

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

## PRESS RELEASE 473

### JOE HOCKEY HERALDS THE END OF THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

#### AND

#### ENTITLEMENT OF CHILDREN TO A FREE PUBLIC EDUCATION

**If the Coalition comes to power in Canberra Australia is looking at the winding back of educational services into the eighteenth century – before the Age of Enlightenment.**

**Joe Hockey and Abbot, both products of the religious system of education, are prepared to do with one fell swoop what Gillard is doing by stealth.**

In a widely-reported speech in London in April by [Federal Shadow Treasurer, Joe Hockey](#) said that the **age of entitlement** is over and Australia has to re-think its approach to universal free services.

He called for a reduction in universal free services and proposed a co-payment by users of these services. He cited the example of health services in Australia which are partly funded through compulsory levies paid to either government or private health insurers.

Interviewed about his speech on the [ABC's Lateline](#), Hockey said that the Coalition will be looking closely at a whole range of entitlements. He said that Australia must reduce the size of government.

Hockey's speech along with the proposals of Tim Hawkes from the Kings School Parramatta ( See Press Release 472 at <http://www.adogs.info/images/pr472.pdf> ) raises the spectre of fees in government schools. He included education as part of the entitlement system that he says should be wound back. Although he did not say so explicitly, the logical implication of his argument is that universal free public education should be abolished and means-tested fees introduced in government schools.

As Save Our Schools have pointed out in a Press Release on 11 May 2012 influential advisors of the Liberal Party have proposed just this.

[Gerard Henderson](#), a former chief-of-staff for John Howard and executive director of the Sydney Institute which the Liberal Party draws on for policy advice, recently specifically advocated means-tested fees in government schools. He even used the same private health insurance example as Hockey.

[John Roskam](#), executive director of the Institute of Public Affairs and former executive director of the Liberal Party's Menzies Research Centre, says that free government schools is a notion "whose time has passed". He says free public education is "[middle class welfare](#)".

[The Centre for Independent Studies](#), from which the Liberal Party also draws policy initiatives, has said that compulsory fees in government schools in high income areas "is not an inherently bad idea", although it does fear it is "political poison".

[Andrew Norton](#), former education advisor to David Kemp as Federal Education Minister in the Howard Government and former research fellow at CIS now at the Grattan Institute, also advocates abolishing free government school education.

A notable feature of Hockey's speech is that it was given major billing at the [Institute of Economic Affairs](#) in London. The Institute is the leading free market economics think tank in the UK. It advocates a free market in education and sees for-profit schools as the future. One of its writers has called for [a global chain of Tesco schools](#).

There is clearly a push for an end to free education in circles around the Liberal Party. Hockey's speech is grounded in a political and economic philosophy which rejects universal provision of government services and advocates extreme free market approaches to public policy issues. While Hockey does not specifically target public education in his speech, he does mention it and the implication for free education is clear.

Joe Hockey and the Coalition are forgetting a number of things. DOGS points them to the 'real world' of taxation and government accountability in a democratic society.

- Citizens pay taxes. They pay a wide variety of taxes. They have been paying the GST since 2001 on the basis that this was necessary for the continued provision of high quality services.
- They expect services - high value services - for their money.
- A free secular and universal education system is one of the basic services.
- It is the duty of our Australian governments to provide a high quality public education system for every Australian child.
- Anyone who wants a private service should to pay for it.
- Public school parents are now paying double education taxes – taxes for a public system and taxes for a myriad of private religious schools that they either cannot or do not wish to use.
- Public school parents represent almost two thirds of parents in Australia. They represent a lot of voters.

## HOWEVER

Under the free market neo-liberal, cannibalistic capital systems operating in some western countries, the ‘age of entitlement’ applies to

- banks and corporations that are ‘too big to fail’ or
- mining corporations that are ‘too big to pay taxes.’
- Education for the rich

Hockey admits that the Coalition fuelled the entitlement system when in government. In fact, it created an entitlement for the rich when it introduced the current SES funding model for private schools which delivered huge windfall gains to many of the wealthiest schools in Australia. It also introduced the “no losers” guarantee which has protected and extended these windfall gains for over 10 years.

About 140 exclusive private schools who serve the richest families in the country will get over \$660 million in Federal funding this year. They also get state government funding.

