

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

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New South Wales Catholic Education Bureaucrat

Muddies the Turbulent Funding Waters

Dallas McInerney, the Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Schools NSW, (595 Catholic schools and 255,000 students) has attempted to quieten unrest amongst the faithful in New South Wales with a somewhat dissembling article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 16 November 2018. His article is entitled '*Healthy competition Benefits All Schools*'. In it, he attempts to hose down the exposure of funding rorts by his bureaucracy by Andrew Piccoli. This erstwhile Minister for Education, a good Catholic himself, is now a director of the Gonski Institute for Education at UNSW. His criticisms are found at

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/piccoli-accuses-catholics-of-bullying-over-school-funding-20181019-p50as9.html> and

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/political-fix-why-morrison-s-school-funding-deal-is-a-dud-20180921-p50581.html> .

He wrote:

"The church is not as influential as its operators claim. Countless Catholic parishioners have lost faith in the church in the face of various scandals and as a result they don't listen to or trust the church to the same extent as in the past."

Dr Piccoli, ... warned the church would give more money to rich city schools than needier schools in country electorates.

Catholic authorities were not required to justify how they distributed government funds within their own system, which runs schools in both disadvantaged and wealthy areas. Wealthy schools often received more to keep fees down.

For example, St Gregory's in Queanbeyan received \$2000 less per student than Prouille Catholic Primary in Wahroonga, and Cathedral Catholic primary in Bathurst got \$4000 less per student than St Michael's in wealthier Stanmore.

St Joseph's in Condobolin, where 30 per cent of students were Indigenous, received the same amount as St Fiacre's in Leichhardt, where 2 per cent were Indigenous.

"There are many other examples in regional centres like Tamworth, Griffith and Wagga Wagga," said Dr Piccoli.

"The fact that for years the Catholic school system has been overfunding advantaged Catholic schools at the expense of disadvantaged students is yet another moral and financial scandal the church wants to avoid.

"It is a situation the NSW government cannot and should not ignore."

How did the NSW Catholic bureaucrat McInerney answer these criticisms?

Firstly, Dallas McInerney did not, like Stephen Elder in Victoria go on the open offensive with robo calls and political threats. After all, Elder has already gotten a good deal out of the Coalition and Labor parties. No, he took the softly, softly approach. He skilfully mixed fact with fiction, taking a number of ideological positions for granted and using 'feel good' verbiage like 'fairer' and 'healthy competition'

Since the economic argument – that private schools save the government money- is wearing paper thin , McInerney talked overall figures and aspiration. He gave a list of four 'basic facts' all of which are oversimplified and far from uncontested.

1. Firstly, McInerney argued: It costs over \$13,000 a year on average to educate a child in any school, and state and federal government provide some funding to all sectors to keep schools affordable.

(So far so good But this does not take into account the fact that governments have to pay a much higher sum for children who are economically or geographically disadvantaged, the vast number of whom are in the public systems. Nor does it take account of the fact that many schools with fees choose to not be affordable for the vast majority of families)

2. Secondly, McInerney said that : All schools are funded to the same benchmark, the Schooling Resources Standard (SRS) . The SRS is made up of a base amount (\$10,953 per primary student or \$13,764 per secondary student) plus extra funding for six types of disadvantage.

(So far, so good. Except, as Andrew Piccoli pointed out, McInerney's Catholic bureaucracy diverts funding from disadvantaged students to

wealthier schools and is not accountable to anyone – government or parents – for doing so. Education funding or interest from billions of dollars of large grants, can go to paying compensation for activities of paedophile priests.)

3. Thirdly, McInerney claims that government schools will always receive more public funding than non-government schools because taxpayers fund the entire DSRS amount in all public schools, whereas in non-government schools the SRS is only partly funded by taxpayers because parents are expected to make up the shortfall based on their ability to pay fees. The more parents can afford, the less public funding a non-government school attracts. What could be fairer?

(Well- where to start! At the beginning and end of it all. The Alpha and Omega of the DOGS position:

What could be fairer would be if all schools were open to all children, free, secular and universal. i.e. if all schools were public schools.

The research of Trevor Cobbold, the Auditor General, and Adrian Piccoli indicate that the Catholic Education systems have not been fair with their own disadvantaged children. And McInerney avoids answering their concerns, skimming over the real issues.)

4. Fourthly, McInerney argues that, because public funding for government schools has risen every year in line with enrolments (it has never been cut to pay for government schools.

*(McInerney does not mention pupils are leaving the Catholic for the government system in New South Wales. Nor does he mention that billions of dollars in public money have been **diverted from our public systems** to pay for a rival denominational system which duplicates, many times over, public facilities. But this is because*

5. Finally, McInerney wants to argue that all the parallel Catholic system is doing is providing ‘healthy competition that improves all schools’. (a contention disproved again and again in recent PISA and OECD reports as Australian education falls lower and lower in the international stakes)

No mention in all of this Catholic system administrator's dissembling list of assertions is made of 'parental choice'; of 'Catholic values'; or even religion. His high point is a pitch to the neo-liberal market laid up in heaven .

Perhaps the most damning fact check response to McInerney's article is found at the ABC website *Counting the Cost of the Education Revolution* at

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-22/counting-the-cost-of-the-education-revolution/10495756>

This website points to the 2100 local public schools teaching students from similar backgrounds which are receiving less per student in government funding than nearby Catholic schools.

Fascinating stuff. It makes hlardliner Elder and his bishop in Melbourne, and Softly softly, don't stir the neoliberal possum McInerney and his bishop in Sydney look less and less credible.

DOGS reiterate that a Democratic State cannot deal and should not deal with religious men who bully the government on one hand, while dissembling on the other. The future of the nation's children and taxpayer's money should not be placed in the hands of such men.

The future of our children should be placed in the hands of secular administrations that are answerable directly to the Parliament through a responsible Minister for the expenditure of every dollar of public money. They should be expected to run first rate schools that are open to all children, teachers, and administrators. They should be free, secular and universal. In other words:

State Aid should be for State schools only.

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