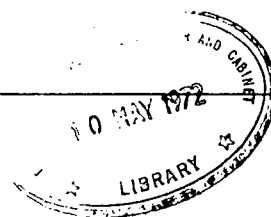


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PRIME MINISTER



MACQUARIE NETWORK WEEKLY BROADCAST

BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
WILLIAM McMAHON, CH, MP

3 MAY 1972

E D U C A T I O N

Most of you will agree that our greatest resources as a nation are the talents and abilities of our young people. It is therefore absolutely vital to our future as a nation that education should have a high priority among our national goals.

Education has this high priority in the policy thinking of Liberal-Country Party Governments. That's why we have seen a rapidly-growing Commonwealth involvement in many areas of education.

Our help to the States and the non-Government school system at an accelerating rate are quite specific.

Firstly, there is the need to increase the availability, or quantity of education as the population grows, and to meet the aspirations of children who wish to stay at school longer or to go on to higher education. Secondly, we aim to improve the quality of education.

To achieve these two overriding objectives, we are committed, firstly, and very importantly, to our very strong belief, that people have a right to freedom of choice of schools for individuals or groups within our community. We also want to reduce inequalities of opportunity in education and we want to instill in all families a wish to encourage their children to make the most of their personal potential. They are our major objectives.

Our methods, too, are simply stated. We want to work in co-operation with State Governments and independent school authorities. We want to encourage much greater local interest in the day-to-day running of schools. Above all, we want to avoid centralised monolithic control and enforced uniformity and conformity.

In a nutshell: The Liberal Party approach is aimed at releasing energies, removing obstacles and encouraging innovation.

Now you are entitled to ask: What have we done to achieve this?

Let us take the ten years up to 1971 as an example, although we were already giving substantial help in education before then, with universities and scholarships. One significant move by the Commonwealth was on aid to independent schools.

This policy began in a limited way in Canberra many years ago, but the Liberal-Country Party coalition was the first Federal Government to act nationally on aid to independent schools, as part of programmes of direct Commonwealth assistance to all schools.

We were the only major party to wholeheartedly accept the challenge of the plural society to help educate children outside the State system.

But it would be grossly wrong to take this to mean that we do not have a significant and great concern for Government schools. The figures for direct Commonwealth assistance to state schools show that our support is weighted in favour of Government schools on that basis.

Teacher training assistance is helping produce new teachers faster than new pupils. Average class sizes are coming down. In 1961, only 28 per cent of the 15 to 18-year-olds stayed at school. Last year, it was 42 per cent.

We are moving into new areas of education support by helping migrant children to overcome the language barrier, and by special grants we are deliberately discriminating in favour of aboriginal students.

There were over 600,000 more children in Australian schools last year than in 1961, many of them in the higher secondary classes where costs are greatest.

Through our expanding general revenue grants to the States, it can be shown that the Commonwealth provides more than half of the total recurrent spending by Governments on education in Australia. Since 1961, direct Commonwealth spending on education has gone up more than six times, and spending on universities has almost tripled.

In the last Budget, the increase for education was 14 per cent. In December, we decided on a further \$20 million grant to the States. This was the first time that Federal grants have been made specifically for primary and secondary school classroom construction.

Some of that money is already being spent to replace and remodel old and outmoded schools in the cities.

From the beginning of this year, we also substantially increased the grants to independent schools which we began in 1970.

You can see our record is a good one. And you can count on us to improve on it in the future.

We aim to provide the maximum Commonwealth support to both Government and non-Government schools with the minimum of centralised controls.

We do not want another bureaucratic apparatus in Canberra with the power to reach down into schools across the nation and dictate which shall grow and which shall wither by giving or withholding finance.
