

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

PRESS RELEASE 813

**PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE THE *REAL* PROBLEM :
BUT - POLITICIANS TALK AND DO NOTHING**

For the last half century, we have witnessed growing entanglement of religion with the State and the advent of neoliberal economic orthodoxy in Australian politics. As a results, with monotonous regularity, both political parties wax moralistic on educational issues – and do nothing.

Our educational problems are often laid at the feet of an under-resourced public education system. We are falling behind in the international education stakes: Blame the teachers! Back to Basics! Shed crocodile tears for the disadvantaged while making sure they only receive crumbs from the handouts for the wealthy!

Our continuing problems are identified by international organisations as growing inequalities. But again and again, our politicians, our media, even our economic gurus – talk and do nothing.

Public school supporters take comfort in the occasional exposés, but year after year, ‘Needs’ Enquiry after ‘Needs’ Enquiry note that nothing has changed. If anything, with bi-partizan political support, the inequalities perpetuated by our educational arrangements are getting worse.

DOGS wish to do a reality check!

The real, major, continuing problem, going back into our British past is the underlying reality of an enduring cycle of class privilege and anti-democratic corruption with

1. The private school problem: Accountability

Accountability for the expenditure of public money is a basic democratic principle. It inhibits corruption. Yet in the last week, for example, noises were made in [NSW about the lack of scrutiny of Catholic school spending](#). We were told by Jordan Baker in the Sydney Morning Herald that although Catholic schools in NSW receiving \$600 million in taxpayer funding per annum, the NSW government's only budgetary oversight of the Catholic sector's annual funding was a one-page document stating how much money it would be paid.

Former NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said the document, obtained by Greens MP David Shoebridge under freedom of information, showed that schools receiving large amounts of public money were not subject to enough scrutiny.

DOGS have been exposing the corrupt and corrupting lack of accountability by religious bureaucrats for half a century while Auditors General reports are gathering dust – and nothing has been done. Religious authorities thumb their noses at our politicians and threaten them at the ballot box.

2. The Private School Problem : Exclusiveness

The affordability of private school fees is a perennial source of verbal hand wringing amongst parents, grandparents and even economists. This issue usually surfaces at the beginning of the year, but, as the Australian economy slows and wages stagnate, [Unconventional Economist](#) in [Australian Economy, Featured Article](#) on 14 October 2019 at <https://www.macrobusiness.com.au/2019/10/private-school-fees-are-becoming-too-high-to-justify/> are making interesting noises about private school fees becoming too high to justify. But the real question is, justify to whom?

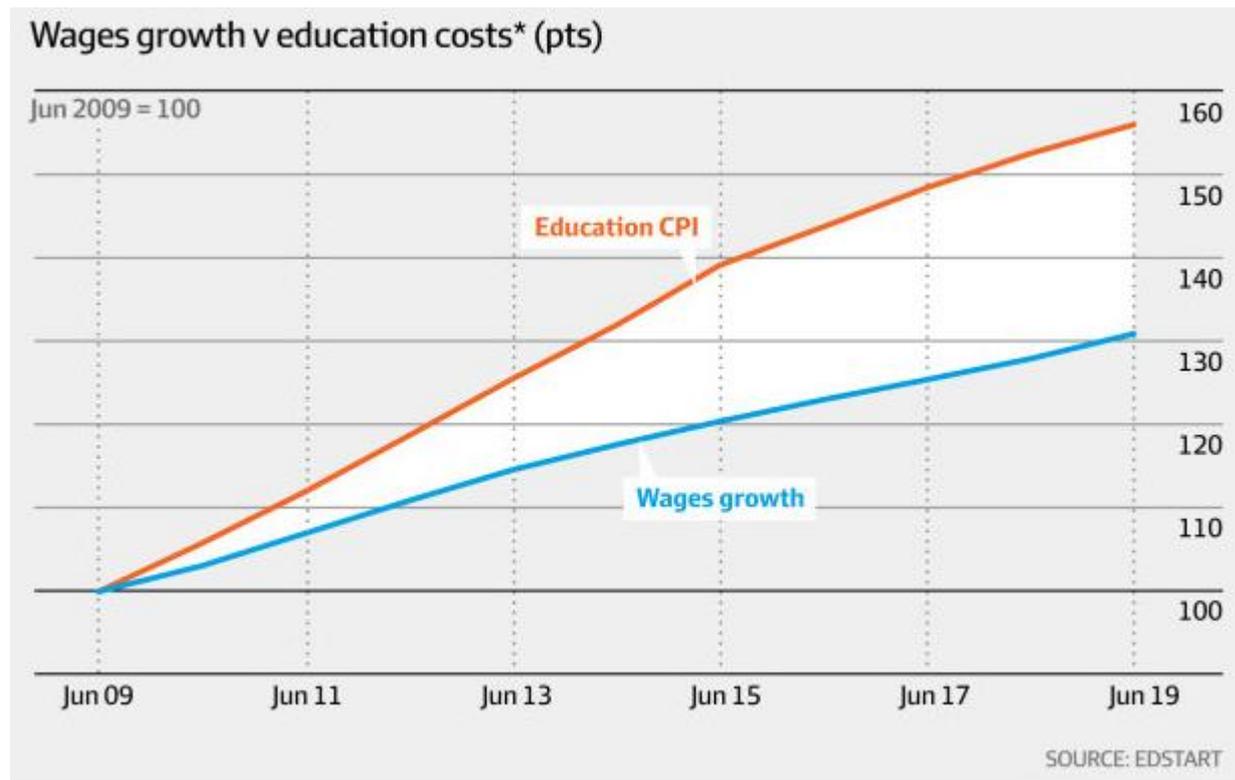
With Australian real household disposable incomes lower today than seven years ago:

