



From the Principal:

A Letter from Canberra

I'm writing this week from Canberra, where I am attending the Christian Schools National Policy Forum. Darren Iape, our Operations Manager is here also, to add a national perspective of the Christian Schools movement to his already steep learning curve. In this editorial I want to try to give you all a sense of why it is important for us to meet in Canberra, the national capital and to meet with the politicians and bureaucrats who are involved in legislating or implementing policies that can have a huge impact on how Northside Christian College operates.

Over the two days of this forum, we interact directly with some key members of Parliament: Julia Gillard, Deputy prime Minister and Minister for Education is the keynote speaker at the annual dinner in the Mural Hall of Parliament House; Christopher Pyne, Shadow Minister for Education addressed the group of 215 delegates on Monday afternoon, giving the Opposition perspective on the government's many changes to education policy and funding. We also get to hear from educators, economists and academics working on the proposed National Curriculum.

Why does a talk-fest like this matter? There are many reasons why it is not only informative, but vital in terms of communicating a Christian perspective on education directly to those who are dreaming up new policies that have enormous power to affect our current freedoms to operate a school in line with our Christian beliefs and values. For example, we have been able to raise and address issues such as the right of a Christian school to employ only Christian teachers. This right is being challenged in proposed changes to the Equal Opportunities law. The new Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians specifically proposes that schools uniform policy on difficult issues such as ***“gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion”***. As thinking Christians we do not want to encourage prejudice or discrimination. However, we want to maintain the right to make decisions and policies that govern our school based on biblical ethics, not on political correctness. Politicians need to hear well-thought out, clearly expressed views on how their proposals actually erode freedoms previously enshrined in legislation that apply to faith-based schools.

I thank God for the awareness and respect that our National leaders have developed in Canberra. Christian Schools Australia (our national body) is regularly invited to attend briefings, or be on working parties and committees that develop policy statements on a wide range of educational issues. Our voice is being heard, and our point of view is strongly expressed in the media and to Senate committees. The Christian Schools movement must be mature, wise and proactive at the policy level and in the public debate if we are to ensure that Christian Schools can continue to operate as they do now in the future. We all need to be praying for men like Stephen O'Doherty, Peter Crimmins and Mark Spencer who represent us at the highest levels of Government.

There is also great encouragement to meet with Christian education leaders from all over Australia, to pray with them and to hear their stories of what God is doing in their school, just as He is at work providing us with all that we need. We were reminded today to keep our focus simple; keep our eyes on Jesus, encourage staff and students to grow in their relationship with Jesus, and to be grateful for every blessing we receive from the hand of gracious Father. We believe that children are so important in God's plan for humanity. As parents and teachers, we are accountable to God for the quality and godliness of the education we provide in partnership through schools like Northside Christian College.

Stephen Leslie