A public education agenda for the new education minister

Save Our Schools (SOS) today presented a public education agenda for the new Minister for Education, Jason Clare. SOS National Convenor, Trevor Cobbold, said that Labor's silence on crucial issues in public education must end: "The new minister must step up for public schools".

"Labor went to the election without an agenda for public education. It cannot be a do nothing government on public education. There are major issues and challenges facing public education that the new minister must take action on.

"The foremost priority is to ensure that public schools are fully funded at 100 per cent of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) within five years. At present, public schools in all states except the ACT are funded at less than 90 per cent of their SRS and will remain at less than 91 per cent until at least 2029 and 2032 in the case of Queensland. In contrast, private schools in all states except the Northern Territory are funded at above 100 per cent of their SRS. The under-funding of public schools amounts to about $7 billion a year.

"This situation constitutes a crisis in public education which must be resolved. It is harming the learning of disadvantaged students who are two to four years behind their advantaged peers. Over 80 per cent of these students are in public schools and 98 per cent of all disadvantaged schools are public schools.

"Last December, the Labor education shadow minister, Tanya Plibersek, said that "The inequity at the heart of our funding system absolutely has to change," and that, "Every student should get 100 per cent of the fair funding level" [Geelong Advertiser, 11 December 2021]. The new minister must expedite full funding of public schools.

"The first step is to increase the Commonwealth role in funding public education. The arbitrary limit placed on Commonwealth funding of public schools by the previous government of only 20 per cent or their SRS must be lifted. The Commonwealth has a key role to play in ensuring national equity in education.

"A second step is to re-negotiate the Commonwealth-State bilateral funding agreements to ensure that public schools are funded at 100 per cent of their SRS within 5 years. The states must also increase their share of the SRS of public schools.

"Re-negotiation of the agreements must include stopping the states defrauding public schools by including expenditures not included in the measure of the SRS as part of their contribution to the SRS of public schools. This skulduggery is defrauding public schools of about $2 billion a year."

Mr. Cobbold called on the minister to support the inclusion of specific equity objectives in the National School Reform Agreement which is being reviewed by the Productivity Commission.

"Equity is only vaguely defined in the current agreement. It can be interpreted in a myriad of ways to avoid accountability. A clear national statement is needed to guide education policy and funding and to monitor progress towards achieving equity in school outcomes. We propose the following definition:

> All students should receive an adequate education and school outcomes for different social groups such as low SES, Indigenous and remote area students should be similar to high SES students.

"This definition is consistent with the approach adopted by the original Gonski Report on school funding.

"The minister should also commission a review of the funding loadings for disadvantaged students and schools. Research studies show that the loadings are far too low to make a significant difference to the achievement of these students and schools. They need to be five times larger than the basic loadings to lift the results of disadvantaged students to average levels, let alone get to the level of high SES students.

"There are also many other pressing issues that the minister must engage with. These include reducing the teacher shortage, decreasing teacher workload and reversing the casualisation of teaching. These issues are contributing to attrition from the teaching workforce. The Commonwealth can provide leadership and incentive on these matters."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026