

Primary schools 'caught short' on \$635m



Unhappy about the lack of communication. Photo: PENNY STEPHENS

Farrah Tomazin and Miki Perkins

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PRINCIPALS have accused several state and territory governments of failing to pass on millions of dollars in funding designed to address shortfalls in primary schools.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard last year announced primary schools

would get an extra \$635 million over five years to fix a long-standing anomaly in which their students received less money than those in secondary schools.

The changes amount to an increase of about \$100 per child. But principals say instead of passing on the federal funding, some state and territories have absorbed it into their education budgets.

"These funds were supposed to go directly to primary schools — and now we're caught short," said Australian Government Primary Principals Association president Norm Hart.

In Victoria, Education Minister Bronwyn Pike is facing a backlash from principals who had planned their 2009 school year based on the money going directly into their budgets.

Otherwise, said Victorian Principals Association president Gabrielle Leigh, schools could not be sure the money was being used, as intended, to increase funding for students in prep to grade 6.

But Ms Pike's spokesman Cameron Scott said the money would be passed on through the state's traditional funding model, and would flow to schools from July 1.

Schools would ultimately get \$588 per primary student, he said — "well in excess of the \$100 increase requested".

"The Victorian Government has for years distributed school funding based on a system ... to best address a variety of student needs and that will continue."

South Australia will pass on the funding to schools via resources for maths and science and a one-off payment of \$73 per primary student. The Northern Territory has distributed money to schools to improve literacy and numeracy. In NSW, half the money will be for primary teacher wages, with the rest sent directly to schools.

■ Victorian builders have been awarded more than \$450 million in contracts for the Federal Government's education infrastructure revamp, days before the deadline to begin work on projects expires.

The first round of the biggest funding program — Primary Schools for the 21st Century — provides up to \$3 million to every school in the nation for infrastructure projects. Work must start by the end of June.

The State Government yesterday was unable to provide a start date for the Victorian construction effort, but spokeswoman Peta James said it would "start soon". Department of Education

