

## WHY THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION IS NOT TRANSFORMING OUR SCHOOLS

Brian J. Caldwell<sup>1</sup>

The Rudd Government's 'education revolution' is heading for failure because it has not adopted key strategies that international experience tells us are important for success. Most of what has been achieved to date has simply added new layers of bureaucracy to old, with initiatives that may ultimately have little or no impact on how students learn. Australia may end up with one of the most centralised and bureaucratically organised systems of education in the world, with ministers left flailing for explanations as to why performance had flat lined and expectations had not been fulfilled.

My reasons for drawing this conclusion are based on an assessment of progress in addressing 10 strategies that emerged from a five-year study of successful school reform around the world reported in *Why not the Best Schools* (Caldwell & Harris, 2008). It involved 73 seminars and workshops with more than 4,000 school and school system leaders in 11 countries, culminating in highly focused studies in Australia, China, England, Finland, Wales and the United States.

In 2009 I rated progress on each of 10 strategies on a scale from 1 to 10, with the total of 43 out of 100 suggesting that the Rudd Government needed to lift its game and focus on the essentials (Caldwell, 2009). Since then we have seen the launch of the My School website and the release of a draft national curriculum in four subjects.

My purpose today is to update the score card in the light of these developments. I have drawn the conclusion that there is unlikely to be an education revolution led by government in the foreseeable future. There is a transformation under way but it is being led by schools.

### Updating the score card

In *Why not the Best Schools* we proposed a 10-point 10-year strategy for achieving the transformation of the nation's schools, with transformation defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings.

1. A national curriculum is designed that is broad enough and sufficiently adaptable to ensure the professional judgement of a highly-skilled profession will prevail at the school level
2. Initial teacher education is transformed to ensure all teachers have a master's degree and remain at the forefront of knowledge and skill through continuous professional development
3. New structural arrangements are designed to ensure diversity of programs in the post-compulsory years in an effective constantly-changing alignment of education, economy and society
4. National testing of all students is minimised as the highest levels of knowledge and skill are developed by teachers and those who support them
5. The wider community including business is seriously engaged in design and delivery with public and private funds deployed through networks of foundations and trusts

---

<sup>1</sup> Brian J. Caldwell is Managing Director of Educational Transformations and Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he was Dean of Education from 1998 to 2004. Themes in this paper were addressed in his presentation at a public forum on education at the Performing Arts Centre, Hamilton, Victoria on 4 March 2010.