

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 764

What is the Future of “Free’ Education

When SCOMO loses the next Election it will be because of the State School not the Private school vote

The procession of so-called ‘Needs’ policies 1973-2018 —were supposed to put the State Aid question to rest. Yet, in the latest State Aid auction, won resoundingly – again – by the sectarian Catholic interest, we are confronted with a deluge of media reports referring to ‘buying school peace’; ‘conflict’; and ‘funding wars’.

Whereas in the 1960s taxpayers were confronted with demands for millions, now it is billions and ever more billions for not only running but also capital costs for expansion of private schools. Their level of subsidy – circa 95% and in some cases over 100% - means that they are no longer even ‘user-pays’. They are taxpayer funded schools which are NOT FREE in any sense of that term. Pupils can be rejected on the basis of sect, sex, or ability to pay fees. Taxpayers are subsidising fees, not free education.

DOGS are happy to analyse the current funding and political situation but would wish to go back to basics.

We cannot have a policy for educating every single child in Australia unless we have schools which are open to all children.

We cannot open ALL our schools to ALL our children unless ALL those schools are FREE. But subsidising with public money any school that charges ANY fees we are following a policy of

- ‘parental choice’
- ‘User Pays’
- entrenched disadvantage and
- decline in standards in our education systems.

Arguments used by the Catholic education lobbyists in the current State Aid auction, have emphasised their alleged wish to subsidise fee paying schools.

But the provision of billions of dollars of public money to schools which charge ANY fees whatever means that the basic principle of free education for all our children – at taxpayer expense has been effectively undermined. Since the 1970s *Needs* policies have been a smoke screen avoiding confrontation with this basic principle.

The only way forward, is abandonment of Needs policies from Karmel, Gonski, or anyone else. It is legislation making the charging of fees illegal and provision of public money for public schools only.

If a small Scandinavian country like Finland, laid waste by Germany and Russia, can do it, why can't Australia?

In the current mess, the Catholic lobby may be laughing all the way to the bank with an extra 4.5 billions and a \$ 1.2 Billion slush fund, and Dan Tehan, the Federal Education Minister may think that he has satisfied his colleagues in swinging seats. But all he has done is consolidate public school and even State government opposition. Consider the Teacher union response:

“Mr Morrison may think he has settled the funding wars but he is wrong. We will escalate our campaign in 18 target seats, ensuring that parents ... know that it is the Morrison govt which has abandoned public school students.” @CHaythorpeAEU #fairfundingnow
[http://www.aefederal.org.au/news-media/media-releases/2018/september/200918 ...](http://www.aefederal.org.au/news-media/media-releases/2018/september/200918...)

And consider the response of Adrian Piccoli a former NSW minister for education and director of the Gonski Institute for Education at UNSW. He called the Catholic funding deal a ‘political fix’ and a ‘dud’ at <https://www.smh.com.au/education/political-fix-why-morrison-s-school-funding-deal-is-a-dud-20180921-p50581.html>.

DOGS reproduce some of his article, asking readers to note that Piccoli ends up saying that the private sector are never satisfied – they will be back for more.

The Commonwealth and the Catholic Education Commission made it very clear in their media statements that this new deal is going to subsidise choice in wealthier parts of Australia.

Poorer Catholics should be outraged by this fact alone. Earlier this year I asked a Catholic bishop why the relatively low socio-economic status Sacred Heart Primary School in Wagga Wagga received \$10,000 in government funding for each student while Prouille Catholic Primary School in Wahroonga and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in West Pymble, with 70 per cent of children in the top quartile of SES and 1 per cent in the bottom quartile, both get around \$10,500 per student. Across 250 students that's \$100,000 extra just in government funding to the high SES schools.*

On top of that, both Prouille Catholic Primary and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour charge \$3,000 in fees compared with Sacred Heart in Wagga, which can only charge \$1,500 given the nature of their parent bodies. Again, across 250 students that's another \$375,000 more available to an already advantaged school.

The bishop's response was that some Catholic schools in wealthier parts of Sydney get extra subsidy from the Catholic system to boost their enrolments. He admitted to me they use funding to buy market share particularly in wealthier suburbs.

The real issue here is that Catholic schools in wealthy suburbs want to keep fees low to compete for enrolments against "free" public schools but keep their services high to compete against independent schools.

There is nothing equitable or fair about that at all and is contrary to the very concept of needs-based funding. This does nothing for the kids who need the funding the most.

The Catholic Education Commission also argues that if funding was cut it would have to close schools, presumably like those two Catholic schools on the north shore. I wonder about that because Waitara Public School and plenty of other public schools in the same area serving quite high SES children, only get around \$9,000 per student in government funding and charge no school fees and they seem to operate without much trouble.

As for the \$1.2 billion slush fund, well, it's anyone's guess as to how it will be used. It looks like a number has been plucked out of the sky to throw at the non-government sector to keep it happy.

Education Minister Tehan's media release suggested it could go to help farmers subsidise the cost of boarding school. If the federal National Party thinks this is the highest priority for regional education then its MPs need to visit a lot more schools in their electorates. Presumably most of those farmers are bypassing the local country public and Catholic high school because they don't think they are good enough. Perhaps it's because they don't have enough funding?

And don't think this is the end of it. Given the wording of the various statements made this week there is every chance that when this slush fund runs out the parties to the deal will go back for more.

The minister and the sector have said they will "review the new arrangements". What this really means is that this sweetheart deal could be continued indefinitely. Just when we thought the funding wars were over, a new front has opened.

The Labor opposition is having many billions each way on the education vote. If they win the next federal election which education vote will have put them in? The only certainty is that it will be the public education vote that puts the Morrison government off the opposition benches and more independents on the cross benches.

