



The Coalition's plan for real action on
Quality Education

**Stand up for Australia.
Stand up for real action.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition is committed to quality schooling for all children.

Schools should be about achieving excellence and equipping our children for happy and productive lives. Education should be a pathway towards prosperity – for individuals, their families and our nation as a whole. Yet under Labor it has been about spin, waste, bureaucracy and ineptitude.

Nowhere has the waste and incompetence of the Labor Government been more apparent than in our schools. Promising an 'education revolution', the Rudd-Gillard Government has instead recklessly wasted billions of taxpayer dollars, leaving countless families disappointed by broken promises and ignored the needs of teachers and schools that face uncertainty about their future funding.

This gross waste and mismanagement has compromised the education, services and assistance that our students need and deserve. Australian schools are clearly no better off than they were three years ago.

The Coalition has a plan for real action to invest wisely and meaningfully in our schools to promote quality teaching through individual reward and recognition and to help children with disabilities. Our plan is based on parental choice, local decision-making and greater certainty for schools.

A Coalition Government will:

1. Establish a **Better Teacher Reward Fund** to recognise and reward our best and brightest teachers
2. Establish a **School Technology Fund** to ensure schools get the technology they need and want
3. Extend the **Education Tax Rebate** to help parents meet the costs of education and support families
4. Establish an **Education Card** to support students with disabilities and their families
5. Maintain equitable funding arrangements for existing schools and support **Establishment Grants** to help new schools to grow
6. Restructure **National Partnerships** to achieve value for money
7. Stop Labor's 'school halls' programme waste and **provide a schools building boost**
8. Give **greater control to school principals** so they can effectively deal with issues in their schools
9. Support and strengthen the **National Safe School Framework** by addressing cyber-bullying
10. Extend support and funding for the **National School Chaplaincy Programme**
11. Work towards a **better National Curriculum** and provide professional support to teachers as part of the process
12. Revise the **My School Website** to help student improvement
13. Put the **study of languages** back on the agenda
14. Establish a dedicated **Regional Education Fund** and give a real voice and true future to regional education
15. Continue the **Secure Schools** Programme

HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

Labor came to power in 2007 promising ‘*nothing less than a revolution in education*’¹ and vowing to make education their top priority in government. Instead, education ranks among the Rudd-Gillard Government’s worst failures, a flagship example of traditional Labor waste and mismanagement. Labor simply cannot be trusted with taxpayers money.

Labor promised that their massive ‘Building the Education Revolution’ (BER) infrastructure programme would provide schools with the buildings and improvements they actually need and that taxpayers would get value for money.

The BER programme has been plagued by rip-offs and rorts to the tune of \$6-8 billion - problems that would have been minimised, if not eliminated, had the Government entrusted school communities with the management of their own projects rather than channelling the money through state government bureaucracies. By imposing prescriptive guidelines, many schools have been forced to accept buildings they did not want and cannot use.

For example, Holland Park State School in Queensland received \$1.5 million for a new library even though it already possessed one.² Other schools have received hundreds of thousands of dollars even though they are due for closure or relocation. In just one example, four schools in Tasmania together received over a million dollars despite being scheduled for closure.³ In true Labor tradition, the total cost of the BER programme blew out by \$1.5 billion.

Labor promised at the last election that every student in Australia would receive a computer and all schools would have access to fast broadband speeds.

But the Computers in Schools programme, also known as the ‘Digital Education Revolution’ has also been a shambles from the start. The Labor Government’s original election promise pledged \$1 billion to give a computer to every student in Australia. The cost eventually blew out to two billion of taxpayers’ dollars.

In its first year, computers were allocated to less than 10 per cent of public schools in Australia. As at February 2010, only 220,000 of the 1 million computers have been installed in schools and none have been connected to fast 100 megabits per second fibre broadband, as promised by Labor.

Labor promised they would support parental choice. Although it is clear that parents want choice in their childrens’ education and expect all schools to receive appropriate government funding, the Labor Government continues to vacillate. Captive to the Education Union, Labor is at heart philosophically opposed to supporting choice and diversity in schools.

