Turnbull must not abandon Gonski and federal responsibility for public schools



Malcolm Turnbull's proposal to end Federal Government funding of public schools would entrench inequity and end needs-based Gonski funding in Australian schools, the AEU said today.

Prime Minister Turnbull suggested on radio this morning that one option being discussed as part of his plans to change income tax arrangements was for State Governments to take full responsibility for funding public schools, while the Federal Government took responsibility for private schools.

AEU Deputy Federal President Maurie Mulheron said the plan, which will be discussed at tomorrow's COAG meeting, would be a disaster and was an attempt by Mr Turnbull to dodge responsibility for funding schools.

"Locking in a system where State Governments have full responsibility for public schools and the Federal Government for private schools is locking in inequity and would be the end of needs-based Gonski funding," Mr Mulheron said.

"Schools don't care whether their funding comes from the State or Federal Government – they just care about whether they have the funds to meet the needs of their students.

"The key recommendation of the Gonski Review was that the Federal Government needed to work with the States and take the bulk of responsibility for ensuring disadvantaged schools got the funding they needed.

"This meant two-thirds of the extra revenue schools need was to come from the Federal Government and one-third from the States, recognising that the Federal Government had greater access to funding than the cash-strapped States.

"Mr Turnbull's plan goes against the principles of the Gonski model and its goal of giving every student the chance of a quality education regardless of where they go to school.

"We need Mr Turnbull to fund the full six years of Gonski reforms which fund all schools on the basis of need, not whether they are public or private. He needs to match Labor's commitment to invest an extra $4.5 billion in schools in 2018 and 2019.

"Malcolm Turnbull's real agenda is becoming clear. His income tax plan is simply a way for the Federal Government to abandon its responsibilities to public schools and hospitals.

“State Governments must reject this plan and demand that the Federal Government continue to fund all schools on the basis of need.

“We are already seeing Gonski funding making a positive difference to student results. We need the full six years of the Gonski agreements to ensure that all schools get the resources they need to educate all of their students.

“Prior to the Gonski reforms we had a funding system that was not based on need and which saw the biggest increases in funding go to private schools.

“Gonski funding aims to resolve this mess by ensuring that both levels of government take their share of responsibility for funding the schools which educate disadvantaged students.

“Mr Turnbull wants to turn his back on this and go back to an inefficient, divisive and inequitable system which will see thousands of students left behind.

The Federal Government’s own Green Paper on Reform of the Federation warned against what Mr Turnbull has proposed saying that:

“This option could, however, lead to very different funding models being applied across the States and Territories and between the government and non-government sectors, leading to differences in the level of public funding for schools with similar population characteristics. This is likely to give rise to concerns about fairness, as well as introduce perverse incentives for governments to shift costs within the system.”

Mr Mulheron said Mr Turnbull’s plan would disadvantage students in States which had less capacity to raise their own income tax.

“If Malcolm Turnbull fails to fund Gonski in full, he is failing our kids,” Mr Mulheron said.

“We know that 1-in-7 15 year-olds struggles to read properly, and 1-in-5 struggles with basic maths.

“We also know that disadvantaged students are five times more likely to be poor performers than students from wealthy backgrounds.

“It is not in our long-term social or economic interest to let these children leave school without the skills to get a job or lead a successful life.

“Gonski funding delivers extra funding to all schools, but delivers the biggest increases to schools which educate disadvantaged students."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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