

Thursday, 9th June 2011

Communique - Abbotsleigh Parent Forum

Premier supports school choice and diversity

The Premier of New South Wales, Barry O'Farrell, addressed more than 400 parents of independent school students, representing more than 60 independent schools from across New South Wales, who gathered at Abbotsleigh School last night to voice their concerns that the Federal Government's Review of Funding for Schooling could result in a decrease in funding support for students attending independent schools.

The Forum, jointly organised by Abbotsleigh School and the NSW Parents' Council, saw parents attending from as far afield as Armidale, Orange and Wagga Wagga, representing a diverse range of schools including low fee Anglican, Christian, Catholic and Islamic schools, as well as specialist schools catering for students with disabilities and special needs. Also attending were representatives from Steiner Education Australia, the Australian Association of Christian Schools, Christian Education National, Seventh-day Adventist Schools of NSW, the Australian Council of Jewish Schools and the Uniting Church Board of Education.

The parents raised concerns about the possibility that the Federal Government's Review of Funding for Schooling could see a decrease in government support for their children's education.

Addressing the gathering, Premier O'Farrell said that the NSW Government strongly supported the principle of choice in education and that parents should not be penalised for their decision to spend their after-tax dollars on their children's education.

"There is nothing more important than the education of our children, and the NSW Coalition Government will be lobbying the Gillard Government to ensure that no NSW independent school students are disadvantaged as a result of the Review", Mr O'Farrell said.

The Forum agreed on several key assurances that it sought from the Federal Government in relation to the Review of Funding for Schooling:

- that overall spending on education should be increased
- that funding for all students be indexed to keep pace with increases in education costs in real terms
- additional funding should be provided to cover the full costs of educating disadvantaged students, particularly those with a disability or special learning needs, regardless of the type of school they attend
- that the Federal Government commit to ongoing support for all students and schools and that this be recognised in legislation that provides long term funding certainty
- that the principles of choice and support for diversity in education would be maintained under any new funding model.

The Forum also noted that, contrary to common perception, 75 per cent of independent schools had an SES ranking in the bottom half of the government's funding scale, meaning they catered for lower socio-economic communities. This debunks the myth popularised by the Australian Education Union and the Australian Greens which suggests that independent schools cater predominantly for families on higher incomes.

Parents at the Forum, in conjunction with independent school principals, stressed the importance of ensuring that their local Members of Parliament were aware of the facts relating to school funding and that the misconceptions that were prominent in the media were corrected.

"As parents and voters, we will not accept that some students are less equal than others with regard to government funding", a parent at the Forum said.

Participants also agreed that it is imperative that there be adequate funding for those students who are most disadvantaged, noting that these students are enrolled in all types of schools.

President of the NSW Parents' Council, Malcolm Pound, also told the Forum that opponents of independent schooling tended to focus only on reducing funding to independent schools.

"The position that penalises parents who choose to put their after tax dollars into their children's education is counter-productive. It makes absolutely no sense to approach funding in this way – these contributions should be encouraged rather than discouraged."

"We should be aiming to improve the funding arrangements for all schools rather than seeking to reduce funding to one particular group. Independent school parents will not support any decisions by governments that result in this type of outcome", Mr Pound said.

Supporting the view of the NSW Parents' Council was Paul Fletcher, the Federal Member for Bradfield, who told the Forum that NSW parents expected governments to support their right to choose a non-government school education for their children. He also stated that he would continue to strongly represent the views of his electorate, where more than 53% of students were enrolled in non-government schools.

Other speakers at the Forum included the Executive Director of the Independent Schools Council of Australia, Bill Daniels, and the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, Dr Geoff Newcombe.

Several other state and federal politicians, including the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, Federal Minister for School Education, Peter Garrett, and NSW Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, were invited to the Forum but were unable to attend.

Attachment: list of schools and organisations in attendance at the Forum

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For further information contact the NSW Parents' Council: www.parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au
or the Association of Independent Schools of NSW: www.aisnsw.edu.au

Parents and Representatives of the following schools/organisations in attendance at the Abbotsleigh Parents' Forum, 8th June 2011

<p>Schools</p> <p>Abbotsleigh School Al Faisal College Arden Anglican School Arkana College Aspect Central Coast School Barker College Georges River Grammar School Giant Steps Sydney Highfields Preparatory School International Grammar School Kambala Knox Grammar School Kuyper Christian School Linuwel Rudolf Steiner School Loreto Kirribilli Loreto Normanhurst Meriden School Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College Montgrove College Mosman Preparatory School Mount St Benedict College Newington College Northcross Christian School Northholm Grammar School Northside Montessori School Nowra Anglican College Oakhill College O'Connor Catholic College, Armidale Orange Christian School Oxford Falls Grammar School Our Lady of Trinity School Pacific Hills Christian School Pittwater House PLC Sydney Pymble Ladies' College Queenwood School Ravenswood School for Girls Redeemer Baptist School Redfield College Riverina Anglican School Roseville College Shoalhaven Anglican School SHORE St Andrew's Cathedral School St Catherine's School St Edmund's School St Gregory's College St Lucy's School</p>	<p>St Luke's Grammar School St Pius X College Sydney Grammar School Sydney Grammar Preparatory School, St Ives Tangara School for Girls Tara Anglican School for Girls The Athena School The Armidale School The Hills Adventist School The King's School The Scots College Trinity Grammar School Wahroonga Preparatory School Warrah School Wenona William Clarke College Wollemi College</p> <p>School organisations</p> <p>Australian Association of Christian Schools Australian Council of Jewish Schools Christian Education National Seventh-day Adventist Schools Steiner Education Australia Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation Uniting Church Board of Education</p>
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