COMMUNIQUÉ

The Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) met on Friday 3 August 2012 in Sydney. The Standing Council had a full agenda during which it considered many matters relating to school education and early childhood education and care.

Biennial National Education Forum

Ministers noted the great success of the third National Biennial Education Forum held on 2 August 2012. Although the forum was based in Sydney, Ministers, educators and the public joined the forum on line from throughout the country. Keynote speakers at the forum included Andreas Schleicher, the Deputy Director for Education for the OECD, Professor Geoff Masters, the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Michael Stevenson, the Vice President of Global Education at Cisco and Valerie Hannon, Director of the Innovation Unit.

Ministers welcomed the opportunity to showcase the manner in which equity and excellence has been promoted through innovative learning and teaching practices.

School Funding Reform

Standing Council noted the verbal update from the Australian Government in relation to school funding reform.   The Australian Government thanked Education Ministers and their officials for their contributions to the policy development processes that have been underway since the release of the Gonski Report.

Early Years Workforce Strategy

Standing Council today endorsed the Early Years Workforce Strategy to address the workforce requirements of the early childhood education and care sector. In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy - Investing in the Early Years*. One of the priorities identified in this strategy was to strengthen the workforce across early childhood development and family support services. There is increasing recognition that the work of caring for and educating young children is complex and requires enhanced qualifications and ongoing professional development. Programs delivered by qualified educators are particularly effective in improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

Investing in Focus Schools

Ministers discussed strategies for implementing the *Investing in Focus Schools* Initiative. Activities to be implemented under the Initiative will focus on three priority areas that have been shown to contribute to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Engagement and Connections, Attendance, and Literacy and Numeracy). The Initiative will operate in every state and territory across Australia.

Closing the Gap: Indigenous Enrolment and Attendance in Early Childhood Education in Remote Communities

Standing Council has welcomed a paper showing that states and territories are making encouraging progress towards achieving the early childhood education *Closing the Gap* target by 2013. The latest results from the ABS Experimental Estimates on Preschool Education indicate that in 2011 over 90 per cent of Indigenous children living in remote communities in the year before full time schooling were enrolled in a preschool program. While states and territories are making good progress, there are still considerable challenges to provide preschool access in small remote communities.

National Partnership on Early Childhood Education

Noting that the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education is to expire on 30 June 2013, the Standing Council noted the urgency of agreeing to ongoing and sustained funding of universal access to early childhood education for 2013.   Ministers agreed to hold a teleconference in October to consider future arrangements and agree on Council's advice to the Council of Australian Governments on this matter.

Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework

Standing Council has endorsed the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework*. The Framework highlights what is required to build a comprehensive approach to high quality teacher performance and effective development.

The Framework was drafted following extensive national consultation that included 40 submissions from government, Catholic and independent school sectors, teacher unions, principal associations, professional associations, regulatory authorities, teacher educators and other interested groups and individuals. The submissions were overwhelmingly supportive of the direction of the Framework, and saw it as well aligned with, but building on, existing practice.

Standing Council noted that implementation of the Framework will be a matter for individual jurisdictions and school systems.

The Australian Charter for Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders

Ministers endorsed the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*. The *Charter* describes the importance and characteristics of high quality professional learning in improving teacher and school leader practice. The Charter, working in conjunction with the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, the *National Professional Standard for Principals* and the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* promotes the central role of professional learning in improving teacher and school leader practice.

Students with a Disability

Ministers welcomed a paper reviewing the first five years of the *Disability Standards for Education*. The review was based on the input received from roundtable discussions in all capital cities and analysis of 200 submissions. The review provides valuable information and recommendations relating to the SCSEEC strategic priority of achieving equity in education for students with disability, as identified in the Melbourne Declaration.

States and territories have agreed to work with the Australian Government in identifying priority actions to improve the effectiveness of the Standards in practice.

Harmonisation of Regulatory Frameworks for Non-Government Schools

Standing Council endorsed further work to improve regulatory harmonisation for the purposes of administering public funding to non-government schools. Ministers noted that there are nine different regulatory systems involved in the provision of public funding to non-government schools. Each non-government school has to meet the requirements of both the state or territory and the Australian Government.

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