



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Windsor questions Deputy PM over Education funding shift**

The Australian Government's decision to redirect funding from the Science and Language Centres for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Secondary Schools element of the Building the Education Revolution Program has been questioned by the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor in the Parliament today.

Mr Windsor asked the Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP to explain to the communities of Ashford, Emmaville, Bundarra and Bingara why this decision was taken?

Mr Windsor is very disappointed and concerned that the Government has made their decision to redirect funding from this program without properly understanding the "need" of the four Central Schools at Ashford, Bingara, Bundarra and Emmaville.

"I am very disappointed that the Government has used their original statement on the Science and Languages Centre program to fund only 500 schools and even though they have funded 537 schools under the program, instead of spending the \$1B they budgeted for and given the remaining twenty six schools the money, they redirected some \$170m to the Primary School Program for which they did not budget correctly.

That is not the fault of the Central Schools that made application to the Science and Language Centre Program.

It concerns me that Ashford, Bingara, Bundarra and Emmaville Central Schools, all schools whose students would benefit greatly from better science and language centres as well as the other schools in other parts of Australia that applied and were not successful, had their hopes raised, put a lot of time and effort into their submissions to the program and have missed out particularly when there was sufficient money in that program to go around.

I ask the Government again to reconsider their decision so that these smaller schools will not be further disadvantaged," Mr Windsor said.

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## **Mr Windsor's Question to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, the Hon Julia Gillard MP and her answer**

**Mr WINDSOR** (3.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education and relates to changes to infrastructure funding in New South Wales schools. The minister would be well aware of the disappointment felt by 26 central schools in disadvantaged areas in rural New South Wales at having their funding for science and language centres removed and transferred to primary schools to rectify demand issues under the Building the Education Revolution program. Given that four of those schools are in the electorate of New England, could the minister explain to the communities of Ashford, Emmaville, Bundarra and Bingara why this decision was taken? Will the government revisit this decision?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for his question. As the member is probably aware, when the government announced the \$42 billion nation-building package—the economic stimulus that we need to support Australian jobs with Building the Education Revolution as its centrepiece—one of the components of the Building the Education Revolution program was our pledge to construct 500 science and language centres around the country. This was the only part of the program that was done by way of competitive bid. The National School Pride Program was an entitlement for all schools calibrated to school size. The Primary Schools for the 21st Century program was a program for all primary schools calibrated to school size. The Science and Language Centres program was one where applications were made and assessed. There were various criteria, including need. The applications were not assessed by me. They were assessed by an independent panel and the independent panel made recommendations to government. Government has funded 537 of those applications as recommended by the independent panel. So we have more than delivered on that promise. The overdelivery on that promise was able to be done at a lesser cost than the \$1 billion originally budgeted for. So, when it came to making adjustments within the \$42 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, the residual money of that billion dollars was reallocated to help support expenditure under Primary Schools for the 21st Century. Obviously, in earlier questions in question time today I have explained how that costing was done and what was changed about that costing. Can I say to the member for New England that I understand that any school that missed out on a competitive funding round would be disappointed; I understand that. But we have pledged to fund 500 science and language centres and we are actually constructing more.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms GILLARD**—I hear interjections from the Liberal Party, from the opposition, about priorities in relation to this. Because we are keeping it within the \$42 billion funding envelope, obviously if we were to fund more science and language centres, that would need to come at a cost somewhere else in the program.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Ms GILLARD**—To the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Warringah and the member for Sturt, who are interjecting, I would say this: if they want at any point to walk into the parliament and table at the dispatch box a list of schools which should not be funded under the National School Pride program or should not be funded under Primary Schools for the 21st Century in order to fund more science and language centres within the \$42 billion envelope of our economic stimulus plan then they should feel free to do that. But I have issued that challenge to them before and I have not yet got a list from them about the schools they say should not be funded. I will set that test, I will set that homework, for the shadow minister, and anytime he wants to furnish that list of schools that should be not funded according to the Liberal Party—

*Mr Pyne interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Sturt is warned!

**Ms GILLARD**—I will be very ready to receive it.