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Speech

Taking Schools to the Next Level

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Nearly all the educational debate in the media at present is about higher education. This is understandable as the Government is proposing a significant reform agenda and it needs to be fully discussed and understood. However, when we consider the relative size and influence of education sectors, the schools sector is what matters most. After parents, there is no greater influence on our children. Schools enrol 3.3 million students, employ over 250,000 teaching staff and consume \$26 billion of taxpayers' money.

Thirty two per cent of the 3.3 million students attend a Catholic or Independent school. Twenty years ago, the figure was only 24 per cent. Non-government school enrolments have grown by 300,000 over this period while government school numbers have remained steady at about 2.25 million.

The median fee that parents pay to send a child to a non-government school is \$1,568. (DEST analysis, 2001 data) But why do parents, having paid their taxes to support government schools, bypass a lower cost education and delve into their wallets again to send their children to Catholic or independent schools, where certainly in the lower fee end, class sizes may be larger and facilities far more humble than at the nearby state government school? Families are voting with their feet. Some argue that the gradual shift to the non-government sector implies that Catholic and Independent schools are increasingly performing better at the things that parents want. In reality, we don't really know whether this is the case. However, there is at least a public *perception* by some that Catholic and independent schools are better. Ironically, a significant part of the perception, I believe, is driven by those who supposedly purport to advocate for government schools. Almost every day we are told that government schools need to be "saved", that they are under-resourced, that they are falling apart, that their teachers are unhappy with the conditions and want to strike. In the meantime, the non-government schools are marketing their wares, proudly proclaiming their values and successes. Surely this feeds a perception, even if wrong, that non-government schools are delivering while the state government schools are struggling?

One thing we do know for sure is that the schooling system in Australia is world class. In international tests, Australian school children are only outperformed by Finland in reading literacy, Japan and Hong Kong-China in mathematical literacy, and Japan and Korea in

scientific literacy. You can't have over two thirds of your schools supposedly in decay and produce such results.

It is also true that many government schools are considered so outstanding that families will move location and pay tens of thousands of dollars more to be in their catchment zones. In Perth, for example, housing is being advertised as being in the Rossmoyne Senior High School Zone; Rossmoyne being the initial winner of *The Australian's* School of the Year in 2001. In NSW, 15,000 year 7 students vie for 3,300 places in government selective high schools.

But how can parents tell that a school is good or bad. It is remarkably difficult to assess. An interesting survey for *The Australian* newspaper might be to ask what information is available to parents to make a sensible decision. In Australia, compared with other countries, there is next to no meaningful information about school performance. In such an environment, perceptions flourish.

Later I will outline my agenda for reform which I believe needs to occur in schooling to take all schools – government and non-government – to the next level. The agenda is informed by parental attitudes, by overseas practice and by the excellence occurring in sections of Australian schooling. I will outline an ambitious 10 point agenda which captures the Australian Government's priorities.

Before doing so, let me firstly address the issue that is never far beneath the surface in any discussion of government and non-government schools. And that is the perception held by some that we are creating a social problem with this slow drift to non-government schools. Those totally opposed to the dual sector system wrongly argue that it creates a social divide between the wealthy kids who access the top-class education at Catholic and independent schools and the poor kids that have to make do with government schools. Many critics then take the next step and accuse the Australian government of supporting the widening of this supposed divide by overly resourcing non-government schools at the expense of government schools. These assertions are not underpinned by factual analysis.

First, Catholic and independent schools are not the bastion of the wealthy. Non-government schools serve parents of all income levels and the vast majority of non-government schools are low fee schools. For example, ABS statistics show that one in every five children who come from families with an annual income of less than \$20,900 attends a catholic or independent school. Further, half of all parents with children at non-government schools pay less than \$1,568 per child per annum in fees. (DEST analysis, 2001 data). This is \$30 per week. When we examine the growth in non-government school enrolments, we find that nearly all the growth in enrolments and in new schools is in the low fee schools. In fact from 1996 to 2000, enrolments in the wealthier schools declined by 4.1 per cent while low fee schools had a 14.2 per cent increase. (DEST analysis) This has arisen in no small part due to the Australian Government's policy of supporting school choice for all families.

