**Achieving Teacher Quality: The Coalition's Approach**

**Sydney Institute Address**

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[Greetings]

School education policy and suggestions for its reform seem to be a topic on policy makers' lips – it's hard to open a newspaper or turn on the radio without coming across it. No-one appears satisfied with the lot of school education right now.

Part of this surge in interest has related to the Gonski Review and the Federal Government's school funding model. However, a broader policy debate has also emerged, focussed on how best to improve the outcomes being achieved by Australian schools.

In my address today, I will speak both about the wider context of this debate, as well as the potential for policies specifically focussed on improving teacher effectiveness.

Historically, Australia's education system has performed relatively well. According to the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 results, of the 65 assessed school systems Australia was ranked 9th in reading, 10th in science and 15th in mathematics. These results were significantly above the OECD average on all three measures and ranked us clearly above nations like the US, UK, Germany and France.

However, between 2000 and 2009, Australia's performance had slipped and a number of school systems, particularly in East Asia, have overtaken us. [1]

Between 2000 and 2009, Australia was one of only four countries to record a statistically significant decline in student reading performance.[2]

[1] OECD, PISA 2009 database
[2] OECD (2009) *Change in reading performance between 2000 and 2009*, online database, figure V.2.1.

And this decline occurred despite education spending over the same period increasing in real terms by 44 per cent.[3]

We're paying more and achieving less.

For the last five years we have heard a constant stream of rhetoric from the current Federal Government about an 'education revolution'.

Instead of a 'revolution', what has been delivered is a masterclass in wasteful spending and appalling mismanagement, all without any tangible impact on what actually matters: improving how and what teachers are teaching so student outcomes are improved.

But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised – after all, the fate of the 'education revolution' was predicted over 90 years ago by Franz Kafka, who wrote: *"Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy".*

The truth is the 'education revolution' was never going to deliver on the promise of Labor's rhetoric, because Australian education did not need a revolution. What it needed, and still needs, are two things: practical

[3] Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Sonnemann, J., and Burns, T. (2012) *Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Grattan Institute, p10

policies that are focussed on addressing the shortcomings in our current system and effective implementation of those policies.

As I have highlighted, a major issue facing our current system is slipping student outcomes. There are 3 sets of policies needed to address this. These policies need to be designed to improve the quality of the curriculum, to improve the quality of teaching and to improve the school environment, in other words how schools, their facilities and their staff are resourced and managed.

Under our Constitution, the State and Territory Governments have the responsibility for schools, a situation that limits the scope of policies that can be pursued at the Federal level.

That caveat notwithstanding, the Federal Government has a vitally important role to play, and if elected, a Coalition Federal Government will act to address all three of these policy areas.

Specifically at the last election, we promised that a Coalition Government would:

1. review the national curriculum, widen the consultative process and invest to ensure that teachers are able to access the professional development support they need to effectively implement it;

2. act to give Government schools autonomy – in our view, this is the single most important step that we can take to enable schools to engage with their students and parents, as well as to effectively address the specific, local issues faced by individual school communities; and

3. improve the teaching in our schools - this is the issue that I propose to focus on today.

The standard policy prescription to improve teaching in the past has been to **hire more teachers.**

The argument goes like this – more teachers equals smaller class sizes, smaller classes equates to more personalised instruction for children, which in turn leads to improved student outcomes.

It's a simple argument and one that has resulted in enormous amounts of wasted government spending for a long period of time.

Conversely, a recent Grattan Institute paper on teacher effectiveness concluded:

> *"the evidence overwhelmingly shows that investing in* ***improved teacher effectiveness rather than the number of teachers*** *is the most successful method of improving student learning and creating top performing education systems".*[4]

Extensive academic research into the effectiveness of the 'class size' policy has produced two, remarkably consistent findings in both Australian and international studies:[5]

- reducing class sizes is incredibly expensive; and
- reducing class sizes does not meaningfully improve student performance.

[4] Jensen, B., 2010, *Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne
[5] *Ibid*

Policies pursuing a further reduction in class sizes will not work. We need a new approach to improve the teaching in our schools.

Most people have been exposed to both great teaching and terrible teaching in the course of their – or their children's – time at school. They intuitively understand the importance of teacher quality.

