



LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION THE HON KIM C BEAZLEY MP

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**SPEECH TO THE
AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS
MELBOURNE
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STANDARDS NOT SLOGANS

It really is a great pleasure to be here. Especially on such an auspicious date: "World Teachers' Day".

Friends, in my job, like in yours, there are good days and bad days. But today is up there with the best.

Why? Because I'm here talking to a room full of parents and educators, the champions of millions of Australian kids, about three critical issues that drive me in politics. Education. The future of our children. And nation building. Three issues so close to my own heart. Three foundation stones of the Government I'll lead.

It's always been my burning ambition to be the Education Prime Minister. That's why I didn't need any convincing to come here today and explain how I'll do that. How my government, working with parents and teachers, will harness all our energy and conviction to build a nation we're proud to hand to our kids.

Today I want to talk with you about school standards. About curriculum standards appropriate for the knowledge economy our kids will face in the decades ahead. Standards that support their personal needs and parents' too. Standards that ensure our kids are well-equipped for the future.

So today I'll outline my plans for standards-based pay for teachers. Including higher pay for teachers who lift their standards. A comprehensive set of national standards for teaching and learning.

This is another great and defining difference between John Howard and me. I believe in standards. He's all about slogans.

Now I admit I have a vested interest in this. I've done nearly 30 years as a father. I know what it's like. Full of hope and with the best intentions. Setting out on an uncharted journey to an unknown destination. Enormous joy but also the niggling, day to day worries. You know what I mean, right? Just when you think you've got one spot fire extinguished another one breaks out.

From the minute our kids are born we wear our hearts on our sleeves. And I can tell you, as a grandfather, it doesn't let up.

Seems to me we're destined to live the ups and downs of our children's experiences. From that first day, clutching their hand, walking them into pre-school. Determined not to lose it in front of the welcoming teacher. Until, still holding out our hand, we guide them through the harrowing, wobbly weeks of those final exams. Something so many parents are doing even as we speak.

Better Schools

All of us are passionate about education. About great schools for all our kids.

As I said I'm determined to be the Education Prime Minister. Determined to give every Australian kid a great education. That is my great and constant passion.

You're here today because you have ideas and aspirations about the schools we need for the future.

I'm here because I want to lead a government that backs you all the way. That backs public education all the way.

I do believe the Federal Government has a special responsibility for our public schools. That's the best way to deliver real choice for all parents.

I want them to have a real choice – including the choice of a public school with the highest standards. Because I believe education is the greatest gift a nation can give its children.

Nothing's more important than a school that takes our irrepressible, curious, wide-eyed five-year olds and turns them into confident, questioning, independent young adults. That throws wide open the windows to the world. That shows them how to learn from the past and lean forward to the future. That takes every child and finds the best in them.

To do this you need a government that knows how to lead and also how to be a team player. How to set the direction ahead. And also how to work cooperatively and constructively with parents and teachers to get there.

My Government will do this.

We'll create a public education system that has the confidence and support of parents and teachers because it's the best there is.

So that when the parents of middle Australia do the daily double shift – the long hours at work plus the second shift at home raising their kids - my Government will be there to support them with quality education.

So when they put in the hours and the effort, they're rewarded. Rewarded with an education system that shares their dream of a better future for their kids. That gives their kids the best start in life. An education system that leads the field in quality teaching and quality learning. Classrooms where teaching respect and tolerance is as much an essential part of learning as reading and writing. Where parents, teachers and government are allies not adversaries. Where we lift all schools up, not drag some down. That's the system I'll build.

It's very different from what we've got from John Howard. When it comes to education John Howard and I are worlds apart. John Howard doesn't care about the future of public education because he doesn't believe in it.

When I look at teachers I see dedicated, hardworking professionals. He sees Maoist operatives.

When I imagine the schools of the future I see modern, well-equipped, first class centres of learning excellence.

John Howard views them as a place where history can be conveniently re-written and old culture wars fought out.

When I look at education I see the most effective investment we can make in our nation's future prosperity.

John Howard sees education as just another user-pays industry.

He's taking schools down the American path. Just as he has with industrial relations and health.

I will never take John Howard's path. I will never play the blame game, demonising states and teachers alike. And I will never use education as a battleground for extreme industrial relations changes.

What I will do is work with parents and teachers to build the quality schools all Australian kids need and deserve.

Higher Standards

When we talk about the schools we need, the debate begins squarely with school standards. The standards we need to give our kids the skills, confidence and ability to make their way in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

The curriculum standards appropriate for the knowledge economy they'll face in the decades ahead. And the quality teaching standards now widely recognised as one of the most critical factors governing student achievement.

