

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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Where did our Politicians Go to School and Where do they send their Children?

Even though we have had a Labor Government in power since 2022, and now have one with an increased majority, Australia still has one of the most unequal education systems in the OECD with taxpayer funding – direct and indirect – favouring the wealthy and religious.

The Class of 2024

[In 2024, research indicated that](#) private school graduates were over-represented in the nation's parliament, with data revealing more than half of independent and Coalition MPs attended non-government schools. Findings from the research were presented by Christopher Harris, and published in the [Sydney Morning Herald, 15 September 2024.](#)

The analysis was based on data on MPs' school backgrounds compiled by think tank Per Capita. Where no high school information was available, schooling information was subsequently obtained by the *Sydney Morning Herald* for most of the remaining MPs.

Half of Labor MPs went to public schools, including Assistant Employment Minister Andrew Leigh, who graduated from the selective James Ruse. "It was an easy place to be a nerd," he said.

About 23 per cent of Labor MPs in the 2024 parliament were privately educated. Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles went to Geelong Grammar, Parramatta MP Andrew Charlton attended Knox and Bennelong MP Jerome Laxale graduated from King's.

Coalition shadow minister Angus Taylor also attended King's, Paul Fletcher went to Sydney Grammar, Andrew Hastie went to Scots and Opposition Leader Peter Dutton went to St Paul's, a private school in Brisbane.

About 30 per cent of Coalition MPs went to private schools, however that proportion rises to 39 per cent for shadow ministers. It is well above the 20 per cent of students nationally who currently attend independent schools.

Independent MPs Zali Steggall went to Queenwood, Allegra Spender went to Ascham, while Kylea Tink graduated from public school in Coonabarabran in the NSW central west.

When it came to Labor, public, Catholic and private school alumni reflected the current split of students in Australia's schools. About 60 per cent of Labor MPs went to public school compared to 57 per cent of the current school-aged population. However, a disproportionate number of those who hold ministerial positions went to Catholic schools.

Other MPs such as Llew O'Brien dropped out from Pittwater High early because he had to take on caring responsibilities for his mother while Warren Entsch also left school early in the 1960s despite dreaming of studying to be a vet some day at university.

"I was the eldest of four children ... there was no such thing as HECS," he said.

Labor public school graduates include Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, who went to Jannali Girls, and Leigh at James Ruse.

It was Leigh's memory of his public school education which is a testimony to the best that our public schools offer our country's children.

Leigh said he loved the intellectual environment and the enthusiasm that teachers and students brought to curious inquiry and shaped his future passions and interests.

Assignments were handed back in order of the lowest scoring student to the highest, staff would play maths games at lunchtime and recess in the staffroom and teachers were passionate about the subjects.

"Judith Anderson – she was my English teacher and left me with a lifelong love of Jane Austen, William Shakespeare and John Donne," he said.

The New Class of 2025

There's 27 new members of the Labor Party's 123-member caucus, as well as the more recent Greens defector Dorinda Cox and Tasmanian Senator Josh Dolega, who filled Anne Urquhart's spot after her shift to Braddon.

[A survey of new members and senator published by Karen Barlow in The Saturday Paper of 28 June 2025](#) shows Labor's caucus has a Left majority for the first time

since national groupings were introduced. She also lists and details of their home ownership, education and previous careers.

Those who answered the question on their own education and that of their children indicated that roughly half of the newcomers attended public and half private, mainly Catholic schools. However, more were sending their children to private as opposed to public schools, although some proudly owned their public school inheritance and current support. For example:

Julie-Ann Campbell

Electorate Moreton

Previous job Lawyer representing workers in the manufacturing industry. First woman state secretary and campaign director of Labor in Queensland.

Faction Left

Union Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union

Religion Uniting

School Brisbane State High School

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? I have a two-year-old daughter, Margaret.

How many houses do you own? Two

What got you into politics? When I was in high school, the Liberal government was making deep cuts to tertiary education, and it just didn't seem fair. I knew I couldn't sit back and do nothing. So, at 17, I started going to local branch meetings ... I've always believed that if something's not right, you have to stand up and take action.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? Everywhere I go people are feeling cost-of-living pressure. Health, housing and affordability ... I'll be championing the practical solutions our community needs to strengthen Medicare, make housing more affordable and ease everyday costs like energy bills, student debt and childcare.

Rowan Holzberger

Electorate Forde

Previous job Fitter and machinist

Faction Left

Union AMWU

Religion None

School Willyama High School, Broken Hill

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? Last child graduated from a state school today!