This intuitive sense is supported by extensive international and domestic research that has found the quality of teaching is the most significant predictor of student outcomes (apart from family background) and increasing teacher effectiveness outweighs the impact of any other school education program or policy.[6]

If we want to address the ultimate issue – the slipping academic performance of Australian schools – then improving the effectiveness of our teachers is critical.

So what actions can the Commonwealth take to improve teacher effectiveness?

[6] Jensen, B., 2010, *Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne *citing*: Hanushek, E., J. Kain, et al. (1998). *Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement*. Cambridge, MA, NBER Working Paper Series No. 6691.; Rockoff, J. E. (2004). *"The Impact of Individual Teachers on Student Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data."* American Economic Review 94: 247-252.; Hanushek, E. A., J. F. Kain, et al. (2005), *The Market for Teacher Quality*, Cambridge, MA, NBER Working Paper Series No. 11154.; Aaronson, D., L. Barrow, et al. (2007). *"Teachers and Student Achievement in the Chicago Public High Schools."* Journal of Labor Economics 25(1): 95-135.; Nye, B., S. Konstantopoulos, et al. (2007). *"How Large Are Teacher Effects?"* Educational Research 26: 237-257.; Leigh, A. and C. Ryan (2010). *"Long-Run Trends in School Productivity : Evidence From Australia."* Forthcoming, Education Finance and Policy.

There are two different groups of teachers to address –

- prospective teachers who are still in training, or contemplating a career in education; and
- current teachers who are already working in schools.

There are two major measures that can improve the effectiveness of **new teachers entering the profession**. First, ensuring that those seeking to become teachers have a strong track record of academic attainment and second, improving the quality of the pre-service education that new teachers receive.

Over the last 10 years, the requirements to enter a teaching course at Australian universities have declined. For example, the average tertiary admission rank (ATAR) required for undergraduate teaching courses in Victoria declined from 75 in 2004 to 67.5 in 2011. In regional Victoria the

average is only 59.[7] This story is true across the country, with minimum admission standards commonly in the mid-50s to low-60s.

So what can we do about these declining standards?

A number of commentators appear to advocate the wholesale adoption of the education policies of other nations as a panacea – Finland springs to mind. While these kinds of arguments are simplistic and unhelpful, I do think we can usefully look to international experiences to provide some insight into what might work to address the unique set of challenges facing Australian education.

To this end, a common feature of the East Asian school systems that have performed so strongly over the last decade is the strong academic track record of the people who become teachers.

For example, a 2007 McKinsey study detailed that Singapore draws their teachers only from the top one third of the graduating secondary school

[7] Victorian Institute of Teaching from Victorian Tertiary Admission Centre published information, cited in Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), June 2012, *New directions for school leadership and the teaching profession,* at 10

class, [8] and Dr Jensen from the Grattan Institute has noted that the South Korean system is even more selective again.[9]

By way of contrast, the Productivity Commission recently estimated that approximately one third of those enrolled in Australian pre-service education between 2005 and 2010 had year 12 results that placed them **outside** the top 30 per cent of their class.[10]

The Coalition recognises the need to ensure that the next generation of teachers are above average academically and we support the recent moves to ensure that education courses generally only take candidates with literacy and numeracy skills in the top 30 per cent of the population.

However, putting a floor under the entry requirements really just addresses a symptom of the wider problem, which is that a career in teaching is not appealing enough to the highest calibre candidates.

[8] McKinsey and Company, 2007, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, cited in Productivity Commission 2012, *Schools Workforce*, Research Report, Canberra, at 126

[9] Grattan Melbourne event, 28 February 2012, *Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia – edited transcript*, at 7

[10] Productivity Commission 2012, *Schools Workforce*, Research Report, Canberra

A 2009 survey of school leavers revealed that only 1 per cent of 'high achievers' (defined as TER over 90) had teaching or education as their first preference for university. [11]

The report also revealed that those people who did want to study education were the most likely of all school leavers to rate the "level of HECS" and "having confidence in meeting the demands of the course" as being major influences on why they wanted to study education. Rated less important than other fields was the idea that teaching "extended on subjects liked as a part of Year 12".[12]

So, this evidence suggests that increasing numbers of students are choosing to study education, because they think it is cheap, easy and it does not extend or deepen the knowledge they gained during year 12.