Of course, just as it is untrue that non-government schools are the bastion of the wealthy, it is equally untrue that state government schools are the bastion of the poor. Nearly fifty per cent of students who come from families with an annual income of over \$104,000 attend a state government school. (ABS 2001)

Second, even if non-government schools were the bastion of the wealthy, the influence on educational attainment of school sector is low compared with other factors. Extensive research from the Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) shows that there are greater differences between *schools* within each sector than between *sectors*, and the impact of school sector has become *less marked* since the late 1980s as the non-government school sector has grown and become more diverse.

As ACER researchers Adrian Beavis, Gary Marks and Ken Rowe have pointed out, what counts most in Australian schools is the ability of the students and the quality of the teachers. In fact, the quality of teachers is the single most important factor on students' outcomes – explaining up to 60 per cent of the variation in learning outcomes.

It is true that the non-Catholic independent schools (and particularly the high fee ones) have a greater proportion of students going on to university. However, these schools frequently recruit bright students and this has an impact on their results just as it does for academically selective state high schools. It is ability that is at work in both cases – not the resources.

The final leg of the argument – that the Federal Government's funding policies are supporting this supposed divide by funding non-government schools at the expense of government schools – is also wrong. Any dispassionate analysis of the contribution of Australian taxpayers to childrens' education shows that a student in a State Government school is a long way out in front in terms of the public funding they receive. The 2.25 million students in government schools receive \$19.9 billion in public funding every year. The 1.04 million students in Catholic and independent schools are allocated just \$6.2 billion. In other words, government schools enrol 68 per cent of students and receive 76 per cent of total public funding; non-government schools enrol 32 per cent of students and receive 24 per cent of total public funding. If every student in the non-government school sector enrolled in the government sector, taxpayers (through federal and state governments) would need to contribute an additional \$3 billion.

Even when fee income is taken into account, government schools are not disadvantaged compared with non-government schools. In fact, analysis from the Australian Department of Education Science and Training says that recurrent expenditure per student at a non-government school is 12 per cent less than for a student at a State school.

And far from under-funding state government schools, the Australian Government delivers increases to these schools through the most generous indexation mechanism in the Australian Government – the AGSRC Index. The Australian Government has increased funding to state government schools by 60 per cent since 1996. This year's budget delivered an additional 5.5 per cent increase. Meanwhile, the average state government budget increase to its own schools was only 2.1 per cent – below the inflation rate.

Taking Schools to the Next Level: The National Education Framework for Schools

1. Supporting the Professional Standing of Teachers

"Everybody's worried about buildings and so-called social disadvantage. The real social disadvantage is not having competent teachers."

(Dr Ken Rowe, Research Director, ACER)

Nearly all the local and international evidence-based research indicates that what matters most in influencing educational outcomes is the quality of teaching. In some respect, there is nothing surprising in this finding: in a national survey of community views of *What makes an effective school*, McGraw, Piper, Banks and Evans (1992) found that the most frequently mentioned factor was the quality of teachers, constituting 65 per cent of all responses (cited in Rowe 2003). The finding also explains why our kids can seemingly have a bad year followed by a blinder at the same school.

But how are parents to know whether teachers at a school are good? If parents fronted up to their local school – government or non-government – to enquire as to how many teachers were involved in professional development and quality assurance that is professionally recognised, what response might they receive?

Australia's teachers need to formally recognise what most already do. They need a body of nationally consistent professional development standards developed by them for them. They need to proudly promote evidence of participation by teachers in them. We also need a teacher registration system in each state and mutual recognition agreements. At present, a person qualified to teach in Albury is not necessarily qualified to teach in Wodonga. This is

nonsense.

Higher pay for quality teaching must be supported. At the moment the most mediocre teacher is paid the same as someone who has a life-changing impact on our children. Other countries are working on recognising teachers with advanced qualifications and on delivering performance pay to reward the best teachers. We need to follow suit in order to keep our best teachers in the classroom and in Australia.

Further attention needs to be given to the quality of teacher training courses. The profession itself needs to have far greater influence in this area. Other faculties also need to be more closely integrated and influential over teacher education to ensure that standards are maintained in the key subject discipline areas. More teacher practicum needs to be done as part of teacher training.

The Australian Government is already investing \$159m into teacher professional development and the creation of innovative online materials to support teachers. Several months ago, I announced an injection of \$10m to establish a National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership in Canberra in 2004. The National Institute will be managed by the profession for the profession to enhance the quality and status of teachers and school leaders. Its functions are being developed by the profession with the consulting assistance of a consortium comprising Allen Consulting, Deloitte Consulting and Gregor Ramsey.

