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A FOCUS ON EARLY EDUCATION

A Country Liberals Government will conduct a significant overhaul of the Territory’s education system to give students the best possible chance of achieving results in line with their counterparts interstate.

Launching the next phase of the Country Liberals’ education reform programme, Opposition Leader Terry Mills said he would inject nearly $27 million a year to improve education outcomes including a 5% improvement in reading and writing results in the first year of Government and a 15% improvement in NAPLAN outcomes in the first term.

The Way Forward – Early Education for a Strong Future will see the introduction of an Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy; literacy and numeracy tests for Year 1 students; after-school literacy and numeracy programs; additional class-room support for teachers; the introduction of multi-disciplinary behavioural management teams; more support for school councils and assistance for COGSO to access Government grants.

“The MySchool website shows all too clearly that the Territory education system needs change,” Mr Mills said.

“While the Chief Minister Paul Henderson and the Education Minister Chris Burns are satisfied that Territory students achieve minimum national benchmarks, the Country Liberals believe education outcomes should be in line with national averages and above.”

NAPLAN test results over the past two years showed Territory students were achieving literacy and numeracy results significantly below those of interstate students.

The 2009 NAPLAN tests showed 30% of year 3 students were below the national minimum standard in reading; 36% were below the national minimum standard in spelling and more than 28% were below the national minimum standard in numeracy.

“Early education is the platform upon which the rest of a child’s education is based. The Country Liberals believe there is significant room for additional support for hard-working teachers as they lay the foundations for the rest of a student’s education,” Mr Mills said.

Within the first month in office, the Country Liberals will establish an Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy to undertake a comprehensive review of both disciplines in the Northern Territory and recommend on areas of improvement.

The Panel will examine barriers to student achievement in literacy and numeracy; investigate the effectiveness of current programs from Transition to Year 6; consider the level of Departmental support to schools and teachers and review access for teachers to professional development in literacy and numeracy.

The Country Liberals will also support schools to introduce literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessments of students during Year 1.

Students who fail to meet appropriate numeracy and literacy levels are less likely to attain satisfactory educational outcomes in the future. The testing of Year 1 students is designed to get students on the right track before they fall too far behind their peers.

Mr Mills said boosting teacher support and returning the focus of classroom learning to students will make the educational journey smoother for children in Territory schools.

“The Country Liberals will spend $10.5million a year recruiting classroom tutors to the education system to help teachers and students and to boost literacy and numeracy outcomes in the Territory,” he said.

“The initiative will provide schools with additional funding so every primary classroom from Year 2 upwards will have a teacher assistant offering three-hours a day of one-on-one literacy and numeracy support to students struggling with the curriculum.

“The tutors will be recruited from within the community, including family members of students, trainee teachers, undergraduates and former teachers.”

Another initiative designed to support teachers and improve classroom behaviour is the introduction of multi-disciplinary behavioural management teams, headed by psychologists, to work with at-risk students and their families.

Mr Mills said too often, students with learning difficulties develop behavioural issues that have a negative impact on their school years – and beyond.

“The Country Liberals will recruit 20 specialist and appropriately qualified child mental health workers, headed by child psychologists and including behavioural therapists,” he said.
“They will work with primary students identified with learning and behavioural difficulties in a bid to keep them within the educational mainstream and ensure they get the most out of their early education.”

In a further bid to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, the Country Liberals will introduce an intensive after-school literacy and numeracy program.

School councils will have access of up to $250,000 to provide these programs for students in Years 2 to 6 identified as falling into the lowest literacy and numeracy band of their year level.

“These programs will be available to students who demonstrate consistent attendance at school and a genuine desire to achieve better outcomes,” Mr Mills said.

“School councils will have a degree of flexibility as to how they use the funding. They can select from options like home-based tutoring, homework centres or after school and holiday programs.”

School councillors will also be acknowledged for their service with a $1.5 million contribution over 3 years – distributed through the Council of Government School Organisation (COGSO) – for annual training and development programs for current and future school council members.

“The community has a high expectation of our schools to deliver outcomes,” Mr Mills said.

It follows that the people who sit on school councils have the appropriate training in order to maximise their potential to contribute to a vibrant school community.”

The Country Liberals believe Territory schools are missing out on grants available from the Government and private sectors because they lack the resources to apply for the funding or are unaware of the availability of programs.

“In Government, we will boost resources for COGSO, who will then take the lead role in seeking and applying for grants on behalf of the schools.

“We will employ one additional worker each in COGSO’s Darwin and Alice Springs offices to take a lead role in organising tenders and engaging with the community to ensure all schools have equal access to available funding.”

Mr Mills said the policy was fully costed and would be regularly reviewed to ensure its target outcomes were being achieved.

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