



Contact Angelo Gavrielatos at angelo@aeufederal.org.au

The 'fair go' principle

Schools funding must reflect community rights and government obligations.

On April 15 the Deputy Prime Minister announced the commencement of the schools funding review. This review represents one of the most important chapters in the history of schools funding in Australia.

The minister has indicated that the review will be a two-stage process with the first stage seeking views from stakeholder groups on terms of reference. The second stage will commence once the terms of reference have been finalised. We are told it will include open consultations with stakeholders and the broader community.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented levels of investment in school education by the Rudd government, including an 80 per cent increase in funding to government schools and a 50 per cent increase in funding to private schools, there is an inherent bias in Commonwealth funding to private schools.

As shown by Dr Jim McMorro, by the end of the budget period in 2013, a real increase in Commonwealth recurrent funding for government schools of just over \$520 per student is projected: "This increase would fund the equivalent of three additional teachers, on average, in a government school of around 500 students," according to McMorro.

"The comparable real increase for each student in a non-government school is higher at \$860 ... This would support the employment of the equivalent of five additional teaching staff at a non-government school with 500 students," he noted.

The projected share of Commonwealth funding directed to public schools at the end of the current funding period in 2012–13 will be 36 per cent of total schools funding.

The review provides the opportunity to finally get rid of a funding system so corrupted that more than 50 per cent of private schools are receiving more government funding than they would

"... this is an indefensible, unsustainable funding system..."

be entitled to if the funding formula were properly applied—\$3.5 billion more.

As highlighted in a review commissioned by the Howard government, this is an indefensible, unsustainable funding system that favours private schools and is contributing to a deepening inequality in the provision of education. Research shows that only 35 per cent of the growth in Commonwealth funding to private schools has been enrolment driven.

This review of schools funding will be about the rights of Australian families and the obligation of governments: the right of every family and child to have access to a well-resourced, high quality public school in their local community.

After all, the only guarantee in the provision of education for every child is enrolment in his/her local public school. Only by properly funding our public schools can we guarantee every child has the opportunity to fulfill his/her potential.

It is therefore the obligation of governments to properly and adequately fund government schools. As Kevin Rudd himself has said: "The Commonwealth has a primary obligation to adequately and appropriately fund Government schools".

A comment by Kevin Rudd, during the health debate on 23 March this year with opposition leader Tony Abbott, is pertinent in the context of the review of schools funding. He said: "...for Australia and our way of life we have always accepted, as a principle..., that wherever you come from, whether your health is good or bad, whether you're rich or poor, and whatever part of our federation you happen to have grown up in—a small country town or a large city—that you should be able to have access to the best hospital services and the best health services which we can provide. That's our overall principle. It's the principle of a fair go."

Our hope is that Kevin Rudd utters a similar set of words for education—public education. ●

Angelo Gavrielatos
AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT