

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

**PRESS RELEASE 520#**

## **SCHOOL AUTONOMY : RECIPE FOR DISINTEGRATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

**26 July 2013**

**As the Catholic Education system becomes more and more centralised and ramps up its lobbying expertise at public expense, so attacks on the nerve systems of our public education systems continues apace. Where central public education administrations have not been taken over by private school advocates, they will be dispersed. Madness!**

Both parties, Liberal and Labour, are committed to the isolation of public schools from a centralised support system. They are turning them into ‘independent schools.’ This represents the death knell for our proud systems of public education which have distributed educational opportunities to so many disadvantaged children in so many far flung places.

**The public systems were centralised in the first place to provide equality of opportunity and accountability. Both principles are now abandoned.**

### **Labor Party**

Christ Bowen, the new Labor Party Treasurer, is a graduate of the New South Wales public school system. He should know better than to adopt the failed British system of so-called ‘free’ schools which are government funded and regulated, but not government run. In his new book : *Hearts and Minds: a Blueprint for Modern Labor, (1913)* Chris Bowen re-names the British model, State schools ripe for religious takeovers, ‘opportunity academies’.

### **Liberal Party**

The Coalition’s *Real Solutions for All Australians* policy booklet promises to encourage public schools to become independent schools. Mr Pyne says that, under a Coalition government, the WA model of independent public schools’ will be adopted nationally. The ‘autonomous’ Victoria public school principals, teachers, and parents will tell anyone ready to listen that the cutting off of schools from a central support system is merely an excuse for devolving costs and responsibility for raising money for basic educational provision down the line.

## **Opposition to Public School Autonomy:**

Although Western Australia has leapt head first into the privatisation of public education with 'free' independent public schools, New South Wales is more cautious. Josephine Tovey, from the Sydney Morning Herald on July 20, 2013 reports as follows:

*The NSW Coalition government has rejected an education election policy of Tony Abbott, saying it will not go along with any plan to turn public schools into independent schools because there is no evidence it improves student outcomes....*

*Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said that while the government was committed to devolving more decision-making power to individual schools there was "no evidence" to suggest encouraging public schools to become independent was in the schools' or the students' best interests.*

*"While we are talking about very significant devolution of authority from the centre out to local schools, we are not talking about wholesale autonomy," he said. "We will not be introducing charter schools or independent public schools because there is no evidence that they improve student performance."*

*The division follows fiery exchanges between the NSW government and the federal opposition over school funding, after Premier Barry O'Farrell defied his federal counterparts in April to sign on to Labor's Better Schools reforms.*

*The policy implemented by Western Australia, which has resulted in more than 250 government schools opting to become independent since 2010, received a mostly positive appraisal in a recent evaluation by the University of Melbourne, which found principals valued the greater decision-making powers, but there are concerns it is creating a two-tiered public system.*

*Under the policy, schools can apply to become an IPS, giving them autonomy over budgets and staffing, greater discretion over curriculum, and managed partly by a school board. They remain publicly funded and do not charge compulsory fees.*

*Mr Pyne said the Coalition strongly supported public education remaining "universally available and free to all that seek it" but said it had long been the Coalition's policy to work with the states to give principals and schools more autonomy.*

*"We would like to see a similar model to the Western Australian independent school model in other states, but at the same time, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work in education," he said. "We will work constructively with the states to increase autonomy."*

*Federal Education Minister Bill Shorten said the Better Schools plan did offer principals more autonomy, but said "the WA independent public schools model is about cost-cutting".*

*The Australian Education Union has labelled the move part of a deeper agenda aimed at "the privatisation of public education in Australia".*

*"These policies contribute to a growing segregation between schools which has a negative impact on the overall wellbeing of students," union president Angelo Gavrielatos said.*

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/nsw-shuns-federal-coalition-plan-to-split-state-schools-20130719-2q9ng.html#ixzz2ZjAxhAtS>