

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 624#

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Simon Birmingham, School Vouchers and The Public Reaction

What does the Federal Minister for Education REALLY believe in – if , as a Coalition politician he believes in anything?

Matthew Knott, the Communications and Education correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald* has revealed Birmingham's passionate advocacy for school vouchers - yet another US failed experiment .

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/education-minister-simon-birmingham-an-advocate-for-school-vouchers-20151026-gkiv5v.html#ixzz3pu0MswOl>

Knott's evidence? Birmingham's maiden speech to Parliament in 2007. In this speech he trotted out the worn out privatisation rhetoric, weeping crocodile tears for 'needy' parents as follows:

It is time that at least one state, in at least one region, trialled the implementation of school vouchers – affording all families the opportunity of choice, the opportunity to allocate the government funding for their child to pay the fees to the school of their choice...The neediest should not be the ones to miss out on choice.

In 2012 he said: "*Parents should be free to choose the education that best suits their child, with government funding appropriate to the students' needs moving with that student, regardless of the type of school they attend*". He also expressed support for US-style charter schools (privately managed public schools).

But in recent days he is taking a step backwards.

Asked whether he still supported a trial of school vouchers, Senator Birmingham said any funding changes would "*require leadership from the states*"...and "*vouchers are not the policy of the government and our focus remains firmly on how to lift teacher quality, school autonomy, parental engagement and, ultimately, student outcomes.*"

Perhaps he noted the reaction to his wholesale privatisation ideas, not just from the Labor Party, but from those who availed themselves of the internet commentary.

However- DOGS note that:

GONSKI IS ALSO A VERSION OF A VOUCHER SYSTEM

only way forward for public education is to

PROVIDE PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS ONLY

Here are some of them:

- Education for All,

How about people who keep going on about Gonksi read what it actually recommends?

The Gonski panel recommended having non-government schools funded on the basis of the wealth of the students' neighbours; i.e., keeping the Howard government's socio-economic funding model. The Gonski model funds not only mainstream students according to how well off the neighbours of the students in the school are, but also disadvantaged students in the same way. Students, including disadvantaged students, have their funding adjusted according to the sector they are in. A student with a low SES or with a non-English-speaking background in a government school will get a loading of 100 per cent of the amount for that category. The very same student in a non-government school will get between 20 and 90 per cent of that loading, not because of the variation in fees private schools charge but because of the variation in the SES level of the neighbours of the students who go there. It's completely bonkers.

The Gonksi model is guaranteed to socially stratify our schools because it says the more you earn the less your child gets. Thus, the wealthy, the upper middle, the middle middle, the lower middle and the poor all have to concentrate in their own schools because the funding system segregates them. A school that wants to take both middle class and poor students will not be able to because the presence of middle class students will cut its government funding and thus push its fees up and thus drive out the poor, who will end up at the government school.

Commenter

Chris Curtis

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 8:56AM

- Our current system allows rich Independent Schools, charging fees around \$30,000 per year, to also put their hand out for a few extra thousand dollars of government money. Not content with facilities many Australians could only dream about, they may want a second indoor pool, larger air conditioned auditorium, a more up to date gymnasium for their Rugby players and their rowers. Their principals have contracts

which provide a remuneration higher than the salary of our PM. The school has several air conditioned coaches to assist their students to travel to sporting and educational events.

On the other end of the scale we have many public and poor Catholic schools who struggle from day to day. Class rooms have not seen new paint in over two decades. Carpet in the classrooms shows too many signs of aging. Blinds on the windows need repair. The only rooms air conditioned may be the administration area and Library. Any excursion involves a cost which puts a burden on struggling families. No school bus, but an expensive private bus which makes many short journeys prohibitively expensive.

Now some want all students to have a voucher. Said voucher would enable our Independent Schools to siphon off more public money. How much more public money do they need? Surely government funding should be on a needs basis. Our poor schools need resourcing. The Gonski proposals need to be funded in full. Simon Birmingham needs to get his own education up to speed. How many poor public and Catholic schools does he regularly visit? Does he favour the full Gonski funding? Does he see Independent Schools receiving government funding as double dippers?

