

SCHOOLS AND PRESCHOOLS

EDUCATION
VICTORIA
AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS

2006

OUR ELECTION COMMITMENT

Investment in education should be the highest priority for governments - our very future depends on it. The Bracks Government (and those before it) have failed to help the children who struggle, starved the public system of resources, allowed school buildings to become dilapidated and done nothing about a serious shortages of teachers.

The Democrats commitment is for:

- An extra teacher for every 100 students to reduce class sizes and for specialist assistance in literacy and numeracy
- An educational needs supplement that recognises the higher demands on some schools
- \$400m a year over 10 years to replace portable classrooms and rebuild dilapidated schools
- Primary schools to be funded at the same level as secondary schools
- A guarantee of multi-purpose indoor sport and performing arts facilities in all schools
- Specialist programs for gifted children and those with learning and other disabilities
- School counsellors, nurses and/or student welfare officers in each school
- Guarantees of specialist teachers in gifted education, physical education, languages and the arts at all levels of schooling
- Homework networks in disadvantaged areas run by qualified social workers and volunteers to provide students with social and educational supports to complete their secondary schooling
- State-wide adoption and funding for sex and relationships education and for programs like Solving the Jigsaw to reduce the incidence of bullying in schools and improve safety, confidence and maturity in children
- Greater flexibility in school transport where the closest school may not be the most suitable for particular students
- A study of schooling costs - uniforms, text books, school camps, etc. - with a view to subsidising or reducing the impact on needy families

VET

- An expansion of vocational education and training programs in schools and better links with TAFE
- An expansion of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
- An offer for alternative timetabling and accommodation for rural students to attend courses in regional centres

THIS TIME

AN UPPER HOUSE THAT WORKS

The DEMOCRATS VISION for a school system in Victoria is one that:

- is well-resourced, publicly funded and equitable,
- is secular, innovative, modern and vibrant, and
- meets the very diverse social and educational needs of all children and young people, regardless of ability to pay.

- The promotion of programs for students to mix academic studies with business skills

Teachers and principals

- An increase in teacher undergraduate places
- The introduction of programs for succession planning for school leadership

Preschool

- The Education Department to have responsibility for funding and managing preschool for all three and four year-olds
- Wage parity for preschool teachers
- Funding models that allow smaller class sizes and flexibility for reasonable fluctuations in preschool populations



A U S T R A L I A N TM
DEMOCRATS

This election commitment was updated on October 31, 2006
All our election commitments are available online at
www.vic.democrats.org.au

- Centres co-located with primary schools, where possible
- Better linkages with maternal & child health services, childcare and other early childhood development services and networks

The background

Government schools under-resourced

In six years the Bracks Government has made only modest increases in funding for state schools and they have fallen further behind independent schools in terms of resources, class sizes and particularly in school buildings and facilities. As a result, the percentage of students in non-government schools has continued to rise and, at 35%, is the highest of any state.

This is not helped by the fact that Federal Government spending on non-government schools is now three times the rate of spending on government schools - 84% compared to 31%. It is clear that parents are opting for schools that are better resourced than governments are prepared to fund.

There is no long term plan to rebuild public school infrastructure



Senator Lyn Allison with students from Fairfield Primary School

in Victoria and not enough money for the backlog of urgently needed maintenance.

Teachers make a difference

Chronic teacher shortages are set to worsen with the imminent retirement 'baby-boomer' teachers. This means subjects have been dropped and maths, science, health and information technology, amongst other subjects, are being taught by teachers without expertise in those areas.

Teachers are often under-valued, overworked and lack the resources to tackle the complex range of social and educational problems that children bring to school. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with challenging behaviours need encouragement and assistance to prevent them from dropping out of education and disrupting class.

There is no plan to further reduce class sizes or to fix the teacher shortages in many subjects.

Counselling and specialist assistance for children with learning and disabilities are desperately needed. Gifted children are not adequately catered for either with only a handful of programs available around the state.

Parents want high standards, not one-off handouts

The \$300 beginning school payment in prep and year 7 is no doubt a help to parents with uniforms and books. However, why not tackle the increasingly high 'voluntary' fees paid at all year levels through adequate resources for the basic amenities they are often needed to fund?

Early childhood is crucial

Investing in early childhood is the soundest investment in the future that we can make. Preschool is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Around 4,000 Victorian children miss out because of a shortage of places and high fees.

Given the importance of the early years of schooling, primary schools should receive at least as much funding per child from governments as students in secondary schools. (Currently they receive from the state government around \$1,100 (25%) less per student, a much lower base allocation and no supplementary funding.)

Early literacy programs can be effective but the ability of schools to provide intensive assistance, one-on-one or in small groups is very limited. The successful Reading Recovery program should be funded for every level of primary school.

The Democrats oppose:

- Voucher systems for schools funding
- Unnecessary benchmarking, testing and school by school comparisons that don't take into account the learning challenges faced by students in particular schools
- Private partnership lease-back arrangements for school infrastructure