Labor has abolished the Establishment Grants programme for non-government schools. This popular and successful programme provided small grants to new non-government schools in their difficult first two years to help them get going.

Labor’s so called ‘education revolution’ has been nothing but a flagship example of waste, mismanagement, and missed opportunities – the hallmark of Labor and the Rudd-Gillard Government.

1 ‘Rudd vows education revolution’ *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 January 2007

2 ‘Rudd funds to pay for duplicate buildings’ *The Australian* 16 June 2009

3 ‘Doomed schools given \$1m’ *The Mercury* 25 May 2009

THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION ON QUALITY EDUCATION

The Coalition is committed to building a world class education system that will equip Australian children to succeed in an increasing competitive world. It understands that excellence in the classroom directly translates into national prosperity and productivity.

The Coalition will:

1. Create a Better Teacher Reward Fund to keep our best teachers in classrooms

A Coalition Government will commit \$200 million to establish a Better Teacher Reward Fund.

Every school in Australia will be eligible to apply for funding from the Better Teacher Reward Fund for the sole purpose of paying their teachers more and paying them more judiciously.

The Better Teacher Reward Fund will be administered by an independent Board of Trustees, appointed after consultation with industry stakeholders. The Board will be given strict guidelines to ensure fairness and transparency and ensure that schools get their fair share.

School principals will be responsible for lodging applications to the Better Teacher Reward Fund. The Board will assess the applications by considering the merits of each individual application, on a school by school basis. This will include liaison with the school council or other relevant parent group.

Preference will be given to applications covering the work of teachers in disadvantaged schools, schools with a high proportion of special needs students and schools located in regional areas.

The Board will make payments directly to teachers. The first payments will commence in the 2013 school year. The Board of Trustees will have the capacity to withhold tax. This will eliminate the need for the involvement of state education departments who would otherwise be the employer of the teacher and required to make the payment to them via state government payroll systems.

Rewarding better teachers in this manner will make a real difference on the ground. It will recognise and reward those teachers who have worked especially hard to provide our children with the education they deserve.

It will help pay our teachers more money to encourage them to continue to provide excellence in education and ensure our kids get the best quality education possible.

In addition, giving school principals this opportunity to increase the remuneration of the best teachers in this way will help empower them within school communities.

The Fund will also be able to avoid the state government bureaucracies, therefore avoiding rorting and departmental rent-seeking, stopping the opportunity for waste and mismanagement, avoiding a repeat of the bungled BER programme and ensuring that the money makes a difference on the ground and is not lost as it flows through different levels of bureaucracy.

2. Ensure schools get the technology they need and want

Labor's 'Computers in Schools' programme is a failed policy, not because computers aren't beneficial, but because Labor over-promised and under-delivered.

At the last election, Labor promised to deliver a laptop to every secondary student from year 9 to year 12 by December 2011 with high speed broadband. We know that currently, only a third of these computers are on desks in schools with one year to go. We also know that the programme was initially meant to cost \$1 billion but it has blown out to \$2.2 billion.

At this rate of delivery, by the programme's end date of December 2011, less than half the promised computers will be on desks.

Not every school is exactly the same. Schools should have more of a say about what they want in their 'toolbox for the 21st century', not just simply sit back and conform to Labor's prescriptive approach which leaves computers in boxes on the school doorstep.

The Coalition is focused on empowering schools to decide what they need, not the one-size-fits-all approach taken by Labor.

A Coalition Government will commit \$120 million towards the establishment of a School Technology Fund to provide grants for the technology improvements needed to improve education outcomes in schools. These grants will support new and future teaching and learning approaches – including the integration of ICT and multimedia technologies.

Grants approved through the School Technology Fund will be paid directly to schools. This will avoid state government bureaucracies and help ensure that the money provided makes a difference and that value is obtained.

