

5.3b Speech by Glenn Fowler at the 2015 AEU Federal Conference, moving the Conference Statement

I commend this Conference statement to you as an excellent signpost for where we are at.

Since we met this time last year, the Abbott government has confirmed that its only interest in the Gonski reforms is to actively dismantle its architecture whilst remaining wilfully blind to the benefits that Gonski is already bringing to the lives of children. The Coalition government needs to be defeated, but before that we will see opportunities to get Gonski back on the tracks in Victoria and Queensland. This Gonski-denying federal government is rapidly losing its state government partners-in-crime.

The logic of depriving needy Australians of the resources they need whilst refusing to countenance meaningful tax reform is a weak logic at the best of times – it is at its very weakest in the immoral neglect of students with disability. The lies they've told on this is reason enough to vote them out.

Where does one even start with this federal government's treatment of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students? They've walked away from needs-based funding, slashed support services and language programs and they slavishly support Direct Instruction because... well, just because... The Abbott government's well-publicised failure on the issue of school attendance is a perfect vignette of their performance in education – simplistic ideas backed by three word slogans, top down approaches, no actual progress.

School autonomy in managing budgets and resources has been declared inconsequential and/or dangerous by the OECD, the Productivity Commission and even the Grattan Institute's Ben Jensen. Yet if you listen to the federal Minister for Education, whose name I won't mention because you'll only hiss at me, and I can't really remember it anyway, their signature policy of Independent Public Schools has been a roaring success. What a joke! NSW, ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, despite adroitly accepting IPS money, will have no Independent Public Schools. Queensland is likely to jump from this sinking ship. WA doesn't want the money despite inventing IPS. Without want to isolate my NT colleagues here, this basically leaves NT as the jewel in the IPS crown. We need to ram home our evidence advantage and kick this thing on the way down.

The less said about the curriculum review the better. Barry Spurr's despicable racism distracted from "Marlboro Kev" Donnelly's view that it might okay for some kids to be hit at school which distracted from a review which was designed to distract from Gonski.

It is no surprise that Greg Craven's review into initial teacher education has fallen woefully short. As his university ACU demonstrates, he is quite comfortable with people with an ATAR in the 30s coming through the front door into our profession in a way that the other professions would never tolerate. This gives Craven's university "bums on seats", and in a deregulated university environment that's the name of the game.

Abbott and Co are playing games with Early Childhood Education funding. Will they really be so monumentally stupid as to tell Australians that their 4 year olds need 25% less preschool when the research and even the Productivity Commission says otherwise? We will see.

For years we've been saying to governments that their robbing of TAFEs to subsidise private trainers of variable quality is going to cause incredible damage. Now that the damage has occurred and is so obvious, the conversation has changed. There's a skip in the step of our TAFE activists – it feels like the momentum might just be shifting our way. Our campaigns have helped, and the recent proclivity

of high-profile private providers to kick spectacular own goals has seen the doors of Labor MPs opening to us with an unusual hospitality.

Abbott's plan to reform the Federation is a thinly-veiled attempt to walk away from the hard and pricey bits of governing. We will keep close watch, but the reality is that the more barnacles this government acquires, the less capital it has to use up on reforms like this.

Now I won't lie to you: it is a lot of fun getting stuck into this Coalition government, and its leader Tony Abbott, and that chap with the curly hair who has something to do with education, whose name I can't recall. But we must always consider the work we need to do with the alternative – the ALP. We need to convince anyone who aspires to election, at any level, that there is an opportunity here. The evidence for our policy positions is profound – and we've heard this weekend from some wonderful contributors to that evidence bank. Political aspirants can either accept the evidence, or they can ignore it. They can either accept that Australians overwhelmingly want not just a strong economy but a better and fairer society for all its citizens and not just a privileged few ... or they can ignore it. Politicians can accept that people want governments to build and grow our common wealth rather than whittle it away ... or they can ignore it. Baileau and Napthine ignored it and look what our Victorian comrades and the Victorian people did to them. Newman ignored it and look what our Queensland comrades and the Queensland community did to him.

A national awakening has seen Australians reject short-sighted, nasty, mean & tricky governments. Now parties and leaders don't get a second term by default any more. Australians are quite capable of seeing Rupert Murdoch's headlines instructing them how to vote and then summarily ignoring them. Social media, 'electronic graffiti', is influential. Unions are highly influential too, as recently acknowledged by the ALP and wonderfully squealed about by the Liberals. When governments stray from what matters, and govern only for their mates, we will argue with them, we will mobilise, campaign and assemble in large numbers, and we will take them on. We'll keep kicking them out until one of them gets the message.