

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 727

“Catholic and independent schools reignite feud over Government funding”

Is there a Fracture in the State Aid alliance between Catholic and Protestant schools ?

For almost a century (1872-1969) direct State Aid to private schools ceased in Australia because Protestant schools were prepared to be genuinely independent. This ended in 1969. Catholic schools got their State Aid and wealthy Protestant schools lined up for their handouts. Since the introduction of the Labor Party “Needs” policy in 1973 the Catholic sector have gamed the system –outrageously. Periodically even the Auditor Generals –State and Federal- have been outraged.

But the infamous religious alliance is under strain. There have been a few public spats between Michelle Green from the non-Catholic and Stephen Elder from the Catholic sector in Victoria. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/we-will-not-be-scapegoats-stoush-erupts-between-independent-catholic-schools-20171114-gzl8n8.html> and <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/independent-schools-lash-out-at-catholics-over-gaming-the-system-claims-20171010-gyy29e.html>

A further funding feud between Catholic and independent schools was ignited on 23 November 2017 when the Catholic and independent sectors presented conflicting data to the new National Schools Resourcing Board.

The board was formed as part of the Coalition's education funding legislation based on controversial changes to the Gonski model announced earlier this year. It is examining how socio-economic status calculations determine federal funding. Its membership is skewed towards the Catholic and private sector. Public schools may have only one or two supporters.

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) has compiled census data that it says raises questions about whether Catholic schools actually educate larger numbers of disadvantaged families. ? But the Catholic sector says the data is misleading and insists it is justified in fighting for all of its schools to maintain low fees and remain accessible to all.

According to ISCA's census data, 56 per cent of students who attend Catholic schools hail from middle-income families earning between \$52,000 and \$156,000, compared with 45 per cent for the independent sector. About 31 per cent of students at Catholic schools are from the top income bracket of more than \$156,000, compared with 41 per cent of enrolments in independent schools. Almost 5 per cent of families in the Catholic system earn a family income of between \$234,000 and \$259,000 a year. **The proportion of students educated by the Catholic and independent sectors whose families fall into the lowest income bracket is identical at 13 per cent.**

No mention is made of what this really means – for the public system which is open to all comers and enrolls by far the greatest proportion of disadvantaged children. The Catholic and private systems have always courted the ‘respectable’ ‘aspiring’ classes and sent the disadvantaged down the road to the local public school – if it exists.

The current argument mirrors that of 1973. Then as now, the Catholic sector acquired the ‘Needy’ label so that their bureaucracy could attract billions of public money with no strings attached. And the Protestants have gone along, willingly, for the ride. But the genuinely needy as well as a high percentage of Catholic students have always — since 1848 — been in the public system.

Statistics do not always lie and the non-Catholic sector are nervous – and a bit less inclined to game the system than their Catholic cousins.

But don’t expect too much from the statistics in future. The transparency opened up by posting individual school grants on line is fading back into the land of the opaque, as Catholic bureaucrats get their way in the corridors of power.

The Government, under pressure from the Catholic sector has now removed how much Commonwealth funding more than 1700 Catholic schools are set to receive over the next decade under the Gonski 2.0 model. And similar changes have also been made for 18 independent school systems across Australia, including the Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans and Anglicans. So perhaps some of the Protestants have been bought off once more.

A school by school breakdown of projected funding however, will still be available for state schools and other so-called independent schools. (*The Age*, Nov. 27, 2017)
<http://www.smh.com.au/national/parents-kept-in-the-dark-on-school-funding-under-government-changes-20171126-gzt4jm.html>

The Private system can fool some of the people – particularly rusted on old boys and insecure aspirational parents – some of the time. But they cannot fool them all of the time. Consider the following comments on the ABC report at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-23/catholic-and-independent-schools-re-ignite-feud-over-funding/9183672>

BS Filter

When researching primary schools for my daughter, I found that the local Catholic primary receives more government money (Federal and state combined) than the local government school, and when fees are taken into account, receives 50% more money per student than the government school. All to achieve Naplan results that aren't quite as good as the government school. So what are they doing with the money?

Harry O

I have a friend who is a teacher at a Catholic School. Fees are a minimum of \$30,000 PA and increase each year by \$5000. Plus parents must cover full costs of excursions, uniforms, books, sports equipment and a building fee just to name a few. The school provides Nothing for free. Also, the students MUST attend Bible Study and the religious activities on a

Monthly basis, and then parents have to attend as well. In other words, they are believers in the Bible. So, they actually discriminate as they do not take anyone. And as they charge fees, they should get less than the Public System. Same as independent schools that charge fees. And my friend is paid \$156,000 PA. A teacher in the Public school doing the same gets @ \$76,000. Their school is magnificent, massive sporting ovals, huge halls, brilliant classrooms and ALL the current technology. Much more than the surrounding public schools. I don't mind funding to help the poorer ones. But I do remember Howard increased funding for private schools, because he stated, private schools have better outcomes so deserved extra money over public schools.

Pennpenn

A religiously-based organisation (a Catholic group no less!) lying in pursuit of more money? Say not so!

R. Giskard

I don't see why Catholic schools should receive preferential treatment over other private schools. It sounds like Catholic schools have been rotting the system for a long time

DOGS HAVE BEEN HERE MANY TIMES BEFORE. THE HYPOCRISY OF THE PRIVATE RELIGIOUS SECTOR IS BEYOND CONTEMPT. BUT THE GROWING INEQUALITIES IN THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM POINT TO ONLY ONE SOLUTION:

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