

COMMUNIQUE

Governments invest in education to drive social, cultural and economic development and, in countries such as Australia, to sustain the conditions that make true democracy possible.

Australian governments have a shared responsibility to maintain the primacy of inclusive public schooling, in the interests of achieving a more educated, just and open society.

This principle should be formally embodied in law, through complementary legislation enacted by all governments in the Australian federation. It recognises that our children and young people share an equal entitlement to achieve their personal best and develop their intellectual capacity and well-being to take their place as active citizens. A commitment by government to high quality public schooling, open to all without regard to family background or circumstances, is essential to making this genuine universal entitlement.

The Forum acknowledges recent moves by the Commonwealth Government, through increased investment in schools, to begin to redress the neglect of public schooling over the past decade.

We also acknowledge the leadership of the Commonwealth Government in pursuing a coherent national approach to the key elements of a high quality education system. The commitments made for increased investment in schooling – including for schools serving students from disadvantaged families and communities, for educational technology and infrastructure and for quality teaching – need to be secured for the longer term, beyond the life of the current funding commitments, and must recognise the unique obligations and requirements of public schooling. Such a commitment is now essential and urgent if the government's commitments to increasing participation in higher education are to be achieved.

The review of schools funding foreshadowed by the Commonwealth is critical to achieving the values, principles and objectives that underpin its education revolution.

The Forum calls on governments to collaborate in an open and comprehensive national review that centres on the entitlement of all students to high quality schooling; and the resources required for that entitlement to be realised in schools across the country. The key objective of this review, based on a wealth of evidence, should be to create public policy and funding arrangements for schools in recognition of the fundamental role of public schools in safeguarding and advancing the national interest through providing a framework of universal opportunity for all to gain the benefits of education.