

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 581#

There never was Needs-Based Funding- with Whitlam or Anyone Else

State Aid to Unequal Institutions Leads to Inequalities

Education Commentators are romancing about the Whitlam vision for 'Needs-based' funding in Australia, and bemoan the fact that inequities are not diminishing but increasing. DOGS have news for them. There never was a 'Needs' policy and what has happened was predictable.

Anna Patty in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 December bemoans the fact that Whitlam's so-called education legacy, a vision for needs-based funding, has not been realised. She notes that if anything the equity gap between schools seems to be widening.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/whitlams-education-legacy-was-his-vision-for-needsbased-schools-funding-realise-20141220-11f81d.html>

DOGS can tell the truth without fear or favour. If you give public funding to unequal institutions or institutions that select and divide children on any criteria, then you will increase inequity. That is the logical and historical truth. There never was, or could be a genuine 'Needs' policy.

Let's get the historical record straight. Whitlam gave State Aid to wealthy religious schools in Australia that selected children on the basis of religion and charged fees. The so-called 'Needs' policy was always a rationale for the political support of the wealthy and powerful Catholic church – and the Protestant schools had to be paid off.

The DOGS conducted protests in 1972 against 'the Schools with the Pools' . Community outrage in those days about the amount of money going to these wealthy schools led in part, to the Labor party Needs policy, the Schools Commission legislation in 1973, and the poor parish school mythology. There were many wealthy 'needy' schools and there was always wealthy churches running 'needy' schools on behalf of Australia's bunyip aristocracy.

In the 1970s and 1980s DOGS laughed at the demands by wealthy schools to be labelled 'poor' like the poor parish schools; they revealed the 'bottom of the schoolyard' schemes as the Catholic church diverted funds for 'poor' primary schools into secondary school expansion, and predicted the current problems confronting public education in full page Advertisements. (For example, *The Age*: 12 November 1970; 27 November, 1972, 4; 16 May 1973, 10; 12

July 1973, 14; 12 December 1975, 12 ; 23 June 1977, 16; 2 December 1977; 5 December, 1977, 12; 3 May 1984, 18; 28 November 1984, 20; 1 May 1985; 30 August 1988, 22-23; 2 March 1998, 11; April 26, 2005; 27 March 2006; *The Herald*: 1 December 1972, 11; 11 December 1975, 38; *The Australian* : 10 December 1975, 5; 19 July 1985, 7; *Canberra Times*: 18 December 1980; 4 November 1983,11; 6 April 1984, 9. Advertisements since this time did not deal with the Schools Commission.)

There were poor parish schools used as political blackmail in the 1960's, but there were also wealthy churches and Church schools. Now there are derelict public schools. In the past 40 years the 'poor parish school' mythology won out. Yet that the expression is falling out of use lately.

To illustrate her point in the *Age* article, Anna Patty refers to the infamous Goulburn case, then goes on to tell the long sad story of failed 'Needs' policies and the need to keep the religious sectors happy – the 'albatross' around Karmel's, the Schools Commission and Gonski's necks.

In July 1962, a Catholic school in Goulburn closed its doors to students in protest against the federal government's refusal to provide it with three new toilets.

The health department declared them essential, but the school was too poor to pay.

Fifty years on, a Catholic college that now stands in Goulburn is no longer socially disadvantaged but receives \$11,513 per student per year in combined government funding. When income from fees and other sources is taken into account, a total of \$15,098 is received.

Meanwhile, a government high school in Goulburn, which the federal government's My School website has classified as disadvantaged, receives \$11,392 in combined government funding, \$121 less than the Catholic school. When funding from other sources is included, the total is \$11,764. Another local government high school receives \$14,508 per student.

An analysis of the federal government's measure of social disadvantage on the My School website suggests the equity gap between schools is widening.

The Goulburn protest has another side to the story. The protest was called off by the Catholic church. The Goulburn public schools were able to accommodate the children – although one Catholic headmaster may have been reluctant – and Catholic parents and children accommodated in local State schools were happy and disinclined to return to a system of enforced, sectarian indoctrination!

Because of State Aid – billions and billions of dollars of it, since 1978 the pupil share of children in free, secular and universal public schools has declined from 78% to 65%. Now the Abbott/Pyne vision is to make that 0% by privatising the lot!

The majority of religious private schools of Australia receive at least 80% + of their funding from the Australian taxpayers. The time has come to have genuinely independent schools, take the rest over, rationalise our educational infrastructure, stop the duplication, and open all our schools, as public schools to all our children. That is the only way to have a successful 'Needs' policy.

he interesting thing is that it has taken billions and billions and further billions of public funding to increase the pupil percentage share of Catholic enrolments from 18% to 21%. The sad thing is that those billions have encouraged the increase in other sectarian schools.

The tragedy of Whitlam's Needs policy was that our politicians refused to call the bluff of the wealthy Catholic Church. They supported a sectarian, unaccountable education system designed for a monarchy or oligarchy — never a democracy. 'Needs' policies have always been a piece of illogical 'feel good' rhetoric with no basis in reality.

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