

# THE HARD ASK

With election day imminent, Australian Educator put some crucial questions to the party leaders on their plans for public education.

PRIME MINISTER JOHN HOWARD  
LEADER  
LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

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

**A** The Liberal/National Coalition Government will provide a record \$31.3 billion for schools over the next four years. In addition, about 40 cents in every dollar the states and territories have to spend comes from other Australian Government payments and the GST.

I am committed to strengthening all our schools. Over the next four years, the Australian Government will provide \$9.8 billion to the states and territories in specific funding for

**I am committed to strengthening all our schools.**

government schools. This is a \$1.9 billion increase over the current quadrennium. Since 1996, the Government has increased funding to government schools by 68.7 per cent.

When we look at the full picture the fact is that government schools, which educate 68 per cent of Australia's students, receive 76 per cent of Australian taxpayers' dollars. To look only at one part of the equation is to misrepresent the facts.

This Government will continue to offer parents choice.

Furthermore, the Government's reforms to the higher education sector will significantly increase educational opportunities for all Australians. We will deliver an additional \$2.6 billion in new funding to the sector over the next five years, and \$11 billion over the next 10 years. Facilitating access to higher education is a key priority which is why we will deliver 35,000 additional fully-funded Commonwealth-supported places over the next five years. We have placed particular emphasis on national priority areas of nursing and teaching.

To assist students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education opportunities, the Coalition is providing \$327 million over the next five years to fund 40,000 Commonwealth learning scholarships. Commonwealth education costs scholarships and Commonwealth accommodation scholarships will provide \$2,000 and \$4,000 respectively per year for four years to assist students to cover education and accommodation costs associated with their studies.

Last year, the Australian Government offered the states and territories \$3.57 billion in funding over three years under a new ANTA (Australian National Training

Authority) agreement. The offer which, if accepted, would have created up to 71,000 additional publicly funded training places, was rejected by all states and territories. This year \$1.13 billion will be provided to the states and territories to support their training systems. In total, the Australian Government will spend more than \$2.1 billion this year on training.

The Australian Government is also strongly committed to vocational education and training (VET). Since 1996 we have increased funding for VET in real terms by 33 per cent, and have increased funding for New Apprenticeships and industry training by 83 per cent.

**Q** How will your party respond to the national teacher shortage which is set to worsen in the next decade?

**A** The MCEETYA report on teacher supply and demand for 2002 concluded that the teacher labour market is in balance, but there are ongoing current recruitment difficulties in secondary specialist areas and in some locations. State and territory education ministers report that there are no significant teacher vacancies overall. In fact, in some states, there is a significant number of teacher graduates who cannot find jobs.

Over the next five to 10 years, ►16

MARK LATHAM  
FEDERAL OPPOSITION LEADER  
AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY

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

**A** A Federal Labor Government, in its policies and programs for schools, will adopt the principles set out in the national education platform:

*Labor recognises that all governments have a primary obligation for the provision of high-quality public schooling that is accessible to all children and young people. Public schooling must continue to be free and secular, to shape and be shaped by*

### ...Labor will increase Commonwealth funding for public schools.

*Australian society and culture, to strive for educational and intellectual excellence, to contribute to the development of the shared values that sustain democratic life and to foster innovation, critical awareness, creativity and optimism towards a shared future...*

*Labor will give priority for public education through enhanced Commonwealth programs for schools.*

Labor will endorse the framework of principles for the funding of schools that was developed for the Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which includes the principle that all governments recognise the need to fund government schools as a national priority.

Consistent with this commitment, Labor will increase Commonwealth funding for public schools.

**Q** How will your party respond to the national teacher shortage which is set to worsen in the next decade?

**A** Labor agrees that the national teacher shortage will worsen without urgent action. Labor will provide an additional 20,000 funded places in public universities and, as part of this commitment, will fund an extra 4,600 new teacher education places by 2008.

Labor will also create 500 additional new full-time HECS-funded postgraduate teacher education places in areas of specialisation and professional development each year; and will provide an additional \$86 million over three years to increase the quality of teacher education, including meeting the costs of classroom teacher practicum.

Labor will place maths and science in the lowest HECS band to encourage students and potential teachers to pursue these fields of study.

Labor also recognises that public schools in outer metropolitan and regional areas are staffed by large numbers of beginning teachers. There is a high turnover of teaching staff in these schools, with beginning teachers needing support to help them remain in teaching. We will provide additional resources to targeted schools to provide incentives for outstanding teachers to be appointed to those schools, whose role will include mentoring, induction and professional support for the teaching staff in those schools.

**Q** What will your party do to ensure access to high-quality education with improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students?