Every school in Australia will be eligible to apply for grants to provide items such as:

- smart white boards and other projection technology
- implementation of Learning Management systems
- professional development in the area of ICT for teachers
- laptops or fixed computers
- software
- printers and scanners
- digital cameras and video cameras
- extra utilities – such as additional of power points or storage facilities for ICT technologies

Schools will be able to decide what they need and determine the best way they can get value for money. This will enable schools to match appropriate technology with the education requirements of different year levels, or to use funding for more ICT professional development to incorporate the best technology to support learning.

While the needs of each school are likely to vary, grants of up to \$50,000 will be available through the School Technology Fund.

A School Technology Assessment Panel will be established to assess grant applications and make funding recommendations. Education sector stakeholders and IT experts will be invited to serve on the Panel. To boost ICT equity in schools, applications from the most disadvantaged schools will be given priority.

3. Extend the Education Tax Rebate

The Coalition is committed to supporting families. We believe in easing the pressure of increasing costs of living to empower parents to make choices about the educational opportunities available to their children.

Before the 2007 election, in response to a Coalition commitment, Labor promised to introduce a \$4.4 billion Education Tax Rebate. Labor has since cut funding available through the Rebate by \$1.6 billion – a clear broken promise to Australian families.

The Coalition will increase the Rebate from \$390 to up to \$500 per year per child in primary school. Eligible parents will be able to claim a fifty percent rebate for up to \$1000 of education-related expenses for each child in primary school.

For the higher costs incurred at secondary school, the Coalition will increase the rebate from \$779 to up to \$1000 per year per child in secondary school. Eligible parents will be able to claim a fifty percent rebate for up to \$2000 of education-related expenses for each child in secondary school.

The Coalition will also significantly expand the Rebate to include the following expenses:

- o Government and non-government school fees
- o Camps and excursions
- o Special education costs for children with disabilities, like dyslexia
- o Extra-curricular activities, such as music, dance or drama lessons
- o Tutoring costs
- o Musical instruments required for lessons
- o School photos
- o Sporting fees and equipment

The Coalition will provide relief to families as soon as possible. Subject to the passage of legislation, the Rebate will apply for all eligible expenses incurred from 1 January 2011.

4. Support students with a disability and their families

The Coalition is committed to helping young Australians and their families living with a disability. We believe it is time to take real action to put a better model in place to help to get the best possible educational outcome for Australian students with a disability.

These young Australians and their parents face many barriers to accessing the sort of educational opportunities that their classmates take for granted.

The Coalition will work at a Ministerial Council level to reach agreement between jurisdictions on clear categories for funding for students with a disability. A nationally consistent definition is the first crucial step on the road towards providing greater assistance for all students with disabilities.

The Coalition will also commit \$314 million over the forward estimates to provide portable funding for students with disabilities through an Education Card. The Education Card will be worth up to \$20,000 per year. The Education Card will be introduced incrementally, in a targeted manner - commencing with those who need it most and with reference to the newly created disability definitions. It is estimated that the roll-out of the Education Card will initially provide assistance to almost 6000 disabled children and their families.

5. Maintain funding equity for existing schools and help new schools grow

Schools need certainty about long term funding arrangements in order to plan effectively for the future and ensure that every Australian child gets access to the best quality education.

The Coalition commits to continuing the existing funding model for schools to ensure that money is targeted depending on the social and economic status of the community in which it is located. This commitment will ensure that communities that need the most help get their fair share.

We will also consult widely to ensure ongoing funding quality is maintained when the current model expires.

To help new schools develop, the Coalition will also re-introduce Establishment Grants for new schools that are started outside of the public system. These grants will be available from 2011 and will encourage diversity in educational options for parents and students and recognise the increased start-up costs faced by new schools. These grants will be valued at \$500 per student for the first two years of operation.

6. Restructuring National Partnerships to achieve real value for money

Much of the Rudd-Gillard Government's so-called 'education revolution' involves channelling money to state government bureaucracies in order to create red-tape and line State Government coffers, with little transparency or accountability.

