

Uni hosts debate on healthcare reform

KEY experts and decision-makers will discuss the growing pressures on Australia's healthcare system in a webinar hosted by the University of Newcastle on Wednesday, July 20.

Health economics professor Francesco Paolucci, of the University of Newcastle and University of Bologna, Italy, will co-moderate the "Debate on Healthcare Systems Reform" event from 5pm.

He said it was a rare opportunity for the community to hear from "outstanding and distinguished" speakers including Professor Alex Robson, the Productivity Commission deputy chair; Alfa D'Amato, of NSW Health; Brian Kelleher of the Department of Health; and Professor Henry Ergas, an economist and columnist for *The Australian*.

"Healthcare systems globally are under tremendous stress," Professor Paolucci said. "An ever-challenging post-COVID era, with rising global, social and economic uncertainty are drivers of this stress. Australia is no exception."

Prof Paolucci said while the economic performance of the country still allows health budgets to be wealthy in an "unprecedented way", one-off policies did not have the ability to foster long term improvements in performance, efficiency and equity.

The session would discuss primary care funding challenges, the sustainability of the private health insurance market, and the interaction between public and private schemes. He hoped attendees would gain a deeper understanding of the challenges, and hear of potential avenues for reform. The session will be held at the University of Newcastle and online via Zoom. Register your interest online via bit.ly/AusHealthRef.



HOLISTIC: Rochelle Dooley said the school helped gifted students reach their academic potential plus excel in other domains. **Picture:** Marina Neil

Shake-up for selective school entry process

BY HELEN GREGORY

MEREWETHER High principal Rochelle Dooley has welcomed an overhaul of the way students gain entry to the state's selective schools.

"I think it's great that we're supporting all areas of our community and the equity placement model will support students to increase their accessibility to [schools], but in saying that I think at Merewether High School we already have that as part of our basis because of our geographic location," Ms Dooley said. The government's new admissions

process - to be implemented for 2023 enrolments - will reserve up to 20 per cent of places in each selective school and opportunity class for students from a low socio-economic background, Aboriginal background, a disability, or who live in a rural or remote area. The change follows a 2018 review that found there were fewer applications from students in these four groups. To gain entry, a student in these groups would have to sit the placement test and perform within 10 per cent of the minimum requirements for a general applicant. If there

are not enough applications to a school from students from these four groups or if these students do not meet the minimum requirements, the places will be offered to general applicants based on their test performance.

Ms Dooley said the school had received 672 applications for its 180 year seven places next year, with 607 applicants listing the school as their first choice. "At this point in time it would be difficult to speculate in regards to the impact it might have on our school's enrolment, but regardless of the outcome or changes that may impact us,

the professional and dedicated staff at the school will continue to expertly cater for those individual needs of the students and really ensure each student achieves their full potential across all domains," she said. "I can't see there being any significant changes for our school due to the way we're [already] able to cater - and our location and the demographics of our broader community enable us to be accessible - to those groups." Ms Dooley said the school was very inclusive. "We have students from a diverse range of whether it be cultural or socio-econom-

ic backgrounds," she said. "We're currently one of the only academically selective high schools across the state that has a relatively close gender balance. From year seven to 12 currently we're sitting with male students at 53 per cent and females at 47 per cent... [elsewhere it's more likely to be] heavily boy focused." She said students came from as far away as Stroud, Nelson Bay, Coorabong and the Hunter Valley. The school sometimes sees families from further away relocate to attend. The school has a different enrolment process for years eight to 12.



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