Federal Coalition Policy on School Education

Since 1996 the federal Coalition has pursued a strong reform agenda in school education, particularly in the area of educational accountability through benchmark testing in literacy and numeracy.

In November 2003 a 10-point National Education Framework for Schools was announced, which formalised the Coalition’s key concerns around quality education provision—including teaching standards, national consistency in schooling and values education—and set the agenda for programs introduced in the 2005-08 funding quadrennium.

The Coalition has been consistent and vocal in its support of a strong non-government schools sector, the right of parents to choice in the education of their children and the value of family contribution to the cost of school education. Its support of parental choice has been reinforced with a proposed tax rebate for a wide range of educational expenses, including school fees.

Full details of funding arrangements for the 2009-12 quadrennium are yet to be announced. However, a defining characteristic of the Coalition’s reform agenda in the current quadrennium has been its implementation of policy through conditions attached to general recurrent grants.

In its 2007 federal Budget the Coalition government announced that in the 2009-12 quadrennium further conditions of funding would be external examinations for Year 12 students and performance pay for teachers.

School autonomy therefore remains a key issue for the independent sector in federal education policy.

2005-08 QUADRENNIUM

Key elements of the Australian Government’s reform agenda for schools for the 2005-08 funding quadrennium are:

- Increased investment in school education
- The Australian Government legislated funding of $33 billion for schools for 2005-08, a $9.5 billion increase over the previous quadrennium

General recurrent funding

- Rural and remote loading on SES grants for non-government schools
- Schools serving students with high-level needs deemed ‘special assistance schools’ so that students can attract the maximum SES grant
- General recurrent grants indexed annually to the AGSRC index

Literacy and numeracy

- Introduction of national tests in literacy and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9; sample national testing for Years 6 and 10 in ICT and Civics and Citizenship
- $2.1 billion for the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program
- $457 million to provide families with $700 vouchers for additional tutoring for students failing to reach literacy and numeracy benchmarks
Capital funding

- $1.5 billion for allocation under the Capital Grants Program
- Additional capital funding for Northern Territory non-government schools
- Up to $50,000 per school for solar hot water systems and rainwater tanks
- Commitment to continue the Investing in Our Schools Program, which in this quadrennium delivered $700 million for government schools for small projects as determined by school communities, and $300 million for non-government schools

National consistency in schooling

- A common school starting age by 2010
- Development of Statements of Learning in key subjects to build more consistency in curriculum outcomes
- Development of a national system for the transmission of student information for students moving from one jurisdiction to another
- Development of an Australian Certificate of Education for Year 12

Vocational training and education

- Establishment of Australian Technical Colleges, specialist secondary schools enabling students to undertake vocational education with a trades focus as well as academic education
- Funding of a VET in Schools program
- Establishment of a schools-business forum

Educational accountability

- All students to meet all national benchmarks
- Public reporting on 13 measures of school performance including teacher qualifications and professional development, student attendance, percentage of students meeting benchmarks and school leaver destinations

Reporting to parents

- As a condition of their Australian Government funding, schools must provide student report cards in plain English with student achievement described in A to E grades or an equivalent

Teacher quality

- Establishment of Teaching Australia to promote the teaching profession, conduct professional learning and research and develop nationally consistent standards for teachers and principals
- $159 million for teacher professional development
- $110 million for teacher practicum
Indigenous education

- $2.1 billion for targeted supplementary assistance for Indigenous students
- $69 million for the Indigenous Youth Mobility and Indigenous Youth Leadership Programs
- Capital funding for boarding schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students

Students with disability

- Targeted per capita funding for students with disability; plus $5 million for a research project on portability of funding for students with disability and a research project and teachers’ guide on integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms

School curriculum and culture

- $35 million to support values education and Civics and Citizenship education programs
- Project to improve the teaching of boys
- Implementation of the National Values Frame-work and National Safe Schools Framework
- Flying the Australian flag
- Compulsory physical activity for students of compulsory school age
- Promotion of music education
- Project to boost innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics in schools
- Languages education

2009-12 QUADRENNIUM

In the 2007 Federal Budget, the Coalition government announced a school education package of $42 billion over four years, including rewards of up to $50,000 a year for schools improving literacy and numeracy outcomes and Summer Schools for teachers in key curriculum areas. At the same time the government announced its plans to introduce further conditions to funding in the 2009-12 quadrennium:

- National teacher training and registration requirements
- Core national curriculum standards in key subjects
- External assessment in Year 12
- School and state comparisons of student and school data
- Performance-based pay for teachers
- Autonomy of principals in the government sector to hire and fire staff
Recent announcements

• Funding conditional on 150 hours’ teaching of Australian History to students in Years 9 and 10
• Investing in Our Schools Program continued
• Drought relief of additional funding up to $10,000 for schools in EC declared areas; an increase of $1,000 to the Assistance for Isolated Children Additional Boarding Allowance; and ongoing supplementary allowance of $1000 for all students with an AIC Distance Education Allowance
• A further 100 Australian Technical Colleges to be established, including two Defence ATCs
• Expansion of Summer Schools for Teachers program to include teachers educating students with special needs

Education Tax Rebate

A tax rebate of up to $400 per child in preschool and each year of primary school and $800 per child for each year of secondary school for expenses of up to $1,000 and $2,000 will be payable. The rebate will cover a range of educational expenses, including:

• Government and non-government school fees
• Preschool fees and expenses
• School uniforms, text books, stationery, calculators
• Camps and excursions
• Laptops, software and broadband access
• Extra-curricula school activities such as sports, music, dance and drama

The rebate, which has been costed at $6.3 billion over four years, is available to all Australian parents, guardians or carers responsible for the educational expenses of children.

Coalition’s National Education Framework for Schools

• Supporting the professional standing of teachers
• Attracting the best to the teaching profession
• National consistency in schooling
• Giving more autonomy to school principals
• All schools to be high performing
• Providing meaningful information to parents
• Making values a core part of schooling
• Creating safer schools
• Accelerating indigenous education outcomes
• Creating smooth transitions from school to career