A public education agenda for the new minister

Public education advocacy group Save Our Schools (SOS) has presented a public education agenda for Federal Education Minister Jason Clare and called on the minister to step up for public schools.

SOS national convenor Trevor Cobbold said Labor went to the recent federal election without an agenda for public education and could not 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,” Mr Cobbold said.

“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.”

Mr Cobbold said the first step was to increase the Commonwealth role in funding public education.

He said the arbitrary limit placed on Commonwealth funding of public schools by the previous government of only 20 per cent or their SRS had to be lifted and that the Commonwealth had 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 five years. The states must also increase their share of the SRS of public schools,” Mr Cobbold said.

“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 Minister Clare to support the inclusion of specific equity objectives in the National School Reform Agreement which is being reviewed by the Productivity Commission.

“A clear national statement is needed to guide education policy and funding and to monitor progress towards achieving equity in school outcomes,” he said.

“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.”

Mr Cobbold called on Minister Clare to commission a review of the funding loadings for disadvantaged 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,” he said.

“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.
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