

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 1047

HOW TO DISAPPEAR A PROBLEM:

State aid for Sectarian Schools

In a recent article entitled

[*How to disappear a problem - The school system has spent fifty years not fixing one of its central flaws*](#)

published on Inside Story on 10 July 2025, Dean Ashenden, an Honorary Senior Fellow at the University of Melbourne tells the dismal story, starting with the Karmel Committee of 1973, of the increasing residualisation of public education; the growing sectarian basis of ‘educational choice’; and the ‘concentrations of disadvantage within the public system. He concludes:

Labor governments since Rudd and Gillard (2007–13) have recognised the need for school reform but avoided structural reform and the politics it requires, preferring instead reform-as-technique, incremental steps toward targets in this or that aspect of schooling in search of a frictionless way around vested interests. Big problems have been converted into the counterfeit currency of “outcomes.” It hasn’t worked, even in its own desiccated terms, and there is no reason to believe that it will. Unlike the Schools Commission in 1978, those who now direct “reform” can measure the waves but don’t understand that beneath the waves are currents. And, also unlike the Schools Commission in 1978, “understanding” is not what they’re after. •

DOGS respond as follows:

The current situation is exactly what DOGS predicted in 1964 when State Aid started to trickle into private sectarian schools. After 1973 State Aid became a flood It now amounts to billions and even increasing billions of dollars dividing our children along religious, sectarian lines. Only the struggling public system brings them together.

Dean Ashendon is right that politicians have preferred incremental steps in small targets *in search of a frictionless way around vested interests.*

So perhaps he should go further and call a spade a spade. Who and what are these ‘vested interests’.

Coalition parties have at least been honest. They have promoted and generously funded – with taxpayers funds –religious schools for a wealthy and powerful oligarchy under the catch cry of ‘choice’.

But the Labor Party politicians, academics and even some teacher unions have never had the intestinal fortitude to confront Dean Ashenden’s ‘vested interests’.

Dean Ashenden is weeping tears of frustration now, 50 years later. But where was he and academics like him when the DOGS took the private schools and churches to the High Court under Section 116 of the Constitution?

They have never been prepared to be called ‘ anti- religion-; ‘anti-Catholic’; or even anti- oligarchy’.

Even though promoters of equality of opportunity and public education are only promoting the most fundamental institution for a democracy : namely public education.

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