The \$1.1 billion partnership for schools from low socio-economic areas is an example of where much better value for money can be obtained by allowing school communities greater autonomy.

The Coalition will restructure this partnership for low socio-economic areas to ensure that every dollar spent achieves the best possible value for money and provides the best help. We will give schools and their communities a greater say, while ensuring that not one dollar is cut for these schools and better value is obtained.

The restructure of the National Partnerships will bypass state governments, ensuring money is better targeted and the effectiveness of investment can be measured.

The Coalition recognises that boosting entry levels for higher education, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds begins in primary school – not in year 12.

Schools will achieve better value from their federal investment through self management, having the ultimate flexibility to design programs and literacy and numeracy projects that are tailored to their school community and to their individual students.

The Coalition anticipates that this measure, along with our boost to principal autonomy and changes to the Education Tax Rebate, will increase the dividend of young people who go onto higher education into the future.

This restructure will involve securing special funding for school technology grants and the Better Teacher Reward Fund.

7. Stop labor's waste and provide a BER school building boost

Billions have been wasted on Labor's Building the Education (BER) 'school halls' programme. We will stop the waste, allow schools get value for money for what they receive, and let schools re-invest any savings.

The Coalition will redirect unspent BER 'school halls' funds away from state education departments and instead give these funds directly to each school.

Schools that have been allocated funding under Labor's BER 'school halls' programme will still be entitled to receive that money.

However, they will have the option of choosing to stick with the project/s they have been told they will receive or to select another option that actually suits their needs.

If schools keep their original project, they will be free to take on the management of that project themselves, including getting better value for money through a proper competitive tender process and the use of local builders and contractors rather than state government controlled providers.

The Coalition will consult extensively with affected stakeholders about the most effective way to ensure schools get what they want and achieve value for money.

8. Unshackle school Principals so they can deal with issues ‘on the ground’

Our school principals are shackled by union-prescribed rules that have been legitimised by state bureaucracies. The unions hinder decision-making on the ground and in a timely manner. Most importantly, governments will always struggle to understand the specific issues faced by individual school communities. By contrast, senior members of a school community usually know what is best for their school.

International studies show that students from disadvantaged areas have a better chance of going on to higher education when they come from a school where principals have a greater say in running the school.⁴

The Coalition believes that the more autonomous a school is, the more it will be focussed on the school community, the more parents will be engaged and the better the overall outcome for its students.

The Coalition will drive reform in the area of principal autonomy through recurrent funding agreements with the states and territories. Specifically, we will deliver a model which will:

- Allow direct school involvement in the selection and ongoing performance management of staff.
- Increase flexibility to support schools to choose how to deploy financial resources that flow to the school.
- Support schools or several schools planning together with a range of options in addition to traditional governance arrangements, such as ‘federations of schools that pool resources and governance arrangements.’

9. Strengthen the National Safe School Framework – addressing the key issues of bullying, cyber-bullying and discipline in our schools.

Bullying is a big problem for parents and students. The ‘high-tech’ nature of our everyday lives has created new and easier opportunities for bullies to ply their trade. The Coalition is committed to ensuring that students can maximise their educational experience in an environment that is free from harassment and bullying.

To progress this commitment, the Coalition will ensure that future education funding agreements with state governments will include measures to empower principals, giving them the authority to tackle bullying and cyber bullying occurring both on and off campus within their school community.

The Coalition’s real action plan to combat bullying in schools will:

- Grant new powers to principals giving them greater autonomy to deal with bullying issues within their schools – on and off campus, holding students to account outside of the schoolyard for how they treat their peers.
- Launch a new national anti-bullying education campaign.

4. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Policy Brief (2004). Retrieved at:<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/8/29472036.pdf>

- Establish new National Cyber Bullying Taskforce comprising representatives from the internet industry, experts, education stakeholders, parents and students. The taskforce will be responsible for developing a code for social networking sites and recommending a universal system for children to report cyber bullying and refer offensive material.
- Develop national reporting requirements for all schools on incidences of bullying in schools, both for on and off campus bullying and cyber bullying.
- Expand existing research into cyber bullying. Under the previous Government two research projects were commissioned to better understand cyber bullying and how to address it. The Coalition will expand this research to include all school age groups.

