



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SATURDAY, MAY 3 1980

ADDRESS TO RIVERVIEW COLLEGE

This is a very special year for Riverview and it is a pleasure for me to be able to share some small part of it with you. I am grateful for your invitation.

The celebration of a centenary represents a milestone in any life. For a school, it offers the chance to reflect how a philosophy in action has stood the test of time. I know that Riverview has passed this test with flying colours.

The diversity of your scholastic, cultural and sporting achievements and the contribution made to community services by boys who have felt the influence of Riverview, add each year to the school's impressive history.

There is a temptation, on occasions such as these, to reflect how an institution's progress has outstripped the expectations of its founder. And this is true in many cases. But such a sentiment in relation to Riverview does poor justice to the vision that Father Dalton had for this school more than 100 years ago. Nor does it taken into account the men of learning and care who have so successfully guided Riverview since the day on February 12, 1880 when the two Moore boys became the school's first boarders.

At that time, this beautiful venue was a forbidding environment for anyone, including someone of Father Dalton's indomitable faith. But there was one area where, unfortunately, even Father Dalton's faith could not prevail. He came to Sydney to establish his new school filled with the spirit of Australian nationalism. In Melbourne, he had found Australian rules in triumphant possession of the football field. He recognised it, even then, as the Australian game. When he came to Sydney and found Rugby flourishing, he dismissed it as a passing phase. But before the decade was out, the school magazine was forced to admit, reluctantly, that "the days of the game in New South Wales are numbered."

By 1892 innovation and entertainment died and the game was discarded. But that was a rare failure for Father Dalton. His undoubted success was the acquisition of such a grand setting for a school. His diary sums up the reason for buying this site when he said,

"The most beautiful situation, commanding a really grand view - completely isolated and central to the parish (of North Shore)"

In different ways, these qualities remain.

To them, from the beginning, Father Dalton added his conviction in the value and necessity of Catholic education. But the triumph that we celebrate today is the product of a long and often bitter struggle. While no reasonable person today would dare challenge the right of church schools to their share of public funds; or challenge our objective to see that, for the poorer schools, that share should be increased; that was not always the case.

Everybody knows, that for three quarters of a century, the rights of church schools, and those who attended them, were ignored. They should not today be taken for granted. The challenge to freedom in education: to the right of parents to educate their children as they see fit is still with us. But the kind of spirit that prevails here today; a spirit born of success in the face of a struggle, is the kind of spirit that will enable the cause of schools like this to prevail in the future.

Your motto, "Quantum potes tantum aude", sums up this spirit that has pervaded the educational philosophy at work in the halls of this college for 100 years. I have had the privilege to meet and work with many old Ignatians and their attitudes to life and personal qualities have always impressed me.

I work closely with three of them now. Mr David Connolly, the Member for Bradfield; Mr Stephen Lusher, the Member for Hume; and Mr Peter Johnson, the Member for Brisbane all attended Riverview and have carried with them into Parliament the ideals and values that derive from their school days here at Riverview.

They will appreciate more than most, how much the physical environment has been further improved since their leaving. In recent years, your facilities, particularly for the senior secondary students, have been expanded and in 1972, I was fortunate to be present with you to officially open these extensions.

At the beginning of a new century in the life of Riverview, this magnificent school complex reminds us that the present stature of the college has not been achieved without selflessness, sacrifice and hard work.

In the years since the war, not only has education become accepted as a right but increasingly the view gained respect and support, that governments were failing if some people were denied government support for education merely because they placed importance on the value of religion in education. And it was a Liberal government in the 60's that made the move towards a more responsible government approach to non-government schools.

The support for independent schools was timely. When I was Minister for Education, in the early 70's, retention rates in secondary schools were rising rapidly; costs were increasing; and as a result, the pressure and burden upon independent schools threatened the very future of many of them.

This was a critical time for education, for some schools and for government. I remember well the issue we faced. It was simply, whether we wanted a country of diversity to be served by diversity of education; whether a right existed for those with particular

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religious beliefs to establish their own schools; or whether all education was to be secular and run by the State. I believed strongly that freedom, independence and choice in education were essential.

The pressure for governments to abandon their neglect of private schools had to be met. I do not doubt that great schools like Riverview would have survived no matter what the circumstances. But the parish schools placed increasing burdens upon Australian families to pay for an education based on their commitment to a faith.

We should never lose sight of the enormous sacrifice made down through the years by those who have believed, often against great odds, in the value and the very existence of religious education. And let us dismiss now the fallacy that religious education is synonymous with wealth; that an endorsement of the values of religious education is an endorsement of the advantages of wealth.

Many Australian families whose incomes are very low make great sacrifices, are prepared to pursue difficult courses, because of their faith and their religious beliefs. A centenary offers us the opportunity to remember and respect the dedication of these people; parents, old boys and the community at large, who have entered in different ways into an active service for the church.

For too long their sacrifices were compounded by injustices created by the denial of government support. The 60's saw the beginning of an active programme to restore equality to the opportunities for education. From initial assistance in support of building programmes, to the per capita grants and now through increased support based on a right to education; governments have demonstrated their unyielding commitment to a dual system of education in Australia.

