Introduction

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a Ministerial Statement about our achievements in schools and cross-border education.

This Government has honoured all its education election promises.

The difference between the Coalition and Labor is that we are driving long term policies, to improve the quality of our education system, not short term politics to satisfy allied vested interests.

Australian school student performance results as measured by international testing have declined over the last 12 years. While national testing indicates some positive changes, overall student performance in key areas of numeracy and reading have not shown marked improvement.

This cannot be allowed to continue.

Education policy must now be measured not by how much money has been allocated, not by the number of teachers, not by classroom sizes, but whether public funds are being spent on what works to improve student outcomes!
Certainty and stability in school funding

We inherited a school funding mess from Labor with only three states fully signed up – hardly a national system.

We fixed the mess and honoured our election commitment of matching dollar for dollar the previous government’s spending over the next four years.

More than that, we reinstated the $1.2 billion cut by the previous government because they felt it reasonable to completely exclude funding to states and territories that hadn’t signed up.

Australia now has a national needs based funding system which includes loadings for disadvantage.

We did what Labor could not achieve by providing certainty and stability to schools.

Students First Initiatives

The Students First framework focuses on four priority areas:

- Improving the quality of our teachers
- Increasing school autonomy
- Promoting parental engagement
- Ensuring our curriculum is robust and relevant

Teacher Quality

Improving teacher quality has been more talked about than acted upon for far too long.

Teacher quality is known to be the greatest in-school contributor to student performance.

We want better teacher standards and training to produce great teachers with practical skills to teach effectively in the classroom.

Hence, I have appointed the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group to provide advice on reforming teacher education.

I expect to receive the final report soon.

To ensure our vision for teacher reform is achieved I appointed the internationally recognised Professor John Hattie as the new chair of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership.

We have also expanded the Teach for Australia programme which fast tracks high-calibre non-teaching graduates into disadvantaged schools.
School autonomy

Giving parents, teachers and principals a greater say in how their schools are run is a key ingredient to improving student performance. All states and territories are moving in this direction.

To support the states and territories further we have invested $70 million over four years through our Independent Public School initiative.

I am pleased to report that most states and territories have now signed agreements to participate.

We are delivering what we promised.

Promoting parental engagement

Research shows that when parents are engaged in their children’s education, their children perform better.

We have committed $1 million per year over four years to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to research parental engagement and inform future policy actions.

The Independent Public Schools initiative will also promote greater parental involvement in their children’s school.

A robust National Curriculum

A robust national curriculum is one of the foundations of a quality education. It must be up-to-date, relevant, balanced and understandable to all parents.

We established, as promised, an independent review. It reported in October and has been widely praised because it focussed on getting the national curriculum back to basics – to what really matters.

Implementation will be a priority during 2015 following consultation with state and territory education ministers on 12 December.

NAPLAN faster turnaround

This Government supports the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) but results have been taking too long to be returned to teachers.

We promised to reduce the NAPLAN turnaround time.

I am pleased to report that preliminary results are now being provided four weeks earlier. We are delivering!
NAPLAN Online

We are moving to have online delivery for NAPLAN in 2017 for schools that are ready.

We have progressed this project from ‘in principle’ agreement, to allocating $24.7 million so it can start in less than three years.

This is a great step forward. It will allow teachers a faster and better understanding of their students’ abilities so as to improve every student’s performance.

Australian Education Act 2013

Nothing better contrasts the approach of the Coalition to the conduct of the former government than our changes to the Australian Education Act 2013.

Labor rushed the passage of the current Act resulting in numerous errors.

Our amendments passed the Parliament and have not only fixed these, but have allowed us to provide an extra $6.8 million for non-government schools that have significant numbers of Indigenous boarding students from remote areas.

This fixed an identified funding shortfall which the previous government failed to provide.

But more needs to be done.

Following recent consultations there was unanimous agreement from stakeholders that the command and control aspects of the Act place unnecessary regulatory burdens on all schools.

We will address this problem next year when we introduce further amendments to the Act.

Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools (Good to Great Schools)

In remote primary schools that have a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, NAPLAN results show basic English literacy is not being achieved.

Evidence suggests that alphabetic teaching approaches are beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read.

We appointed Good to Great Schools Australia to introduce alphabetic teaching approaches under our Flexible Literacy in Remote Primary Schools Programme.