Curriculum Standards

Let me turn first to curriculum standards; the subject of heated debate recently.

I believe the curriculum must prepare our students for the knowledge economy – the new global environment they'll face in the decades ahead.

I want curriculum standards that prepare our kids for the complexities and demands of the future. Education should be about standards, not slogans.

That's why I reckon John Howard and Julie Bishop just don't get it. So out of touch with what parents want for their kids and their schools. So short-sighted they fail to understand what good schools can contribute to a modern economy and to a brighter national future.

There's been a lot of talk about a national curriculum in the last few weeks. And Jenny Macklin will put forward some new ideas in the near future.

Today, I want to be very clear about this.

I believe Australia needs consistent, high national standards in curriculum. So we can have national agreement on the essentials that all young Australians should know and be able to do. That means high national standards, which should include sharing of information and expertise in innovation and research.

And of course with families now so mobile, that means national benchmarking is necessary as well.

We do need to achieve national consistency, while maintaining the historical and geographical basis of learning, and I'll work with the states to do that. Building on their achievements and incorporating their goals through the national body, the Curriculum Corporation.

But I don't believe Australia needs a uniform national curriculum. I don't accept the Howard Government's lowest common denominator, one size fits all approach.

Classroom teachers bring great initiatives and insights to enlivening their children's learning. I don't want that squashed by bureaucracy.

It just makes sense for kids in Western Australia to learn more about Kalgoorlie and kids in Victoria to learn more about Sovereign Hill.

And I know that many parents around the country are worried that standards will be watered down.

For instance parents in New South Wales are worried about any threat to the Higher Schools Certificate, which they rightly prize.

Australia does not need a massive centralisation of control, with Canberra bureaucrats taking over what students learn across the nation. It's not the right approach for our kids' future and that's why I won't support it.

Teaching Standards

I mentioned earlier that high teaching standards are critical to student achievement and success.

In fact studies in Victorian schools reveal that classroom and teacher standards account for over 50 per cent of the variance in student achievement in the subjects of English and mathematics.

To put it simply, the best teaching standards produce the best results for our kids.

All the evidence suggests that the most effective investment a government can make to improve students' learning is quality teaching.

It's all about teachers.

Teachers are our greatest resource and our most valuable asset. We need to invest in their education and training. And when they repay that investment and reach the highest standards of professionalism and leadership, we should reward them.

Standards-based Pay

That's why today I'm announcing my plan for standards-based pay for teachers in public schools.

And my plan to deliver higher pay to teachers who improve their standards.

A comprehensive set of national standards for teaching and learning.

We'll encourage and support teachers to achieve professional excellence. And when they do, we'll recognise their efforts with negotiated incentives and financial reward.

So when they put in the extra time and hard work to be the best teachers for our kids, they're rewarded.

Because teachers can't be expected to be driven by their idealism alone.

Like everyone, they have families to support and mortgages to pay. Their pay packets are as crucial as anyone's.

In fact, a recent OECD report states "*the lack of financial recognition of teaching performance is likely to contribute to teachers leaving the profession ... for attractive job prospects elsewhere*".

We can't allow a brain drain from the teaching profession.

Julie Bishop says the Government supports so-called "merit pay". What do they mean in practice?

Well, it's hard to say precisely, because this is a Government of spin. No plan and no vision, just a series of short sighted slogans.

But if the Howard Government means anything by so-called "merit pay", they mean paying teachers more when students get higher marks and principals allocating performance bonuses within schools. The only problem? It just doesn't work. You only have to look at the overseas experience.

In the US, the system is described by the OECD as a failure. Why? Poor implementation; lack of clear criteria; and a failure to give teachers useful and effective feedback.

And what is the result? Low morale among teachers and a less cooperative and constructive learning climate.

Merit pay is another Howard Government path to Americanisation that we shouldn't take.

What I want to see is a new set of high national standards for the teaching profession and I want to see teachers paid more when they achieve those standards.

That's why today I'm announcing the Government I lead will develop an explicit set of national teaching standards. These will be based on the existing national framework which was approved by all the Education ministers – including the then Federal Minister, Brendan Nelson.

The national framework already defines teaching standards at four levels – from *graduation*, through *competence* and *accomplishment* to the highest level of *leadership*. Some States are already developing criteria for these teaching standards.

I want independent professional bodies, like those which exist in the States, to develop more detailed measures of performance. And I envisage these independent bodies playing a strong role in deciding when individual teachers have reached these levels.

To encourage teachers in public schools to achieve the highest professional standards, we'll fund higher salaries.

