

# **AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

## **Press Release 729**

### **DOGS ANTI-STATE AID POSITION ENTERS THE MAINSTREAM**

**Recent reports in the mainstream media — most particularly the Fairfax papers — indicate that a worm is turning in the Australian political psyche. The DOGS anti-State Aid position is coming in from the cold. Why?**

**There are a number of reasons:**

1. excellent work on funding figures done by Trevor Cobbold and Chris Bonner from Save Our Schools <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/funding/new-figures-confirm-more-private-schools-will-be-over-funded-under-gonski-20>, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/private-schools-set-to-get-more-than-they-need-under-gonski-20-freedom-of-information-documents-reveal-20171210-h023h7.html>
2. exposure by educators, Fairfax papers and the *Guardian* of the outrageous diversion of public funds from the poor to the wealthy by Catholic church clerics and bureaucrats. (DOGS have been doing this since 1969.)
3. findings of the Victorian and Federal Auditors General of misapplication of public funds by the Catholic bureaucracies. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/most-private-schools-cant-prove-they-spend-government-funds-appropriately-watchdog-20160309-gnekbj.html> and <http://www.adogs.info/press/state-auditor-general-finally-blows-whistle-public-funding-private-schools>; <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/measuring-impact-australian-government-school-funding>
4. findings of the Commission of Enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/11/why-australias-royal-commission-on-child-sexual-abuse-had-to-happen-explainer>
5. PISA and NAPLAN results which indicate that Australia is falling behind in the international educational and economic race. <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/un-agency-ranks-australia-39-out-of-41-countries-for-quality-education-20170615-gwrt9u.html>; <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/wakeup-call-one-in-four-boys-falling-short-of-naplan-minimum-standard-20171212-h036wm.html?btis>

Most importantly perhaps is the simple fact that the threat of the ‘Catholic’ vote which was always tied to the vote of the insecure aspirational class, has dissipated. Aspirational and even wealthy parents have looked at the evidence and realised that private is not, never was, and never could be, better than public. For the private system is always parasitic on the public system and if you build the one up at the expense of the other, that nation’s children, its economy, its social harmony and its international status will be placed in irretrievable decline.

And so, you have Elizabeth Farrelly from the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 8 December writing what would never have been printed — except perhaps on the DOGS website — ten years ago. And even then, DOGS would never actually ‘ban’ private schools – only demand that they be ‘independent’. Here I an excerpt from her article:

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/elizabeth-farrelly-why-private-schools-should-be-banned-20171207-h010p1.html>

### **Elizabeth Farrelly: Why private schools should be banned**

*If I had one wish for Australia it'd be this. Ban private schools.*

*The [Turnbull government has been caught](#) hiding funding figures for Catholic schools but it beats me why such funding even exists. Indeed, it beats me why private schools exist. Why they're even legal....*

*...Private schools are just very, very bad for the country.*

*Public money is our money. It's there to fund stuff in which we all believe and from which we all benefit – stuff that makes Australia fairer, more creative, more harmonious, more successful....*

*Every year we pour \$53 billion into a system that can only divide us, with a quarter of it – \$12.7billion – going straight to educational big business.*

*And for what? What does it buy, this immense spend? It buys a system that deliberately tribalises children before they can read, that has parents selling their houses for school fees, stressing about homework and entry exams and increasingly*

investing in [private tutoring for four year olds](#). Yet for all that effort and angst, it's a system that leaves us (as [recent news](#) yet again makes clear) [less well educated](#) with each passing year....

*For every private school student the burden decrement on the public system is fairly small, but the personal advantage is immense.*

*Three arguments are usually advanced for private schools. One, choice. Parents should be free to choose expensive or religious education for their kids if they wish. Two, quality. Private schools offer better education and, regardless of politics, the kid's interests should prevail. Three, burden: private schools, far from siphoning wealth from the public system, lightens its load.*

*None of these arguments stack up. Take choice. Choice relies on comparison, product to product. But education is not shampoo. You can't try a school for a few weeks or years and know that how your kid tracks is a direct result, or how things might have been different elsewhere. So comparison is illusory.*

*Indeed, a [new paper](#) suggests that the focus on choice and competition may itself be distracting us from the content and purpose of education, in favour of its trappings. Which goes directly to the quality argument. Many parents send their kids to private schools, even when they don't approve, because they think the education is better and there's at least a modicum of discipline. And yes, private schools are more able to impose order and sack teachers for non-performance. But, given that these students are already more biddable and more literate, it's impossible to prove any net educational benefit.*

*Three years ago, David Gillespie (author of *Free Schools*) argued persuasively that, once you correct for socioeconomic advantage, even the most expensive schools add nothing to educational outcome. This may be one reason why – it's [now reported](#) – more wealthy parents are choosing to put their kids in the public school system. Across the board, though, quality is low and falling, with consistently dropping international test scores in maths and science. Even a recent and welcome [improvement in reading](#), mainly because girls love books, still takes us only to about the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average. Could do better.*

*And that leads immediately to the idea of burden. Does anyone suggest sport's Big Money dudes – the sponsors and gravy-trainers, the owners and big-bucks players – are taking the burden off the public sport system?*

*No, they're creaming off the talent, quarantining it from public access for vast private profit and getting a public leg-up on the way. This is so wrong on so many levels. What's weird is that we can see it with sport, but with schooling – where the bill is six times the size, and annual – we're blind.*

*But honestly – burden? According to the [ABC](#), almost a quarter of the \$53 billion funding of schools (\$12.7 billion) goes to private schools – which educate roughly a third (34 per cent) of populace. So each private school student sucks almost two-thirds as much as each public one. Before the benefit of their \$30,000 in fees. In other words, for every private school student the burden decrement on the public system is fairly small, but the personal advantage is immense.*

*This is manifestly unfair. Private schools heighten inequality, privileging the privileged, hogging the teaching talent and siphoning off kids already equipped with reading backgrounds, so depriving the public system of beneficial peer-to-peer learning.*

*But that's not all. Tribalising children before they outgrow the booster seat can only encourage class-based and religious sectarianism. Friendly rivalry is one thing. But you can't allow a lovely school like Loreto Normanhurst without also allowing schools that demand your mother's birth certificate, or preach against infidels. This can only bring hatred.*

*But the best argument against private schools is productivity. Squabble all you like about divvying up the pie but far more useful – and more fun – is growing it. Technically, yes, education is a burden, but as an appreciating asset it's more house than car; an investment.*

*Forty years ago, Finland stunned the world by nationalising schools, revering teachers, ending streaming, entering school late, shrinking the school day, reducing homework and extending holidays – then topping every test. Lately, its schools slipped a little, mainly due to global financial crisis-driven reductions. But its*

*schools are still up there, and in an extraordinary turn-up Dr Pasi Sahlberg, who as minister designed the Finnish system, will move to Sydney next year, to teach.*

*Maybe we can persuade him to fix our schools, putting all schools up there with Grammar, say, or Loreto. If he needs more than Gladys' stadium money, we could give him WestConnex as well. Wouldn't that be great? Save the parks, clean the air, grow the future. Win, win, win.*

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