Adelaide, 20 February 2012

GONSKI PANEL REVIEW COMMENT

The Headmaster of St Peter’s College in Adelaide, Simon Murray, has described the Gonski Panel Report on the funding of schools in Australia as an important contribution to the national education agenda and a valuable resource on which to base a further phase of consultation.

But, Mr Murray warns, because the Gonski Review was narrowly focused, there is potential for a less than optimum outcome when the federal government eventually decides on the way forward.

“The opening paragraph in the Gonski Report is telling,” said Mr Murray. “It says: ‘High-quality schooling fosters the development of creative, informed and resilient citizens who are able to participate fully in a dynamic and globalised world. It also leads to many benefits for individuals and society, including higher levels of employment and earnings, and better health, longevity, tolerance and social cohesion.’”

“Yet, the Terms of Reference restricted the Panel to focus on funding for schooling and its impact on outcomes as they are currently measured by governments both nationally and internationally, effectively a measurement of numeracy and literacy.

“That is much narrower than the attributes of creativity, resilience and the potential to promote tolerance and social cohesion referred to in the Report’s opening paragraph,” said Mr Murray.

“The Report is a valuable document. In particular, I strongly welcome the recognition of the equity gap in funding for students with disabilities attending non-government schools.

“I believe we now have an excellent platform on which to base an additional, extensive round of consultation. That consultation should be broad while supporting financial and other modelling, yet to be undertaken, needs to be rigorous.”

Mr Murray said he did have several other concerns including the proposal to use NAPLAN scores as a measure of need. “NAPLAN was never intended for that purpose and should not be used in that way.”

As well, in terms of determining social disadvantage or social exclusion, Mr Murray believes the only reliable data source for determining this accurately is ABS Census data. Data on this issue collected by schools is, he believes, inherently suspect.

Mr Murray added that, as consultation was likely to extend well into 2012 and possibly into next calendar year, he would welcome the government locking in current funding arrangements for another year or two.

“Schools generally operate on five-year plans and certainty is critical to our planning. Most schools would welcome the certainty that this extension would provide.”

ENDS

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