

ON EDUCATION

To many of my supporters and critics alike, I am seen primarily as a great champion of our resources sectors. That is true but it is not my only passion.

Our greatest challenge is in education.

Schools must have a degree of autonomy over how they operate. For that to occur, they must have critical mass, otherwise the kids suffer.

For the record, I don't believe there is any evidence that suggests lowering class sizes below 25 makes a major difference in educational outcomes.

I support giving principals greater autonomy over resources. But at the moment, are they qualified to cope? I think an incoming government should establish a dedicated diploma course in school management for principals, as a prerequisite to becoming a principal - so they can fulfill a wider set of duties. I mean – how many principals are adequately informed about property management, industrial law, negotiating skills and the like?

Labor has announced a policy on secondary education and early years investment. These are worthwhile policies and I will argue for them.

But beyond sensible new investments, we need a more radical shift in education policy. One that takes us beyond classroom sizes, teacher autonomy, or culture wars about what our children are taught.

Academy and trade should not be seen in a hierarchical way, with one being dominant over the other. Too often, trade subjects are starved of resources because it does not suit the academic goals set by schools.

Tasmania requires competencies in both, with basic subjects common to both – e.g., numeracy and literacy

In a jurisdiction like ours, we need to scour the world for best practice.

There is no shortage of proven ideas.

The 'Leader in Me' program in the United States is a three-year initiative to turn around under-performing schools. It's a program that challenges the gifted but embraces the so-called 'silent failers'. We should embrace it here.

We must embrace new technologies to assist in the delivery of proper outcomes.

New technologies will enable an outreach into rural and regional communities with programs that to date have not been offered.

This has been the hallmark of the so-called 'flipped' classroom trial in the United States. Early evidence from these trials confirms what we all intuitively know – that the virtual classroom enables a broader outreach, and connects better with the 'ipod generation'. Homework is often done at school with more time is dedicated during normal hours to projects and interactive class discussion.

The point I am making is that more money is - in isolation - not the answer. Yes we do need more resources – and I have signed the 'Gonski Pledge' – but looking at new class models and improving teacher quality are still, in my view, the key to getting us up the education league table.