

DECLARATION ON EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS – DRAFT

Some comments from Catholic Secondary Principals Australia

Preamble:

Generally this is far too negative a statement of current educational achievement and experience in Australia. The formulation of the paragraph commencing 'While Australia is highly ranked...' is such that the high ranking of educational outcomes is dismissed in relation to unfavourable comparisons. These need to be clearly addressed - but so do the current achievements need to be clearly and positively acknowledged.

It would be more helpful if the preamble were to concentrate on the needs of young people rather than on perceived educational deficits. Moving in to the 21st century, these include:

- ❖ Ability to receive, retrieve and express complex ideas and information in visual, written and spoken form;
- ❖ Personal and interpersonal skills that allow young people to establish a values framework that embraces a concern for others and allows them to sustain a healthy lifestyle and build positive relations with others;
- ❖ An historical and contemporary understanding of humanity and human society;
- ❖ An understanding of science and technology and the impact of science and technology on the world;
- ❖ Aesthetic and creative awareness;
- ❖ A global outlook;
- ❖ Environmental awareness and ecological responsibility

The Preamble should also include a strong statement that the role of family and parents is of equal importance to that of teachers in the learning process and the achievement of educational outcomes by students and in the development of values to which the Statement refers (p.4). Ignoring the impact of family and parents facilitates a 'blame game' in relation to schools and teachers that is not helpful. Schools and teachers work in conjunction with families and cannot substitute for them or be expected to make up totally for deficit in this area, no matter how hard they try.

The statement that the world is 'a harder place for young people to grow up in than ever before' (p.4) is not only without evidence and obviously contentious – it is unnecessary. It would not be difficult to find historical challenges to this statement, and as it appears to refer to contemporary young people in Australia (even those who are disadvantaged) would be offensive as well as contentious when viewed from many other historical and cultural perspectives.

Section 2: Our Educational Goals for Young Australians

This section is generally sound, well-structured and clearly stated.

Section 3: A Commitment to Action: Collective Responsibility for Personalised Learning:

The introductory passage of this section refers to the importance of a personalised approach to learning but fails to acknowledge the required commitment to finances to support such an approach. Without such a commitment of resources, the commitment to personalised learning for ‘every young Australian...whatever their needs, abilities, background or circumstances’ is empty rhetoric which, moreover, is bound to be disappointed.

Subsection d Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Two of the three common factors of the ‘best school systems’ reduce the role of teachers to that of ‘instructors’. Whilst instruction – and instructional skill – is an essential part of teaching, such a reduction ignores the broader role of the teacher, particularly in inspirational and transformational interactions with students. Contemporary research indicates the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in the achievement of learning outcomes by students; it is also crucial to developing enthusiasm and commitment to life-long learning by young people. This reductionist language diminishes the professional role of the teacher and does little to enhance the attraction of the profession. It does not reflect either the research or the knowledge of teachers, students and parents that highly successful teachers do a great deal more than ‘instruct’ students in classrooms.

The statement notes the responsibility of government, school systems and schools to ‘attract, develop and reward’ high-quality professionals. There needs to be greater clarity about the need to commit to capacity-building in the profession.

Subsection g: Increasing accountability and transparency

Public reporting of school performance should address the complex roles of schools, with reporting drawn from data that go beyond basic skills achievement to include student achievement; student achievement; school culture; parent satisfaction and engagement; and teacher performance and engagement.

Reporting of basic skills achievement needs to be achieved within a context that includes measurement of intellectual capital of the school (quality of staff; breadth of curriculum and subject offerings) as well as its financial capital (financial resources, facilities and physical resources) as well as the school’s social capital (parent and broader community of school; school culture, tone and ethos).

Further comments:

The paper does not address the issue of what can be envisaged as effective schooling and school settings to achieve educational goals for young people in the 21st century. This is a substantial lack when seeking to clarify those goals and related commitments. Issues of effective, developing and emerging pedagogies; school organisation and its effect on learning; and the role of students within schools all have substantial impact on educational outcomes for young people and need to be addressed in any discussion of educational goals and related commitments to the achievement of these.

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