Even the NSW Liberal Education Minister, Stokes, already sees the education voting numbers on the board, and is demanding extra funding for public schools

before he will sign up to the Catholic funding deal. The Victorian government is also reluctant to embrace Tehan's funding 'deal' and is angling for the public school vote with advertisements for public school enrolments.

Times have changed. The media are no longer buying the 'poor parish school' hype as evidence mounts on Catholic rorting of the funding system in favour of top end schools in their resourcing wars with the wealthy independent sector.

The headings of the following articles tell their own story. The Fairfax media journalists and editorials are consistently critical:

- Special funding for Catholic Schools worsens dispute it was meant to settle editorial, *Australian Financial Review*, 23 September 2018 at: <https://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/special-funding-for-catholic-schools-worsens-dispute-it-was-meant-to-settle-20180923-h15qkm>
- 'Catholic funds boost 'excessive'', editorial, *The Age* at
- Jennifer Hewett, 'Tehan seems excessively optimistic' in *Australian Financial Review*, 24 September 2018 at <https://www.afr.com/opinion/columnists/education-minister-dan-tehan-excessively-optimistic-about-solving-school-funding-20180923-h15qll>
- Michael Koziol, 'Catholic funds boost 'excessive'', Grattan Institute analysis, *The Age*, 24 September 2018 at <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/morrison-government-giving-catholic-schools-10-times-what-they-need-analysis-20180923-p505gz.html>
- 'Buying school peace with temporary cash' *Australian Financial Review*, 25 September 2018, editorial, p. 38 at <https://www.afr.com/opinion/editorials/buying-school-peace-with-temporary-prosperity-20180924-h15t46>
- 'School Funding deal lacks transparency, editorial *The Age*, 25 September 2018 at <https://www.theage.com.au/national/school-funding-deal-lacks-transparency-20180924-p505ps.html>
- 'Catholic schools tipped to Stagnate', Henrietta Cook at <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/catholic-enrolments-set-to-stagnate-over-next-decade-20180926-p5067m.html>

The Murdoch Press, not unsurprisingly, gives columns to Catholic system lobbyist from the Victorian Catholic Education Commission, former liberal MP, Stephen Elder and his attempt to answer critics. *The Australian* which is behind a pay wall, had these articles on the Funding Wars:

- 'Catholic Schools to Fight for State Cash', *The Australian*, 26 September 2018 and
- Rosie Lewis, 'Catholics swipe at predictable complaints' over funding deal', *The Australian*, 25 September 2018

But *The Guardian* provides perhaps the most extensive analysis of the ‘funding wars’ issue with the possibility that the extra grants may not get through the Senate :

- ‘ Greens seek to disallow big chunk of extra funding to Catholic schools’ 21 September 2018 at [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/21/greens-
seek-to-disallow-big-chunk-of-extra-funding-to-catholic-schools](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/21/greens-seek-to-disallow-big-chunk-of-extra-funding-to-catholic-schools)
- **Lyndsay Connors, ‘Coalition recycles old nonsense with business-as-usual schools deal’,** 23 September 2018
at:[https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/22/coalition-recycles-old-
nonsense-with-business-as-usual-schools-package](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/22/coalition-recycles-old-nonsense-with-business-as-usual-schools-package)
- Coalition admits states could derail its \$4.6bn for Catholic and independent schools on 23 September at [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-
news/2018/sep/23/coalition-admits-states-could-derail-its-46bn-for-catholic-and-
independent-schools](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/23/coalition-admits-states-could-derail-its-46bn-for-catholic-and-independent-schools)
- Victoria's Catholic education head appears to claim credit for minister's scalp on 24 September at [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/24/victorias-
catholic-education-head-appears-to-claim-credit-for-ministers-scalp](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/24/victorias-catholic-education-head-appears-to-claim-credit-for-ministers-scalp) and
- States seek public education deal after Coalition's Catholic school handout on 26 September at [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/26/states-seek-
public-education-deal-after-coalitions-catholic-school-handout](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/26/states-seek-public-education-deal-after-coalitions-catholic-school-handout)
- **Government threatens to withhold billions in school funding unless states back new deal** at [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-
news/2018/sep/27/government-threatens-to-withhold-billions-in-school-funding-
unless-states-back-new-deal](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/27/government-threatens-to-withhold-billions-in-school-funding-unless-states-back-new-deal)

The Federal Government, which does not have power under Section 51 of the Constitution to deal with education, but uses Section 96 with grants for specific purposes, has moved to bullying tactics. Morrison and Tehan are reduced to threatening to ‘stop supply’ of school funding to the States. It is to be hoped that the States call their bluff.

Meanwhile, Lyndsay Connors sums up the \$.4.6 billion package as ‘entitlement-based augmented by need’, and notes that

It is nonsense for Morrison or his new education minister, Dan Tehan, to claim that they can guarantee their new billions will make private schools more accessible to parents in the name of ‘choice. They appear not to understand that it is not the subsidy that determines a child’s access to these schools, but the upfront fee determined privately by the school.

It is hoped that Lyndsay Connors, and other public school lobbyists still wedded to the “Needs” rhetoric will finally get back to BASIC PRINCIPLES AND END THE ‘SCHOOL FUNDING WARS ONCE AND FOR ALL’.

YOU CANNOT HAVE GENUINE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA UNLESS THAT EDUCATION IS

- ABSOLUTELY FREE
- FREE FROM ASPIRATIONAL PARENTS BLEATING ABOUT 'CHOICE', AND
- FREE FROM RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, OR FINANCIAL TESTS.

THIS MEANS THAT STATE AID SHOULD BE FOR STATE SCHOOLS ONLY.

WE PAY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS. TAKE THEM OVER AND MAKE THEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM

855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS

<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>