

## President's message

### Winter's cooling blast

I write this as we see the weather maps turn a deep blue as a creeping cloak of frigid weather makes its way up the east coast towards our shivering Sydneysiders. One can only hope that on its way over Canberra, it will also cool the temperature of the furious rhetoric that has surrounded the passage of the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017.

As the national parent body ACSSO has approached the issue of education funding in good faith, and an absolute focus on policy over politics, with its longstanding call for Fair, Simple and Transparent, and truly needs based funding with no special deals.

Following the Senate inquiry into the Bill the Greens, the cross benchers and their parties negotiated with Government to define amendments that could improve the Bill by delivering its changes within a shorter six-year time frame with additional funding, the forming of an Independent body to review funding levels and binding the states and territories into delivering their fair share of funding into public schools.

Education funding is a highly complex wicked problem with no right or wrong answers – only better or worse outcomes. What has been branded as Gonski 2.0 is now enshrined in law with its passage through the Senate. What it has done is to produce a model that has finally brought an end to the 27 separate funding agreements interlaced with special deals and other peculiar adjustments that gave an unfair advantage to a number of private sector schooling providers. Whilst not perfect, it's a significant step forward in moving us all closer to an outbreak of peace in the funding debate.

### Warriors and peacemakers

Out of sight of all the warrior-like rhetoric there are peacemakers working quietly to influence the formulation of good policy with the tools of calm and reasoned argument. ACSSO is one of them and is now looking to the future. What lies ahead of us is to observe the forming of the independent body that will explore the suitability of the current Schooling Resource Standard together with the six additional needs based loadings to address disadvantage. There is a common expectation of its potential to significantly de-politicise the needs based funding policy with an objective appraisal that must be truly independent. ACSSO would further exhort the body to look closely at true need versus subjective want; it must also be in a position to offer recommendations to government, both present and future, that may result in future legislative change. Such changes may be necessary to properly utilise whatever funding provision is made by governments and not to be influenced those best able to lobby for their sectorial interests. We need a truly needs based Schooling Resource Standard funding formula - ideally utilising the new transparency provisions of the Act - that may well result some schools being ineligible for government funding. The current means based eligibility criteria for the aged pension might offer a suitable policy precedent.

This, together with David Gonski AC's 'Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools' or what we know as Gonski 2.0, will occupy ACSSO's interest for some considerable period. The review is due to report before the end of this year with the first half of 2018 seeing further discussion with states and territories via the COAG Education Council to negotiate, agree and implement its recommendations.

Looking to this time next year I hope that we're in a position to reflect on the Prime Minister's words from his pre-budget announcement alongside David Gonski AC and his Education Minister when he declared that the intent of the Quality Schools initiative, and the Bill that would frame it, was to

produce 'Great schools, great teachers and great outcomes'. In a world of political slogans it's a great one to hold the politicians across all jurisdictions entirely accountable for. I think we'd all struggle to find a parent that wouldn't want this for their child and wider community; especially the vast majority of us that have actively chosen public education as the best opportunity for our children's future.

Phillip Spratt

24 July 2017