

16 August, 2007

Ms Pat Byrne
Federal President
Australian Education Union
Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street
Southbank
Victoria, 3006

Dear Ms Byrne,

I refer to your letter of 12 July. I regret the delay in reply.

Please see my responses to your questions for the *Australian Educator* magazine below.

How will your Party's education proposals at the next election ensure that public education is a national priority?

The chance of a quality education remains the best way for a young Australian to maximise his or her potential and get ahead.

This requires a greater investment in education at every level and better educational outcomes across the nation, irrespective of whether a child attends a public, private, religious or secular school.

A strong public education system with quality educational outcomes is essential to achieve this, as approximately 70 per cent of Australian children attend Government schools.

To ensure opportunity for all of our children, it is therefore a central obligation of a Commonwealth Government to adequately and appropriately invest in education in Government schools.

A Rudd Labor Government is committed to fully discharging this obligation by funding all schools on the basis of need and fairness. Our aspiration and intention is to fund all schools more.

Will your Party commit to meeting the \$2.9 billion shortfall in recurrent funding identified by the Ministerial Council, MCEETYA?

Federal Labor is committed to a greater investment in education at every level, including in our primary and secondary schools.

We have already committed to invest \$450 million to provide universal access to high quality early childhood education and \$2.5 billion to improve trades facilities in all of Australia's 2,650 secondary schools, with further detailed election commitments to follow in the run up to the forthcoming election.

Historically in Australia we have from time to time been at risk of having a two tiered schools system. In the 1960's and 1970's for example, one such risk was poor Catholic schools. Now, one such risk is needy Government schools, particularly needy Government primary schools.

Federal Labor's aspiration is to invest more in schools at every level, in every sector. Federal Labor is not proposing to take a dollar of any school. Federal Labor's aspiration is to increase funding to schools. This will be done on the basis of need and fairness.

At present, there is an especial funding need, in my view, in the following areas: needy primary schools, schools in rural, regional and remote Australia, special education, and Indigenous education.

Our detailed financial commitments will be announced in the run-up to and during the forthcoming Federal election.

What will your Party do to ensure access to high-quality public education for Indigenous children to provide results consistent with other students?

It is appalling that many Indigenous children, particularly in remote areas, do not have access to quality schooling and that nearly half of all Indigenous four year olds miss out on preschool.

Not surprisingly, outcomes in Indigenous education continue to lag dramatically behind those of other Australian children.

In numeracy and literacy, for example, according to the *2005 National Report on Schooling in Australia*, the proportion of Indigenous students in Years 3, 5 and 7 achieving at or above the benchmark level is significantly lower than the proportions for non-Indigenous students.

That is why Labor has committed to halving the gaps in literacy and numeracy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children within 10 years.

Ensuring Indigenous children go to school and get an education is one of the most important things we can do to give them opportunity and the hope of a better future.

Federal Labor is committed to invest in practical measures that work to improve educational outcomes for indigenous students.

Federal Labor has already put forward a range of positive policy proposals, including commitments to:

- Invest \$30 million to provide 200 teachers for more than 2,000 Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory who don't attend school at all;
- Invest \$34.5 million on Individual Learning Plans for Indigenous children; and
- Close the gap in Year 12 retention between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children by 2020;

Studies show that 'pay for performance' salary structures don't work in education. What is your policy on teachers' pay?

Historically as a society, Australia has undervalued teachers. We haven't paid them enough respect. We haven't paid them enough regard. And we haven't paid them enough. We are now suffering the adverse consequences of this.

The Howard Government's so-called performance pay approach would see teachers paid on the basis of student outcomes in standardised tests. As well, it would be possible, according to Minister Bishop, to pay some teachers more by paying other teachers less than they currently get.

Federal Labor rejects the Government's so-called performance pay approach.

Federal Labor believes in rewarding quality teaching, and takes a comprehensive approach to rewarding quality teaching.

This requires a comprehensive strategy that rewards professional teaching excellence and quality teaching in the classroom. This includes rewarding teachers in their early years for engaging in induction and mentoring programmes, rewarding teachers for engaging in ongoing professional development and rewarding teachers for specialist accreditation and qualifications in key areas such as numeracy, literacy, maths and science.

We also need to reward teachers for where they teach, like rural, regional and remote Australia.

How will your Party address the issue of Australia's 'high quality – low equity' education outcomes as identified by the OECD?

While some young Australians perform very well against international education comparisons, too many don't perform as well as they could or should.

Research indicates that socio-economic factors have a significant adverse impact on this underperforming 'tail' of students, which sees a significant number of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds or from battling or dysfunctional families fall behind.

The relationship between academic results and socio-economic disadvantage is noticeably high in Australia. Federal Labor is committed to improving the educational outcomes of all young Australians, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or socio-economic circumstances.

Federal Labor sees this as a real area of need where greater investment is required.

Federal Labor believes that we have to intervene early to provide additional support and assistance for those children who are at risk of falling behind.

That is why Labor has already committed to invest \$450 million to provide universal access to high quality early childhood education and is committed to lifting Year 12 retention rates from 75 per cent to 85 per cent by 2015 and to 90 per cent by 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Rudd MP
Federal Labor Leader
Federal Member for Griffith