



AEU Parliamentary Brief

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Schools Funding

The Australian Education Union is concerned at recent public statements by both the Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, and the Shadow Education Spokesperson, Stephen Smith, in relation to the future federal funding of schools under a Labor government.

While categorically reassuring the parents of students in private schools that those schools will not experience any funding cuts under an ALP funding model, and indeed will continue to receive funds indexed at the AGSRC level, both Rudd and Smith have consistently failed, in any way, to acknowledge the needs of the 70% of students attending government schools.

This has been the case despite the principles outlined in the *Lifelong Education and Training* chapter of the draft ALP platform particularly as expressed in

- clause 21 where the ALP endorses the MCEETYA funding principles which include a commitment to ensure that *the total level of funding for government schooling is adequate to ensure access to high quality government schooling for all, and all governments' funding policies recognise this a national priority and*

- clause 23, which states that *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 Australian society and culture, to keep pace with the times, to strive for educational and intellectual excellence, to contribute to the development of 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 schools through enhanced Commonwealth programs for schools.*

If the ALP is serious about not having a two-tiered education system in Australia it must address the existing imbalance in federal education funding to schools. Since 1996 the public share has dropped from 42% to 35% and, under the present model, will be further reduced to 32% by 2010.

Kevin Rudd and Stephen Smith have continued to maintain that the ALP's schools funding policy will be based on "need and fairness", yet they consistently fail to take the simple step of acknowledging that this must mean a priority for

public schools, given that the public sector is where the need is greatest.

Federal Labor's public positioning on this matter raises questions for teachers and parents of public school children, but answers none. To claim that the policy is based on need and fairness while at the same time guaranteeing the levels of funding currently being received by some schools, and insisting that the indexation mechanism (which ensures that increased expenditure in the public sector flows to the private sector) * will not be disturbed, is easily interpreted as a restatement of current Coalition policy.

Parents and teachers of children in public schools could be forgiven for thinking that the ALP is more concerned with wooing the votes of the minority at the expense of the needs of the majority. What is being asked here is simply that the party adheres to its policy.

The electorate has a right to be informed of Labor's intentions well in advance of the election. It is incumbent upon both Kevin Rudd and Stephen Smith to outline how the ALP intends to ensure that public schools receive the funding that they need and deserve.

**Funding levels for private schools are indexed to reflect the increase in costs incurred by government to educate students in public schools (This is commonly referred to as the Average Government Student Recurrent Cost - AGSRC). Because public schools enrol approximately 90% of students with disabilities, Aboriginal students and those from isolated and remote settings, the average cost of this public education provision is higher than in private schools. To automatically link this funding to private schools, therefore, is clearly inappropriate. By not breaking the nexus between the cost of educating students in public schools and the funding of private schools the ALP will ensure that the position of privilege currently enjoyed by private schools will be preserved.*



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