The Higher Education package also provides an additional \$81.4 million dollars for teaching courses – a 9.9 per cent increase – primarily to be used for strengthening teacher practicum. We have also recently received the Final Report from the independent Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education. We are currently examining the recommendations.

There is no higher goal in my portfolio than raising the quality, professionalism and status of teachers. We will continue to do everything we can to achieve it.

2. Attracting the Best to the Profession

Many of the measures outlined above (eg, pay for performance, increasing the quality of teacher courses, raising the professionalism of teachers) will make the pursuit of a teaching career more attractive to our best and brightest students. In addition, the Higher Education reforms will quarantine teaching from any HECS increases and allow them to be decreased. Although some in the higher education sector have been critical of this initiative, the purpose of the measure is to make the pursuit of teaching more attractive relative to other courses.

We also want to attract the best people to teaching not just at the start but during their careers. While previous generations had one or two occupations in their life, current generations are likely to have several. For the best and brightest, we want to ensure that teaching is one of them. Imagine the additional experience that a former scientist, engineer, doctor or business person could bring to the classroom. We should be targeting these people and making it as easy as possible for them to enter the profession.

One particular segment that we are increasingly failing to attract to the teaching profession (particularly primary teaching) is men. In 2002, the proportion of male primary teachers was only 20.9%. This is a decrease of five percentage points over only a decade and the decrease will continue: there are currently only 18.8% of trainees who are male. In the US, the proportion has dropped to 6%.

This is a particular concern to the Government in light of the evidence that shows that boys are underachieving both relative to girls and relative to their own performance from 25 years ago. Many boys have no positive male role models at all in their lives.

We need to make it easier for educational authorities to actively promote and encourage men into primary teaching. At present we have the situation whereby the Human Rights

and Equal Opportunity Commission will not allow education authorities to offer male only teaching scholarships as they have declared such scholarships to be in breach of the Sexual Discrimination Act. Yet at the same time, it is fine for the University of Melbourne to offer female-only Research Fellowships in some fields and the United Trades and Labour Council in South Australia to offer women-only unionists' work experience programs. Just last week, the Victorian Government announced a policy of affirmative action for women barristers, even though women constitute a similar proportion of male primary teachers (18.6%) and the proportion is rising.

Commonsense needs to prevail to allow educational authorities to get more men into classrooms. And if it takes an amendment of the Sexual Discrimination Act to do this, then this must occur.

3. National Consistency in Schooling

Since Federation, we have made progress in moving towards greater consistency in key areas of national importance: transportation, corporate law, environmental regulation, university regulation etc. In schooling, however, the "rail gauge" problem remains firmly entrenched. Consider the following: there are six different starting ages for the first year of schooling across the country and the starting age varies by up to a year. In four jurisdictions, primary school finishes at year 6, in the other four it finishes at year 7. We have eight different curricula whereby educational standards in one jurisdiction do not always match the educational standards in another. There is no agreed standard or certificate for year 10. There is no agreed certificate for year 12 or agreed means of assessment. Year 12 certificates are not always comparable or recognised in other jurisdictions. Tertiary entrance requirements are different in each state. I could go on.

This madness needs to end. At the very least, the 76,000 children who move interstate each year should not feel like they have arrived in a foreign country. Most western countries have uniform school starting ages, the same length of schooling wherever you live and a common core of school subjects. In Australia, many schools, government and non-government, are getting around the problem by offering the internationally recognised Baccalaureate.

The Australian Government's agenda is clear on this issue. We will do everything we can (including the use of funding as a lever if necessary) to see greater consistency in schooling in Australia. By the end of the decade, at the very least we should have common starting ages and school structure, consistent curriculum standards, common testing and a national tertiary entrance system. We have already made some progress. In July this year, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to work towards having a uniform starting age for schooling by 2010, to having consistent curriculum outcomes in the key subject areas of English, Mathematics, Science and Civics and to the expansion of the national testing regime to include science, information technology and civics.

These are positive steps towards achieving greater national consistency in educational outcomes. However, we will continue at every opportunity to encourage the States and Territories to commit to further progress. Parochialism is just beneath the surface (earlier this year, the State and Territories could not even agree on a common year 3 and 5 spelling test!). We will not let up on achieving our objectives.

4. Giving More Autonomy to School Principals

"We have limited flexibility to be responsive to our students and community needs. We know what we want to do; I would like to be able to get on with it."

