



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

Schools Assistance Amendment Bill 2011

In Committee

SPEECH

Monday, 19 September 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Collins, Sen Jacinta

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Senator JACINTA COLLINS (Victoria—Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations) (11:15): I think Senator Mason for moving these two amendments together. It may save the chamber some time. These amendments have already been moved and lost in the other place. They were lost because they are poor amendments that do nothing to enhance the delivery of the Australian curriculum. I shall repeat, for the benefit of the opposition, the arguments made by the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth in the House.

The first opposition amendment relates to the issue, as mentioned by Senator Mason, of teacher professional development. The Australian government is making a substantial contribution to the establishment of Australia's first national curriculum. This is the curriculum that the coalition often talked about but were unable to deliver, much like their early childhood agenda. Under the National Education Agreement, the Australian government and states and territories are jointly responsible for the development of the Australian curriculum. States and territories, including non-government schools and systems, are responsible for implementation of the Australian curriculum. This was a commitment under the National Education Agreement and is a requirement of the Schools Assistance Act. Implementation refers to delivery with appropriate support. This has clearly been understood by the states and territories since this was first discussed at ministerial council meetings. The first opposition amendment ignores this agreement. It is also fiscally irresponsible.

The opposition already has a \$70 billion black hole, and this amendment would commit the Commonwealth to further millions of uncapped expenditure. There are over 100,000 non-government schoolteachers in the teacher workforce in Australia. The coalition refers to 'such funding as is necessary', without definition, in the amendment. The opposition have promised cuts of \$2.8 billion and have yet to tell us what proportion of the \$70 billion black hole will come from education—another \$5 billion in cuts, \$10 billion, \$15 billion and now another uncapped promise.

All states and territories have agreed that the implementation of the Australian curriculum is their responsibility. They have committed to this. All states and territories have programs that could be used or redirected to focus on professional development for teachers to deliver the Australian curriculum. One significant benefit of the Australian curriculum will be the sharing of national and state and territory resources to support all teachers. The Australian government is also supporting the delivery of the national curriculum. The national digital resource collection, managed by Education Services Australia, gives schools access to over 5,000 resources aligned to the Australian curriculum. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is delivering professional development in the form of the Leading Curriculum Change Professional Learning Flagship Program.

Let me move to the second opposition amendment, which is also an inaccurate reflection of current processes. Firstly, the Australian government believes strongly in school choice. The government's policies recognise this principle in practice. The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth has regular meetings with the non-government school sector and takes into account their views when making decisions at ministerial council meetings. The Australian Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee, AEEYSOC, is made up of senior officials of government departments across states and territories. This committee was specifically established and formulated to provide support directly to ministers in relation to ministerial council meetings, and this is the key point. Membership of AEEYSOC is not an appropriate decision for the Australian parliament. It is a decision for the ministerial council and it is a decision for education ministers from all states and territories. I would also make the point that it is a decision that the coalition somehow forgot to make when they had the opportunity.

The non-government sector is represented on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA, and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, AITSL. The Australian government has also established the strategic policy working group chaired by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations secretary. It includes representation from the Catholic and independent sectors and was

specifically established to consult on the government's education reforms. The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth personally chairs the cross-sectoral Australian government election commitments working group. This is a significant opportunity for formal consultation, and this is entirely reasonable given the importance of the non-government school sector. It is also more consultation than the former coalition government ever provided. The government will continue to consult with the non-government sector and to include the non-government sector in working parties and committees. These amendments should be defeated.