

Julia Gillard has announced a cash bonus scheme for teachers that is poorly designed, has no successful counterpart in comparable countries and is almost certain to be abandoned or postponed. It is astonishing under these conditions that \$426 million will be set aside in the budget as an initial payment on the final cost of \$1.3 billion.

The intentions may be commendable. After all, there can be no disagreement that high-quality teaching is the most important school-based factor in accounting for student achievement, and it should be recognised and rewarded.

But this scheme will not achieve these intentions. Ministers at state and territory levels and non-government authorities should reject it or insist on a major redesign.

It cannot be implemented in the time frame announced by the Prime Minister. A total of 25,000 teachers, 10 per cent of the workforce, will receive the bonus in 2014, based on appraisals in 2013. This means 250,000 teachers must be appraised according to an agreed and valid framework. No such framework exists.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership has been charged with developing one and has to its credit secured agreement on 37 teaching standards for each of four categories of teachers - 148 different standards. There are no agreed evidence-based approaches to determine how each standard will be measured. Implementation in 2013 will probably be no more than a hastily contrived tick-the-box approach that will de-professionalise teaching.

International experts on school improvement give such schemes the thumbs-down. Michael Fullan, of the University of Toronto, concluded in a recent review that "performance-based merit pay is a non-starter" and that "when commonsense tells you it won't work, when no research exists that backs up the claim for merit pay ... it is time to give up the ghost". He noted that performance pay was used in virtually no other profession.

Fullan has been the chief education adviser to the government of Ontario, which gets some of the best results in the Program for International Student Achievement. With Alberta it is not far behind Finland in the program. None has adopted or plans to adopt a bonus system or merit pay.

McKinsey & Company has published two reports on education reform which list the factors that account for high performance or dramatic improvement. Among 20 national or sub-national systems, the only examples of bonuses or performance pay are three systems that moved from "poor" to "fair": Western Cape (South Africa), Madhya Pradesh (India) and Minas Gerais (Brazil), none of which are relevant to Australia. Systems that improved at a higher level ensured teachers were paid appropriately, preferably significantly above GDP per capita.

It is extraordinary that Gillard announced the policy with the words: "We will build the system to measure great teaching; we will monitor teaching performance." Her government neither owns nor operates a single school. To get her policy up she must secure the agreement of every state and territory and every non-government school authority. This is unlikely.

Gillard raised the possibility that NAPLAN scores and information on the My School website might be used. This is bizarre. Apart from concerns about the validity of scores and

comparisons, there is no provision for assessing the performance of teachers in areas other than literacy and numeracy - for example, in the arts.

The public and profession are crying out for coherent policy. If Gillard wishes to achieve this she ought to connect a reward scheme to another policy, namely, delivering more autonomy for government schools, and deliver the funds to schools for local decision-making. The criteria for allocating bonuses in highly disadvantaged settings will differ greatly from those for schools in advantaged settings. Some bonuses will be shared among a team of teachers or across a school, since it is the collective effort that secures outstanding performance.

The tragedy is that this poorly conceived policy will have little effect on students' achievement levels and will further demoralise a profession that is tired of top-down command-and-control approaches to reform.

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