("Our Future" February 2001 survey of Australian Primary Principals by APPA)

The shift towards giving school principals greater power over the running of their schools has been occurring in two states (Victorian and South Australia) and in several countries overseas. It needs to be accelerated nation wide.

Critically important is for principals to have the power over staffing. Few boards or heads

of any organisation – be it business, non-profit or government enterprise – could guarantee quality of their service without some control over who they employed. Schools are no different. Additionally, principals and School Councils need control over their budgets so that they can determine the local priorities (within the broad curriculum framework) rather than every priority being set by the central education bureaucracy – in the case of the NSW Department of Education and Training, the biggest in the world. Principals should also determine (in conjunction with their communities) the appropriate school hours and use of school facilities that will best accommodate the demands of the families that the school serves.

The relative lack of power of the principals and school council in government schools is one of the key differences between the government and independent school sectors. If an independent school is underperforming, we know who is responsible. In the government sector such accountability is spread through the whole system. Anyone who has dealt with large education bureaucracies knows how difficult it is to find out where the buck stops.

Victoria has taken the lead in this devolution process and the amount of funding devolved to school global budgets continues to grow (now 94 per cent of funding). South Australia is also making progress. However, in both states, principals still do not have full power over staffing.

Research into country performance in international comparative studies has identified school autonomy in process and personnel decisions as one of the key factors in success. (Kiel University reported by Woessmann, 2001) We should be following the lead of these countries and follow the lead of independent schools by giving principals in government schools in Australia the power and responsibility for delivering quality education for their communities.

5. Intolerance of Poorly Performing Schools

The corollary of giving Principals more autonomy is the acceptance of accountability for performance of that school. Every child deserves to be taught at an excellent school by excellent teachers and if the school is not performing, then action should be taken. Unfortunately (and to the detriment of many children), a culture exists that accepts poor performance in our school system. In Victoria, for example, schools are reviewed every three years and those that are doing badly may be asked to develop improvement plans. However, as Professor Teese from the University of Melbourne's Centre for Post-Compulsory Learning points out "We've had about 10 years of these reviews, yet we still have schools that are struggling." (*The Age*, 10/11/2003)

In South Australia, the State Government recently intervened in a government high school where it felt student outcomes had been persistently poor. It was a front page story, has constantly been in the media and has been contested by the unions. Addressing poor performance in government schools in this way clearly doesn't happen very often.

Other countries are much further advanced than Australia in this area. In the UK, schools are frequently inspected and those that fail to improve outcomes after a given period are closed down. In the US, under the No Child Left Behind policy, federal funds are tied to improvements and if there are no improvements after four years, Principals can be sacked or parents given the opportunity to move their child to a better school or get financial assistance to hire tutors. In some states, schools are publicly labelled as "in need of improvement". In both the UK and US, schools have to report to parents against detailed academic and non-academic measures.

Governments, teachers unions and parents should be equally as intolerant of poorly performing schools as those in the US or UK. I am announcing today that the Australian Government will work towards this. To start with, parents and the public need to have the information. Our schools should be as equally transparent about their progress as US or UK schools. Parents and the public should be able to know how their school is progressing and ask appropriate questions if they feel that something is awry. The Australian Government will be insisting upon this as a condition of funding for the next four years.

I will also be initiating discussions with the state and territory education Ministers as to what practices that are in place overseas can be adopted here for the benefit of students.

We want to consider whether stronger performance measures can be put in place, whether inspectors are relevant, and what financial incentives and actions should be put in place to deal with persistent underperformance.

The results from the UK show that schools – no matter what socio-economic groups they serve – can significantly improve when there is capable leadership and a willingness to embrace change. Examples in Australia prove the point. For example, Salisbury High School in South Australia, a school which serves a low socio-economic community, transformed from being a school with declining enrolments to one with which is now winning awards and has a waiting list.

Poorly performing schools should be dealt with as a matter of course, not through accident or a fortunate change in leadership. Parents and students should not have to rely upon fortune or extreme circumstances for change to occur.

6. Providing meaningful information to parents

I mentioned at the outset that there is very little meaningful public information about the performance of individual schools in Australia, particularly government schools. How can parents make meaningful assessments about where to send their child without this information? How can we hold schools to account?

Comprehensive reporting to parents on school performance is normal in many countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, through the *Parents Charter* there is a standard set of information made publicly available on all schools, which covers examination and national curriculum tests results as well as information on the improvement of schools. In a number of American States, a *School Accountability Report Card* is issued for each school. This includes information on dropout rates, class sizes, numbers of credentialed teachers, number of days of staff development, suspension and expulsion rates and data on the last three years of achievement in reading, writing and arithmetic.

