



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle
Adjournment Debate**

**BUDGET 2007-08: EDUCATION
9 May 2007**

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (7.49 p.m.)—I cannot pass up this opportunity to have a closer look at what this budget has offered for education. Having spent three decades of my career as a teacher, a demonstration teacher, a curriculum consultant and a principal, and over a quarter of a century as a parent—as many people here have—of children passing through education systems, I have a special interest, just like the Australian people.

So what did the budget offer? Early learning? A best start in life? Some early intervention programs for children? Some medical checks to make sure they start school properly? Nothing. For primary school education all I could see was a \$700 voucher system for parents to put towards private tuition. It sounds good but there was nothing for support teachers for children with learning difficulties, nothing extra for school counsellors to do those diagnostic assessments and no funds for special literacy programs or numeracy programs. For those sorts of approaches, which allow each child to have greater individual attention and support, there was nothing at all.

I am waiting to see what is in this \$700 voucher system that can make sure children actually benefit and to stop people making close private arrangements like nominating an accommodating friend or relative as a tutor and then pocketing the money and denying a child an opportunity. What about those tutors who do not deliver value for money, who do not understand the special needs of students? They will do very well, thank you very much, but the students are not at the centre of this decision. Apparently, that is not the government's concern—as long as the cheque is in the mail in an election year, as long as those flagpoles have flags flying and as long as chaplains are there to provide some sort of support, we apparently do not really need to worry about child-centred learning.

Perhaps secondary schools are benefiting. But there is not much there at all. There is a \$5,000 bonus for teachers who complete—and I quote the minister from question time today—'the government's summer school'. It sounds a bit like the Bart Simpson approach, doesn't it—write 100 times on the

blackboard: 'AWAs are good, unions are bad.' That is a real concern. What does a government summer school look like? Perhaps it is individual schools that need to say what professional development and training would benefit their students, not a government summer school. It sounds exceedingly like Big Brother.

At this stage little is known about the possible \$50,000 for succeeding schools but, by my reckoning and my knowledge of schools in my electorate, that is a lot of schools. I hope they all achieve that \$50,000 bonus, because they have certainly worked for it. But, as to what government hoops the schools will need to jump through to gain that money, we just do not know at this stage.

What about our TAFEs? There does not seem to be much there either. The additional \$1,000 or so for apprentices in their first and second years is a very welcome improvement as long as you have a job and can gain an apprenticeship. But given that the retention rates for apprentices under the government scheme has fallen below 50 per cent, anything that helps young people complete their apprenticeships will be welcomed by everyone in this field.

Three additional Australian technical colleges just does not cut it for me. These have been beset with problems: finding teachers, setting up adequate facilities, commencing in time to deliver training. What a pity this funding did not go to TAFEs and industry based training companies like the Hunter Institute and group training companies in my electorate that are already attaining retention rates of 80 per cent to 90 per cent for their apprentices in areas of critical trade shortages. But it is an election year and some parochial announcements in a few key seats, like the seat of Macquarie perhaps, just might help this neglectful government to gain the votes it needs to save its skin.

Perhaps the budget dollars have been directed to universities. On the surface, yes there are some funds there, but let us look more closely. A \$5 billion endowment fund sounds good but \$300 million a year to be shared between 38 universities will not do very much to not address the neglect and the backlog in capital maintenance and replacement programs. In the almost half a billion dollars for research facilities there is nothing for the Hunter Medical Research Institute at Newcastle University—an outstanding research facility, which is a joint venture with the Hunter New England Health Service. They have a pressing need. They have to relocate and consolidate facilities. They have to make some decisions now but they received no funds.

So does this new budget, in terms of education, promise to lift Australia to the top of the OECD tables in productivity and innovation? I think not. What a dreadful waste! It is Labor's education revolution for me, and I think that will be the option of the Australian people, as well.