MEDIA RELEASE

Schools Assistance Bill must be passed

Independent schools today expressed concerns about their ability to pay staff next year should the Schools Assistance Bill, which provides $28 billion in funding for non-government schools for the next four years, not be passed before Parliament rises for the year.

Dr Geoff Newcombe, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, said: “It is absolutely critical that this Bill is passed without delay so that independent schools have enough funds early in 2009 to pay their teachers and staff. Any hold-up would have a major impact on the financial viability of some independent schools. A number would not be able to continue operating without this government funding.”

“Independent schools must operate on sound management principles and have already prepared budgets and cashflow forecasts for 2009 based on the receipt of Australian Government funding in January next year. With an average of 40% of their funding coming from governments and the remainder from tuition fees paid by parents and fundraising, the Bill represents a significant part of their budget”, Dr Newcombe said.

Concerns about some aspects of the Schools Assistance Bill, particularly the implementation of the proposed national curriculum and the new reporting framework were raised at a Senate Standing Committee inquiry into the Bill. However, most independent school groups are confident that these issues will be satisfactorily dealt with in consultations with the Government.

“What we don’t want is a situation where proposed amendments delay the Bill until next year. This would be disastrous for many independent schools”, Dr Newcombe said.

“With just four sitting days left before Parliament rises for the summer break it is crucial that the political differences are put aside and the Bill is passed. The education of over half a million students in independent schools depends on it.”

ENDS

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