This type of information should be available for the parents of children in Australian schools. The Australian Government will be taking this up with State and Territory Governments. Schools should publish and make readily accessible their academic outcomes, what vocational, education and training options are offered, where its graduates go, the professional standing of its teachers, absentee rates etc. If we want school choice to occur based on facts and not perception, then such information is vital. I intend to introduce requirements into the next quadrennium of school funding to enrich the information on school performance that is available to parents. This is not about 'league tables' but about parents' right to full information.

As well as broadening the information available about school performance, schools also need to give parents comprehensive feedback about how their child is progressing. In 2000, the Howard Government introduced national literacy and numeracy testing and benchmarking. These have now become a critical part of the schooling system and the only indicator of academic performance at the national level. However, only four states report a child's scores to their parents against the national benchmarks. Three other states have agreed to do so from 2004, but NSW stands alone in refusing. Surely NSW parents also deserve to know how their child is performing against the national benchmarks. From 2003, the Australian Government, with agreement from the States and Territories, will be expanding the testing regime to include science, civics and information and communication technology.

7. Making values a core part of schooling

"Character is higher than intellect"

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Australian society has a shared sense of values such as tolerance, trustworthiness, mutual

respect, courage, compassion and honesty; courtesy and doing one's best are part of Australia's democratic way of life. Every Australian child needs to have an understanding of these values as part of their schooling

For some time I have been concerned that while all Australian schools (government and non-government) teach values, some do so more explicitly than others. Following an investment by the Australian Government of nearly \$600,000, 69 schools across the country have completed innovative studies into values education and those studies will be built into a framework for improved values education in Australian schools. I will be seeking the endorsement of State and Territory Education Ministers for the adoption of this national framework.

Many schools have the values they teach as part of their educational planning. Many schools market themselves to parents on the basis of these values. I would like to see every Australian school have values embedded in their curriculum and approach.

8. Creating safer schools

This week, one child in six will be bullied at school. The effects on all concerned can be devastating: those who are bullied are likely to have higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression and illness and have an increased tendency to suicide; while the children who do the bullying are more likely to drop out of school and use drugs and alcohol or be involved in violent behaviour in adult life.

There are no circumstances where bullying is acceptable in schools. Yet at the moment we are not well equipped to address and deal with the issue. For example, most teachers-in-training receive little instruction on dealing with bullying, violence and child abuse; only 36 per cent of new teachers recently surveyed felt their course adequately addressed these issues. Further, not every school has well known protocols in place which teachers and parents can follow.

This situation needs to be addressed and the Australian Government is doing so. In July 2003, I took to a meeting of State and Territory Education Ministers the National Safe Schools Framework, which was then endorsed by all participants. The framework will include a set of agreed guiding principles for schools to follow so that every school can have in place a comprehensive set of protocols for providing a safe learning environment, and for handling incidents involving bullying, violence or any form of child abuse. Next year I intend to introduce legislation into the Parliament that requires the Framework's implementation in all our schools.

An additional \$4.3m will also be injected to support the implementation of the framework. This will include \$3m for teacher professional development, \$1m in grant money for schools to select, implement and showcase effective programs, and \$300,000 for materials and other support to guide the implementation of the framework.

We should be doing everything we can to ensure that our kids are able to go to schools where they feel safe and protected. These initiatives will be an important contribution to ensure this.

9. Accelerating indigenous education outcomes

Last week the second *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* was tabled in the Australian Parliament. The Report finds that on many measures, the results and the specific outcomes for Indigenous students are the best to date. For example, the latest year 3 and 5 literacy and numeracy results were the best ever in five out of six national benchmark areas. There was a 12.3 per cent increase in year 12 enrolments to a record 2,941 students. This contributed to a record year 12 retention rate of 38 per cent. This is up from 29 per cent in 1996.

While these improvements are welcomed, unacceptable disadvantage remains. Year 12 retention rates may have risen to record levels, but they are still only half that of non-Indigenous Australians. Numeracy and literacy results show improvement, yet one in four

Indigenous Year 3s cannot pass a basic reading test. The disadvantage is particularly pronounced in remote regions of Australia. In remote parts of the Northern Territory, only 1 in 8 can pass a basic year 3 reading test. Only 1 in 10 Indigenous Australians in remote regions complete year 12. If you want to know of a crisis in education in Australia, this is it.

