

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 1004

## PISA RESULTS JUSTIFY NEED FOR FUNDING OVERHAUL OF AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

PISA results are with us again and there is a plethora of commentaries. First, the ABC at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-05/pisa-international-school-rankings-in-maths-science-reading/103185468> summing it up perhaps with

*Students throughout the world have fallen behind on reading and maths during the pandemic, but Australian teens have managed to buck the trend.*

*Rather than dipping, Australia's results in maths, science and reading have actually held steady since 2018, according to the latest international education rankings. It means Australian 15-year-olds now rank ninth in the world for reading and science and 10th in the world for maths.*

*But the story isn't all rosy, with the data revealing almost half still failed to reach national standards in those subjects, with those from wealthier backgrounds outperforming students from less-privileged families.*

Then, According to [Pasi Sahlberg, the Finnish Education Professor currently employed at the University of Melbourne](#), writing in the Guardian newspaper on 6 December 2023, there is good news and bad news for Australia in the [latest Pisa – Programme for International Student Assessment – results](#) released this week by the OECD.

First the good news: Australia is back in the OECD's top 10 education countries.

But that good news is not because our education systems are performing better than before. Australia is still sliding downwards – but other countries are doing so faster.

Pisa measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. It has been administered every three years since 2000 in all OECD member countries and in an increasing number of non-members.

Overall, in OECD countries students' performance has dropped dramatically since 2000. The pandemic made an already bad situation worse. The gap between before and after Covid mathematics scores is equivalent to almost one year of learning.

One way to interpret the latest Pisa data confirms what we already know: Australia offers world-class schooling to most young people – but not to all. The most privileged half of our students perform at similar level to those in the education superpowers Japan and Korea.

[Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools](#) has a more brutal interpretation:

The OECD's 2022 PISA results reveal Australia has one of the most unequal school systems in the OECD and that inequality is increasing. The new results intensify the pressure on the Federal and state/territory governments to fully fund public schools because they enrol over 80% of disadvantaged students. To his credit, the [Federal Minister for Education, Jason Clare](#), said: "This again highlights the importance of fixing the funding gap and this education gap in Australian schools."

[The AEU agrees with Trevor Cobbold](#), but puts a grass roots perspective on the circumstances. The President, Correna Haythorpe, responded to the results as follows:

*This test was conducted after two years of disrupted learning and at a time when public school teachers demonstrated their extraordinary commitment to their students despite unsustainable workloads and rising teacher shortages," Ms Haythorpe said.*

*"But only 1.3% of public schools are resourced to the minimum level that governments agreed a decade ago they need to meet the needs of their students.*

*"Unacceptable achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations are a clear reminder we don't have an equitable education system that can meet the needs of every child.*

*"Making our education system fairer starts with fairer funding. Government funding for public schools per student increased by 17%, after inflation, between 2012 and 2021. That is half the rate of private schools, which are now overfunded by almost \$3 billion.*

*"This is despite public schools educating the vast majority of higher needs students such as children in rural and remote areas, First Nations students and those with a disability. 82% of children from low SES backgrounds are in public schools. "*

The pressure is now upon the federal government to deal with the gross inequalities in funding caused by the capitulation of both Liberal and Labor parties to the private religious sector.

And perhaps the most interesting comments came from the readers of the Pasi Sahlberg article, especially those that mirror the DOGS position:

*phutty*

*7 Dec 2023 0.17*

As an Australian who lives in Estonia - the country whose kids performed best in the PISA results in Europe - I'd add that there's something to be said for the fact that private and religion-based schools are very much a minority here, and that 99% of students follow exactly the same curriculum for most of their years spent in school education. As such, the educational landscape is much more even (although there is still a significant gap between Estonian-language and Russian-language schools, precisely because of the language difference) and literacy is higher across the board. Keep 'class' out of classrooms and the results speak for themselves.

*Sisyphus*

*6 Dec 2023 22.28*

So basically if you have parents wealthy enough to send you to a private school then you are one of the high achievers, looking forward to a university degree and one of the high demand professions.

On the other hand if you live in a low socioeconomic area, probably the a majority, you are in for a life where every move is going to be hard. Some of these make it and a lot don't.

And the real irony is this two tier system is heavily backed by the neo Lib ALP!

The ALP is the political arm of the affiliated unions and the biggest and therefore the most influential of these are Catholic and right faction.

The Vatican doesn't even believe in socialism, they believe only 'god' should look after the welfare of people.

The private school union is an affiliated union to the ALP.

The State School union is not. Says it all.

Time to ditch the ALP and form a real democratic socialist party.

*iruka*

*6 Dec 2023 21.27*

I'm afraid the inequalities described don't represent failure, but success - the success of a social and political project.

Education has become, these past couple of decades, an increasingly *-more-* effective means of reproducing intergenerational inequality. This has been done by means of the segregation of students - via countless strategies, and justified by countless bottomlessly dishonest narratives, and the identities and labels they impose.

Schools, politicians, middle class parents (not wealthy parents, just solidly middle class ones) have colluded in the invention of these strategies.....

Dedicating the resources necessary to reverse the growing inequality won't be easy - not because it will be expensive, but because it will face the dogged determination of middle class parents to do whatever's necessary to defend what they've gained.

You can expect every sort of fearmongering to fill the usual low-lying areas of public discourse - from incoherent narratives about the looming collapse of public education as a whole to ever-uglier stories about the behaviour of the wrong sorts of pupils. (the Willie Horton strategy, using 8-year-olds...)

The countries whose results demonstrate less inequality aren't necessarily more enlightened. Some just try harder to educate everyone because an educated population is a more valuable resource - a greater pool of human capital.

(There may be a correlation with birthrates? Fewer children make raising the value of those there are more important.... Worth looking into...)

The middle class project to limit the value of less-than-middle-class children, so as - essentially - to engineer a scarcity that increases the value of their own, doesn't just create inequality; it degrades the economic and social prospects of their country.

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