

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

## **SCHOOLS**

### **PRESS RELEASE 776**

#### **THE RESULT OF HALF A CENTURY OF**

#### **'NEEDS' POLICIES:**

#### **The Politics of Absurdity**

State Aid to private schools was justified under a Labor Party 'Needs' policy in 1973. Whitlam, like Menzies before him, was after the 'Catholic' vote. From the beginning the wealthy schools demanded funding for their peculiar 'needs', even when they had Olympic standard swimming pools.

Fifty years later, the 'Needs' of wealthy elite schools must be catered for before those of any disadvantaged public school that is without basic facilities, have been upgraded.

From the very beginning various 'Needs' policies under Lib/Lab governments have been gamed shamelessly by the private religious sector, leading to ever growing social inequality and empty churches. The rhetoric of a half century parade of 'Needs' policies and the stark realities of Australian educational funding are escalating exponentially.

Pity Gonski in his academic 'Inequalities' hothouse at the University of New South Wales.

In one of the time-honoured media rituals exposing glaring inequalities, the extravagant building plans for seven 'elite' Sydney schools were revealed in the [Sun Herald](#) during 2018. The public were informed that

*Seven schools are planning to spend a combined total of more than \$365 million on new facilities and school redevelopments, an analysis of development applications currently waiting for approval from the NSW Department of Planning and Environment has revealed.*

*Scots College in Sydney's east has submitted plans for a \$25.1 million major upgrade of its library building, including a "complete recladding of the exterior in a Scottish Baronial architectural style" complete with castellations, a tower, a turret, and "grand bay windows".*

*Loreto Kirribilli has submitted plans for a \$103.3 million staged redevelopment of the school, including a new five-storey "innovation centre", outdoor rooftop learning terraces and two "vertical connection pods".*

*Cranbrook's \$75 million redevelopment plan includes a new aquatic recreation centre, a drama theatre, "teaching terraces" and a new academic and liberal arts facility, while SCEGGS Darlinghurst's \$48.7 million plan includes a new six-storey "multi-purpose building", possibly with new swimming facilities.*

*St Catherine's School has submitted modifications to its previously approved \$62.5 million redevelopment, which still includes an orchestra pit, a ballet studio, a playbox theatre and a new aquatic centre.*

*St Aloysius' College is also planning a major redevelopment, including a new sports facility and extensions of its great hall, chapel and existing learning facilities. The plan does not provide an exact value but will cost over \$30 million.*

*Loreto Normanhurst is planning to construct a number of new buildings and a "bush chapel" and increase its student cap from 1150 students to 2000, with costs expected to exceed \$20 million.*

[Chris Bonor](#) a retired secondary school Principal from the Centre for Policy Development on 27 December 2018 referred to this particular spending spree as 'the elite arms race going nuclear.

What is of most interest in his article on the website of [John Menadue - Pearls and Irritations](#) is his questioning of State Aid to wealthy schools and his suggestion that this be re-allocated to the public sector.

*In total, the additional recurrent funding of non-government schools over government schools was [around \\$5 billion in 2015](#), around \$3 billion of which was provided by governments.*

*If reallocated, even a portion of this \$3 billion would provide extra for schools where the investment would make a measurable difference. There is an abundance of research which shows that, subject to targeting and strict accountability, additional investment in disadvantaged schools is an investment with real achievement dividends.*

*There are a host of questions arising as a consequence of overspend on so many of Australia's school students. If a 'black hole' is a place where things disappear without leaving much of a known trace, then it seems an apt description of these schools and the money they receive. To what extent should public funding be allowed to contribute to this problem? Many politicians and commentators wring their hands over the amounts going into*

*schools for little apparent return. In this context the questionable priorities of government have created a big part of the problem.*

*In the past such concern about elite schools was written off by some as 'the politics of envy'. The unearned status of these schools and the funding they receive is really the politics of absurdity.*

This all smacks of common sense. But if Chris Bonor goes back to 1973 he will discover that Needs policies have always been studies in rhetorical ambiguity, open to bottom of the schoolyard schemes.

When, in 1973, the Karmel Committee suggested cutting public funds to wealthy Class A schools, there was an outcry. Schools were swiftly 're-classified' and downgraded by the then Minister for Education, Kim Beasley. Politicians of all persuasions decided to throw public money into the unholy alliance between the wealthy Catholic and Protestant schools.

For Labor politicians, Public schools representatives were easier to deal with than screaming elite school parents. Their representatives were hand-picked and duchessed. Outspoken public school parents like Joan Kirner were put on the Schools Commission while some funds, for a few years in the 1970s, went into badly disadvantaged public schools. By 1978 Peter Tannock – later distinguished as a Papal Knight was head of the Schools Commission, and any real semblance of a Needs policy was gone.

By 1984, when the public school representatives finally wrote dissenting reports, the days of the Schools Commission were numbered. It was meant to obliterate the State Aid debate, not exacerbate it. In the years of the Howard Government it became official. "Private schools' were in the Federal Government's DNA. Their 'Needs' took precedence.

The unwritten educational policy in Australia is : The public sector must always be the poor relation.

Under Gillard, in 2011, Gonski, a rather sensible businessman with philanthropic aspirations, was flabbergasted by the levels of inequity he discovered in the real world of Australian education funding.

He tried again- as Karmel had done – to bring some sense of reality and balance into the Australian educational landscape. But he had political terms of

reference to fulfil. ‘No schools was to lose a dollar’ and he had to be ‘sector blind’. Gonski was back to square one. For in 1973 the pattern had been set – by the Labor Party. And, in 2019, the Labor Party is in no way offering a solution to a perennial problem. The Private sector will be paid off long before the needs of public schools are solved.

The only way forward is back. The State Aid problem was solved in the nineteenth century by our colonial forebears but opened up by the Menzies and Whitlam governments in the 1960s and 1970s.

The only way to educate ALL Australian children is to have adequate public funding of schools that are public in purpose and outcome; public in access; public in ownership and control; public in accountability. Private schools never have, never do and never will do this. Diverting public money from public to private schools has been, is, and always will be disastrous education policy.

If parents demanding choice wish to have genuinely independent schools, then our elite private schools should give back every dollar they receive in public funding and parents and religious men should put their money where their mouth is.

Chris Bonor and other public school advocates are outraged by the methods employed by Australian religious and social elites to manipulate the largesse of the public Treasury for the advancement of their young. But they are not yet to the point of taking a firm, principled stand on education funding.

While ever public money is available to the private religious sector, they will game the system. The ‘Needs’ policies of the last half century may have been well intentioned. But the pathway to hell is paved with good intentions.

Private schools have proved that they cannot be trusted with expenditure of public money. Above all, they cannot be trusted with the education of our children.

The proof of the education pudding is in the way they have consumed it.

State Aid should be withdrawn from schools that are not freely accessible to every Australian child, with offence to none. The accessibility to both students and teachers should be without fear, favour, or entrance requirements.

Australian children NEED a well funded public education system, not an elitist, divisive, private, religious system intent of gaming a 'Needs' policy however well intentioned that policy may be.

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