Media Release

09 October 2011

Independent Schools Victoria Fails Funding Research

A research report prepared for the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling lacks factual evidence and seems to be ideologically driven, and a second is a wasted opportunity in this crucial time for the education sector across Australia, says Independent Schools Victoria.

It says in submissions to the Gonski Review that the report prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) contains ‘cherry-picked’ data with a lack of understanding of aspects of the education system.

The second report by the Nous Group consortium selectively uses data on which to build the foundations of its recommendations.

The Chief Executive of Independent Schools Victoria, Ms Michelle Green, criticised the way researchers writing both reports interpreted the international measure for student assessment (PISA).

Ms Green said her association was concerned that students’ performance on PISA tests was the sole basis for determining student outcomes.

‘Leaving aside a conflict of interest for ACER, which administers the PISA tests for Australian students, its researchers made no effort to examine student outcome at the completion of schooling. Rich data sets for Victoria include On Track surveys, which show student destinations and post-secondary schooling.’

Ms Green said it was most alarming that the Nous report chose to run down Australia’s strong, high performing school system by comparing Australia with a tiny and bizarrely constituted list of so-called PISA ‘comparison countries’.

‘The researchers give major and undue emphasis to SES when low SES accounts for well under 20 per cent impact on student performance. They are also selective about the data they think is relevant to support their suppositions about SES.’
Ms Green said the influence of the average socioeconomic characteristics of schools on Australia’s PISA performance is a very minor fraction of the total impact of SES, and yet many of the report’s conclusions and policy recommendations are based on an inflated assessment of its significance.

‘The NOUS researchers flip-flopped over countries with which Australia should be compared. This risks derailing Australian education policy because we will be distracted in future by other so-called comparison countries.’

It would be naive to assume that Australia could adopt the ‘best’ elements of another country’s school system without also inheriting some unintended and unwanted consequences.

The Nous Group report implies a cause and effect relationship between the existence of non-government schools and the impact on student performance without evidence, and is based on pre-conceived notions about what a ‘good’ education system should be, Ms Green said.