All Indigenous Australians face significantly greater challenges than Australians from other cultures. But are the disadvantages faced by Indigenous students who live in Arnhem Land or Cape York or the Kimberly, in environments characterised by alcohol abuse, domestic violence and limited access to mainstream infrastructure, greater than those faced by Indigenous students in our large cities? I think they are.

Over the course of the next 6 months, we will be working on significantly reforming the Australian Government's Indigenous Education efforts. The Australian Government invests over \$467million a year for Indigenous specific education purposes. And while we have achieved good results, progress needs to be accelerated and our efforts more targeted. Reforms need to be guided by three broad principles:

1. *Focusing effort on areas of greatest disadvantage.* This will mean that more indigenous specific resources will be targeted at remote regions where the greatest educational disadvantage exists
2. *Directing resources to programs that demonstrably achieve improvements in educational outcomes.* The Australian Government funds many programs, but some have only a marginal impact while other programs are life-changing. I will re-directing resources to those programs that work.
3. *Leveraging mainstream resources.* One of the key recommendations of the Commonwealth Grant Commissions review of indigenous education was that mainstream resources need to be applied to improving indigenous education outcomes, rather than the current practice whereby only indigenous specific resources are applied for this purpose. I will be working to implement this recommendation.

Like any reforms, these reforms will not be pain-free. However, if we truly want to accelerate the educational outcomes of Indigenous people, then reform is necessary.

10. Creating Smooth Transitions From School to Career

Today, our children are growing up in an environment which is very different from our own. Expectations are different, opportunities are greater. Understanding the options and making the right choices is confronting and challenging for many young Australians.

To help students reach decisions that will enable them fulfil their own potential, we need to provide up-to-date, interesting, and accurate information about careers – not only to students, but also to those who shape their decisions: parents, teachers, careers counsellors and friends.

We need to provide them with real worthwhile work experience, so that they can learn to understand the patterns and responsibilities of work, and lose the fear that moving from school to work, whether full or part-time, may hold for them.

We need to help them build a set of employability skills – such as communication skills, teamwork, adaptability and reliability. These are, in effect, the application of the values I have referred to already today – values such as honesty, integrity, commitment and loyalty, are just as vital in the workplace and just as valued by prospective employers, as by the community at large.

Preliminary findings in research conducted by my Department on career aspirations show students are influenced by a range of resources: parents, friends, friends of parents, and not surprisingly, occupations portrayed on TV programs. We need to direct influences on them to take an active interest in these careers resources, to inform themselves, and to encourage young Australians to "think outside the box" in establishing where their potential

might take them.

Over the coming months, I will be making announcements regarding a new approach to careers advisers. Careers advisers need better resources, attuned to their needs, and their timetable. They need better training and defined professional standards. We need to examine the opportunities for career advising as a basic unit of the diploma of education – after all, it's not just the careers adviser who has influence over a young person's decision making when it comes to careers, but all other teachers. We need to build on the impressive work already done in innovative pilots for students at risk of dropping out which are already helping young Australians.

To build a seamless and integrated system of transitions linking together vocational pathways we have established 220 local partnerships of schools, industry government and community throughout Australia to assist students through their transitions.

Young Australians today can expect to have five to seven different occupations throughout their lifetime. They will need career management skills, resilience and initiative to manage this kind of life. Today's students need to be independent learners, flexible and engaged with the community.

We are building a careers and transitions system that will equip them for this future

Conclusion

The Australian Government remains committed to school choice as a fundamental democratic right. We remain committed to quality schooling for all Australian students regardless of the school they attend and we will continue to provide record funding to all Australian schools. Unlike the alternatives, this agenda is not divisive, setting government schools against Catholic and Independent ones. It will strengthen all schools and build national consistency.

The skill and knowledge embedded in our labour force is a key to economic growth. Schools are the foundation of those skills and knowledge. The OECD estimates that each additional year of education across the population lifts GDP in the long term by between 4 and 7 per cent.

If we are to maximise this effect for Australia's future then we need a genuinely national education system, proper recognition of quality teaching, greater freedom for schools at the local level, schools that are safe and committed to teaching values, educational justice for Indigenous Australians, a commitment to do something about schools that are not performing and a seamless transition from school to career for all young people.

We have a very strong school system but we need to take Australian schooling to the next level – from good to great will require the triumph of good policy over crippling ideology.

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