

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 609#


IS AUSTRALIA INTENT ON FOLLOWING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND DOWNWARD MOBILITY?

In the nineteenth century Australian citizens and their politicians were determined to leave behind the social distinctions of the Old World. But are we being dragged back into a top down society with little hope of social mobility for the children of the poor?

By 1900 the Australian States had public systems which educated all Australian children together . Australia led the world in the educational levels of the citizenry of their fledgling democracy – one which practised what Mélin called ‘socialism without doctrine’. The dominance of established religion, aristocratic, caste systems and inequality were left behind. Every child, however poor, could look forward to a prosperous life of social mobility.

In our history we have always looked backward to the UK. And the current generation of politicians is no exception. The public funding of private schools which discriminate on the basis of religion and ability to pay hampers social mobility. One of the major drivers of inequality is the principle of ‘parental choice’. This enables the ‘Haves’ to discriminate against the ‘Have nots’.

Gonski invented a voucher formula which he hoped might alleviate the gross disparities developing in Australian education. Like all ‘Needs’ policies before it, it will come to grief on the greed of the private sector. But even this is being abandoned by an Abbott/Pyne government with ‘private schools in their DNA.’ The Victorian ALP Andrews government has also thumbed its nose at the Gonski formula, pouring scarce public resources into the private sector. Australia is confronted with an unequal future as the next generation, deprived of educational opportunities, falls into ‘downward mobility.’ Richard Teese, in *The Age* of 3 August 2015 indicates awareness of this possibility. <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-challenge-facing-victorias-public-schools-20150802-gipmge.html>

So now, Australian middle class parents with secure incomes - a declining breed - are doing what their UK peers have been doing... ‘shopping around’ for special ‘choices’ for their offspring, especially their ‘not so bright’ offspring. Consider the following report about Middle class parents using the ‘glass floor’ to ensure their children succeed over poorer peers from the UK: at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/middle-class-parents-use-glass-floor-to-ensure-their-children-succeed-over-poorer-peers-report-finds-10416418.html> by [Siobhan Fenton](#) 

Children with less academic ability are more likely to succeed than brighter but poorer peers

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Wealthy parents create a "glass-floor" to ensure that their less academically gifted children "hoard the best opportunities" over smarter but disadvantaged peers, a report has found.

[The report](#), from [the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission](#), found that children from wealthier families but with less academic ability are 35% more likely to become high earners than more talented children from poor families.

The study, entitled *Downward mobility, opportunity hoarding and the 'glass floor'*, analysed the lives of 17,000 people born in the same week in the UK in 1970. It found that: "High attaining children from less advantaged family backgrounds are less able to, or at least less successful, at converting this early high potential into later labour market success."

"If policy makers are determined to increase social mobility in a climate where 'room at the top' is not expanding then the factors that limit downward mobility will need to be addressed."

The report also found that wealthier parents were using their resources and influence to give their children an unfair advantage. These included, finding them unpaid internships, using their social networks to form advantageous connections and ensuring they are able to access better education. Commission chairman Alan Milburn said of the findings: "It has long been recognised that there is a glass ceiling in British society which prevents children with potential progressing to the top.

"This research reveals that there is a glass floor that inhibits social mobility as much as the glass ceiling. It is a social scandal that all too often demography is still destiny in Britain.

"The Government should make its core mission the levelling of the playing field so that every child in the country has an equal opportunity to go as far as their abilities can take them."

The report concluded: "A society in which the success or failure of children with equal ability rests on the social and economic status of their parents is not a fair one. Not only is it unfair but it is a waste of the talents of those with potential from less advantaged backgrounds; damaging for the individuals, the economy and society."

**AT LEAST IN THE UK THERE IS RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM OF DOWNWARD
MOBILITY AUSTRALIA STILL HAS CANBERRA HEADS BURIED IN SAND**

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