**A** The national government has a particular responsibility for the education of Indigenous people. In the schools area, Indigenous communities and families support and depend on high-quality public schooling for their children and Labor's priority for public schools will benefit Indigenous students in particular. Labor will enhance Indigenous education funding, both in financial terms and in the development of consultative and inclusive program arrangements. A particular emphasis in Labor's programs will be to encourage and support Indigenous teachers and education workers, who play a critical role in enhancing successful education outcomes for students.

**Q** The National Preschool Inquiry has found that early childhood education provision is fragmented and at least 40,000 children are not receiving preschool education. What does your party propose to address this matter?

**A** In some states preschool participation levels are too low, and national leadership is needed to address that issue.

Labor will establish a national education, care and development curriculum for children aged 0-5 years as a guide to parents and able to be used in any type of early education and care facility, including preschool. Recognising the importance of early childhood education to successful transition to school, Labor will work with all state ►16

SENATOR ANDREW BARTLETT  
PARLIAMENTARY LEADER  
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS

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

**A** Public education is a joint federal/state responsibility and the Democrats argue that it should be a national priority to deliver a steady reversal of the decline in the proportional share of enrolments in government schools through:

- leadership that promotes the many virtues of public education
- a higher level of funding that properly resources government schools, meets new national education standards and factors in disadvantage in social, economic, learning, distance, cultural and language terms, and
- ongoing improvement in teaching through evaluating and applying best practice, through professional development, more flexible and improved teaching environments, reduced teacher: student ratios and through better access to expertise in pedagogy and learning disability.

To do this an extra \$1 billion a year, matched by the states, should be invested in government schools.

**Q** How will your party respond to the national teacher shortage which is set to worsen in the next decade?

**A** Immediate and long-term workforce planning is needed to avoid the teacher shortages that loom.

The Democrats propose:

- administrative support and teacher aides in schools, freeing up teachers to concentrate on classroom teaching and one-to-one assistance for those children who do not learn at the same rate or in the same way as their peers
- an extra 1,000 university teaching places each year from 2005, including sufficient teacher education places in science
- special incentives for Indigenous students and flexible accelerated teacher education pathways for science teaching, and
- high-quality teacher education programs accompanied by housing assistance and scholarships.

## Public education is a joint federal/state responsibility...

**Q** What will your party do to ensure access to high-quality education with improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students?

**A** Little progress has been made on improving the educational status of Indigenous Australians, despite a Senate inquiry some years ago that found major deficiencies in their schooling.

The Democrats propose:

- more culturally appropriate programs, curricula and school environments, as determined by Indigenous communities
- replacement of the many substandard school buildings and equipment in remote Indigenous schools
- recruitment of more Indigenous teachers and greater financial assistance and support in their undergraduate training

- programs in the more remote schools that recognise the ESL (English as a second language) status of Indigenous students
- that the health problems that create barriers to learning be addressed as a matter of urgency, and
- bilingual education in Indigenous languages where this is possible and desired by the community.

**Q** The National Preschool Inquiry has found that early childhood education provision is fragmented and at least 40,000 children are not receiving preschool education. What does your party propose to address this matter?

**A** Firstly, I commend the AEU for funding this important and timely inquiry. The inquiry report will be used to inform policy development for the Democrats and, hopefully, the Government. Many parents cannot afford preschool fees and preschool teachers are in short supply, partly because they are paid around \$7,000 less than their primary school counterparts.

The Democrats propose:

- a re-engagement of the Federal Government in the development of a national framework on preschool that includes a guarantee of free preschool to all three- and four-year-old children funded 50:50 by the Commonwealth and the states, and
- more generous and more flexible funding arrangements that ensure universal access to a high standard of preschool to improve the social and educational readiness of infants for primary school and provide wage parity for teachers. ■

SENATOR BOB BROWN

LEADER

AUSTRALIAN GREENS

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

**A** A strong and optimistic public education and TAFE system is central to the Greens' vision for a just, cohesive and successful society. The Howard Government has aggressively increased the funding of private schools while starving public education of growth funding. Commonwealth TAFE funding has been cut by 15 per cent since 1996. If this bias to private provision is not corrected, the future of public education is at risk.

The Greens will be campaigning for a new deal for public education that puts it at the top of the nation's agenda, including:

- ending the funding of the wealthiest private schools and re-directing the \$1.5 billion saved over 2005 to 2008 to a new national Disadvantaged Schools Program for public education
- holding the total Commonwealth funding of all other private schools at 2003/04 levels and redirecting the \$5 billion saved into public education

...teaching a real history of Indigenous Australians...is more important than flying the flag.

- further increasing the Commonwealth's funding of public education, without automatic flow-ons to private schools
- a New Schools Policy, to stop the unplanned growth of private schools
- a \$2.8 billion increase in the federal funding of TAFE over 2005 to 2007, including funding the growth in student numbers, ending TAFE fees

and a "Save TAFE" package to reverse casualisation and the exploitation of casual teachers in TAFE, and

- ending the funding of private providers that compete with TAFE.

