

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 900
SAVE OUR SCHOOLS:
TREVOR COBBOLD ON THE
HISTORY AND FATE OF THE
GONSKI REPORT**

The following is the Conclusion of a new working paper published by Save Our Schools. It provides a comprehensive review of the Gonski inquiry and its report on school funding in Australia. The full paper can be downloaded below. Comments on the paper are invited. Notification of issues not covered and mistakes of fact, analysis and interpretation will be appreciated. Please excuse any remaining typos and repetitions. Comments can be sent to the Save Our Schools email address: saveourschools690@gmail.com

The Gonski Report was a watershed in the history of school funding in Australia. It changed the whole focus of school funding from choice under the Howard Government's SES model to making equity in education the centrepiece of education policy. It made the biggest commitment to improving equity in education in the history of school funding in Australia.

The strength of the Report was that it recognised the problem of disadvantage in Australian schooling and made serious recommendations about future funding to reduce disadvantage. It made several contributions to the development of a more equitable school funding system.

First, it adopted far reaching equity objectives. It supported a minimum level of education for all students which it set at Year 12 or its equivalent and the social equity objective that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions.

Second, it established the principles and framework for a funding system to achieve greater equity in education. It recommended a needs-based model comprised of a base funding level and funding loadings for various categories of disadvantage. Public and private schools would be funded according to the same principles and framework.

Third, it recommended a large increase in funding of \$5 billion a year, the large part of which would go to public schools because they enrol the vast majority of disadvantaged students.

Fourth, it recommended a nationally integrated funding model combining Commonwealth and state funding. It also recommended the establishment of an

independent National Schools Resourcing Body to oversee the maintenance and development of the model.

However, the recommendations of the report promised only limited progress towards its ambitious and challenging equity goals. There were several key weaknesses in the report that would serve to perpetuate inequity in education.

First, there were several inconsistencies between the equity goals set in the report and the outcomes targets used to determine the estimated funding increases. The funding estimates were based on more limited outcomes targets than those implied by the dual equity objective adopted by the report. In particular, the Report adopted a limited measure of adequacy in education and ignored its own social equity objective in setting the standard for the SRS.

Second, too much of the additional funding would be directed to adequately resourced schools because the SRS was set too high. It left too little to be directed at disadvantaged students. This was exacerbated by funding loadings for low SES students, Indigenous students and students with limited English proficiency that were far too small and unlikely to prove effective.

Third, the new “no losers” guarantee was a severe self-imposed constraint on the scope of what the review could recommend. The review panel effectively rewrote its formal terms of reference in adhering to the Government’s guarantee that no school will lose a single dollar. This self-inflicted weakness undermined its commitment to equity and served to sustain inequity. It meant that the over-funding of many well-off private schools that resulted from exceptions to the Howard Government’s SES model would be formally incorporated into the future funding model. High SES private schools would continue to receive large amounts of government funding which contributes to their large resource advantage over lower SES government and private schools. This funding could be better used in funding disadvantaged schools.

Fourth, the Report’s recommendations for the funding of private schools were based on the flawed concept of capacity to contribute. All available measures of the capacity to contribute over-estimate the financial need of schools because they ignore income and in-kind resources provided by grandparents and ignore private donations to private schools and their assets. These omissions from the assessment of capacity to contribute results in significant over-funding of private schools.

Fifth, the Report’s support for greater resort to philanthropy in funding government schools had little regard to the influence that philanthropic organisations have acquired over education policy in some overseas countries and their predilection to support market-based education policies.

Sixth, the Report’s support for greater autonomy for principals in making decisions about budgeting and staffing was somewhat cavalier in that it had

little regard to the extensive research evidence that shows that autonomy in these areas has little to no impact on student achievement.

However, these flaws should not detract from recognising the contribution of the Report in to achieving a more equitable funding model. It made equity in education the central focus of education policy and funding and promised a much needed funding boost for disadvantaged schools. It provided the basis for developing a genuine nationally integrated needs-based funding system. Unfortunately, its weaknesses meant that the massive over-funding of private schools would continue

<https://saveourschools.com.au/funding/a-review-of-the-gonski-school-funding-inquiry-and-report/#comment-48181>

DOGS COMMENT

A marvellous informative paper. Worth reading in full if only to understand the complete intransigence of the Coalition and the Independent Schools of Victoria. However, DOGS are saddened that people still think that a needs policy is even possible when you have to deal with religious men. Many place power and wealth before genuine compassion and the education of each and every Australian child - not just the chosen few. We are now more than paying for an expensive denominational system. Schools which are not open to all children and teachers and parents - with offence to none – should be taken over and made into public schools.

Our 19th century forefathers trod this road. In 1844 a Select Committee on Education in NSW rejected a denominational system and recommended a general system of education – which became our public system.

They said: ‘The first great objection to the denominational system is its expense; the number of schools in a given locality ought to depend on the number of children requiring instruction which that locality contains. To admit any other principle is to depart from those maxims of wholesome economy upon which public money should always be administered. It appears to your Committee impossible not to see, that the very essence of a denominational system is to leave the majority uneducated, in order thoroughly to imbue the minority with peculiar tenets. It is a system always tending to excess or defect...It places the State in the awkward dilemma, or either applying money whose expenditure it is not permitted to regulate, or of interfering between the Clergy and their superiors....your Committee have thought it better to recommend that one uniform system shall be established for the whole of the colony, and that an adherence

to that system should be made the indispensable condition under which alone public aid will be granted.'

It took another thirty six years before politicians like Parkes finally confronted the religious hierarchies and withdrew all public funds from sectarian schools. The national system – now our public systems- were finally able to flourish. If we don't learn from our history, then.....well what are we doing right now?

NB: A Paper entitled *From Karmel to Gonski* outlining increasing inequalities in both Australian educational and social developments under the cloak of a so-called 'Needs' policy was presented by Jean Ely at Melbourne University in November 2020. It is on our website home page. www.adogs.info/

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