

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 469

PETER GARRETT AND THE GONSKI REPORT

19 April 2012

- In his address to the Sydney Institute¹ entitled *Developing a uniquely Australian school education system*² Federal Education Minister Garrett:
 - started with the ‘national interest’ rhetoric;
 - attempted to bury the private/public debate; and
 - effectively privatized our public education systems by
 - isolating schools from their central State administrations;
 - undermining teacher unions with national professional standards for teachers together with performance pay
 - control of curriculum with a National curriculum authority together with standardized testing and
 - the introduction of a resource standard or voucher system of education funding for both public and private schools.

DOGS alert public education supporters to the dangers ahead.

¹ The Sydney Institute is a conservative think tank . Gerard Henderson is its Director.

² <http://www.investinaustralia.com/news/developing-uniquely-australian-school-education-system%E2%80%94address-sydney-institute-12c3>

The National Rhetoric

Garrett drew on the arguments used by Peter Board and Frank Tate at the turn of the C20 when they steered the public education sector into sector education. He said that education :

1. is the key to our prospects as a nation
2. Ensured a world class education for its citizens is a nation building enterprise.

reform has to be a national enterprise.

is unique in public policy terms because it reaches into every household in a way that is manifestly different to other arms of government.

provides experiences that stay with us forever.
also provides us with a productive future workforce;

3. delivers an informed citizenry.
is a great enabler; creating scientists and mathematicians, artists and tradesmen, doctors, lawyers and...politicians.

unlocks potential that lies within every person, it lifts us up to realise our dreams and ambitions.

benefits each individual and strengthens communities and workplaces.

is not something that can be left to chance or personal circumstance.

and finally,

It is not in the nation's interest to allow this to happen, particularly at this moment in our history.

Garrett went on to wax lyrical about *the creation of a modern economy that is diverse and resilient with a nimble, creative, empathic and problem solving people, admitting that the standard of our education, as is widely acknowledged, is crucial.*

The rest of his speech consists of an interesting interpretation of Australian educational history, together with admissions of an extraordinary failure to ensure equity in our educational offerings to the nation's children in the last fifty years. He notes that we are failing to keep up with the international Joneses:

2009 PISA data tells us that 25% of Australian students from the lowest SES backgrounds are failing to reach minimum proficiency levels across all the literacy domains tested.

What really, is he intending to do about it?

Although Garrett is prepared to use Finland as an example of a successful education system, he is not prepared to bite the bullet of the lack of public support for the private sector in that country.

He rejects the no-State-Aid position, as well as the privatization of public education position. But his policies will lead to the virtual privatization of the public systems throughout Australia.

The realistic cynic can read between the rhetoric and political spin to analyse the long term plan: The Federal Government plans, through the power of the purse

- to break down the State administration of public schools by isolating public schools into discrete institutions . The spin words are ‘Empowering local schools.’
- to break down the power of the teacher unions by the introduction of national standards for teachers and school principals.
- to control what is actually taught in schools through a national curriculum authority and testing procedures.
- to placate the private sector by providing a version of a voucher system with a sideways kick for ‘disadvantaged’ students. So we go forward to another private school rorting of another version of the ‘Needs’ policy.
- And all because, back in 1973 Karmel would not bite the bullet and admit (as he bemoaned later) that only institutions that enroll ALL children regardless of class creed, culture or ability to pay, can serve ALL the disadvantaged.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the wealthier independent schools are strutting their political stuff to ensure that they retain their privileged funding status. They are crying poor and threatening further hikes in school fees.

The Catholic sector is strangely quiet. No doubt the major beneficiary of public funding to their highly centralized system of education is already doing its deals in the corridors of power.

DOGS predict that Mr Garrett can spout as much nationalist rhetoric as he pleases. Unless complete public control of private education institutions is on the agenda and these institutions are rationalized and forced to accept open enrolment and public accountability, ownership and control, Australian will continue to fall behind in the international race.

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