The *Australian Financial Review* [reports](#) that private school fees have risen at roughly twice the rate of inflation every year for the past decade:

Edstart, which lends money for education, says private school fees have gone up 3.1 per cent this year – nearly twice the rate of inflation...

A survey of 1600 families by the company across the nation showed that private school fees consumed 35 per cent of net family income, and in South Australia and Victoria the figure was close to 40 per cent...

Edstart chief executive Jack Stevens said parents had always felt school fees were a burden but a decade of fee increases running above inflation had them “up in arms”...

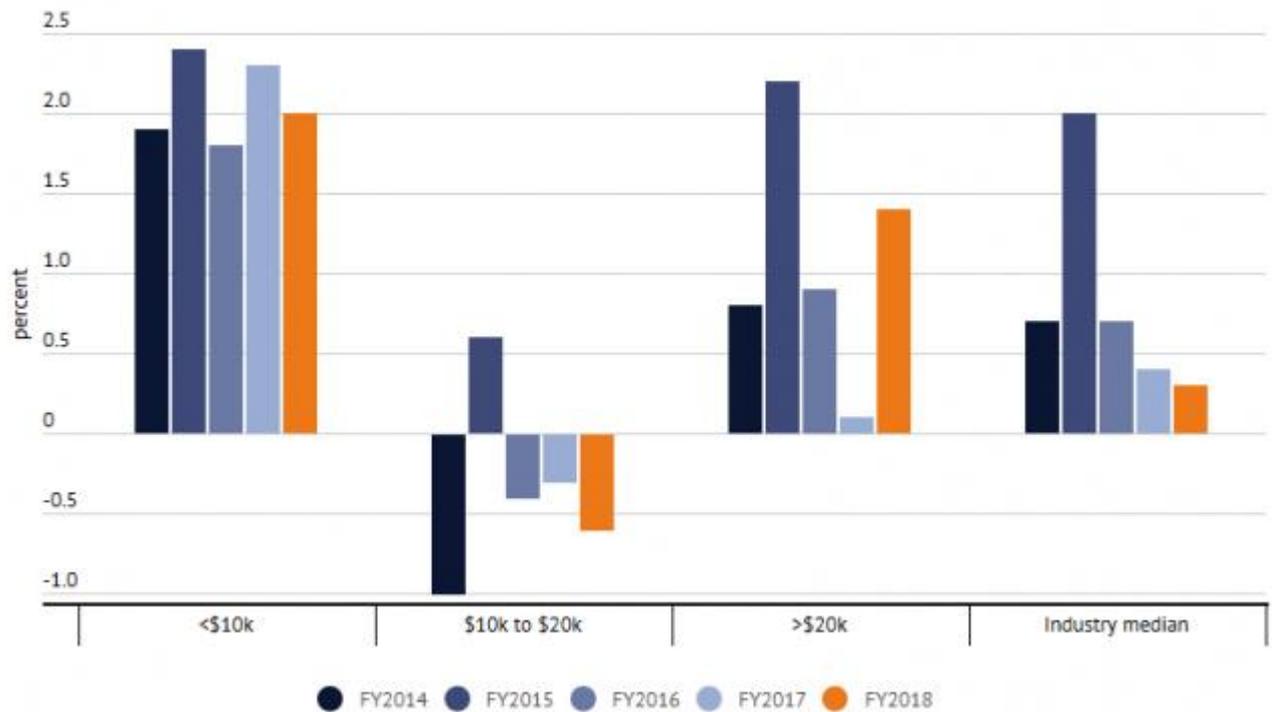


Not surprisingly, then, private school enrolments are [sliding](#) in favour of the public school system:

The proportion of children in government schools grew in 2017 and 2018, Census data shows, ending a run that stretches back to 1970 in which private schools increased their share of Australia’s student population.

Analysis by ANZ reveals that it is mid-tier private schools, which charge between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year in tuition fees, that have been most affected by the shift...

Total student enrolment growth



Source: MySchool data, company financials and ANZ analysis

Census data shows that between 1970 and 2016 the proportion of Australian schoolchildren in government schools declined from 78.1 per cent to 65.2 per cent.

But in 2017, the government sector increased its share to 65.6 per cent, rising to 65.7 per cent last year, in the first consecutive year-on-year rise in the past 50 years.

“While the structural shift towards non-government education has been evident over the last three decades, the trend appears to have halted,” the ANZ report said.

Evidence suggests that the academic benefits of private schools are, at best, very marginal ([see here](#)). While at the same time, the costs of private schools are becoming difficult to justify.

Therefore, with private school fees rising inexorably and household incomes stagnating, expect many more Australian families to choose the public schooling option.

Back in the day, when Mr Kemp was the Minister for Education in the Coalition government, the propping up of wealthy private schools with taxpayer funds was allegedly to make them cheaper. But for whom were they to be made cheaper?

You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. One comment to the article in the Financial Review indicated the educational reality in Australia:

Mal [October 15, 2019 at 10:52 am](#) wrote

