Funding of education in Australia – a hot debate

The funding of education in Australia is very topical and emotional. The implications of the Federal Government initiated Gonski Review are yet to be seen although a time line for its implementation has been established and the conversation continues. The means of funding the Gonski Review recommendations is an ongoing issue. Beyond the Review there remain questions about educational standards and the effectiveness of teachers, curriculum and all the resources allocated to the education of school aged students across Australia. This article will seek to clarify some terminology used and an understanding of this debate.

Too quickly a conversation about the funding of school education turns to a debate about “Public vs Private” schools. A debate along these lines distracts from the central issue of providing quality learning environments for our young people. By this, I mean a school experience in which the students are well taught across a variety of areas, valued and encouraged to strive beyond school as life-long learners. This can take place in any school, regardless of the system of ownership, governance and philosophy. The results at All Saints’ speak for themselves and I have supreme confidence in the effectiveness of our teachers and how we allocate resources to provide our students with a high quality experience at school.

The terms “Public” and “Private” schools are simplistic. In fact, there are three sectors in school education in Australia. They are the Government Schools, the Catholic Systemic Schools and the Independent Schools. Each sector receives funding from similar sources but in different proportions. Schools in each sector earn operating income from State and Federal Governments, charges to parents (fees) and through funds privately raised (sometimes through business partnerships, sponsorship or through fundraising events or appeals).

All Saints’ College is an independent school. This means that we can make decisions within our school about the allocation of our resources, unhindered by a large bureaucracy removed from the school. An excellent example of the effectiveness of this is the Building the Education Revolution (BER) project where Federal Government funds were used to provide both a new library and upgrade an old building. This was completed on time and on budget because of the autonomy of the school throughout the process.

As an independent school, we stand alone financially. We receive some money from both State and Federal Governments but the bulk of our income is raised through tuition fees. The School Council makes annual decisions about a budget and gives me guidelines within which I have to oversee the operations of the school. With the wonderful assistance of parents we are sometimes able to undertake extra projects to advance the school using additional funds raised by the efforts of parents. It is important for our school community to know that all money raised at this school, or paid to the school as fees are returned to our school to provide an excellent experience for our students.

All Saints’ College has a 140 year history of serving students from regional NSW, regardless of social background or academic ability. Although funding from the State and Federal Governments is not the main source of revenue it enables the tuition fees to be kept as low as possible. Another way to look at this is that the cost of education in Australia is underwritten by government funding as well as the families who are paying after tax dollars to invest in the education of children. This private investment sustains the quality of the education we provide our students.

This is not a “private” school, it is an independent school. We are publicly accountable for all the funding we receive, regardless of its source, and I am proud of what we achieve with the limited resources available to us. The limited government funding received, assists in the education of our students at a much lower cost to the government than if the students were to be fully-funded in a Government school. This same funding enables us to provide an excellent experience for students of regional NSW.

We are fortunate to have a fabulous school. The support of our school community is invaluable in our progress.