional targeted funding to support excellence and equity for all students is a national priority. The latest national benchmark literacy and numeracy results provide further evidence for additional targeted funding for primary education, rural education and Indigenous education.

Prime Minister Rudd must surely now heed the findings of government and independent reports that declare the SES funding model

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unsustainable and indefensible. If he will not abandon his commitment to maintain this model until 2012, he must at the very least initiate an immediate review.

Finally, Prime Minister Rudd and Deputy Prime Minister Gillard must reject the approach of their predecessors that made the denigration of teachers commonplace. In addition to competitive salaries for all teachers, a genuine regard and respect for the profession from the top office of this land would lead to a dramatic lifting of the status of teachers.

Having announced the chair of his National Curriculum Board (a board that is to consist of "experts"), Prime Minister Rudd must immediately acknowledge that it is teachers

who are the expert professionals trained to design, develop, implement and deliver curriculum. Failure to include the voice of practising teachers on this board would represent a serious affront to all teachers. Any task aimed at the design of curriculum without practising teachers will fail!

The development of a "national curriculum" cannot and will not in itself improve the educational outcomes of students. Educational outcomes can only be improved if the implementation of a curriculum is properly resourced.

As teachers we support a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum aimed at equipping students with all the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21st century. Governments must therefore provide a curriculum guarantee that will ensure all students have the chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life.

Our schools must be resourced to achieve equity and excellence in education, ameliorating rather than exacerbating the effect of social background on educational achievement.

As teachers and educators, we remain ready and committed to fulfil our responsibility to achieve the highest possible standards in our classrooms.

Prime Minister Rudd, we call on you and your government to accept your responsibility to properly fund our public education system. ●



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