

I want to start by talking about a game: one that, like it or not, we are all part of. It is the blame and shame game. As people who work in schools, despite the fact there are students from varying socio-economic backgrounds, a range of abilities, disabilities and behaviours, and in some cases students with lots of personal baggage, we're only too well aware of what it's like to be constantly on the receiving end of blame.

- When our students cannot read well enough but they have never being read to at home; or
- when our students are obese and chips, pizza and coke are a major part of their diets; or
- when there is something not quite right in the world;

the broader community is all too quick to point the finger at schools or say that schools should be doing more.

You might remember it being mooted that teachers should check school lunch boxes; to be responsible for how well students eat. And we mustn't forget that teachers could 'crush' student self esteem through the use of the red pen which is an aggressive colour. Then of course teacher training is deemed as inadequate, with the suggestion that teachers aren't quite good enough, yet the training provided for other professions is never questioned.

We suffered it for years under the Howard Government. What a relief it was then, to hear the then Labor Opposition in the lead-up to the last Federal Election say "we must end the blame game". The now Prime Minister then made it clear that he believed this allowed Governments, both State and Federal, to avoid their responsibilities. After all, if it's someone else's fault for whatever's wrong, it is possible to avoid scrutiny of poor policy or a lack of action.

We agree, but it appears that the Rudd government is only too happy to get in on the act. This government uses both blame and distraction as strategies for dodging the real issues, while adopting some completely inappropriate policies.

'Teach for Australia' is one example. Does anyone here really believe that someone, no matter how bright they are, can train to be an effective teacher in six weeks? It's laughable and (this cartoon) depicts it beautifully. It shows a very unruly class with a caption that reads, "He's very bright. It's a shame we don't have a clue what he's talking about".

We are told that this is the answer to teacher shortages in specific curriculum areas. It is not. And this union for one will not accept that. Of course then we'll be blamed for the continuing shortages of teachers. And if there is any fall-out from these 6 week trained people it will be schools that will cop it. The government is unlikely to be held to account for its policy.

So, here we are, and despite their campaign boast that they would end the blame game, the Rudd Government uses words designed to get public support for that very thing: words such as transparency, accountability and public scrutiny. These appeal to some people in the community who are also part of the 'it's someone else's fault' culture. The words, the arguments and the implied blame that goes with them are a major distraction from the real issue. Just listen to these words from Julia Gillard:

*"We're bringing new thinking to the way we run our schools. Not hiding away failure but subjecting it to the cleansing sunshine of public scrutiny."*

Minister Gillard, **who** is hiding? It is clearly you and the Rudd Labor Government because you have failed to address the real issues and

needs of public education. The continuation of the Howard Government's unfair recurrent funding of schools in this country is a perfect example of such failure. A Labor Party and Government should stand up and fight for social justice and the rights of all to escape poverty. They **should** know that the best way to achieve this is to provide a first class education system that can be accessed by all. With regard to ongoing funding, the Government has failed and failed badly. On an A to F reporting scale we give them an F.

While the Government hides behind its unacceptable education funding policies and thereby avoids its social justice obligations, the Government bandies about issues in public that ensure teachers and schools are seen as failing their communities.

Governments have justified their attacks on teachers and schools saying:

- We have poured thousands of millions of dollars into schools; and
- Our national performance compared to other countries has barely changed, or has fallen over the last decade or more.

Both statements are valid to some degree. However, one needs to ask: where has the vast bulk of the additional funding gone? Answer: To Non-Government schools: to 30% of the nation's students and that amount has risen over the last decade.

There is little doubt that had the additional funding been allocated on the basis of need and not greed, Australia would be performing at a far higher level when it comes to educational outcomes, maybe like Finland where all the money goes into public schools. You do not improve educational outcomes by pouring more and more money into wealthy schools so they can build new swimming pools; rifle ranges and provide rowing eights. You do so by providing additional funding on the basis of need so that all students can access a quality education.

