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## **EDUCATION ABOUT MORE THAN JUST SCHOOLS**

The Uniting Church today called on political leaders to stop driving a wedge between public and private schools and focus on what really matters in education - quality and lifelong learning.

National President, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton, said both parties had dished out election sweeteners during the last few weeks but neither had recognised the need to support all students in all schools.

“The hand outs being offered by both parties lack a vision for the education of future generations. They focus on funding to particular types of schools and not on how we ensure that a high quality education is available to all children.

“They are driven by short-term political gain and do not address the key question of how we make Australia a progressive and highly educated nation.

“All schools must build positive, creative and passionate young people if our nation is to flourish. To do this, all schools need adequate funds and resources, and most importantly a vision for the future.

“Our political leaders are doing very little to address the constant arguments between the States and the Commonwealth around funding and administration of our schools.

“At the moment there is no clear vision in education for the future. We have two levels of government with a financial investment in education but no one government is able to implement a vision for a significantly better future. In the meantime, the public is left with promises of more money, but no plan for how to deliver a much-needed difference.

“The current debate misses the point that across the entire education sector the funding pot is simply too small and the bureaucracy is too complex,” Rev. Drayton said.

Uniting Education, National Director, John Emmett, said the real issue is not the funding of non-government schools, but the adequate resourcing of the whole sector.

“It’s time to re-visit the two-tier system that exists in both primary and secondary schools which is based on the capacity of people to pay. The focus must shift from that of ‘users pays’ to the basic value that every child deserves the very best education we as a nation can offer.

“There needs to be a major increase in new funding to government schools coupled with a change in policy to allow them the freedom to acquire and accumulate funds,” Mr Emmett said.

“Quality teaching must be supported and strengthened with more funding and resources. Teachers are at the heart of the education system and we need to help them improve their skills.

“Issues to do with University and further education must also be debated. Funding needs to be increased to universities for more places and to ensure lecture and study group sizes do not reach unsustainable levels.

“HECS fees should be held at 2004 levels and governments need to ensure the number of full fee paying places does not blow out and make university attendance dependant on people’s capacity to pay, or repay debt.

“It is time to stop squabbling over far too small a pot of money, dishing out monetary favours and start talking about the real issues in education.”

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**Dr Drayton is also available for interview on request**