

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 464

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION IMITATING THE ENGLISH CLASS SYSTEM

March 8 2012

The MySchool website and Gonski Committee research papers have exposed the growing social division between the sectarian and public school systems, the underpinning of a growing class/caste system in this country.

Our colonial forebears attempted to leave the British class system behind and largely succeeded in doing so – with the opening of public schools to all children without discrimination.

Not any more. Our sectarian system is devoting more and more of its public and private endowment to relegating children from the lower orders to our public schools.

In this Australia is merely imitating its Imperial founder, Great Britain.

In an article in *The Guardian*, entitled, ‘Church Schools Shun Poorest Pupils’, 5 March 2012, Jessica Shepherd and Simon Rogers note that *most Catholic and Church of England schools have a higher proportion of middle-class children than the local population*. They claim that *England's faith schools are failing to mirror their local communities by shunning the poorest pupils in their area*,

The Guardian analysed the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals – a key indicator of poverty– in each of England's 19,534 state, non-selective primary and secondary schools. All schools designated for children with special needs were taken out.

The Roman Catholic church, which has repeatedly insisted its schools are inclusive, comes out particularly badly in the examination of data published by the Department for Education

(DfE) last month and in December. Three-quarters of Catholic primary and secondary schools have a more affluent mix of pupils than their local area.

The figures also reveal that most Church of England (CofE) primary schools have an intake that is untypically affluent and more middle-class than a year ago. The findings will fuel claims that what in England are called faith schools have been picking pupils from well-off families by selecting on the basis of religion.

The schools have been grouped according to whether they are affiliated to the CofE, the Catholic church or have no religious character.

St John's Church of England primary school in Croydon, south London, for example has 7% of pupils eligible for free meals. The proportion in the borough is 24%.

This analysis reads like research findings presented to the Gonski Committee.

Richy Thompson from the [British Humanist Association](#) said the data gave "*further cause for concern that allowing religious discrimination within our state system exacerbates socioeconomic inequality as well as being religiously and ethnically divisive*".

He said: "We urge the government to end faith-based selection.

DOGS note that the public funding of education institutions which discriminate on the basis of class, cult, culture or ability to pay has turned Australia's egalitarian society back into one that mirrors the British society, a society with all the trammels of class, caste and religious division which Australia attempted to avoid.

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