10. Continue Funding for the National School Chaplaincy Programme

The Coalition introduced the National School Chaplaincy Programme to enable schools to employ a part-time school chaplain, to provide much-needed pastoral care and non-denominational spiritual guidance in schools. Feedback and research confirms that the school chaplaincy programme has had a major beneficial impact on Australian students and school communities.

The Coalition will ensure funding for this programme until 2014.

11. A better national curriculum and related teacher support

The move towards a nationally consistent curriculum for school students has been a step in the right direction, but Labor has politicised the draft curriculum by stealth.

For example, there is no reference to the Magna Carta or the Westminster Parliamentary system which form the fundamental basis for our laws, society and parliament. Instead, the draft curriculum suggests that our students are best served learning about the day-to-day activities of trade unions and the history of the Australian Labor Party.

The Coalition is committed to achieving the right balance and ensuring that our students learn educational basics and important fundamentals about our nation's history and structure. These things should not be compromised in order to accommodate Labor ideology or that of fringe interest groups.

A Coalition Government will take steps to ensure that meaningful, widespread community consultation on the national curriculum occurs with every interested Australian. We will ensure that the important basics are not lost to the voices of vested interest or lobby groups.

The Coalition will review the National Curriculum and widen the consultative process, considering a broader based approach that encourages and fosters choice and diversity.

The Coalition is also concerned that there are no specific resources assigned by the government for the teacher training and professional development required to implement the new National Curriculum, which is to be trialled during 2011, with full implementation by 2013.

As part of the review process, a Coalition Government will consult widely to seek feedback in order to assess the appropriateness of current levels of support with regard to teacher training and professional development in all areas in order to make a considered decision about what level of support is required in the future to roll out key aspects of the curriculum.

Teachers have, not surprisingly, been concerned about the lack of resources to assist them in making the transition to the new curriculum, particularly in the areas of history and science.

To support the Coalition's goal to ensure that teachers are able to access professional development support to implement the new curriculum, \$20 million will be made available in line with the Coalition's implementation timeline.

12. Student improvement

The Coalition will instigate a revision of the MySchool website, primarily to publish overall school improvement, rather than just comparing the raw results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test results against 'like schools'.

Increasing effectiveness of the My Schools website, through increased NAPLAN testing as suggested by many leading education experts, would increase opportunities for schools to identify the cause of students progressing at faster and slower rates, leading to more timely improvement in instruction and schools programs.

The Coalition will examine expanding NAPLAN testing over time from years 3 to 10, to actually measure improvement in students to give parents, teachers and government a far better understanding of how a student, and school is progressing.

13. Putting languages study back on the agenda

In the 1950s, Australia was more culturally aware on at least one vital measure: the foreign language proficiency of those completing high school. By 1960, 40 per cent of year 12 students studied a second language compared to just 14 per cent today. Other statistics should also be cause for concern:

- fewer than five per cent of students now complete secondary school studying an Asian language
- Asian language uptake in our education system has declined steadily since 2002
- 95 per cent of students undertaking Mandarin at Year 12 are either native-speakers of Chinese or have Chinese heritage
- no non-Korean background student currently undertakes Korean at Year 12 – yet Korea is our third largest trading partner
- only 1100 Year 12 students across Australia are enrolled to study Indonesian – the national language of our largest neighbour
- Japanese and Indonesian are currently mostly taught in primary schools

This constitutes a serious skills crisis directly relevant to Australia's international interests. A key factor in our continued prosperity and security as a global nation must be the capacity to understand and operate in languages, cultures and mindsets other than our own.

In the inter-connected world of the 21st century, young Australians have to be equipped with the skills to communicate with people and to understand issues and markets across the globe – this is especially crucial with our major trading partners in the Asian region.

