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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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OPENING OF YAVNEH A. S. LEIBLER
SECONDARY COLLEGE, MELBOURNE

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of sharing with you today the opening and dedication of your new college. It's interesting that today also marks the birthday of a great Australian who was also a member of the Australian Jewish community. I'm speaking of course, of the late General Sir John Monash, a person whose achievements are legendary and none more so than his academic successes. Surely, no better day could have been chosen to open the "Yavneh A. S. Leibler Secondary College", a school which will build on the academic excellence of the Yavneh Primary School.

The opening of this college is a milestone in the life of the Jewish community of Melbourne. This college is not simply an educational institution designed to give students the skills to pass examinations but rather it is a further vital link in a tradition of scholarship and learning which stretches back almost two thousand years, back to the ancient city of Yavneh in Israel.

Yavneh flourished as a centre of Jewish life and study during the years 3830 to 3892 or, for the Gentile press, the years 70 to 132 A.D.

The tradition set by those rabbis, scholars and great seminaries has travelled down the centuries, across continents and vast oceans, been tempered, like steel, by the holocaust and finally come to rest in establishments like Yavneh College.

For the past 18 or so years, Yavneh College's Primary School has sought to impart traditional Jewish religious and cultural values to its pupils.

Now the time has come to develop further, to enable those who commenced their primary schooling at Yavneh to continue their education uninterrupted and to proffer the traditional Jewish values to others who are now at the secondary level.

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Yavneh prides itself on its high level of biblical and other Jewish learning and I've no doubt that the College will continue to attract students mainly from Jewish families. However, the school will be open to all irrespective of race, colour, nationality or religion.

The school will offer an unparalleled opportunity for students to observe and absorb the rich tapestry of Jewish history, a tapestry embroidered with the joy, blood and tears of countless millions.

Lest it be thought that students at Yavneh are constantly immersed in dusty manuscripts and books, I'm pleased to hear Yavneh has a full sporting programme. Last year for example, Yavneh's football team defeated Grimwade House, the junior school of my old school - Melbourne Grammar.

Being present at a school function like this takes me back to my own school days and youth. Many things have changed since then. There have been enormous leaps in technology over the past 30-40 years. Developments, which in my youth, were in the realm of science fiction are now commonplace. The world of radio valves and adding machines has yielded to the world of the printed circuit and computer. Now the silicone chip is revolutionising the electronics industry.

The pace of life is much faster. When I first entered Parliament about 25 years ago Sir Robert Menzies was Prime Minister. He used to visit the United Kingdom about once a year, travelling by ship and taking a leisurely three to four weeks. Nobody saw that as being anything unusual. Nowadays, travellers jet around at ever-increasing speed trying to fit in as much as possible in as short a time as possible.

It may be that in our eagerness to achieve more we, in fact, achieve less. This paradox is most clearly seen in education. Twenty to thirty years ago it was popular to believe that large institutions offered economies of scale that benefitted their students. However, it was found that the large institutions became impersonal bureaucracies -- the teachers divorced from their students; the students resentful of their teachers.

Nowadays, there is a strong body of opinion which believes that education has its greatest successes in a small school. I'm pleased to see that Yavneh intends to keep itself relatively small, maintaining its happy, family-type environment which in turn must benefit its students.

When all is said and done the true test of a school is the calibre of person it sends out into the world. I know that Yavneh with its blending of traditional values with the latest educational developments will produce students that will be a credit to the school, to the Jewish community and to the Australian community as a whole.

Institutions such as Yavneh have been and will continue to be of fundamental importance to the richness and diversity of our national life. It cannot be stressed too often that Australian society is not weakened but strengthened by diversity, that preservation of a cultural heritage can be an integral part of participation in Australian life and love for our country.

This Government believes in diversity in education - in the right of parents to choose the type of education that is best for their children. We totally reject an educational philosophy which removes freedom of choice and which limits Government financial assistance only to State-run institutions.

The Australian Government supports schools like Yavneh and in recent years has provided Yavneh with capital and recurrent grants of over \$400,000.

Yavneh epitomises the initiative of the Australian Jewish community. The secondary college itself is named after a man whose initiative and energy is an example and inspiration to us all.

The late Mr A. S. Leibler involved himself in many aspects of communal life. He was one of the founders of the Mizrachi Organisation in Melbourne, a President of the Jewish Board of Deputies and a founder of this school. The foresight and work of men like the late Mr. Leibler has come to fruition with the opening of this college.

It gives me great pleasure to formally declare open the "Yavneh A. S. Leibler Secondary College".