

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 779

IDENTITY CRISIS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

State Aid was returned to the Catholic – and Protestant – education sectors in the 1960s to tune of ‘Poor parish schools’. There *were* ‘poor parish schools’ which were in danger of collapsing for lack of dedicated monastic teachers.

But there were also many wealthy Catholic and Protestant schools that had no intention of considering a re-distribution of either their own wealth or a fairer system for all Australian children. After all, it was part of their business model to educate the political, legal, and business elite.

For the first time in Australian history the country had the opportunity to cater for more than 90% of our children in public schools.

Instead, more than half a century later, we are laying out billions and billions more dollars to hold the dividing line between one third and two thirds of Australian children.

The ‘poor parish school’ myth has been consigned to the dustbin, with a tranche of failed ‘Needs’ policies consigned to the dust bin. Even the successful businessman/philanthropist/courtier, David Gonski has fled to the hallowed halls of academia.

So, what mythologising must the Catholic sector fall back on to justify its shameless attacks on the public Treasury? Crying poor sounds less and less credible as the public sector gains the moral initiative.

But the religious sector are the acknowledged experts in gaining the moral initiative are they not? Why not grab it back. It only takes the right slogans from the marketing experts.

And, sure enough, Lyndsay Connors, in a recent January 22 article on John Menadue’s blog, ‘*Pearls and Irritations*, [‘Curiouser and Curiouser. The Marketing of Private Schools’](#) posted on 22 January 2019 has turned up the strategy of one very wealthy, prestigious school for those born to rule the Australian polity. Their answer to their problem? Hijack the laudable objectives of the public system and claim it as their own. She notes:

In its recent newspaper advertisement for a Director of Advancement, a long-established Sydney private school for Catholic boys described itself as “an inclusive, non-selective, school, with students attending from all walks of life”. This is a school with exorbitant upfront fees and resource levels to match. Such an audacious attempt at re-branding suggests that there is more afoot here than semantics.

Schools such as this have always borne gladly the epithet of ‘leading’ and ‘exclusive’, regularly bestowed on them by the press. Questioning whom these schools were excluding was dismissed as the ‘politics of envy’....For a school with upfront fees that exclude all but a small number of families to describe itself as “inclusive and non-selective” is preposterous ..

This particular school charges a fee of close to double the government’s basic resource standard. It is both exclusive and selective on that ground alone, not to mention that it discriminates further in its enrolment policy on the grounds of sex and religion.

Its SES measure is 124 and its ICSEA value of 1176 mean is its students are drawn from the most privileged end of the spectrum based on measures of socio-economic circumstances and school-community educational advantage. This school has the second highest ICSEA score of NSW Catholic secondary schools and is in the top eight of NSW non-government secondary schools.

In a self-congratulatory tone, the advertisement describes the provision of bursaries to 90 boys as a ‘testament to the generosity of spirit of its community’. In fact, just 6 per cent of its enrolment comes from the bottom half (Q1 and Q2 quarters). Indigenous students are among those who receive bursaries, of which some are funded from external sources and are based on selection criteria. Almost 80 per cent of its enrolments come from the top quarter (Q4), a proportion that has been maintained for some time. This school would have to reach out to far more medium to low income families to come within cooee of being inclusive.

Why the Disconnect between Image and Reality

Lyndsay Connors is interested to analyse the complete disconnect between the marketing image and the reality. She points to the current identity crisis experienced by the 94% of private schools in the religious sector. The identity crisis, she believes harks back to the Howard Government’s [funding changes](#)

She notes how the religious schools are concerned at how they should market themselves in what they consider a hostile, ‘secular’ society. The Catholic sector, in particular, has had problems about where to position itself in the changing map of Australian schooling. According to Lyndsay identity crisis began in earnest with the abandonment of any pretence at “Needs” policies by the Howard Government.

Lyndsay Connors is mistaken. The private religious sector lost its soul – its identity if you wish to call it that, well back in the 1970s when the religious were in fear of losing their State Aid with the DOGS High Court case.

Their lobbyists managed to keep the matter out of the court through fair means or foul for more than a decade and even when the DOGS finally got fiat from the Victorian Attorney General in 1973. [They did everything they could to stop it reaching court.](#)

Then, in 1979 the DOGS spent 26 days in court in a Trial of Facts trying to prove that they were not really religious, or at least, no more religious than State schools. They were not wrong there if you think about what Christianity is really about. J

Justice Lionel Murphy was the only High Court judge to call them out for what they were - but only in his final 1981 judgement. As the Trial judge he was extremely circumspect and proper.

This is all outlined in 'Contempt of Court' published by Arena in 2011 and on the [DOGS website.](#)

What is happening now is merely a consequence of what happened in 1981. The concern of religious schools confronted with the reduction of 'religious liberty' enshrined in the Australian Constitution to mere discrimination legislation which may or may not grant religious exemptions is very real.

It is heartening the Lyndsay Connors, who has promoted 'Needs policies' in her career as a State School parent representative, has finally understood the dissembling nature of the religious education industry.

She completes her article with the statement:

Treating your fellow-citizens as fools: is there a Latin motto for that?

DOGS just say: You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time.

DOGS are in the position of refusing to be fooled from the beginning.

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