

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

Press Release #1062

Why do Labor Governments Contin

ue to

Shortchange Public Education in Favor of the Private Sector?

There is no question that public schools have received a raw deal under both Labor and Coalition Governments.

Little is expected of Coalition Governments but the track record of the Labor Party is dismal indeed.

Why?

The [latest Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services](#) again exposes a deeply unfair school funding system, with government funding growth continuing to favour private schools over public schools despite rising student need.

The report shows that private schools are now publicly subsidized to a greater extent than ever before. In 2013-14, private schools received 67.7% of the combined government funding per student . In 2023-24, this has increased to 70.8%.

Private schools have received significantly stronger growth in real government funding than public schools over the past decade, both in total funding and on a per-student basis. Combined Commonwealth and state government funding to private schools has grown 30.6% faster than funding to public schools over the last ten years.

“This is yet another year where the data shows that private schools continue to receive the lion’s share of government funding growth while public schools are being shortchanged,” said AEU Federal president Correna Haythorpe.

“Despite educating the vast majority of students with the highest needs, public schools are falling further behind because governments continue to prioritise funding growth for private schools.”

Alarming, the report also shows that per-student government funding for public schools went backwards in the last year, driven by a decline in primary school funding.

Funding per primary student fell from \$18,942 in 2022–23 to \$18,853 in 2023–24, while overall recurrent funding per public school student declined for the first time in a decade.

DOGS HAVE A SIMPLE ANSWER:

Research into the schooling and commitment of Victorian Labor Ministers of Education, Ben Carrol and James Merlino in part explains their commitment to the private sector But the immediate post political careers of James Merlino and his Federal counterpart, Jacinta Collins leave the public school supporter in no doubt whatsoever.

Ben Carrol

The current Victorian Minister for Education and Deputy Premier since 2023 is Ben He attended St Christopher's Primary School and St Bernard's College, Essendon before studying Law at LaTrobe University.

Given the example of his Labor predecessors at the State and federal level, and the current sterling work he is doing on behalf of his alma mater, it will be interesting to following the post political career of Ben Carrol.

James Merlino

Ben Carrol's Victorian Labor Party predecessor in the Minister for Education portfolio was James Merlino.

According to Wikipedia, Merlino attended [St Edmund's Primary School](#), in Melbourne where he became interested in politics.

With the election of the Andrews Labor Government in late 2014, Merlino became Deputy Premier and Education Minister.

Merlino was a member of [Labor's right faction](#) and is a Catholic.

So it was not a surprise that when he retired from politics, he stepped straight into the Chairmanship of a newly established Catholic Education Commission of Victoria. The following report appeared on the website of the [Victorian Catholic Education Authority](#):

6 December 2023 James Merlino appointed as Chair of Victorian Catholic Education Authority

The Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA), the renewed peak body for Catholic education in Victoria, has appointed James Merlino as its inaugural chair. The VCEA was previously the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV). In 2021 the Bishop members of CECV commissioned an independent review into its role, governance and operations. An extensive renewal process followed, which culminated in an Annual General Meeting yesterday, when the Archbishop of Melbourne and the Bishops of Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst accepted VCEA's new constitution, company name and the appointment of Mr James Merlino, Ms Lynn Glover and Mr Damian Murphy as company directors with Mr Merlino appointed as chair. "The AGM was an important milestone in establishing the Victorian Catholic Education Authority as the peak body for Catholic Education in the state and it is a privilege to be appointed as the inaugural chair," Mr Merlino said. "I'd like to thank our CEO Jim Miles for his work to date and I look forward to working with the VCEA team. The VCEA will build on the excellent work of the CECV, and in partnership with Catholic school proprietors, help Catholic schools continue to flourish and provide an outstanding service to the Victorian community." "Under the leadership of the new Board, the VCEA will build on a successful renewal process and move into the next phase providing exceptional support and leadership to school proprietors, students, parents, teachers and staff across all Victorian Catholic school communities," Mr Miles said. Mr Merlino served as Deputy Premier of Victoria and Minister for Education from December 2014 until June 2022 in the first and second Andrews Ministry. He has deep knowledge of the Education sector and Victoria as well as a deep connection to his Catholic faith. Ms Glover has served as a Senior Executive within the Victorian Public Service across various government departments and agencies with more than 40 years of experience including as CEO of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.

VCEA serves as the peak body for Catholic education in Victoria. It represents and advocates on behalf of Catholic education in Victoria on state and national matters, acts as the approved authority for Catholic schools in Victoria, reviews and assures compliance by Catholic education with school registration requirements, and undertakes a range of other activities to support Catholic education in Victoria.

So much for Separation of church and State in Victoria and the welfare of the public education system.

However, if the close connection between politicians, private religious schools and education funding in Victoria has become an open joke in the Victorian Labor Party, the federal connection between church and state has been even more deleterious for public education. Consider the career of Jacinta Collins, a prominent Victorian Labor Senator and Minister from 1995 to 2019.

According to Wikipedia :

Jacinta Mary Ann Collins (born 4 September 1962) is a former Australian politician who served as a [Senator for Victoria](#) from 1995 to 2005 and again from 2008 to 2019. She represented the [Australian Labor Party](#) (ALP) and was the party's deputy leader in the Senate from June to October 2013. **Collins was promoted to the [Second Gillard Ministry](#) as the Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations on 14 September 2010.** A [parliamentary](#)

secretary in the Gillard government and Minister for Mental Health and Ageing in the second Rudd government.

She resigned from the Senate on 15 February 2019, and was announced as the new head of the National Catholic Education Commission on the same day. She commenced her role on 18 February 2019.

So the Labor politician responsible in 2010 for the initial implementation of the Gonski Report in 2010 accepted an appointment as national executive director of the National Catholic Education Commission on 18 February 2019.

Not surprisingly, on 4th May 2023, Jacinta Collins, “a passionate education advocate who champions the needs of Catholic schools, teachers and students was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Notre Dame Australia.”

CONCLUSION

DOGS rest their case. Separation between Church and State in Australia is well and truly broken.

The corruption and jobs for the boys mentality that follows has become normalised to the great detriment of our public education system, our egalitarian society, our democracy, our social cohesion, and parliamentary accountability for proper expenditure of taxpayer funds.

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