For Information

15 March 2012

Gonski Review Update

Yesterday’s article in The Age, ‘Secrecy menace to Gonski reform’, by the Education Editor, Jewel Topsfield, reflects what we have been saying to the Victorian Government, to federal Members of Parliament and to Member Schools.

The Age story said that Victoria has accused the federal government of deliberately withholding information on school funding to prevent the states testing the promise that ‘no school would lose a single dollar’.

It reported that it had seen a state government briefing, which said there was a genuine risk that Victorian families would be handicapped under Gillard government reforms. The briefing note said the Gillard government refused to release the modelling it used to calculate how it could guarantee adequate indexation in payments to schools, or disclose the content of legislation on school funding slated for later this year.

The Age reported that the briefing note said: ‘Without this detail Victoria must oppose any new legislation. Julia Gillard's secrecy is the biggest threat to achieving any of the Gonski reforms.’

We believe that the federal government is attempting to create an ‘unstoppable momentum’ for funding reform, concentrating on particular areas of perceived educational disadvantage. Minister Garrett held a meeting in Ballarat with Principals last Friday, drumming up newspaper and radio publicity. He had earlier meetings in the south-western suburbs on Sydney.

Why is the government rushing to promote the Gonski Review when there is no commitment to funding by either the federal government or state governments, and data used in the review is either suspect or not available to be verified? There are too many questions needing answers, too few answers and too much haste.

There might be useful elements among the proposed Gonski recommendations but reform could be at risk if the process is rushed, or some options might be ‘cherry-picked’ because they are ‘easy’ or politically expedient.

The Age, ‘Secrecy menace to Gonski reform’ by Jewel Topsfield: http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/secrecy-menace-to-gonski-reform-20120314-1v3i2.html#ixzz1p9N8WzvA
Working with governments over many years on various funding reviews, we have learnt that change is not easy, requiring time and goodwill. Attempts can be made to bend data to fit broad brush principles or to meet unstated agendas.

To ensure that the huge investment in the Gonski Review delivers adequate resources fairly distributed to every student throughout Australia, governments must be committed to ensuring that:

- funding will be available
- there will be enough time to verify and model data
- adequate time will be allowed for short term stability and long-term results.

Without these conditions it is impossible for anyone to make a commitment to this reform.

These are the messages that we will be communicating to governments, MPs, education department officers, opinion leaders and the media.

The Independent Schools Victoria Board agreed at its meeting this week that Independent Schools Victoria:

- continues to update members and key stakeholders in relation to the Gonski proposals
- continues to brief local State and Federal MPs to support schools, and provide materials to schools and stakeholder groups consistent with the Board’s position on the Gonski review recommendations
- encourages member schools to approach their local State and Federal MPs to indicate that they need to know the impact of the proposed funding arrangements on their level of per capita funding in the immediate and long-term future.

Also available to download from our website is a PDF version of an information sheet, *School Funding – Too many ifs and buts*, which may be useful for you if contacting your State and Federal Members of Parliament.