

SPEECH

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Speaker Pyne, Christopher, MP	Question No.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (16:02): I thank the member for Herbert for his question during the consideration in detail of this bill. There has been a tremendous amount of misinformation put out by the Australian Education Union, unfortunately. Yet again, they are the culprits who are frightening the parents of children with disability. As a parent myself, and I know the member for Herbert is also a parent, the worst thing that I could possibly imagine is not having the support required for any of my children if they were to have a disability and to be of school age. That is why both this government and the previous government, to be fair, ensured that there was a loading for disabilities as part of the new school funding model. The Australian Education Union knows that, and the sector knows that, and yet the Australian Education Union has been running a quite disgraceful campaign over the past few months, pretending that somehow what this government is doing is different to what was promised by both the then Labor government and ourselves when we were in opposition.

Before the last election, we said that we would fund the new school funding model for four years and that we would ensure that the loadings provided for as part of the new school funding model were entirely fulfilled, as was planned by the legislation passed in the previous parliament—and that is exactly what we are doing. So the loading for disability is precisely what would have been delivered if the Labor government had been re-elected in 2013. As it happened, we were elected, and we set about ensuring that that loading was applied. In fact, I, as the minister for education, brought the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland into the new school funding model. They had been left out because of the chaos and the mess that was the previous government.

The aspect of disability which makes it different from the other loadings is that the statistics upon which the loading is based are all provided by the states and territories. The states and territories provide that information to the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth puts it into the national school funding model and then out comes a monetary figure indicating what we should pay to each state and territory and the non-government sector, be it Catholic or independent, based on their number of children with a disability and the severity of the disability. The education ministers council, upon which I sit, obviously, has been over the last year and a half making sure that that data is as accurate as possible. That is a very difficult job—as difficult as it was when Labor was in power because each state and territory appears to apply a different definition of 'disability'. Some are more generous than others, and as part of the education ministers council—as the member for Herbert quite rightly points out, these matters are uniquely within the gift of the state and territory governments—we are attempting to achieve a nationally consistent dataset, which would also have occurred if Labor was in power, and we are making progress. It is not nearly as fast as the progress that I would like to be making, and I quickly add that that is not because of anything that the Commonwealth has not done. The state and territory education ministers have indicated to me that they will be able to provide that nationally consistent data this year so that it can apply next year, and I will be holding them to that so that every child in Australia with a disability will be able to receive the correct loading, as they should, to match their disability.

We have also put extra money into the More Support for Students with Disabilities initiative—an initiative of the previous government which did not go to students but which went to teachers. The AEU, and I have to say the shadow minister for education, who is not here, and the acting shadow minister for education, have tried to muddy the waters about that particular program and pretend that somehow that money was delivered to students with disability. It was not—it was delivered to teachers to train them in how to adapt their classes for students with disability. It has been a very successful program and because of its success it is coming to an end and therefore it will not continue to be funded. (*Time expired*)