

OPENING OF THE NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL AT  
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS COLLEGE,  
WAVERLEY, N. S. W.

15 FEBRUARY 1970

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr John Gorton

Mr Chairman, Your Grace, Parliamentary Colleagues both Federal and State, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen :

May I thank you for the warmth of your welcome - and thank you in particular, Brother Simmons, for what you had to say and tell you that I regard this occasion to be an honour for me and one which gives me great satisfaction.

I regard it as an honour because I have been asked to be associated today with those who planned and worked and strove and finally completed their task. And I find it of immense satisfaction, because as I look at this new block and cast my mind into the future, I believe there will come from it and from the resources which it includes, hundreds and hundreds of young men into the Australian community, better educated than they would otherwise have been. I believe they will be inculcated with the desire to put their talents and their privileges at the service of their country, and contributing to this nation - not to any segment of it - but to this nation more than they would have been able to contribute had this building not been constructed.

This, of course, is a special day for Waverley. It is a concrete illustration of the advances now being made in educational thinking, in educational techniques, and in the application of technology to make teaching more easy, more interesting, more satisfying and more comprehensive. It is, too, a shining example of the use of funds, both private and public, to the best possible advantage from the point of view of getting value for every dollar spent.

This Middle School block, Sir, is a notable addition to a notable school, a school with a long history and fine tradition. And I would like to congratulate Brother Simmons and his staff and the members of the College Advisory Council on what they have achieved and what we see before us today as a result of that achievement.

I think, too, that this is a justification - if justification were needed - of the policies of governments, both State and Commonwealth but I speak for the Commonwealth - of the policies adopted towards providing encouragement and some assistance to independent schools; a policy based, I believe, on principles of justice, of economic commonsense, and of an appreciation of how best to serve the true interests of education generally throughout our nation.

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Allow me for a moment to set before you what in fact that policy towards education is, because there seems to be some mistaken belief growing in the community, some mistaken idea that governments are only providing help to independent schools, that such schools are the pampered darlings of the Commonwealth Government - and this is not true.

It is true that Commonwealth spending on education in Australia has risen to \$22 a head of population from some \$4½ ten years ago, but the vast majority of this sum and the vast majority of this increase is provided for sectors of public education, and that should be borne constantly in mind. Science blocks have been provided throughout Australia to all secondary schools, which means that 75 per cent of all monetary provision for this has gone to public, not to independent, schools.

Libraries - a programme now getting well under way, but still to be brought to full fruition - are being provided to all secondary schools throughout Australia, which means some 75 per cent of the finances provided goes to State and not to independent schools. Expenditure on secondary technical education, so essential for the future of our nation, is almost entirely confined to government schools. Teacher training colleges are provided with unmatched funds by the Commonwealth, on condition that ten per cent of the places reserved in them for trainees are reserved for those who will teach in independent schools.

In colleges of advanced education, in assistance to universities, the public sector is the sector which receives all expenditure.

So no-one can say that the needs of public education are being in any way ignored, and that is the first point which I wish to make.

Yet there are those who oppose any assistance being given to independent schools, who oppose the provision of science blocks to such schools, of libraries to such schools and, more particularly, oppose the recent provision of assistance towards the running costs of such schools.

I believe that those who so oppose this policy are completely wrong. I can understand - though I would entirely reject - an argument advanced in some quarters that there should be no private independent schools allowed. That at least is a simple argument, and, I think, simply refuted. But I cannot understand the argument which would say to some Australian citizens : "Although you have paid your full share of taxation for a public school system which you do not use, thereby relieving the strain on it; although you have paid additional charges and are paying them to provide a school of a type which you prefer - although you are doing all this, yet you should nevertheless be prohibited from receiving any assistance at all from the taxation revenue to which you have contributed." This seems to me to be entirely unjust, and that is why I said earlier that our policy is based on principles of justice - the policy of giving some assistance.

And the economic argument which supports the provision of assistance to independent schools is irrefutable. How much more would be required from the taxpayers of Australia if there were to be no private schools tomorrow, and those who attended them were to be moved to a state system tomorrow? What great sums would be required, not to improve the existing state schools, but merely to keep them at their present standards? I think the economic argument and the commonsense are quite unassailable.

But moving to the interests of education, you, Brother Simmons, said that what was required of our educational institutions was that they should have independence, that they should seek for excellence and that they should be able to experiment and to have variety. What better way can these ideals be achieved than by having a state school system on the one hand, and independent school systems on the other, so that there is no risk of uniformity being applied by a central education department. There is an opportunity for innovations such as we have seen here today, and innovations not only from independent schools - they can come both from state and independent - but innovations which once they are made and once they have been proved to be successful, are not confined to the sector which made those innovations, but are available for the whole broad field of education throughout Australia.

So both from the point of view of justice, of economic commonsense, and of serving the interests of education, I believe the policies of assistance which have been adopted are right, and I assure you that those policies will continue and will not be changed.

There are those who think that by expressing disagreement and opposition to these policies, which they have a perfect right to do, they are serving the interests of the state sector of education. It may well be - indeed I believe it is - that if they were to achieve the objectives they seek, they would not be defending government schools at all, but merely preventing the improvement of government schools, which will be able the more quickly to be improved if the independent schools are provided some assistance over and above the burdens borne by those who support them, to enable more of the taxpayers' dollars to be left to improve the state school system itself.

We as a government are not interested in just one sector of education. We are, as you know, awaiting the report of an enquiry by all state governments into the needs of education, both in state schools and in independent schools throughout Australia. We believe that the method of such an inquiry by each state government is the best way to carry it out. We know that there are further improvements required to primary and secondary education generally. And we will, as time and opportunity permit, seek to play our part with State Governments in this field. But because we are interested in the whole field of education - state as well as independent - we will not turn our backs on our interest in the independent sector.

May I, Sir, before I declare the Middle School open, merely say this : That as long as there are throughout Australia people who are prepared to give of their income, to give of their time, to give of their effort in order to try to create better opportunities for education, then I think that we can face the future with a high heart. Because there will come from all our schools in greater numbers those better able to grapple with the new problems which will face us, those provided with the technical skills to harness the inventions now being made for the service of mankind, and those with a belief in rightness, in service and in dedication which must be the true end and requirement of education in whatever school that education may take place.

And now, Sir, I have great satisfaction in moving to the tablet and declaring open this new Middle School of Waverley College.

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