

4 February 2010

## INFORMATION TO PARISH PRIESTS, PRINCIPALS, SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Dear Colleagues,

We have had a very profitable three weeks preparing for and commencing the working year ~ I hope you have too! The human mind is quite interesting ~ mine is already playing some tricks looking at this year and reminding me every five minutes of all the things I love about the job! Hopefully that will settle back to some normality quickly!

There has been quite a deal of discussion and thinking about the MySchool website at all levels of Catholic education. I attach a copy of a press-release story which has been received well. However, I would like to clarify several issues:

- (i) I have no real objection to objective measures being taken of Literacy and Numeracy acquisition levels. In fact, I think that it's a necessary part of good practice. I do not believe that these tests need to be done nationally by every child. I certainly don't think there is any need for public comparisons. National standards can be established and made available without testing every child in Australia on the same day!
- (ii) In many ways, we reap what we sow! The literacy and numeracy programs should be of a really high standard in every school and, if they were, we wouldn't have to put up with this nonsense!
- (iii) There is substantial evidence that this approach does not work. That is my main objection.
- (iv) It is extremely disturbing to see the voyeuristic aspects of "just checking what others got". I've done that and so have you; and so have many others – does that make it right and does it help anyone?

In the end

- it tells a completely incomplete story
- it does great damage to the morale of many places – usually those with the most difficult to teach students
- it takes an enormous amount of resources, and
- it doesn't change what needs to change!

If "your" school did really well according to those measures – good for "you." ("You" – as in your school community – especially the children.

If "your" school did reasonably well, according to those measures - good for "you", I think.

If "your" school did only moderately, according to those measures - is that good for "you"? If not, let's do something about it.

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If “your” school did poorly, according to those measures, - that’s not good for “you” or anyone else at all, especially the children, and we need to do something about it; and quickly.

These are some of the realities...!

The most senior people of Catholic Schools Victoria met to discuss many of the MySchool related issues and we will continue to advocate strongly to Julia Gillard’s Office for changes to be made to the range of measures and, in the long run, to the whole concept. However, the Deputy Prime Minister has hitched her wagon so strongly to this that “strong-willed” seems to have morphed into “intransigence” – and that’s not a good stage for negotiating. We will attempt to personalise the key issues for the Minister by pointing out many of the complete injustices which are occurring by using this crude but visually stimulating, populist, mythical short-cut to improvement.

If your community is effected adversely by the information could you please ensure that your Educational Consultant, Max Fletcher or myself are aware of that.

If you are quietly basking in the glory of your results I presume that you will continue to bask humbly because for you to get “fields of green” someone had to get equivalent “fields of red” – that’s how it works! And that’s how it works for every child too.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DH', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Denis Higgins  
Director of Catholic Education, Sandhurst

Enc: Article published in Bendigo Advertiser last week  
Unedited version of that article