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS has done the figures to prove the real beneficiaries of Hockey’s own ‘Age of Entitlement’. Trevor Cobbold writes:

*Geelong Grammar, the most expensive school in Australia, will get \$5.2 million in Federal Government funding this year plus about \$1 million from the Victorian Government. Yet, 73% of its students come from families in the top SES quartile. Its school fees for Years 11 & 12 are \$30,820 per student this year.*

*Sydney Grammar is the most expensive school in NSW. It will get nearly \$4 million in Federal funding and about \$2 million in state government funding this year. Nearly 90% of its students come from the top SES quartile and its Year 12 fees for this year are \$27,324 per student.*

*Why the most expensive and privileged private schools in the country should each get \$6 million a year in government funding defies comprehension.*

*In addition, 1075 private schools get \$615 million a year more than they are entitled to according to their officially assessed SES score. They are over-funded according to the SES funding model’s own funding criteria. These are the so-called “funding maintained” schools that benefit from the “no losers” guarantee. All this funding goes to medium and high income private schools. None of it goes to low income private schools.*

*Together, Federal government funding for exclusive private schools and the over-funding of higher income private schools cost the taxpayer about \$1.2 billion a year.*

*Despite Hockey’s admonition about entitlements, the Coalition says that the schools are entitled to this largesse. The shadow minister for education, Christopher Pyne, defends it, saying that “every child has a basic minimum entitlement for Government support” [[Federal](#)*

[Coalition Submission to the Gonski Review of School Funding, 20 March 2011](#)]. He told the Parliament in July last year that the Coalition supports the over-funding for private schools (called funding maintained schools) as part of the SES funding model.

Tony Abbott also supports this entitlement. He says “Every Australian child is entitled to government assistance towards his or her education” [[The Australian, 5 January 2010](#)].

And, far from winding back this entitlement of the well-off, the Coalition wants to extend it. At the last election, it promised a 50% tax rebate on school fees. It is estimated to cost \$1 billion a year. [Daily Telegraph columnist, Maralyn Parker](#) called it “the most blatant offer of middle class welfare I have seen in any election” [21 July 2010]. [Christopher Pyne re-affirmed the policy](#) in February this year.

While it wants to protect and extend the entitlements of the well-off, the Coalition also says it will strip away some of the funding going to disadvantaged students and schools.

At the last election, it said it would make [savings of \\$750 million in the Smarter Schools national partnerships](#), including taking \$330 million from the Low SES School Communities program. This reduction would primarily impact on low SES government schools.

This is the most blatant hypocrisy. For the Coalition, it appears that entitlements for the well-off are to be protected and extended. It is entitlements for the poor that have to be wound back.

The entitlement argument for government funding of private schools serves to support advantage and privilege. It provides an added resource advantage for well-off families. It exacerbates the resource advantage of higher income private schools over schools which serve disadvantaged communities. It ensures that high SES students continue to get much better results than low SES students. It compounds social inequality in education.

The Gonski report, and much other research, shows a huge achievement gap between rich and poor in Australia’s schools. Low SES students are two to three years behind their high SES peers at age 15. The gap between students in high SES and low SES schools is even larger – three to four years. Some 22 to 28% of low SES students do not achieve international proficiency standards in reading, mathematics and science compared to only 4-5% of high SES students.

The report shows that reducing these gaps is the most fundamental challenge facing Australia’s education system. It recommended an additional \$5 billion to reduce disadvantage and improve equity in education. Removing government funding for exclusive private schools and the over-funding of higher income private schools would be a good down-payment. It would provide over one-fifth of the funding recommended by the report.

Pyne opposes abolishing the SES funding model and any funding reductions for exclusive private schools ([ABC AM, 22 February 2012](#)). He rejects what he labels as “means-testing of private schools”, thus ensuring that the rich continue to get millions in government funding. He wants continued full indexation of funding maintained schools, thus ensuring that their massive over-funding is maintained. He specifically rejects reducing the large achievement gap between rich and poor as the main focus for education policy.

*The Coalition is fundamentally committed to protecting entitlements to education funding for the rich in private schools. The threat posed by Hockey's speech is to a universal public education system that provides for all-comers without discrimination and without regard to capacity to pay. The implication of his argument is that education would everywhere be subject to capacity to pay which, as elsewhere, leads to reduced quality of service for the poor, greater social segregation in provision and more inequality in outcomes.*

*The Coalition must come clean on education funding in the light of Hockey's speech. Is it considering introducing means-tested fees in government schools?*

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