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Time for leadership

Public education needs commitment and vision from the new Rudd government.

Raising the achievement bar and closing the social gap is central to strengthening national productivity and inclusion in the interests of our national wellbeing and international competitiveness. Much has been said by the Rudd government about social inclusion and productivity. However, it remains conspicuous by its silence when it comes to the value of public education and its centrality in capacity building, community building and nation building.

In opening the 2020 summit, Prime Minister Rudd described that in the future we will have to confront “challenges of increasing complexity and intensity.”

Regrettably, some of these challenges may very well have been created by education policy that fragments our communities, exacerbating rather than ameliorating class, religious and ethnic divides. Free, secular, universally accessible public education remains the key to a vibrant, socially inclusive, cohesive and prosperous Australia.

It's time for leadership and a bold vision for public education. It's time to start committing real dollars to improving education outcomes for all students in pursuit of excellence for the common good. With Labor governments nationwide, an historic opportunity exists for the Commonwealth to end blame shifting games and work cooperatively to fulfil governments' primary obligation to public education.

No further evidence is needed to demonstrate that increased funding for public schools is the key to improving educational outcomes overall, increasing participation rates and reducing under-achievement.

Minister Gillard has declared a “new national partnership to boost school education, focused on the particular educational needs of low socioeconomic status schools.”

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The partnership will reform school funding arrangements, improve teacher quality and resourcing, and demand higher standards and expectations of all students.

It will aim to lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent across Australia. It will also try to at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy and Year 12 equivalent attainment rates. As laudable as these announcements are, they cannot succeed without appropriate resourcing and support for teachers.

On the theme of support for teachers the latest announcements surrounding the national curriculum are of concern to public schools and all teachers.

We can now confirm that while the government has three dedicated

seats on the board for the private school lobby—two for the Catholic sector and one for the independent sector—no one will be articulating the needs of public education and therefore the needs and aspirations of our students.

This is another example of the Rudd government pandering to the private school lobby.

Minister Gillard has told us that a new national curriculum will be developed by 2010 to be delivered across the country from January 2011. We are told that the National Curriculum Board will draw together “the best programs from each state and territory” and “will oversee the development of a rigorous, world-class national curriculum for all Australian students from kindergarten to Year 12.”

All this within two years without any detail concerning the involvement of teachers in the development of this new curriculum, without any reference to broad consultation and trialling of any proposed new curriculum in its development, and without any hint of additional resources and professional development necessary for the implementation of such an initiative.

As teachers, we take our ethical and professional responsibility towards our students very seriously. We will continue to campaign to achieve the respect that teachers and public education deserve. ●



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