Commenter

Barr of Nambucca

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 8:01AM

- Barr,

Victorian government schools have had a voucher system for ten years. It's not called that, of course. It is called a per capita payment.

The problem with this debate is that it always avoids the real issue, which is not the existence of non-government schools (common throughout the developed world) or the funding of non-government schools (also common throughout the developed world) but the terms and conditions of that funding (which are stricter in other countries than here).

Social segregation lowers educational achievement. Good policy reduces social segregation. The funding model needs to support social integration. As I explained in response to Education for All, the Gonski model does not do this. The Victorian Labor government's Financial Assistance Model does, and that is the way we ought to go across the whole country.

Commenter

Chris Curtis

Date and time

- Birmingham says "Great advances are not made by standing still" - well, obviously not, they are made by going backwards."

Turnbull has surrounded himself with some classy nutters, has he not? Except they are not nutters, they have an Abbott-agenda of passing all govt spending through private hands so that the friends of the LNP become very rich while taxpayers struggle to find quality education.

Its bad enough at the moment - the rationale for Gonski - and its bloody obvious we need to put money in the areas of weakest outcomes. But that concept doesn't suit the LNP. They want an uneducated workforce because they are cheap and when it comes time to vote, the swallow lies like goldfish take to breadcrumbs.

Let's not worry that uneducated workers are the welfare masses which drain away the taxes of the rich - because "everything is on the table" except negative gearing and superannuation and identification of rich evaders.

I very much doubt that anything is "on the table" at all, except for a GST and tax cut for the rich. Kelly O'Dwyer looks like a token spokesperson, wheeled out by the men to deliver bad news and sheez, she's a woman, so she must have empathy, right?

Commenter

AXIS

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 7:49AM

- *AXIS*, and everyone thought that 'Mr. Fixit' was well and truly over the top, well this new bloke, Senator Birmingham, must be constantly seeing stars and stripes when looking towards the future of educating Aussie kids whereas he should, instead, be seeing the Gonski Report.

Commenter

DukeofWoyWoy

Location

Central Coast NSW

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 9:31AM

- The Liberal Party will never rest until they have satisfied their ideological dream of Full User Pays Private Education and Health. They will start off with subsidies that will help struggling families educate their children privately but will eventually abandon them and leave them with

whatever standard of education they can only afford.

We have seen it with reduced funding for TAFE so that they have to compete with shonky subsidised Private Colleges where many students have been ripped off and learnt little. We have also seen it with the User Pays Higher Education System they tried to introduce into our Universities with reduced funding and where it was going to cost Australian students (including the disadvantaged and less well-off) \$100,000 for a degree when they are just starting out in their adult lives. This was done to make our Universities compete with subsidised Private Universities all for the sake of eventual User Pays Education and vastly reduced Government Funding!

This Liberal Party Government fails to see the benefits of a Fair Education System for all of our society and the returns they will eventually get from taxes from a more employable and productive work force. They want a two-tiered system that is cheaper for them and where there is a big difference between being advantaged and disadvantaged and the Education you receive!

Commenter

Darcy

Location

Sydney

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 10:28AM

- AXIS, spot on, especially your second paragraph. Precisely such a siphoning is happening with the British "academies", which are privately-run public schools. Corruption scandals were widely reported in the weekend British papers,

And performance-based pay for teachers, Simon Birmingham? Based on what performance criteria?

- How about Mr Birmingham considers the funding that would go to the voucher system and injects that to the public education system?

Or

How about Mr Birmingham works with states to streamline the "overly bureaucratized government schools" so that they are not so "overly bureaucratized". The "over bureaucratization" in government schools happens when too many so-called experts put their \$0.02 worth and governments use the education system as a political football.

Or

The Mr Birmingham could work with the government to ensure that the needs-based funding under the Gonski review is rolled out in full.

Commenter

Education for All

Location

Melbourne

Date and time

October 27, 2015, 7:55AM

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