

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 1002

## SWEDISH SCHOOLS MINISTER DECLARES 'FREE' PRIVATE SCHOOL SYSTEM A FAILURE

In a recent book [Waiting for Gonski :How Australia Failed its Schools](#), Tom Greenwell and Chris Bonnor put forward a proposal to fully fund private schools. subject to them not charging fees and not enrolling students on the basis of ability.

In their [Press Release 997](#) DOGS criticised this proposal and referred to a similar criticism produced by [Trevor Cobbold of Save Our Schools](#).

There was nothing particularly original in the Greenwell Bonner proposal, although it was understandable that they were casting about for any compromise that might present a way out of the current intractable education crisis. For Australia is swiftly descending into an inequitable, class ridden and tribal society as we divide our children on the basis of class, creed and colour. Similar 'free' private school experiments have been introduced in the charter schools of America, the British 'free' schools of Michael Gove, and the '*friskolor*' of Sweden.

But public school advocates in both America and Britain have little time for either the 'charter' schools or the British 'free' schools. And now , according to the UK *Guardian*, the [Swedish Schools Minister has declared the free' private school system a failure](#). The following report from Miranda Bryant in Stockholm on 10 November describes the situation in that country.:

### **Lotta Edholm aims to limit the profit-making ability of *friskolor* in her plans for education reform**

[Miranda Bryant in Stockholm](#)

- Sweden has declared a "system failure" in the country's free schools, pledging the biggest shake-up in 30 years and calling into question a model in which profit-making companies run state education.

Sweden's *friskolor*– privately run schools funded by public money – have attracted international acclaim, including from Britain, with the [former](#)

[education secretary Michael Gove using them as a model](#) for hundreds of new British free schools opened under David Cameron's government.

But in recent years, a drop in Swedish educational standards, rising inequality and growing discontent among teachers and parents has helped fuel political momentum for change.

A report by Sweden's biggest teachers' union, Sveriges Lärare, warned in June of the negative consequences of having become one of the world's most marketised school systems, including the viewing of pupils and students as customers and a lack of resources resulting in increased dissatisfaction.

The union demanded the phasing out of for-profit and marketised schools and in the meantime that they reinvested any profits in their businesses. "Joint-stock companies are not a long-term sustainable form of operation to run school activities," it said.

Now Lotta Edholm, a Liberal who was appointed schools minister last year during the formation of [Sweden's Moderate party-run minority coalition](#), has launched an investigation into the issue which, she said, would oversee her plans for reform.

"It will not be possible [in the reformed system] to take out profits at the expense of a good education," she told the Guardian at the ministry of education and research in Stockholm.

Edholm said she planned to "severely limit" schools' ability to withdraw profits and to introduce fines for free schools that did not comply.

"It can't be that the state pumps in lots of money so that you can improve your business and at the same time a portion of that money goes out to you as profits. That we will put a stop to," she said.

The largest profits were made by upper secondary schools, known in Sweden as *gymnasieskola*, she said. "There it has been easier to make profits through having bad quality."

There are thousands of *friskolor* – directly translated as "independent schools" but known as "free schools" – across Sweden, with a higher proportion in cities. About 15% of all primary schoolchildren (six- to 16-year-olds) and 30% of all upper secondary school pupils (16- 19-year-olds) go to a free school.

Edholm said she could not put a number on how many schools were experiencing these issues but said the problem lay in the system itself. "It's not just a problem that it is a number of schools, but it becomes a system failure of everything."

She also pledged to tighten rules on religious influence on teaching in religious schools and to strengthen rules on school ownership, citing a government report that warned free schools could be exploited by Swedish and foreign owners wanting to influence society.

Edholm also accused some free schools of grade inflation, with teachers awarding children grades that were too high – creating imbalance across the whole system. It is understood to be a particular problem in free schools with a low proportion of qualified teachers and schools run as joint-stock companies.

“Free schools tend to give higher grades than municipal schools. That risks that in the end it could be that the municipal schools give higher grades, and that in turn is very bad,” she said.

“It’s unfair and it leads additionally to students thinking they are much more knowledgeable than they are.”

For further information see:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/swedens-schools-minister-declares-free-school-system-failure>

### **The DOGS Position**

As DOGS have constantly argued since 1964, the current downward trajectory into inequality can only be halted by the taking over of the private religious sector. Taxpayers are already subsidising these schools to extremely high levels. State Aid should be withdrawn from private schools. Those that wish to be ‘independent’ should be ‘independent’ of the Public Treasury.

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