Those classroom teachers who meet the rigorous standards for professional *excellence*, as set out in the national framework, could qualify for, say, an additional \$10,000 above the top of the current salary scale.

And for the first time, they'll be required to maintain their ongoing high standard of practice through ongoing professional learning regular re-accreditation.

To advance to the top professional level would require a higher contribution including, for example, mentoring other less experienced teachers and running professional development programs.

I believe there's scope for outstanding younger teachers to be "fast tracked" to the new salary levels if they meet the criteria.

Teachers should be paid on standards not just seniority.

As well, Labor will fund the appointment of outstanding professionals in targeted schools. Schools that have concentrations of disadvantaged students and a high proportion of inexperienced teachers. Schools that need both leadership and excellence in classroom teaching.

These positions could attract a total salary and professional development package of around \$100,000.

The current salary structure for teachers is too flat.

Although teachers just beginning their careers earn comparatively high starting salaries, this soon flattens out and plateaus in their 30s. They face the prospect of another 25 years or so at the same salary level.

We must offer teachers the financial incentive to stay in the profession. And we need to offer young graduates a long-term, career structure that convinces them to sign up for teaching.

My Deputy and Shadow Minister for Education, Jenny Macklin, is releasing a policy discussion paper today which will be the basis for consulting with our school communities about the best way to implement this plan in detail.

High Standards in Teacher Education

Of course standards-based pay is ultimately reliant on high standards in teacher education.

To achieve the high professional levels I've described, teachers need excellence in their own education.

Jenny and I have already announced plans to establish a Higher Education Quality Agency to regularly review the standard of university courses.

And today I can announce that primary and secondary teacher education will be the first courses up for review.

We'll work with State and Territory agencies to accredit teacher education courses against national standards.

And we'll make sure that those who "teach the teachers" are accredited at the highest standards of teaching practice.

In time, this process could extend beyond teacher education into other disciplines. For example, university mathematics, English, science and history - so that universities have more responsibility for the quality of teaching these subjects in schools.

And we'll consider HECS debt "forgiveness" in areas of skills shortage. We'll look at waiving the HECS debt for graduates who become maths, science or technology teachers. Or teachers who work in disadvantaged, or rural and regional schools.

National Standards for Resources

I've made the point that high teaching standards are key determinants of student achievement.

But resources obviously contribute to effective teaching practices too.

My Government will provide resources for *all* schools to achieve the highest standards for their students. And we'll provide additional resources for students with special needs. With funding priority to those schools with the greatest need.

To do this requires a national benchmark. So we'll establish a *national standard of school resources*, based on the work of the taskforce that education ministers have already set up.

We'll start with the principle that high quality schooling is a shared responsibility for all governments. We will end the bickering, blame-shifting and bullying that's the hallmark of the Howard Government. And we'll work

with all governments to develop a national compact on quality schooling based on the principles I have outlined here today.

I understand the critical importance of building bridges with parents, teachers and principals.

We will complement national collaboration with states and territories with greater involvement of parents, teachers and principals.

We will listen to the people who are grounded in the realities of schools when we develop policy and when we implement programs.

Labor will fund the recruitment of more Indigenous teachers in our schools, and support for those teachers in their early years of teaching. This is particularly important for young Indigenous people teaching in schools away from their home communities.

Labor will ensure professional development funding supports teaching standards. Professional development programs and courses funded by the Commonwealth will support teachers to achieve the national professional teaching standards, through approved providers and courses.

We will also encourage the states and territories to make sure their professional development funding supports the national standards as well.

And finally we will negotiate this package with the states and territories; and with teachers' and principals' organisations and professional associations.

All this will be done constructively, in the best interests of students, parents and teachers.

Conclusion

Friends: standards, not slogans. That's my approach to Australia's schools. And it's my approach right across education.

I invite you to contrast the plans I've outlined today with the short-sightedness and the blinding ideology of the Howard Government.

I say that while the Howard Government is all slogans, thought bubbles and bumper stickers, I have firm plans for the future:

A Blueprint for skills: I'll get rid of TAFE fees for the traditional trades so that we can train Australians first.

A White Paper for universities: I'll rebuild the quality of Australian degrees, so that we compete with Harvard and Oxford on brains.

A vision for Australian schools: I'll build all schools up, not drag some down.

And a pledge for our future: I'll be the Education Prime Minister Australian parents and kids so badly need.

The Party I lead is proudly the future Party.

We know getting the future right means getting our schools right.

It means parents and kids as nation builders.

It means lifting all our kids up.

It means providing opportunity.

It means giving parents a real role in their child's education.

It means new ways to raise standards.

It means an education system for the future.

Thank you.