

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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STATE AID TO SECTARIAN SCHOOLS

HAS FAILED

PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVOCATES SHOULD JUST OPPOSE IT AND STOP FUDGING AROUND THE EDGES OF A DISCREDITED NEEDS POLICY

When State Aid to private sectarian schools re-commenced after eighty years in the 1960s, DOGS predicted that politicians and the religious lobby would relegate the public system to a 'wastebasket system' for the poor, disadvantaged and unwanted – if it survived at all. How right we were.

In the 1970s and 1980s Adjunct Associate Professor Lyndsay Connors of Sydney University labelled the DOGS - 'sectarian.' Now, with the benefit of hindsight, Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow, administrators of the defunct Schools Commission 'Needs' policy, are bemoaning the burden of disadvantaged students imposed on the public system by current funding policies.

It remains to be seen whether they have the intestinal fortitude to take on the major beneficiary of State Aid – the Church lobby. DOGS note the interpretation of the history of State Aid written by Lyndsay Connors¹ and

¹ Lyndsay Connors is an Honorary Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Sydney, and a member of the Council for the Order of Australia. Lyndsay Connors first came to the attention of DOGS as a parent representative on the School Commission in its early days. She supported Joan Kirner, another ACSSO representative on the Commission in the 1970s when she attempted to change ACSSO policy from a No-State Aid policy to a 'Needs' policy. As a Schools Commission representative, she refrained from writing any dissenting reports when federal funding of the private sector outpaced that of the public sector. In recent years she has enjoyed an academic career. She is currently outspoken on behalf of greater funding for public

Jim McMorrow² in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 31 December 2011 at <http://m.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/faulty-system-in-class-of-its-own-20111230-1pfft.html>.

- *Over the past half-century, Australia has been conducting a radical experiment with schools funding. This has resulted in changes to schooling in Australia that now requires more than financial tinkering to fix.*
- *This experiment has changed the student profile in our public schools and left them to take on the "heavy lifting", but without the commensurate share of resources, particularly for the schools most affected*

education, but not to the point of rejecting State Aid.

² Jim McMorrow is currently Jim McMorrow is Honorary Associate Professor, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney.² A skilful bureaucrat, he worked with the Schools Commission and the New South Wales Department of Education. Like Lyndsay Connors he is in part responsible for the 'Needs' policy administered by the Schools Commission and expanded by the Keating, Howard and Gillard governments.

- *The focus of school funding policy since the middle of the last century has largely been on arrangements for the public financing of disparate types of non-government school. For public schools, it has been concerned largely with what can only be called dabbling with the financing of the schools serving the least advantaged students. These schools have become progressively concentrated in the public sector.*
- *Along with their other admission criteria, non-government schools have been able to continue charging and setting the level of their private fees, and to combine this income with high levels of public funding driven by enrolments. This has increased the number and range of private school providers, generally religious.*

Here you have the ‘development of a ‘wastebasket system’ in acceptable language. The ‘*profile of students in our public schools*’ has left those schools to take on the ‘*heavy lifting*’ – *without the commensurate share of resources*’ for ‘*the least advantaged students.*’ Good old fashioned ‘State Aid’ is described as *arrangements for the public financing of disparate types of non-government school which has increased the number and range of private school providers, generally religious.*

DOGS ask: What else did the promoters of State Aid for all those ‘poor needy parish schools’ expect?

In 2012 two thirds of Australian children in public schools are suffering because of ‘State Aid’ policies espoused by governments courting the sectarian vote and public school supporters running scared of the sectarian label. How do Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow think they can turn back the tide without confronting the powerful church school lobby?

DOGS wish Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow Good Luck with the alternate rhetoric!

And when will they finally have the courage to say with a lot of Australian citizens and parents: **Wrong Way! Go Back.!**

The Teacher problem

To be fair to Lyndsay Connors, her chief interests now lies in the provision of teachers . Her research in this area is of particular interest. She has some interesting things to say on this matter:

- *Though not widely known or acknowledged, a key feature of changes to Australia's school funding policy has been the progressive transfer of the salaries of teachers in non-government schools to the public purse. Largely bankrolled by the federal government, this has been accompanied by a shift in the balance of enrolments from the public to the private school sector.*
- *The total salary bill for non-government schools in Australia in 2009 was \$7 billion. In the same year, their total recurrent grants from federal and state/territory governments was about \$9 billion, well in excess of this salary bill.*

Meanwhile, Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow are trying to explain current inequities, no longer in terms of a sectarian divide, but merely in terms of *parents exercising what may be mild preferences and for schools to have a differential capacity to select their student intake.*

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