Nearly 40 schools across Western Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory will benefit in 2015.
This will help to close the gap between students from remote areas and those based in metropolitan areas.

**Disability**

The Australian Government is committed to assisting students with disability and this year introduced a loading which provided over $1 billion of Australian Government funding.

This is more funding for students with disability than ever before. In 2015 this will increase by $100 million.

We continue to work with state and territory governments to further refine the funding loading for students with disability to better reflect their needs.

**STEM**

The Government is restoring a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in schools so essential to ensuring a competitive and innovative economy.

Consequently we have allocated:

- $7.4 million to develop and implement Mathematics by inquiry
- $3.5 million towards introduction to computer coding across the curriculum
- $0.5 million towards establishing a P-TECH styled education facility
- $0.6 million to extend national science and mathematics summer schools to include more girls, disadvantaged and Indigenous school students, including those from regional and remote areas.

**School Chaplaincy Programme**

Following the decision of the previous government to provide no ongoing funding for school chaplains, I am pleased to report ALL state and territory governments have now agreed to implement the Government’s new chaplaincy programme.

Funding is available for the 2015 school year and applications are currently being handled by the states and territories.

**Cross-border education**

Madam Speaker in the time remaining, I would like to update the House on recent developments in international education and how the Government is developing a two way street in this important area.

International education is part of our plan to build a more diverse, world-class economy – a five pillar economy – to unleash Australia’s real economic potential.

By developing a world-class five pillar economy we will deliver more jobs.
International education is Australia’s largest services export.

Under Labor the value of this industry plummeted.

Recent figures released by the Department of Education suggest that under the Coalition, international education has grown by over a billion dollars in a year. This is vital income for the Australian economy.

But international education is about much more than economic prosperity for the nation.

Relationships developed through international education underpin our engagement with the rest of the world.

They are the foundation for future research collaboration. They assist to maintain trade, investment and goodwill.

They make our innovative achievements and scholarly assets more visible to the world. They keep us competitive and ensure Australia doesn’t get left behind.

This Government is working hard to:

- promote Australia as the best country in the world to pursue higher education study
- drive growth through greater collaboration with countries in the areas of education and research and
- deliver social mobility programmes such as the New Colombo Plan and the Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships programme.

**New Colombo Plan**

The New Colombo Plan offers Australian undergraduates prestigious scholarships and grants for study and internships/mentorships in the Indo-Pacific region.

More than 3100 students will benefit through the 2015 round.

**Endeavour Scholarships**

We will support 682 Endeavour scholarship recipients to undertake researcher mobility, because international collaboration is well known to lead to more innovation than single country research.

I have also established a number of new education agreements with counties in the Asia pacific region and beyond.

**China and Laos visit**

I recently visited China and Laos to participate in education meetings under the auspices of the East Asia Summit.
Education ministers committed to the development of a Post-2015 Plan of Action.

While in Beijing, I met with my Chinese counterpart, Minister for Education, Mr Yuan Guiren, to discuss the Australia-China education and research relationship and the importance of two-way student mobility through our New Colombo Plan.

**Indonesia MOU and Centre**

During the East Asia Summit I renewed Australia’s agreement in Education and Training with the Republic of Indonesia.

This reaffirms the importance Australia places on the education relationship with Indonesia.

It sets a strong foundation for continued engagement over the next five years by growing people to people links through greater two-way student and academic mobility.

The Government is also supporting the Australia-Indonesia Centre, announced by the Prime Minister last year.

This centre aims to strengthen business, cultural, educational, research and community links and build mutual understanding.

Monash University leads the centre, in partnership with other universities and CSIRO.

At the East Asia summit of Education Ministers, I also led the opportunity to sit down and talk to my counterparts from South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Singapore and Loas.

**Australia-UK Education Dialogue**

Earlier in the year I also visited the then Minister of State for Universities and Science, the Rt Hon David Willetts in the UK.

We agreed to establish an inaugural Australia-UK Education Dialogue. As my department recently noted in Senate committee hearings, it is the first time an initiative like this has ever been done before.

Next year we will continue our efforts and consult over a draft National Strategy for International Education.

**Conclusion**

Madam Speaker, this Government is improving Australian education as promised.

I ask the House to note these achievements.

ENDS