When I think about the pipeline of new teachers that we need to address our slipping student outcomes, these are not the characteristics that I would like to distinguish it.

[11] Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Roy Morgan Research, 2009, *Year 12 Student Choices: A survey on factors influencing Year 12 decision-making on post-school destination, choice of university and preferred subject*, Table 23
[12] Id. at 113

To be clear, I am not suggesting that all new teachers joining the profession fit this profile, and I have met many excellent young teachers who have chosen to pursue a career in education for all the right reasons.

However, this study does highlight our core challenge: to widen the pool from which we draw our new teachers and to make teaching an appealing career to high calibre people who currently do not consider pursuing it.

This is not an easy task but independent programs like Teach for Australia have shown great promise.

Teach for Australia, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the programme, is the local manifestation of Teach for America – a programme that has been successfully operating in the United States since the early 1990s and to-date has been instituted in various guises in 24 countries.

The program works by enlisting high-achieving recent university graduates and professionals to teach for at least two years in a disadvantaged secondary school.

Teach for Australia 'associates' are not graduates of traditional pre-service education courses. Instead, they undertake an intensive 6-week initial training course at the University of Melbourne before they begin teaching and then complete a postgraduate teaching qualification over the following two years.

Programs like Teach for Australia can be justified on the basis that they are effective at providing high quality teachers to disadvantaged schools. However, I believe they have additional, unique value in their ability to make a career in teaching sufficiently prestigious and appealing to attract our top university graduates.

Consider the results of the program internationally:

- in 2011, Teach for America received 48,000 applications for 5,200 places – an 11 per cent acceptance rate;[13]
- 18 per cent of final year Harvard Undergraduates applied to Teach for America in 2011;[14] and
- 8 per cent of final year Oxford students applied to Teach First, the equivalent UK program.[15]

[13] Washington Post, August 3 2011, *Teach for America 2011 acceptance rate: 11 percent*
[14] Harvard Crimson, 1 March 2011, *Teach for America Applications Hold Steady*

One in five graduates from America's most prestigious university (itself with an acceptance rate of only six per cent) now want to work as teachers, in the poorest schools in the country.

And one in ten graduates from Britain's most prestigious university (apologies to any Cambridge graduates) want to work as teachers – and keep in mind that the Teach Next program only began in 2002.

Given this international track record, Teach for Australia and other similar programs show potential to fundamentally alter how people view a career in education.

The second imperative to improve the quality of new teachers is to ensure that they have received high quality teacher training or 'pre-service education'.

Currently however, pre-service education is not preparing new teachers adequately for life in the classroom.

[15] The Telegraph, 5 July 2012, *More Top Graduates to teach in tough schools*

For example, in one survey, only 41 per cent of teachers agreed that their training had left them well prepared for the reality of teaching.[16]

Another study suggested that a majority of teachers felt that their training was helpful in preparing them in relation to only eight out of 15 key teaching skills. Similarly, principals felt that new teachers were well prepared in only four out of 10 key areas.[17]

A central criticism by both teachers and principals is that pre-service education is not well targeted on those practical skills that teachers actually need to be effective in the classroom, in areas like managing a classroom, conducting assessments and reporting and communicating with parents.[18]

Singapore has an excellent system of pre-service education. One of the key strengths of their system is the close link between the National Institute of Education (NIE) – the sole provider of teacher training – and schools.

[16] Australian Education Union, 2009, *New Educators Survey 2008*, Melbourne, cited in Productivity Commission (2012), at 123

[17] McKenzie et al., 2011, *Staff in Australia's Schools 2010*, Report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, cited in Productivity Commission (2012), at 123

[18] Productivity Commission (2012), at 123

These close links have enabled schools to provide direct feedback to the NIE that has led to the replacement of subjects like 'the history and philosophy of education' in favour of courses focussed on practical teaching skills.[19]

There are many obvious differences between Singapore and Australia, not the least of which is our Federation, with its separate State and Territory systems. But I do believe there is scope to profitably create closer ties between providers of pre-service education, their graduates and the schools in which the graduates begin their teaching careers.

These closer ties could have benefits ranging from improving the focus of pre-service education courses, to improving access to practicum placements, or ensuring that new graduates have ongoing support and mentoring in their early years in the workforce.

