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Some good news

An extra \$200 million has been allocated for special needs education.

In a pre-budget announcement, the Federal Government has guaranteed an extra \$200 million for the education of students with disabilities.

The AEU secured a commitment by the Prime Minister during the 2010 federal election campaign for extra funding following a concerted political campaign over two years.

This is a most welcomed boost in funding for one of the most neglected areas of education. We expect the overwhelming majority of the extra funding to be allocated to public schools across Australia given that 80 per cent of students with disabilities, including those with the most severe disabilities, are enrolled in government schools.

While the extra funds will help to better meeting the needs of students with disabilities, more resources will be required following the completion of the current review of schools funding if we are to improve the learning opportunities and outcomes of all students with special needs.

A better deal for public schools

About 7,200 submissions had been received by the schools funding review panel when submissions closed at the end of March. More than 6,000 were submitted as a result of the AEU's For Our Future campaign.

The message from around Australia is loud and clear. If all Australian students are to reach their full potential, we need a better deal for public schools. Parents, teachers and principals demonstrated yet again a great commitment to the great tradition and success story that is public education.

The AEU submission to the funding

“...differences in educational outcomes [should not be] the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions.”

review calls for major changes in the way public and private schools are funded. As we have repeatedly said, this review is an historic opportunity to reform the way our schools are funded.

The current level of government funding is neither adequate to meet the needs of students in our public schools nor distributed equitably, efficiently or sustainably. We must get rid of a federal funding system that is blind to the real needs of students. We must get rid of a funding system that delivers to more than half the private schools more funding than they are entitled to. We must get rid of a funding system that is

delivering more total government funding to private schools serving wealthier families than public schools serving poorer communities. We must get rid of a funding system that is fuelling a resources gap between public and private schools and is exacerbating social divides within communities.

The great challenge for us as a nation is to improve our overall performance in education and ensure that the needs of every child are met so that every child can reach their full potential. The only way we can do that is by ensuring we have well-resourced public schools of the highest quality in every community.

More than 150 years ago, the father of public education, Sir Henry Parkes saw it as a duty to offer an education to every child “making no distinction of faith, asking no question about where a child was born, what may be his condition of life or what the position of his parents, but inviting all to sit side by side”. Recognising the important socialising aspect of schooling, he believed that children should learn together and learn to live together. He said, “let us be whatever faith we may, let us still remember that we are above everything else free citizens...”.

Let us never lose sight of this principle. ●

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