Confident that English is the world's second language, we have become linguistically lazy. Other English speaking countries might be able to get away with this neglect but we can not. Having fewer than 15 per cent of our students leaving school competent in a foreign language – combined with the decline in foreign language study at university – has serious implications for how we relate to the wider world.

The ability to speak a foreign language should be regarded as one of the hallmarks of a good education.

The next Coalition government will work with the states to reconsider and to reinforce the weightings and other incentives which are supposed to encourage high school students to stick with foreign languages.

Shortages of teachers means that it would be difficult to make foreign language study compulsory any time soon, but our ultimate objective should be to ensure that every student has at least some familiarity with other languages and that a significant percentage have studied a foreign language through to school leaving.

14. Give a real voice and true future for regional education

The Coalition will create a \$1 billion Regional Education Fund, to be used to bridge the education gap and address the issues which lead to under-achievement in the regions.

This Fund will be used to invest in twenty-first century education and communication tools to improve learning opportunities in the regions and programmes that encourage quality teachers to move and stay in regional and remote schools.

The Fund will support capital investment in regional universities, as well as initiatives by universities, especially regional universities, to offer innovative educational opportunities for country students and to provide extra material support for students who need to move to obtain higher education.

The Coalition believes school principals should be able to lead and their school councils should be accountable and able to manage their funding responsibility. We will encourage schools to foster creativity, problem solving and teamwork while retaining a core emphasis on numeracy and literacy. We will provide students with the skill sets that employers need, without overlooking the value of a good education in and of itself. We will educate country students to be the professionals that regional communities need.

The Coalition wants to encourage students to complete Year 12 and to support them when they move away from home to higher education.

To oversee this new commitment, the Coalition will appoint a Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education. The Coalition will also establish a dedicated regional education unit in the Department.

Only the Coalition is committed to review ongoing inequities affecting regional students and ensuring that these areas receive the attention and resources they need to provide the highest quality education.

15. Secure Schools Programme

A Coalition Government will commit \$15 million to continue the Secure Schools Programme.

The Secure Schools Programme helps to protect schools that face a special risk of attack, harassment or violence stemming from racial or religious intolerance.

Our ongoing commitment to this programme by the Coalition is recognition of the unique security circumstances that some schools face.

Through the Secure Schools Programme, a Coalition Government will work with schools that face these risks to improve their security arrangements and, above all else, help families and students feel safer in their schools and communities.

The funding will be provided over three years from 2011-12 to 2013-14.

COSTINGS AND FUNDING

The Coalition has previously announced funding of:

- \$760 million towards an extension of the Education Tax Rebate
- \$314 million towards an Education Card for children with a disability
- \$165 million towards the National School Chaplaincy Programme

The Coalition will also commit an additional:

- \$55 million to extend National School Chaplaincy Programme funding to 2013-14
- \$20 million for professional support for teachers in relation to the national curriculum
- \$10.5 million for the Safe School Framework
- \$15 million for the Secure Schools Programme
- \$10 million for School Establishment Grants

This funding will be provided from the nearly \$28 billion in recurrent savings that have been identified by the Coalition over the forward estimates.

In addition, the Coalition will commit \$210 million towards the Better Teacher Reward Fund, and \$120 million towards the School Technology Fund. These measures will be funded through efficiencies achieved from the restructuring of National Partnerships.

The Coalition's Regional Education Fund will be established by quarantining \$1 billion from unallocated funds currently remaining in the existing Education Investment Fund.

	2010-11 \$M	2011-12 \$M	2012-13 \$M	2013-14 \$M	Total \$M
Better Teacher Reward Fund	-	10	100	100	210
School Technology Fund	30	30	30	30	120
Extend Education Tax Rebate	136	196	208	220	760
Education Card	4	60	123	127	314
School Chaplaincy Programme	55	55	55	55	220
Teacher Professional Development	5	7.5	7.5	-	20
Safe School Framework	3.5	3.5	3.5	-	10.5
Secure Schools Programme	-	5	5	5	15
School Establishment Grants	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	10

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