

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 475

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ABDICATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVISION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION.

7 June 2012

- ❖ The Victorian Government has embraced without question the neo-liberal ideology of the user-pays system in education.
- ❖ Although the fruits of this ideology have produced cannibalistic capitalism and looming recession throughout the western world, the Baillieu government are contracting out the education of our children to the denominational rather than the public system.
- ❖ Premier Baillieu and Education Minister Dixon have remembered nothing and learnt less from the failure of the sectarian system to educate Australian children in the Nineteenth century.
- ❖ They bow down before the churchmen and the market laid up in heaven. They are unable to emulate successful countries like Finland – which funds only a vibrant public system open to all children.

Failure to Provide Schools in Melbourne

It is the duty of a democratic government to provide for the education of all its citizens and the only system which can do this is a public system. Such a system is public in purpose and outcome; public in access; ownership; control; funding; accountability; and **provision**.

This is not happening in Victoria. There is provision for very few new schools in the budget and the maintenance budget for existing schools is less than the increases provided to sectarian and dependent schools.

The rot commenced in earnest after the sectarian takeover of the Victorian Education Department in the 1980s and continued in the 1990s when Kennett closed and sold off a large number of public schools. The loss of these schools is now glaringly obvious in the inner city and outlying suburbs. Caroline Milburn in *The Age*, May 28 reported that urgent action was demanded as inner suburbs cried out for new schools. But all that Minister Dixon will provide is more enquiries. The capital works outlined in the Dixon budget do not include any new secondary schools in the Melbourne area. <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/3756-coalition-government-continues-major-investment-in-school-capital-works-across-victoria.html>. But then, Dixon comes from the Catholic Education Office and his church has never accepted the involvement of the State in education, let alone secondary education.

Caroline Milburn wrote:

PRESSURE is mounting on the state government to meet inner urban demands for more schools, with parents waiting anxiously for it to release its reviews on education shortages in their areas.

Reviews into the need for new schools in South Melbourne, Yarraville, Coburg and North Melbourne-Docklands are due to be released this year by Education Minister Martin Dixon.

Another feasibility study for a new secondary school in Prahran is about to start, after the go-ahead in the budget this month....

"I'm contacted on a weekly basis by people concerned about school issues, particularly about where they will send their child after primary school," says Clem Newton-Brown, state Liberal MP for Prahran, whose electorate does not have a year 7-12 government high school. "Of all my policies that I went to the last election with, the campaign for a new high school has been the most popular one."

Booming birth rates, rapid growth in apartment developments and a tendency for young families to stay in the inner suburbs to raise children, has left government schools unable to cope with rising demand.

In the Prahran electorate the nearest co-educational government high school is Elwood Secondary College, five kilometres away.

"My students would have to catch public transport two or three times to even get to Elwood," says Peter Clifton, principal of South Yarra Primary School. "The feasibility study is a step in

the right direction but it needs to be completed as soon as possible. I have about 50 families in grades 5 and 6 who are effectively disenfranchised from direct access to a local, co-educational secondary school."

Port Phillip mayor Rachel Powning has written to the minister warning that growth in the number of young children in the area is much higher than estimates, based on 2006 census data, the education department is using as part of its feasibility study for a new primary school.

A more recent study commissioned by the council found a new primary school should be built much sooner than the five to 10-year time frame suggested.

On Thursday Cr Powning and Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews will speak at a public meeting in South Melbourne to discuss community anger about the area's overcrowded schools.

Many families who campaigned for the reopening of the local high school, Albert Park College, face the prospect of being excluded from the new school's enrolment zone. Last month the school, rebuilt in 2011, announced plans to shrink its intake zone to cope with soaring demand for places.

"Families are feeling very anxious and some are devastated that their children will not be given the same opportunity as others for a good-quality public education," says Cr Powning, who is seeking an urgent meeting with the minister to discuss the need for a junior campus of the high school and build a new primary school.

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/urgent-action-demanded-as-inner-suburbs-cry-out-for-new-schools-20120526-1zaz8.html#ixzz1w9gBlotc>



Port Phillip mayor Rachel Powning. PHOTO: JUSTIN MCMANUS

Meanwhile, the Mowbray College debacle (a private school bankrupted with \$18 million in debt) See <http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/mowbray-college-closure-means-influx->

for-schools/ indicates that for aspirational parents with limited income private education is not a viable option. If they are not careful, a public secondary school will no longer be a 'safety net' choice either. Meanwhile, if Mowbray College is sold, will the public Treasury be reimbursed for the hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money sunk into a failed enterprise?

DOGS note that taxpayers and parents will need to fight the battle of their nineteenth century forebears once again. They will need to take on the churches and governments wedded to a neo-liberal ideology and demand the rights of their children to a first rate public education.

THE DOGS RADIO PROGRAM

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855 ON THE AM DIAL

12.00 NOON SATURDAYS