



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Schools

QUESTION

Wednesday, 3 February 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner Bird, Sharon, MP
Speaker

Source House
Proof No
Responder Gillard, Julia, MP
Question No.

Schools

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on reactions to the launch of the My School website?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion)—I thank the member for Cunningham for her question and for her support of the education revolution, including the My School reform. This was a reform where the parents of this nation voted with their fingertips and got onto My School. To give the House the most recent update figures from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, they are recording 1.6 million visits to the site, 77 million page views and 176 million hits on My School—parents voting with their fingertips desperate for this information. This sentiment was well summarised in yesterday’s *Daily Telegraph*, where Sharryn Brownlee, in talking about the reaction of her P&C to this amount of information, was quoted as saying:

“People really like it ... my e mails haven’t stopped. They are so pleased to be able to look at the information and understand it ... this is changing the level of conversation in P and C meetings from fundraising to education topics.”

That is a very well-put sentiment—and it is happening right around the nation as a result of My School. Of course, My School is also going to be used to help guide where a new \$2 billion of funding, a new \$2 billion of resources, for schools can go to so that it can make the biggest difference for Australian kids—part of our education revolution; part of almost doubling the amount of money going to school education from the national government over the lazy and incompetent days of the Howard government.

We always knew that My School was going to be controversial. We always knew that there was going to be a lot of public debate and we always knew that there would be public debate about misuse of the information. But I regret to inform the House that there was one potential misuse of the information that we did not foresee when we launched My School.

That, of course, is the misuse that the Leader of the Opposition is planning—the misuse of using the My School website to identify schools to rip money out of and stop their nation-building stimulus. The Leader of the Opposition has committed to ripping \$20 billion out of our nation-building stimulus package. Given the single biggest element of the package is infrastructure in schools, if you are ripping \$20 billion out of the package you are ripping money off schools.

So, while Australian parents are on the site trying to work out how to improve their kids’ schools and education, the Leader of the Opposition is on the site trying to find a school to rip some money out of. One wonders what the Leader of the Opposition would say to the principal of Reidy Park Primary School, who said:

We would have had to have lamington drives for the next 100 years to get the money we need to get to do these sorts of things. It is wonderful.

To that he would say, ‘That looks like something that I can hack out and keep.’ What would the Leader of the Opposition say to the principal of Southport Primary School, who said, ‘The stimulus is the most wonderful thing we’ve seen in primary education in the whole of our careers’? Well, the Leader of the Opposition would say that he would be ripping that money out of that school. What would the Leader of the Opposition say to the principal of Sawyer’s Valley, who said:

... we don’t have any visual arts facilities and performing arts is taught in a very old, small building some distance from the rest of the classrooms ...

...

Having a dedicated room for visual arts will be a fantastic boost for students and staff.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—14:52:10 The Leader of the Opposition, for some reason, is talking about MySpace. He should try to keep up.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, under the standing order covering relevance, the question was about the My School website. The minister is straying a very long way from the My School website and the information provided by it. She is now talking about spending

in schools and infrastructure, which has got nothing whatsoever to do with the My School website.

The SPEAKER—I have been listening carefully to the Deputy Prime Minister and she has constructed her response around the reaction to the My School website.

Ms GILLARD—It is called My School, not MySpace, for the edification of the Leader of the Opposition. Let me tell you the link—the opposition was opposed to both. They fought us on the legislation for the My School website and transparency, and voted against the nation-building stimulus package. The point here is a very simple one. The Leader of the Opposition likes to present himself as an honest man. Well, if he is an honest man, come clean with Australian parents about where the \$20 billion is coming out of. It has got to be coming out schools. Table a list of every one so that Australian parents can see it.