I acknowledge the Federal Government's provision of resources through the Building the Education Revolution initiative. This has been the single most significant investment in schools in a long time. However, the Rudd Government sticks to a policy that not only overfunds wealthy schools, but allows the wealthiest ones to receive the most money. Cleansing sunshine indeed Ms Gillard, we need to shine a **spotlight** on the Federal Government's recurrent funding policy for public schools.

Ms Gillard also describes a "*transformative leap*" ... "*informed by a new emphasis on transparency and accountability for every child and every school.*" Hence, the transparency agenda. This policy will see schools providing information to the Federal Government with the aim of them being publicly reported on. And we already know the results of that as we saw league tables published in both the Mercury and the Advocate this year. Many of our school staffs were totally demoralized as a result. It is not as if league tables let parents know how their child is progressing or how well a school could cater for their children's needs. But, as we've seen in other parts of the world, league tables do ultimately fail parents, students, schools and their local communities.

*One last comment from Julia Gillard, "The boy of our story will not be left marooned in an under-performing school while no-one knew or everyone averted their eyes".*

Well Minister, we do not and we will not avert our eyes. We will keep them firmly on the boy in **our** story, that being Kevin Rudd, and we will judge his performance as we are judged. We will not let Mr Rudd forget that he once said, "the Commonwealth has a prime obligation to adequately and properly fund government schools". And Mr Rudd needs to remember that it was the Unions that got him into office and he must not underestimate the power of one of the strongest Unions in the country, the Australian Education Union. The AEU played a key role in the YR@W

campaign. When we're organized, and we **can** achieve this at a national level, we are very effective indeed and it might be someone else who finds themselves marooned due to underperformance.

Despite the distractions and fights we must have about unsuitable policies, the AEU is fixed firmly on the prize. And the prize is an appropriate formula for recurrent funding of education and adequate resources for public schools. We will continue to argue for reasonable class sizes and support for students with high and additional needs; for staff with expertise to assist students. People such as social workers and school psychologists. We will argue that our most challenging schools need adequate resources to run programs that maximize students' chances of success and that there must be alternatives for students who do not cope well in regular classrooms.

Which brings us also to the next **state** government. So far, in the last couple of years we've had the biggest education budget on record and this was maintained in this year's budget. We acknowledge that. We also acknowledge that in these times of economic difficulty an effort has been made to shield schools from the cuts that are being made in education.

But there are other issues and some questions we will ask all the parties in the lead up to the state election including:

- As a percentage of the State Budget, will Education maintain or better still increase its share?
- Will funding of education in general and schools in particular be on the basis of need and where does this leave the funding of private schools?
- Will they be prepared to legislate against the publication of league tables?

Then there are the matters that directly affect our members such as:

- addressing the inequitable practice of standing down our TAs without pay;
- supporting the continuation of the teacher salary Nexus.
- What they intend to do about the PY10 issue

As yet no party has given an undertaking to support a salary Nexus. The government has made it clear there will be no continuation of Nexus beyond our present Agreement. When this Teachers' Agreement is finished in February 2011, the Government has declared that pay rises will be capped at 2.5% for at least two years regardless of wage outcomes for teachers interstate.

Without a Nexus, unless we are prepared for lengthy and bitter industrial campaigns, Tasmanian teachers will go back to being where they were for decades – at the bottom of teachers' salaries across Australia. And with a teacher shortage in other states, it is not hard to guess where our new teachers will go. Tasmania could very well be left with a teacher shortage, and be unable to attract and retain the best of the bunch. A fight for our Nexus is not just a fight about money. It's a fight, in the long term for ongoing industrial peace and mostly it is about the provision of quality education in this state. And fight we will.

In the meantime we must keep striving to have public education recognized as a key issue in the community and by governments. We must hold governments accountable for their policies and decisions, and not let them get away with blame and distraction as tactics. And finally, we must try to stop politicians using education as a political football, and as a way of serving their own agendas and prejudices. Education is way too important for that to continue.