

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 461

GONSKI : FIFTY YEARS FUNDING OF DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS

HAS FAILED THE NATION'S CHILDREN – DISMALLY

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Gonski was asked to reconcile the irreconcilable. He was asked to improve educational equity and reduce disadvantage as well as fund a denominational system which does the opposite.

Our nineteenth century forebears discovered that only public systems that are free, secular and universal offer equity and correct disadvantage. The Denominational system has managed to prove once again that they espouse privilege for the few while disadvantaging the majority.

DOGS predictions of 1964 have been proved right – sadly. Fifty Years of State Aid has had a deleterious effect on the majority of Australian children and Australia is swiftly falling behind in the international education stakes.

Gonski wants to give money to government schools - a sizeable slice of \$5 billion. But this can only happen if sectarian schools are paid off first with a healthy baseline 'resource standard', a voucher by another name. So wealthy schools will receive large funding increases and rot the system – again. The only way around the problem is to make the denominational schools taxpayers are paying for genuinely public schools, rationalize them, and stop State Aid.

Promoters of a genuine Needs policy like Trevor Cobbold of Save Our Schools: (*Gillard Turns Her Back on the Disadvantaged* at <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/funding/gillard-turns-her-back-on-the-disadvantaged> and the ABC's Stephen Long (*Gonski, Plutocracy and Public Policy* at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-02-22/long-gonski-plutocracy-and-public-policy/3843906> have looked at the data collated by the Gonski Review and note the tale it tells of massive educational equality.

They still shy away from the sectarian nature of the State Aid issue: the unholy alliance forged between the Protestant and Catholic religious groups in 1973 that places our public systems in grave jeopardy. If the wealthy Protestant schools lose a

cent, the unholy alliance might unravel. But Long and Cobbold do at least tackle the equity issue head on.

Stephen Long writes:

The Gonski report shows that the wealthier 'independent' schools (to use the report's terminology) are bastions of privilege, while government schools are a repository for the disadvantaged.

It smashes the myth that the non-Catholic private schools are educating 'middle Australia' and boast a large share of students from families of modest means.

On the contrary, close to half of all students in these schools come from families in the top quarter of the population for 'socio-educational advantage': that is, their parents have relatively high-paid, high-skilled jobs and high levels of educational attainment.

That's more than double the share in the government school sector.

About three quarters of all students in the 'independent' schools come from families in the top half of the population for socio-educational advantage.

Long is not prepared to tackle the Roman Catholic Church which might still, billions of dollars later, have under-funded schools. And he bemoans the fact that the Labor Government tied Gonski's hands from the start. But at least the cat is out of the bag.

Trevor Cobbold writes:

What we have is a new "no losers" guarantee which writes the Howard Government's guarantee into the funding bottom line and indexes it into the future.

This sleight-of-hand brings an even greater problem for the future. A major absurdity in the old "SES" scheme is that private schools on the same SES score got vastly different levels of government funding, because of the multitude of special deals that had been done. This was particularly true of the Catholic sector.

The Gonski review has recommended continuing a SES funding scheme, but with schools on the same SES score receiving the same funding. The Government's "no school will lose a single dollar" mantra means that the current funding maintained rates at each SES score will drive the funding rates in the Gonski model. The funding baseline in the Gonski model at each SES score must be that of most over-funded school in order to achieve similar levels of funding.

This can only mean a massive funding boost for many private schools. For example, Cranbrook will have its per student funding doubled to ensure it gets the same funding rate as Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College which has the same SES score but is funding maintained. Similarly, Melbourne Grammar will have its funding more than doubled in order to get the same rate as Loreto Mandeville Hall. Canberra Boys and Girls Grammar schools will get their funding more than doubled to bring it up to the level of Marist College North Shore in Sydney which is classified on the same SES score.

These are not isolated examples. Many, many private schools will get a huge funding boost under the new model. Save Our Schools will publish further analysis in the near future.

The strength of the Gonski report is that it has recognised the problem of disadvantage in Australian schooling, and has made serious recommendations about future funding in this area, with a school resources standard and loadings for various forms of disadvantage.

The weakness – a self-inflicted weakness – is that the report is designed to fit within the framework of current government commitment to the idea that no school will lose a dollar in funding.

The end result is that the current situation continues. There is no additional funding to address disadvantage, while private schools continue to be over-funded according to the SES funding model, and will have that over-funding indexed into the future.

But at least the \$5 billion target is now clear. It is an eminently justifiable down-payment on a system that will really start to address equity issues. This is the challenge to a government committed, at least rhetorically, to equity.

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