The Greens' proposals would end the growth of private schools at the expense of public education and would massively increase the Commonwealth funding of public education to boost teachers' salaries and professional development opportunities, increase the total number of teachers and reduce class sizes, and provide additional resources for children with special needs and public schools which serve disadvantaged communities.

**Q** How will your party respond to the national teacher shortage which is set to worsen in the next decade?

**A** The Greens are committed to increasing public sector teachers' salaries, not only to recognise the importance and difficulty of the work they perform but also to attract a new generation of committed young people into the profession and to reduce the number of early career teachers leaving. Increasing salaries is one ingredient in restoring community respect for the teaching profession. We are also committed to reducing class sizes to improve the working conditions of teachers and the learning conditions for students. The Greens are also working to increase Commonwealth funding and support for teacher education to secure the supply of teachers.

**Q** What will your party do to ensure access to high-quality education with improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students?

**A** The Greens are committed to funding targeted equity programs in public education to ensure that learning outcomes for Indigenous Australians

match those of the rest of the community. While some State government education authorities have established policies which represent a good first step towards this goal, implementation and funding have been disappointing in some cases.

The Greens support Commonwealth funding to ensure that the best aspects of those policies are implemented and that there is an exploration of alternative and innovative modes of public education that are adapted to the educational and social needs and culture of Indigenous communities. This must include recognition of, and respect for, the knowledge and wisdom of community elders and law people, and finding ways of integrating this into a public education setting. We think teaching a real history of Indigenous Australians—including their dispossession—is more important than flying the flag.

In particular, The Greens support increased federal funding to ensure:

- mandatory pre-service teacher education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and educational needs and professional development for all existing teachers
- increased numbers of Aboriginal Education Assistants in public schools
- the exploration of modes of public education that integrate preschool, primary, secondary and TAFE, as well as the complete range of public health and welfare services and community development, and
- increased numbers of teachers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy programs. ▶

## PRIME MINISTER JOHN HOWARD

many teachers will retire. However, there are now more school teacher graduates than ever before, having increased from around 9,500 in 1996 to around 14,000 in 2002. As we create an additional 770 teacher places at university this will increase further. It is estimated that 70,000 students will graduate as qualified teachers over the next five years.

**Q** What will your party do to ensure access to high-quality education with improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students?

**A** The Government will provide \$2.1 billion for Indigenous education over the next four years to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. This is a 20.5 per cent increase over the current quadrennium. Funding will be refocused around programs that have demonstrably improved educational outcomes. The Government

will also ensure a greater weighting of resources towards students who are most disadvantaged, particularly those in remote areas.

**Q** The National Preschool Inquiry has found that early childhood education provision is fragmented and at least 40,000 children are not receiving preschool education. What does your party propose to address this matter?

**A** It is important to be clear that preschool education is a state and territory matter to administer and appropriately fund.

The Coalition Government agrees that there should be greater coherence of early learning and care services. Commonwealth-funded child care has an important role for the nearly 200,000 four- and five-year-olds who use these services. Parents using approved child care are eligible to apply for Child Care Benefit, a subsidy

that assists them with the cost of care.

The Australian Government's primary responsibility for preschool education lies in strategies and funding to support the participation of Indigenous children in preschool. The Government committed funding of around \$11.3 million in 2003 for initiatives to improve education outcomes for Indigenous children through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program.

In addition, the Australian Government makes a significant contribution to providing affordable, quality-assured care for children of preschool age through childcare funding. This Government has allocated record amounts to childcare funding—we expect to spend \$8.5 billion over the next four years, more than any Australian Government has ever spent. ■

## MARK LATHAM

and territory governments to reduce the cost of and increase participation in preschool education programs.

Transition to school programs are critically important. Labor will work with the states and territories to develop an integrated system of child care and early childhood education, to improve access to early childhood education and other appropriate developmental and social activities. Recognising the contribution early childhood education and care services make to children's development, parent support and early identification of children at risk, Labor will develop an integrated national system of local networks linking services such as preschool, child care, playgroups, maternal and children's health, early intervention and parental education. ■

## SENATOR BOB BROWN

**Q** The National Preschool Inquiry has found that early childhood education provision is fragmented and at least 40,000 children are not receiving preschool education. What does your party propose to address this matter?

**A** The Greens recognise the importance of early childhood education to the social and educational development of young people and are working to make up for the lack of funding and government attention it has received in recent years. We are committed to increasing Commonwealth funding for public preschool education so that there are places for all Australian children to experience at least one year of

preschool education. This includes:

- the construction of new public preschool facilities
- increased pre-service and professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, and
- additional teachers and resources for preschool children with special needs.

We will work to ensure that state and Commonwealth governments

**The Greens recognise the importance of early childhood education...**

work in partnership to achieve a national plan for preschool education that establishes standards for teacher education and provision and common educational goals. ■