PRESS STATEMENT:

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DETAILS OF COMMONWEALTH GRANTS FOR SCIENCE FACILITIES IN BOTH STATE AND INDEPENDENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

During the election the Prime Minister amongst other things promised that £5,000,000 would be made available for the provision of science buildings and equipment in secondary schools.

There is a clear national purpose underlying this policy item. In this modern scientific and technological age we want and we need more scientists and more technicians. We will need them for industry and for agriculture so that we can advance and use modern scientific discoveries that are made overseas.

It might have been thought that we were getting enough scientists and technicians and that we do not need specifically to encourage more people to be better scientists. Strangely enough, and I was surprised when I saw the figures, this is not so. In the universities it is the subjects that come under the very broad heading of the Humanities that seem to be under pressure from the great numbers entering the universities, people who study art, literature, English, history - even the Classics. Relatively speaking the pressure on some science facilities has not been great.

The Prime Minister made it quite clear that the funds available would be made available to both independent and State schools, and over recent weeks procedures have been worked out so that any school that believes it has a case for some of this assistance can apply.

£5M. will be made available each year. This will be divided between State and independent schools by getting the number of people in the secondary schools enrolled in each group. The total money available will be divided in proportion to these numbers. This will be done on an Australia-wide basis, and on present numbers it will mean that £3,750,000 will be available for the Government secondary schools in Australia and £1,250,000 will be available for the non-Government schools.

The funds available to the Government schools will then be broken up between the different States in proportion to the population of the States. Each State will be entirely responsible for spending the total funds allotted to it in ways which, in its opinion, best suit the requirements of education in that State.

There are only one or two conditions that the Commonwealth is requiring. The funds of course must be spent for science teaching laboratories in secondary schools or for the capital equipment for such laboratories. The sums must be clearly identifiable in each State Budget and they must also be regarded as additional to any sums which the State would normally be spending on this purpose.

The first funds will be made available in the next Budget of the States for the year 1964/65. The States have all been told about this and no doubt will be deciding which schools qualify for the first grants.

In the case of non-Government schools the Commonwealth will be solely responsible for deciding the grants and it will adopt the following procedures. It will first allot the amount available to non-Government schools between the different States in proportion to the population of the States. The amount available to each State will then be divided into two parts. One will be for assistance to non-Catholic schools within the boundaries of that State and the other will be for assistance to Catholic schools within the State. This division will be made by obtaining the number of secondary school
pupils enrolled in each group of independent schools, and the sum available will be divided in proportion to those numbers. Thus, in each State, for the independent schools, there will be a sum for assistance to Catholic schools and a sum for assistance to non-Catholic schools.

All secondary schools, boys', girls' or co-educational, are eligible for assistance, and any science-teaching laboratory, construction of which began after 1st December, 1963, is eligible to be considered for assistance. Buildings being constructed or finished before that date are not eligible. Any school is eligible to apply for assistance for capital equipment bought after December 1st, 1963. Money for these purposes will be made available in the next Commonwealth budget— that is for the financial year beginning July 1st this year.

Schools that want to seek assistance should make application for it as soon as possible. Application should be made to the Minister in Charge of Commonwealth Activities in Education, of the Prime Minister's Department. I would be happy to forward any applications which might be made if there was a wish to send them through me.

It is highly probable that in the first years of the scheme many schools will be applying and that it will not be possible immediately to meet all requests at once. For this reason it is intended to select schools in each State which will be regarded as ones that merit first consideration. This selection will be done by the Commonwealth, bearing in mind the number of secondary school pupils at each school, the number of students doing science courses and the teaching facilities that are already available and other relevant matters. Even so, it will probably still be necessary to allot priorities between schools which fall into this category.

The Commonwealth wants to create for this purpose two advisory bodies. One body, drawn from people responsible for non-Catholic schools, will be asked to suggest priorities for such schools. It will also be asked to advise on the amount of assistance that should be extended to each one. The other body, drawn from those responsible for Catholic schools, will be asked to do the same thing for such schools. These advisory bodies have not yet been established, but since the policy is going to operate from the middle of this year it is clear that there is some urgency in having them established, and I understand discussions are already in progress to achieve this.

This is an entirely new policy which has been introduced by the Commonwealth, and it is one that has been introduced with firm national objectives in mind. The procedures and machinery that I have tried to outline very briefly may well have to be adapted and altered as the Commonwealth, the States and the schools all gain experience in the administration of these particular proposals.

It can be clearly seen that Senator Gorton has been actively engaged in this work in assistance to the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister himself and the Government have been active in trying to get this proposal introduced as soon as possible.

I believe that the grants will be of great advantage to schools in both categories—the State and the independent schools.

If any more information is required I hope people won't hesitate to get in touch with me.