



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Indian Independence Day

SPEECH

Thursday, 20 August 2015

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Date Thursday, 20 August 2015
Page 9105
Questioner
Speaker Fletcher, Paul, MP

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Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (09:39): Over several years now, Menindee Central School, a kindergarten-to-year-12 school which is 70 per cent Indigenous, has been developing a partnership with schools in Bradfield. As part of the visit I joined a forum which discussed this relationship, dubbed the City/Country Alliance and the lessons which have emerged. Jane Dennett, principal of Killara High School observed that many of her students have much more familiarity with the Qantas lounge when travelling to Europe than with travelling to far-western New South Wales. Brian Debus, the former principal of Menindee and the human dynamo behind this program, spoke of the progress he had seen with some of his Indigenous students over the years. The current principal of Menindee Central School, Daryl Irvine, updated the forum on how the program is continuing.

An important element of this partnership is the remarkable artwork many of the students produce. Mark Cepak, a Lindfield East parent, has been a champion of this, and every second year, when the Menindee children come to Sydney, there is an art show held at the Deli in the Park cafe in East Lindfield.

The City/Country Alliance clearly involves a lot of hard work, and there have been some frustrations along the way. Nevertheless, it has achieved something very significant. This program has helped to open the eyes of Indigenous children from a small country school to understand something of the opportunities that the wider world offers. And it has also allowed students from schools on Sydney's North Shore in my electorate to come to know children from a remote part of Australia, many from a very different cultural background to their own whom they would otherwise not get the chance to meet.

There was a strong representation from Sydney's North Shore at the forum which was held: Lindfield East Public School principal, Andrew Stevenson; Beaumont Road Public School principal, Malcolm McDonald; Killara High School principal, Jane Dennett; and Masada College HSIE teacher, Ryan Gill. My state colleague the member for Davidson, Jonathan O'Dea also joined to the group. It was particularly pleasing to see this extensive representation from North Shore schools. I was also pleased to see representatives from a number of other Sydney schools, as well as representatives from a number of other remote schools. The purpose for bringing all of these schools together was to explore opportunities for the establishment of similar alliances between remote western New South Wales schools and schools in metropolitan Sydney.

In my view, this is a model which offers significant benefits. I congratulate all who have been involved in what has been achieved to date and I hope to see the program expand beyond its current participants over coming years.