Importantly, the Federal Government has the power to directly influence the creation of these ties through the compacts that it has with the Universities who provide pre-service education.

[19] Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Sonnemann, J., and Burns, T. (2012) *Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Grattan Institute at 21

If a Coalition Federal Government is elected, I will investigate the most effective way to ensure that the requirements of pre-service education are appropriately focussed on the practical skills that new teachers need to succeed in the classroom, initially through the creation of a Ministerial Advisory Board.

We will also adapt the current University compacts to increase the level of ongoing mentoring and professional development provided to their recent graduates in teaching.

In addition to improving the effectiveness of new teachers, closer links would provide much needed feedback to providers of pre-service education, allowing them to continually ensure that their training reflects the needs of new teachers and schools.

Effective professional development is a feature of most highly successful private sector organisations. Likewise, the top performing international school systems have a focus on the performance of their current staff, not just new recruits.

While mentoring and professional development systems do formally exist in Australian schools, they are deeply ineffective.

The 2009 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) run by the OECD, revealed that over 60 per cent of Australian teachers feel that appraisals of their work are conducted solely to meet administrative requirements and have minimal impact on the way they actually teach in the classroom.[20]

Instead of a useful tool to improve teacher performance, what has been implemented is just a check-the-box, administrative burden required to satisfy central office.

Unsurprisingly, these systems fail to recognise and encourage high quality teaching. Nine out of 10 teachers say that they would not receive any recognition in their school if they improved the quality of their teaching.[21]

The systems also fail to manage poor performance, with 71 per cent of teachers reporting that in their schools, teachers who display sustained poor performance will not be dismissed.[22]

[20] OECD, 2009, *Creating effective teaching and learning environments: First results from TALIS*, Paris, France, cited in Jensen, B. and Reichl, J., 2011, *Better teacher appraisal and feedback: Improving performance*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne at 7-8

[21] ibid

We can, and must do better than this.

The Productivity Commission has recently made a number of recommendations about the implementation of effective teacher professional development systems.[23]

A central element of these recommendations is that these systems must be school based. Principals must take the lead role in determining how their school should monitor and improve performance.

Central agencies must be limited to supporting and enabling these efforts, not directing them.

While the Federal Government cannot introduce these types of measures directly, we think they are vitally important. Accordingly, if elected, we will make the discretionary Federal funding that is currently paid to the States – for example, through National Partnerships – contingent on the introduction of genuine school and principal autonomy.

State Governments are currently responsible for allocating some Federal discretionary funding to non-Government schools. While we are committed to ensuring that this funding does not flow to States who do

[22] ibid
[23] Productivity Commission (2012), at 179

not act to give schools genuine autonomy, non-Government schools should not suffer for the recalcitrance of their State Government. Accordingly, the Coalition is committed to providing discretionary Federal funding directly to non-Government schools and school systems.

Ultimately, our efforts, in conjunction with State Governments, to introduce genuine principal and school autonomy into the Government school system will create the foundation necessary for principals to develop their staff appropriately, hire the right staff for the right positions, and manage underperforming teachers effectively.

Many of you will be astonished to hear the experiences related to me by school principals on their current inability to be able to appoint, manage and develop staff that so many of their non-government school principals take for granted.

Just last year when I was in Brisbane, a Government school principal told me that his number one priority was to recruit an excellent English teacher for his school. In response to the new teacher request, the Education Department in Queensland sent him a teacher with specialist skills in fine arts.

At a gathering in Victoria with several non-government school principals and one Government school principal, the Government school principal shared with the group how she was envious of the neighbouring non-government schools principals' ability to be able to appoint staff and manage pay incentives to reward the best teachers in their schools.

She explained to me at length her frustration over the years at her inability to retain some of her best and brightest teachers or seriously manage underperforming teachers at the school.

I asked her, if she was so fed up with the Government school system, why had she stayed and not left to join a non-government school?

She replied that she had a deep commitment to public education and had learnt over time to simply manage underperforming teachers.

She also stated her hope was one day the system might improve and that someone with the political will would come to implement the changes that are so sorely needed.

A Coalition Government will not let principals down. We will not let parents down. Most importantly, we will not let students down. We will give principals and parents a real say in the running of their school.

The future of our government school system depends on it.