



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Australian Education (Consequential
and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 17 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Leigh, Andrew, MP

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Dr LEIGH (Fraser—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (19:42): I thank honourable members who have contributed to the debate. The Australian Education (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill is consequential to the enactment of the proposed Australian Education Act 2013. The bill amends the Federal Financial Relations Act 2009 and the Schools Assistance Act 2008 to enable Commonwealth recurrent and capital funding for all Australian schools, including funding for schools participating in the reform arrangements and government schools in states and territories choosing not to participate to be exclusively appropriated under the proposed Australian Education Act 2013 from 1 January 2014. The bill also contains transitional provisions relating to certain requirements under the proposed Australian Education Act 2013 in order to ensure a smooth transition and to reduce the administrative burden on schools and governments associated with moving to the new arrangements.

This bill supports the government's historic national school education reform agenda which will enshrine in law a national approach to funding school education that ensures that schools are funded according to the needs of their students. The reform also importantly links school funding to key school reform directions embedded in the National Plan for School Improvement. These are real reforms that evidence shows will lead to better schools and better outcomes for our students. These are reforms that include investment in quality teaching, recognising the commitment, dedication and potential of every teacher by supporting them with better opportunities for development and career progression. The national plan will continue work already underway in this area by raising entry standards for teaching courses, annual performance assessments for all teachers and providing more support to teachers in their first years in the classroom.

The reforms will invest in quality learning, ensuring that all schools are supported to provide an engaging and responsive environment, one that recognises and takes advantage of changes in technology. It is something we have started through the national curriculum, the National Safe Schools Framework which addresses student behaviour in the classroom and in the playground, and the Digital Education Revolution.

The reforms include empowered school leadership: we recognise the importance of principal autonomy—principals in their schools making local decisions that meet the local needs of their school communities—and teachers in their classrooms being exemplars.

The bill will deliver transparency and accountability, and ensures that parents and the wider community know what governments and schools are doing with school funding: what we are achieving, what we are learning from reforms and how we are sharing what works. The bill will help meet student need. The link between student background and achievement is strong, and too many students from less-advantaged backgrounds are falling behind. We recognise this and we are seeking a shared commitment by all states and territories to support the provision of a high-quality schooling experience for all students.

Better, fairer funding based on the needs of schools and students, together with these National Plan for School Improvement reforms will ensure that all Australian students get the education they deserve; not one dictated to them by what school they go to, where they live or what their parents do for a living. Having the best education possible will help every Australian child to achieve their true potential. It will ensure that we as a nation have the skills and knowledge to compete internationally.

I want to address two issues that were raised by the member for Sturt in his speech to the chamber earlier this evening. At one point the member for Sturt suggested that the government had a secret plan for means testing. Let me be clear: there will be no means testing of parents who send their children to non-government schools under the new school funding plan. The government has always ruled this out, and nothing has changed.

It is important to recognise that the current funding system introduced by the Howard government already takes into account the capacity of a school community to contribute to the costs of education. It is the government's

view that reflecting capacity to contribute is the fairest approach, and that is an approach that is supported across the education sector. What the Gonski review found was that the current method of assessing the capacity to pay is flawed, and does not provide an accurate picture. The review recommended that the government should:

... develop, trial and implement a better measure of the capacity of parents to contribute in consultation with the non-government sectors.

The non-government sector itself has also requested that a more accurate method be developed. That work is now underway and it is referred to in the National Education Reform Agreement.

Another suggestion that the shadow minister made was a claim around school funding indexation. The fact is that current Commonwealth indexation for school funding is 3.9 per cent, having fallen from 5.9 per cent last year due to state government reductions in school spending. The shadow minister is basing projections from a period in which many states and territories had Labor governments which were investing strongly in school spending. But with many Liberal-National party governments having taken over the reins, state government spending on schools has fallen and that has affected Commonwealth indexation for school funding.

Page 120 of budget paper No. 2 in the recent budget shows that should AGSRC fall to three per cent, schools would lose \$16 billion over the six-year period. It is important, I think, for members of the House to be aware of the facts around indexation and the facts around means testing.

I commend the bill to the House. This bill is a small part, yet an essential part, of our vision for Australian schools and students and Australia's future in the global economy.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Debate adjourned.