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Julia Gillard's \$1 billion reading blitz

- by: *EXCLUSIVE* by *Samantha Maiden*
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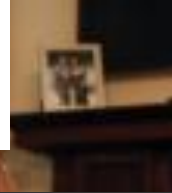
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Schools to conduct reading blitz

PM Julia Gillard's education reform plan will see an intensive reading blitz for 1.1 million children.



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SCHOOLS will be asked to deliver a back-to-basics reading blitz for one million children as a condition of Julia Gillard's education reform plan.

The program may be centred on the teaching of phonics, which involves sounding out letters to children to help students develop basic reading skills.

Announcing the program today, Ms Gillard said it was important for Australia to win the education race to win the economics race.

The program will target kindergarten to year three students and may involve breakfast clubs and after-school activities.

"There are around 75,000 kids at the moment who aren't reading as well as we would like," Ms Gillard said.

"Through this reading blitz, we want to make a difference."

Ms Gillard said 74 per cent of children starting school were at risk of not learning to read well, but studies have shown that could be lowered to six per cent.

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Federal schools minister Peter Garrett said every school would need a plan to address the progress their students were making.

"A focus on literacy will be a very important part of that process," he said.

Ms Gillard said improving reading levels between kindergarten and year three was about the children's future.

"The evidence shows if you come out at year three not reading well, you are very likely to come out of year nine not reading very well either," she said.

"Which means you are very likely to end up an adult who never reads well with all the consequences that has got with the jobs you can do and the jobs that are locked away from you."

The government would work with state and territory governments, and the non-government sector, to complete the national plan to improve reading levels in time for the 2014 school year.

Ms Gillard read Emily and the Big Bad Bunyip to 10 children sitting on the floor of The Lodge today.

The Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MultiLit) program developed by Macquarie University would also be used by some schools.

Warning Australia risks falling behind the world, Ms Gillard' funding offer to the states will be debated by premiers during April's Council of Australian Government meeting.

The national reading blitz and a request that some of the new money be spent on specialist literacy teachers would be one condition of the new funding.

But there are concerns the initial investment will be just \$1 billion to lift falling standards at struggling schools - far less than the \$6.5 billion proposed by the Gonski review of school funding.

Schools will be asked to identify at-risk students and implement an early intervention plan using expert teaching methods and involving parents wherever possible.

Teachers will also be asked to focus on ensuring:

EVERY school has a reading plan that could include phonemics, phonics, fluency and vocabulary knowledge;

STUDENT data is reviewed to diagnose why some students are struggling;

READING plans are tailored for children who need intensive support; and

PARENTS be encouraged to help by introducing a reading routine at home and volunteering in classrooms.

But the Greens have warned the proposed reforms don't go far enough.

"The Prime Minister's plan to back-end the lion's share of the funding until 2019 is just not good enough," Greens spokesman Penny Wright said.

"Whole cohorts will finish primary school or high school before this government plans to start fixing the problems we know are there."

Victoria has announced it will pursue its own rival plan to Julia Gillard to fund schools, prompting a warning from Education Minister Peter Garrett they were consigning Victorian students to less funding over time.

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