How many houses do you own? One

What got you into politics? Real-life experience working in farming, construction, and owning a small business. Understanding the pressures facing local families, and the need for investment in our growing area.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? Infrastructure and housing. I spent nearly a decade advocating for major infrastructure projects like the M1 upgrade and the Coomera Connector, so people in the local suburbs can get home sooner. I'm a passionate advocate for the Albanese government's record investment in housing and for the plan to deliver a Future Made in Australia through investment in local manufacturing to create good secure jobs for local workers.

Anne Urquhart

Electorate Braddon

Previous job Senator for Tasmania; Tasmanian state secretary of the AMWU, factory worker.

Faction Left

Union AMWU

Religion N/A

School East Ulverstone Primary School, Ulverstone High School, Devonport Technical College

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? My children are adults with children of their own. My children attended public schools – Ulverstone Central Primary School, Ulverstone High School and Don College.

How many houses do you own? One

What got you into politics? I have fought for working people all my life. Whether it was on the factory floor at Edgell-Birds Eye, or organising for the AMWU, I knew that only Labor will protect the interests of working people.

Carol Berry

Electorate Whitlam

Previous job Chief executive, The Disability Trust, Illawarra Women's Health Centre, New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability; director of market development, National Disability Insurance Agency; principal project officer, NSW Ombudsman; solicitor, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Faction Left

Union Australian Services Union and Community and Public Sector Union

Religion No religion

School Hazelbrook Primary School, Springwood High School, University of Wollongong

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? Public schools

How many houses do you own? Two

What got you into politics? A passion for social justice.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? I believe in equal opportunity as well as quality care and support for every Australian, and so I want to ensure our public systems are world-leading and continue to deliver what is needed – whether that is healthcare, aged care, veterans' support, disability services, education or childcare. I will also work hard to support our local economy, strengthening the position of local businesses, and have been a longstanding advocate for action on climate change and looking after the natural environment.

Renee Coffey

Electorate Griffith

Previous job Chief executive of a national youth mental health charity; deputy chief executive of a national charity providing scholarships to First Nations young people.

Faction Labor Unity (the Old Guard)

Union United Workers Union and Rail, Tram and Bus Union

Religion Anglican

School Morningside State School, Cannon Hill Anglican College

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? I have two boys who attend a local state primary school.

How many houses do you own? Four, between me and my new husband. We're in the process of selling one.

What got you into politics? Having been involved with anti-racism and reconciliation as a teenager – in response to Pauline Hanson's election to parliament – I was selected to be a youth

speaker at Corroboree 2000, where John Howard refused to apologise to the Stolen Generations. This had a profound effect on me. Eight years later, I was fortunate enough to be sitting in the gallery when Kevin Rudd delivered his apology. While I had always held Labor values, in that moment, I saw how Labor governments can have decisive, demonstrable, profound impact on people's lives. I joined the party shortly after.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? I have a passion for many issues including climate and the environment, housing, health (including mental health), disability advocacy, addressing family and domestic violence. Underpinning all of these issues and more, I am passionate about the role of education and investing in our young people.

Josh Dolega

Electorate Tasmania (Senate)

Previous job Workplace health and safety lead organiser at the Community and Public Sector Union

Faction Left

Union CPSU, ASU Vic–Tas and Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union

Religion No religion

School Spreyton Primary School, Latrobe High School, Don College

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? No children

How many houses do you own? Two. I am currently relocating to the electorate of Braddon and have just purchased a new house. My property in Rokeby [Hobart] will be on the market soon.

What got you into politics? I have followed politics since I was a child. I remember being captivated watching Paul Keating debate on the nightly news. I'm excited to contribute to Labor's positive plan, which is making a real difference to the lives of working people and everyday Australians.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? I'm excited to be part of the team that will deliver Labor's election priorities, including the 20 per cent reduction in HECS debt, more Medicare Urgent Care Clinics and Medicare Mental Health Clinics – particularly in regional Tasmania. I'm also looking forward to the Workplace Protections Order bill coming back to the Senate – this bill is so important for the safety of public servants.

Tom French

Electorate Moore

Previous job Country pub owner, electrician, employment lawyer

Faction Left

Union Electrical Trades Union

Religion Atheist (culturally Catholic)

School St Joseph's Primary School in Dungog, NSW, Dungog High School, Merriwa Central School, University of Newcastle (Bachelor of Business), Murdoch University (Laws), South Metropolitan TAFE (electrical pre-apprenticeship), College of Electrical Training

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? My two boys are aged two and three. Having childcare-aged kids has driven home the challenges local families face.