...this is the plan:–
private school fees should be high enough to keep them for the elite – the “high wealth” individuals. As noted the
Currently some middle class by working 2 jobs get in and may get an opportunity. The plan is to price them out.
The 10K a year govt subsidy per student, which in many cases is higher than the whole public school support, should be kept as high income welfare. The elite also plan , naturally enough , to maintain the good jobs for their children.

The model is Like England and Oxbridge, where the plan to let some kids in to be changed into members of the English ruling class that brought giants like Boris, who can quote classics to his business “partners”, but can’t do basic math. The better egalitarian plan would be to raise all the boats, rather than give a few with enough money a chance to get on the one boat.

Definition of the Problem

A recent book by Francis Green and David Kynaston entitled *Engines of Privilege* 2018 (Bloomsbury) define the private school problem as a cycle of privilege with the corollary of ‘reproduction of social class’. They argue that

it is hard to imagine a notable improvement in social mobility or growing inequalities while private school continues to play an important role. Allowing an unfettered expenditure on high-quality education for only a small minority of the population condemns our society to seeming perpetuity to a damaging degree of social segregation and inequality

They identify continuing problems, in Britain. These can also be identified in Australian political, legal and social culture during the last fifty years: They are:

- A lack of intellectual will, even among progressives, to prioritise the issue;
- a lack of political will to take on majority, long-established institutions;
- the personal ‘ embeddedness’ of the schools in those in power or positions of influence, because of their own schooling and/or their parental choices;
- an enduring attachment to libertarianism at the expense of equality of opportunity; and, similarly enduring,
- the fallacious belief- in effect wishful thinking – that the schools will somehow ‘ wither’ away.

They conclude that, if serious action is ever to be taken about a deeply damaging private school problem in Britain, these problems will have to be surmounted in coming years.

They list options for reform and recommendations.

But that remains for another weekly Press Release.

LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM
855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS
<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>