

# HOW CLEVER IS THE GONSKI? WHY IS IT ALWAYS ABOUT MONEY?

By Kevin Glancy

There's no doubt that we could always spend more money on education as long as there is accountability but as we know the Gillard Government likes to throw our money around in that general direction and with little result.

Despite the billions of dollars spent, with much of it wasted on building school halls for Labor politicians to open (check Bill Shorten's mandatory school 'opening hall rules' for election year) and despite the laptop computer programme which is incomplete and has now hit a brick wall; Gillard and Rudd's Building the Education Revolution has actually seen our standard of education go backwards on the world stage. So much for their rhetoric and generosity with taxpayer's money.

Of course the teacher's union always wants us to believe that education is about money – more money for teachers and they along with their media supporters always lose sight of the fact that state governments own and operate state schools. They also forget that parents who pay for their children to attend private schools also pay extra for the upkeep of the state school system through their taxes.

The federal government also contributes extra to state schools and makes contributions to private schools as it should, given the double whammy contribution made by private school parents. However, schools are first and foremost – a state government responsibility.

Interestingly, as far as the teachers union is concerned, when a Labor state government is in power they seem to make much less noise. Far be it for them to embark on doing damage to the left wing brand of politics they support. Such is their concern for our children's education.

But as far as directing more money into education without accountability goes, there is a different view held by someone who ought to know the true state of our school system. He believes that if Australia wants to climb up the

international rankings in literacy and numeracy, the solution has very little to do with throwing more money at the problem.

Former NSW Deputy Director-General of Schools, Trevor Fletcher was in charge of that state's schools for six years up until 2010 and he points the finger clearly and squarely at 'dud' teachers earning salaries of up to \$100,000 a year.

Trevor believes that the decline in education standards is directly related to the failure to weed out dud teachers and this mediocre system was inflicting *"damage on young people and the status of education"* in Australia.

Mr Fletcher also said the federal government's aim to get Australia back into the world's top five education nations by 2025 was a *"sad joke"*.

*"The truth is that not long ago we were in the top five," he said. "We need to fully understand that we have lost our way and get serious about addressing the real concerns."*

*The national research highlighting the fundamental importance of quality teaching has been clearly articulated for many years but our governments have only ever paid lip service to the key findings."*

Mr Fletcher also highlighted a number of mistakes that have been made and they shed light as to why global studies show that Australian primary students are under-performing.

- Reducing class sizes at a cost of more than \$700 million in NSW made little difference to improving student results.
- Central bureaucracies failed to improve results despite record government funding.
- The debate around funding public and private schools was a "huge distraction"; and;
- Strategies aimed at placating powerful education unions had been a disaster.

Mr Fletcher said too many schools were led by *"absent landlords and landladies"*. In other words, by principals who spent much of their time at conferences or collegial gatherings nominating each other for awards.

*"I have encountered far too many situations where clearly incompetent teachers are still being passed around from school to school to inflict more damage on vulnerable students," he said.*

*"In some Australian jurisdictions the most incompetent teachers can be paid around \$100,000 per year at the top level because there is no rigour available for principals around performance expectations."*

In fairness to Mr Fletcher's extremely brave comments, given they're so politically incorrect and unfashionable, it should be said that there are many dedicated teachers who work hard and who are highly professional in their approach. They should not be mentioned within coo-ee of the words 'dud' or 'mediocre'.

Those teachers are clearly doing their best in the face of system hi-jacked by the unions who use schools for their own political ends and who, as if any more proof was required to confirm my previous statement, are not the slightest bit interested in performance based pay and reward. The question should be asked; Why not – if unions are really interested in improving our childrens education?

It's why I'm inclined to agree with the informed sentiments expressed by Mr Fletcher who is now running a large high school in South Australia.

Much like the private sector that relies on efficiency, teachers should be paid on merit. Our education system might further be aided if teachers kept their brand of left-wing politics and socialism out of the classroom and concentrated on the basics of reading writing and arithmetic.

I can remember a conversation I had with a school teacher some years ago who said in answer to a general question I had asked; "Oh! Spelling – We don't teach spelling!" She replied.

That was in the early nineties and I knew we were in trouble then.

#### **FOOTNOTE:**

Julia Gillard's latest electioneering, thought bubble in announcing a reading programme in schools is typically bereft of detail or budget. In any event, such a programme is reliant on the co-operation and implementation by State Premiers who run and manage the schools.

Yet again and like so many other announcements she has made in the past, she did not have the courtesy to consult the Premiers prior to announcing the programme. Now she is criticizing them for not jumping enthusiastically onboard and accuses them of playing the blame game. Why on earth should they when dealing with such bad manners from a Prime Minister?

This also from a Prime Minister who should really go back to school and learn how to read; to learn that it's not the 'Taliband' as she refers to them – but the Taliban and that the word 'hyper – bowl' is not pronounced in that way. She should also take union mate, Paul 'underminding' Howe along with her to make sure she is not undermined.

*Trevor Fletcher's quotes and comments: Courtesy of Bruce McDougal – The Daily Telegraph December 27, 2012. [www.dailytelegraph.com.au](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au)*

