



The Coalition's Plan for Real Action to  
**Help Students with  
a Disability and  
their Families**

**Stand up for Australia.  
Stand up for real action.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition is committed to helping young Australians and their families living with a disability.

The Coalition believes that it is time to take real action to put a better model in place to help to get the best possible educational outcome for Australian students with a disability.

These young Australians and their parents face many barriers to accessing the sort of educational opportunities that their classmates take for granted.

The Coalition has a plan for real action to help support students with disabilities.

Labor's waste and mismanagement has seen billions of dollars of taxpayers' money wasted on the 'school halls' programme. This is an appalling waste of money that could have been better managed to boost funding for children with disabilities.

The Coalition is committed to ending the waste and taking real action to help children with disabilities at school.

Specifically, an elected Coalition Government will:

## **1. Secure national agreement on definitions of disability**

The Coalition will work at a Ministerial Council level to reach agreement between jurisdictions on clear categories for funding for students with a disability.

A nationally consistent definition is the first crucial step on the road towards providing greater assistance for all students with disabilities.

## **2. Introduce an Education Card for students with a disability**

The Coalition will commit \$314 million over the forward estimates to provide portable funding for students with a disability through an Education Card. The Education Card will be worth up to \$20,000 per year.

The Education Card will be introduced incrementally, in a targeted manner and commencing with those who need it most and with reference to the newly created disability definitions.

It is estimated that the roll-out of the Education Card will initially provide assistance to almost 6000 children with disabilities and their families.

# HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

Labor has wasted the opportunity to help students with disabilities, failing to provide educational choice to them and their families.

Parental decisions about where to send children to school are based predominantly on the ability of that school to support and nurture each child's development.

For parents of children with a disability these choices are very limited.

Parents of children with a disability want an end to the discrimination and the denial of choice when it comes to the education of their children.

These parents want what every parent wants for their child – the right to choose an education that will allow their child to reach their full potential.

This inequity and the stress it causes for these families is unacceptable and it is time something was done about it.

## ***Labor has wasted the education budget***

The Labor Government continues to knowingly waste billions in the school hall programme and it is a national disgrace.

For example, the NSW Public School Principals Forum estimate that up to one third (around \$5 billion out of \$16.2 billion) of the 'Building the Education Revolution' money has been syphoned off in management-related fees and outrageously inflated construction costs.

Labor has failed to properly manage the billions of taxpayer dollars leading to waste, rorts, price gouging, collusion and shameful mismanagement.

Although this is a crime against the taxpayer, the real victims are families with disabled students who might have received real and enduring educational outcomes from the billions that have been wasted due to Labor incompetence and bureaucracy.

## ***Labor has failed to take any real action***

Before the 2007 election, the Coalition commissioned research to investigate options for future funding models to facilitate portability and transparency of funding to support students with a disability who transfer between schools.

The key recommendations for reform were:

- Increasing the overall level of funding available for students with disabilities in schools.
- Securing national agreement on definitions of disabilities and associated funding levels.
- Providing parity of funding across sectors.

Labor sat on this report, eventually publishing it two years later in 2009.

Now Labor is holding off until yet another review is completed in 2011.

Students with disability can expect vastly different treatment depending on which state they live in, which state government department administers funding programmes in that state, what type of school they go to and how their disability is classified or defined.

The system of funding and resourcing of students with disabilities is also complex and simply not working.

To obtain assistance from government, parents of children with a disability need to fill out yet another form, have yet another assessment, wait yet another indefinite period and hope that their child receives the support they need.

# THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY AND THEIR FAMILIES

The Coalition has a plan for real action to help support students with disabilities.

We know billions are being wasted in the Government's 'school hall rip-off programme' through the waste and mismanagement that comes with the bureaucratic management style so typical of Labor.

The 'Building the Education Revolution' programme has been plagued by the red tape of state education departments. There are too many examples of cost blowouts under this programme – often for projects that were not even wanted or needed.

The Coalition does not intend to repeat this mistake when it comes to providing additional support for students with a disability. The Coalition will avoid the state government bureaucracies by introducing funding that follows a student, not the rules of a government department.

Specifically the Coalition will:

## **1. Secure national agreement on definitions of disabilities.**

The Coalition will work at a Ministerial Council level, to reach agreement between jurisdictions on clear categories for funding students with a disability.

These categories will be clear, relevant and appropriate. Most importantly, these categories will be adopted nationally to ensure consistency for parents, students, teachers, governments and other relevant stakeholders.

Nationally consistent definitions are the first crucial step on the road towards providing greater assistance for all students with disabilities.

The Coalition will ensure that this process is complete before 1 July 2011.

## **2. Introduce an Education Card for students with a disability**

The problem with existing systems of support for students with a disability is the lack of portability. Support and assistance traditionally goes to the school and does not follow the student with a disability.

The Coalition will commit \$314 million over the forward estimates to commence the portability of funding for students with a disability through an Education Card. The Education Card will be worth up to \$20,000 per year.

The entitlement attached to the Education Card will follow the student. It will be indexed to inflation and will be paid to educational institutions.

The Education Card will provide targeted assistance to specific areas of the schools population. The purpose of the card is to provide students with additional education needs with a financial opportunity to access the very best schooling options available.

The Coalition will commence the Education Card for students with disability from 1 January 2012, based on agreed nationally consistent definitions, providing portability of the entitlement between schools or school systems. This will provide real choice to parents and a guarantee of a better education for students.

The Education Card will be introduced incrementally and in a targeted manner commencing with those who need it most and with reference to the newly created disability definitions.

Students most in need will get help first, with eligibility to be expanded as the federal budgetary situation improves and Labor's debt is brought under control.

It is estimated that the initial roll-out of the Education Card will provide assistance to almost 6000 of Australia's children with a disability and their families.

This incremental roll-out will also ensure that this major reform to education funding is carefully monitored so the benefits can be maximised.

Students not yet eligible for assistance through the Education Card would remain on the existing Commonwealth and state funding arrangements.

# COSTINGS

The Coalition will commit an additional \$314 million over the forward estimates to increase support for children with disabilities and their families.

This funding will be provided from the more than \$24 billion in recurrent savings that have been identified by the Coalition over the forward estimates.

These savings are a result of cutting Labor's waste and mismanagement and redirecting funding from inefficient and poorly performing Labor Government programmes.

2010-11 \$M	2011-12 \$M	2012-13 \$M	2013-14 \$M	TOTAL \$M
4	60	123	127	<b>314</b>

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