



# PRIME MINISTER

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## ST. PATRICK'S SCHOOL, PORT FAIRY

This is a very special day for the people of Port Fairy. I'm delighted to be with you at this wonderful school. It's a school with a long and colourful history -- as you know the original school was built over 130 years ago. That "school" was one classroom for eight grades, and two teachers.

Today, with its 180 students and seven full-time teachers, and with these extensions, St. Patricks reminds us of what can be achieved by work in a local community.

Much progress has been made since my last visit in 1973. I know that is in no small measure due to the untiring efforts of Sister Rosalie and Father Kiniry in particular.

Of course, this wonderful project would not have been completed without the wholehearted efforts of a great number of men, women and children of this parish. You have made a magnificent contribution and deserve the highest praise. Your work reminds us of the real role that communities are playing in projects such as this throughout Australia.

It is surely a classic illustration of one of the great strengths of Australian society and that is the willingness of people to work together for the wider benefit of the community.

The people who "put in" to make this day happen, certainly lived by the unwritten law that says: "It's not what you get out of life, but what you can put into it".

Although the Government in Canberra has contributed a significant grant to this project, I would not be here today to open these extensions if it had not been for your work.

The Government that I lead has long supported the concept of freedom of choice in education and diversity in the range and type of educational institution. We recognize and actively encourage the right of parents to choose the kind of education they believe best for their children whether in state or independent schools. We therefore have a commitment to support non-government schools.

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It is well worth remembering that these schools educate about 20% of our total school population - over 600,000 students - which, if they were enrolled in the state school system would place an enormous strain on that system and its resources.

Of course, in providing an alternative system, non-government schools add a further dimension and diversity to Australian education and certainly enrich educational experiences.

Their contribution on issues of concern and innovations in education in this country have been important in the past and I am sure they will continue.

As far back as 1963, the Liberal Country Party Government commenced assistance to non-government schools for limited capital purposes. That assistance was widened in 1970 by the Coalition Government which initiated the principle of providing direct per capita grants and extending assistance to primary as well as secondary schools.

Consistent with our desire to help non-government schools - we introduced the concept of providing a minimum of 20% of average running costs per pupil in government schools for recurrent grants. Further progress has been made towards reaching that target in 1978.

These days we are constantly reminded of rising costs and this applies particularly to education expenditure. The Government has been concerned about this question of costs in education. We have therefore decided to launch a study with the states into building costs in both Government and non-Government schools throughout Australia.

This study will specifically identify the differences in costs between states. We want to achieve greater efficiency and economy based on a more detailed knowledge of building options and their relative costs.

The study will identify reasons for difference in cost and give publicity to them. I am hopeful the results will be available later this year.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a great day for St. Patricks and a great day for this community.

Governments - State and Federal - have played an important part in making this day possible. But let me again emphasise that this day belongs to the people of Port Fairy and this parish.

The spirit, the initiative, and the willingness to co-operate that is in evidence here is fair testament to the strength of community pride in this small corner of Victoria.

It's fair demonstration of the confidence you all have in the future of this district. As your local member in Canberra, and as Prime Minister, I'm delighted to be here today. This school and this community will continue to grow and prosper. The quality of the people here will make certain of that. It gives me great pleasure to formally open the extensions of St. Patricks.