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Public Education – It's Really a Matter of Priorities

As the 2003/04 Budget approaches, the organisation representing the parents of the 70% of children who attend government schools seeks assurance that the Federal Government will give serious consideration to the needs of public schools and the students who attend them.

ACSSO President Judith Bundy says "we are in the third year of a funding quadrennium, which has been constructed by this government to systematically divert money for schooling from the public to the private sector. We have a government that claims it has increased funding for public schools at a rate that is higher than the states - but it is simple arithmetic to demonstrate that the per capita funding increase provided by the States in their last budgets was far in excess of that provided by the Commonwealth."

"ACSSO does not expect the Commonwealth to play silly games with figures. It looks to the Commonwealth through its Minister to provide real leadership in relation to an education policy which supports the long term national interest of a cohesive, socially just and productive society. To achieve this goal, the Commonwealth must do much more than simply nurture the unbridled growth of private interest."

Some of the initiatives that the Commonwealth could reasonably support in the budget include greater support to enable the States to further reduce class sizes.

"Clearly the penny has dropped at last in most States – investing money in the early years of schooling will pay dividends later."

ACSSO also supports the current work being undertaken in relation to teacher supply and quality.

"It is essential that every effort is made by all governments to attract and retain quality teachers. And it is essential that quality, experienced teachers are deployed in disadvantaged areas, as there is a clear link between educational intervention as a key measure in reducing future social problems."

Whilst the PISA testing results show that our best students are equal to the best in the world, there is a huge gap between upper and lower end performance, again illustrating the effects of disadvantage.

"This is where the Commonwealth should direct more of its funding" said Judith, who observed that "instead of continuing to facilitate the opening of more unnecessary private schools, the government should address the equity issues already in existence. There is no reason for the huge gaps in student performance in a relatively wealthy country such as Australia. And there is absolutely no need for any student to attend a school that is not well maintained, that is not warm when the weather is cold and cool when it is hot outside."

"It is really a matter of priorities. Government school parents want to know where the priorities of Mr Costello and Dr Nelson are this year."

For further information and comment

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