How many houses do you own? I don't own a house; I live with my partner, Clare, and our two boys.

What got you into politics? I joined the Labor Party and the ETU on the same day in 2014. My experience as an electrician – and earlier, working under WorkChoices during the Howard years – really shaped my views. Back then, I was subcontracting at a bar in Newcastle for less than \$10 an hour. That experience made me passionate about workers' rights and the need for fair workplace laws.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? Delivering on my election commitments, including the major upgrade of Heathridge Park; securing federal government investment in Perth's northern suburbs; activating our Joondalup CBD with live music and events; and working hard every day listening and advocating for the local community.

David Moncrieff

Electorate Hughes

Previous job Financial regulation

Faction Right

Union United Services Union

Religion Catholic

School St John Bosco College, Engadine

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? No children

How many houses do you own? None

What got you into politics? Inaction on climate change by the Howard government.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? Healthcare affordability, infrastructure investment and accessibility of education in southern and south-west Sydney.

Corinne Mulholland

Electorate Queensland (Senate)

Previous job Roles across local and state government and corporate sector; police, corrective services and emergency services, disaster management, health and hospitals, regional development, tourism and hospitality.

Faction Right

Union I have been a member of a number of unions, currently the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA) and AWU.

Religion Catholic

School Good News Lutheran Primary School and Centenary State High School, Brisbane.

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? My husband and I have a seven-month-old son.

How many houses do you own? One

What got you into politics? I grew up volunteering in my local community and realised that getting involved in politics was a great way to help other people, serve my community and deliver the things that could change people's lives.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? The prime minister has outlined a very clear agenda for our government's term to deliver on the commitments we made at the election. That will be my laser focus this term – to do what we said we would do and deliver for Queensland.

Gabriel Ng

Electorate Menzies

Previous job Plaintiff lawyer and volunteer at community legal centres; public servant in refugee and migrant settlement and aged-care sectors

Faction Left

Union I've been a member of ASU and CPSU

Religion None

School Trinity Grammar School, Kew

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? Two children, both at public schools.

How many houses do you own? None

What got you into politics? A strong sense of social justice and the conviction to act on my beliefs. In my career as a lawyer and public servant, I've seen how people can fall between the cracks and how difficult government services and the justice system can be to navigate. I've also seen how government can be an enormous force for good, and I'm committed to ensuring it works

for people to address the challenges we face as a country, from reducing inequality to addressing climate change.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? I'm committed to delivering on what we promised at this election, including more accessible healthcare, better funded public schools and the transition to renewable energy. I'll also be working hard to be a voice for issues that are important to the people of Menzies. I think we need to keep the focus on the housing crisis as one of the major drivers of inequality. I also believe we need to continue to strengthen mental-health supports, so that we're moving towards treating mental health the same way we treat physical health.

Rebecca White

Electorate Lyons

Previous job State member for Lyons and opposition leader in the Tasmanian parliament

Faction Left

Union UWU and CPSU

Religion None

School Sorell School, Rosny College, University of Tasmania

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? Eight-year-old in public school, four-year-old in early childhood education and care.

How many houses do you own? One

What got you into politics? My family and community always stressed the importance of looking out for one another. From a young age, I wanted to get involved and be a part of creating solutions to the problems that I saw, rather than sitting on the sideline. It's my firm belief that, when something needs doing, you get in and try to help.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? I was elected to help my community gain greater access to healthcare and other essential services that make people's lives better and build stronger communities. This will be my focus for the next three years. I'm thrilled to be working as assistant minister across a range of areas I feel personally passionate about, especially as they will support a wide range of people. Over this term of government, I hope to see more people getting a fair go, right across the country.

Charlotte Walker

Electorate South Australia (Senate)

Previous job Australian Services Union, Young Labor president in SA

Faction Left

Union Australian Services Union

Religion No response

School Investigator College, Victor Harbor, University of Adelaide

Are your children in a public, private or independent school? No children

How many houses do you own? None

What got you into politics? I grew up in a household with Labor values, including fairness, empathy and compassion, and valuing public services. In my teenage years, it became very clear to me that only a Labor government can make positive and progressive change.

What are the issues you would like to champion during the term? As the youngest senator in parliament and someone from regional South Australia, I am keen to work as part of the Albanese government on a range of issues, including housing and education. I am looking forward to meeting as many South Australians as possible and representing them in Canberra and also representing young Australians as a senator.

The Saturday Paper *also contacted the following new members and senators, but they did not complete the survey: Basem Abdo, Jess Teesdale, Emma Comer and Dorinda Cox.*

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