However, as part of the education explosion of the last two decades, the resource capacity of government schools has increased dramatically with the result that the gap between non-government school resources and the average of that available to government schools continues to be large.

In fact, the resource targets set by the Schools Commission have been so rapidly achieved by government schools that they now average out, on a 6 point scale, to the second highest point on the scale.

Whereas 90 per cent of all primary school students and 56 per cent of all secondary students in the non-government sector attend schools which are rated, on their resources, as being at the bottom of the scale; that is amongst the schools which demonstrably have the greatest resource needs.

To redress this situation, the Government has continued its funding programme, firmly committed to the principle of education fairness and justice. To do otherwise would be to expect a widespread private and especially Catholic school system to be conducted under trying and inferior circumstances.

To allow this to happen would be harmful to the vitality and potential growth of the entire community. However, some old resentments still remain, causing problems not only for governments but also for the education system as a whole.

In 1973, one group took the legitimate but extreme step of bringing the matter of government aid to non-government schools before the High Court. The very fact that the case arose has given concern in some quarters. The Government, like all litigants, is hopeful of winning, but if that doesn't prove to be so, we will still remain unshaken in our commitment to our policies. We believe them to be important for Australia, Australian education and Australian youth.

We know they are vital for the survival of church schools and independent schools generally. We will take whatever steps are available to us, within the law, which enable our policies to be pursued. If it is necessary, we will seek a constitutional amendment to enable just and proper support to be given to religious and independent institutions. Equality of opportunity in education should not be denied in Australia simply because families place as their highest priority the determination to preserve their religious faith.

And what happens here at Riverview demonstrates that the Government's commitment to schools like this, has not been mis-spent

It is a tribute to you, Father Quin, your staff and the whole school family that the spiritual zeal of the early founders has brought forth a tradition within the school which finds such productive expression. Of course, it is the fate of schools and schoolmasters perhaps like Parliaments and politicians, to feel from time to time that effort is in vain; in the case of education, that long-term success in the education of our youth is but illusory

An article in the "London Times" in 1858 summed up this educational dilemma when it said that:

"It was an unresolved problem how public education was ever effective; how those fierce passions are ever tamed; how the licence of unbridled speech is softened into courtesy; how lawlessness becomes discipline; how false morality gives place to a manly sense of right, and all of this within 2 or 3 years..."

In an obvious reference to the spartan public school life of the day, the article concluded by saying:

"Parents may well abstain from looking too closely at the process and content themselves with the result."

Today, the process and the result; the means and the end; are both important in education.

Your enrolments indicate that what goes on at schools like Riverview is being perceived by the community as providing an adequate response to the demands of a modern, industrial society and the new educational realities.

Part of this adequate response involves an active interest in, and a positive contribution by, parents to the education of their/5

children. There is a tendency sometimes for parents to transfer their responsibilities to schools and to teachers. Yet the family will always be the model for a child's learning. And issues directly affecting children cannot be resolved satisfactorily without full and proper consultation with parents.

That is why involvement by parents in the education process, which affects what is done inside and outside the classroom, is crucial to a child's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

I know that Riverview has a long and proud tradition of parental involvement and support, and your parent-school movement has won approval in the wider Australian education community. Through this kind of support a strong relationship develops between what happens in the home and what happens at school.

And this fosters confidence and security in young people. This is important when young people face the certainty of change and a future which will often be challenging and demanding.

How much more important then, it is, that education itself, in the preparation of young people for the future, offers diversity and choice. That is why there is an important place for an educational tradition of the kind that is exemplified here. For centuries, the Jesuit order has demonstrated a successful capacity for adapting to changing circumstances by providing a spiritual and moral base for young people and by demonstrating an act of concern for the higher development of intellectual attainment.

Young people today are indeed fortunate to enjoy the values, opportunities and the discipline, provided by this kind of education. But they must also seize these opportunities; not because someone is trying to make them achieve, but rather because they themselves want to.

The celebration of 100 years is something which rightly evokes nostalgia and pride when we reflect with thanks upon the achievements of the past. But it also provides a stimulus to re-dedicate ourselves to the successes of the next 100 years.

If, in this period, boys of Riverview avail themselves of the opportunities that lie before them, then they face a future in which they will be truly free; free for work and leisure, for being something as well as doing something. I know it is the hope of us all, that each St. Ignatius boy will learn to sense the worth and dignity of others; will feel his debt to others, and will have commitments - commitments to causes and concerns he has thought about and made his own.

We want him too, because he owes something to the world, to be prepared for a life of service to something beyond himself. To hope that these aims are fulfilled is not too much.

To the whole Riverview family, I urge that you value your educational independence; strive to keep St. Ignatius College in the vanguard of educational achievement.

I thank Father Quin for his invitation to attend these celebrations. You have more cause for optimism about your future, than surely confronted Father Dalton 100 years ago.

May the courage, commitment and vision which has brought Riverview so far since then, continue to motivate and inform those who now take up the challenge of the next 100 years.

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