

Mr Marko Vojkovic
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Dear Marko

Thank you for your email in relation to the education policies of the Liberal Party for the forthcoming state election. I will respond to each of the three specific areas that you have identified:

1. Teacher salaries - It is quite evident that Western Australia currently has a serious teacher shortage. While raw numbers of the shortage give some indication of the problem, what also must be considered is the fact that thousands of our students are now reliant upon SIDE or FLIS for an education more than ever before, hundreds of teachers are being forced to teach outside of their specialist area and hundreds of administrators are being forced to return to the classroom. Unless some bold decisions are made in the short to medium term, this situation is likely to significantly deteriorate even further. I am of the opinion that morale within the teaching profession is as low as it has been in the twenty five years that I have been directly involved in education. This is reflected in numerous areas, not least being the massive rise in teacher resignations over the past five years. The protracted nature of the current EBA negotiations between the Government and the SSTUWA has further exacerbated the anger amongst teachers. Teachers genuinely feel undervalued. They feel that the enormous change that they have had to endure over the past decade – most of which has been without consultation – has not been recognised.

The Liberal Party is extremely conscious of the enormous contribution that teachers make to our community. Therefore, we have committed an additional \$120m towards improving teacher salaries over the current three year agreement period. This contribution is non conditional – that is, teachers will receive this increase, regardless of the outcome of the current vote.

Should teachers reject the current Government offer, I will not refer the negotiations to arbitration. Personally, I regard any move to arbitration as an indication of failure. I will personally intervene to ensure that the salary negotiations are resolved in a prompt and effective manner.

In addition, I will use the first two years in government to communicate widely with the teaching profession to ensure that a wider, more versatile tranche of career opportunities are provided for teachers to keep them in the profession. It is vital that we provide more career opportunities for teachers if we are to avoid a crisis situation in the medium term. In excess of 60% of teachers will be eligible for retirement within the next eight years. Couple this with the fact that more than one in five new graduates left the profession after one year's teaching in 2007 and we have an extremely sobering prospect for the immediate future.

My genuine goal is to provide an environment in our schools to retain our practising teachers and to attract new graduates to the profession.

2. I am extremely conscious of the endemic problems with discipline and behaviour management in our public schools. While such issues can be crudely measured by statistics - in terms of the number of students suspended and excluded - the reality of the situation is not as simplistic. Rather, teachers are frustrated by the lack of respect that they are shown by students on a daily basis. They are fed up with being constantly spat at, sworn at and physically and verbally abused. They are frustrated by what they see as a lack of acknowledgement of these problems by the Department of Education and Training (DET). They feel powerless in terms of resolving these issues. Consequently, many teachers have left, and are leaving the profession as a direct result of inadequate resourcing of behaviour management in our schools. It is absolutely essential that our public schools are adequately resourced to ensure that effective pastoral care and behaviour management strategies can be implemented. Early intervention must be a vital component of these strategies.

Improved behaviour management in public schools will be a priority of a Liberal government. Consequently, the Liberal party will commit an additional \$39m over four years to ensure better behaviour management and pastoral care strategies.

The components of this commitment are as follows:

- An additional \$18m in our first term of government directly to public schools to fund behaviour management programs best suited to the needs of students and teachers. This may include counsellors, additional time allowance for teachers engaged in pastoral and/or behaviour management roles and other measure that improve classroom behaviour and minimise disruption.
- Provide an additional \$10m in our first term of government to increase funding for the school chaplaincy program.

- Provide an additional \$7m in our first term to appoint an additional 50 school psychologists to significantly reduce the current student to psychologist ratio, which is an unacceptable 1 to 2000 students.
- Reinstatement of the school-based police officers, in consultation with school communities.
- Provide Community Schools with the autonomy to determine an effective behaviour management program that reflects the values of the local school and community. That is, that the school is not constrained by a bureaucracy that is out of touch with the specific issues within a school community.

3. I provide a commitment to completely remove levels in all years of schooling (1-12).

We currently have the absurd situation whereby we have two different assessment procedures dividing Years 1 to 10 from Years 11 and 12 - one that is aligned to levels (1-10) and one that is not (11-12). Many parents are very concerned with the education system at present and they need precise and reliable information to reassure them that schools know exactly what they are doing. The problems with levels did not commence in 2005 when they reached Year 11; they exist throughout all years of schooling. In essence, the initial decision to create eight levels for the outcomes approach was always going to create problems. The decision to have eight levels was made to avoid identifying each of the levels with a specific year of schooling. Outcomes were intended as planning tools but in education they are very general and they are not good at describing specific student learning. The progress maps were originally developed as student outcome statements to assist teachers to plan for increasing levels of activities and learning. They were not developed as a tool to report a student's progress because they were, and remain, far too broad.

They became a real problem when it was apparent that they would be used for a fine-grained assessment at Year 12 to determine entry into a high-stake post-secondary school destination. The outcomes of the senior secondary courses are still broad, and teachers do not believe that they can describe in detail, using general statements, what a student can or cannot do. Teachers would rather give specific feedback about what mathematical concepts a student can understand and implement, and the concepts the student is having trouble with, rather than couch the feedback in terms of a level for which the student can manipulate the numbers.

The determining of levels provides teachers, students and parents with far too imprecise information on specific student progress. Currently, it is feasible for an

entire class in one of the years of primary school to Year 10 to be at the same level. Further, most students in our schools will stay on level four throughout years 8 through to 10.

To establish a seamless transition through schooling for our students from Years 1 to 12 and beyond to university, TAFE or another pathway, it is imperative that we make the necessary changes that I have just identified; that is, to report students' progress in grades that are mapped to individual year standards rather than levels.

In terms of the curriculum, I will institute an independent audit of the Curriculum Framework by an Expert Advisory Group immediately upon assuming government.

It is essential that the community has confidence in what is being taught in our schools. The only way in which this can be determined is through a comprehensive examination of the Curriculum Framework - independent of government and the DET.

I trust that this provides you with the information required. Please don't hesitate to contact me should you have any questions (9203-9588).

Kind regards,

Peter Collier MLC
Shadow Minister for Education and Training