

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 653#

SECTARIANISM IN EDUCATION

Funding withdrawn from Islamic but not Catholic schools

Religious schools are sectarian schools. They select pupils on the basis of religion and they indoctrinate children in particular religious tenets. They are also private schools which enjoy public funding – within minimal if any accountability.

When it comes to the exposure of corruption and mismanagement of public funds, however, it seems that some religions are more equal than others. The Catholic certainly take precedence over Islamic systems.

In recent weeks the Victorian Auditor General has exposed extensive mismanagement of public funds by the Victorian Catholic Education Commission. DOGS note that, religion aside, the Victorian Catholic Education bureaucracy is a sub-branch of a very wealthy multinational corporation which pays no taxes, but demands taxpayer money for its various enterprises. See Press Release No. 647 at <http://www.adogs.info/press/state-auditor-general-finally-blows-whistle-public-funding-private-schools> and Press Release 649 at <http://www.adogs.info/press/victorian-catholic-education-commission-self-regulated-system-favouring-high-ses-schools>. But, although there is evidence of the mismanagement of hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars of public money over decades, the State Minister merely promises to make some administrative changes, no money has been returned and no school has been closed. For the Church, this is a small storm in a colonial tea-cup. There has been a bit of sabre rattling and then - business as usual. There is certainly no question of any funds lost from the Coalition government in Canberra. On the contrary. Turnbull and Birmingham are committed to fund ONLY private religious schools.

Compare this story with that of an Islamic school, the Malek Fahd Islamic School in Sydney that has been stripped of Federal Government funding after a recent review. This school was established with a \$12 million grant from the King of Saudi Arabia, but it now faces the loss of \$20 million in government funding and closure. It is not the only Islamic school facing this predicament. What is going on?

There has been a private audit by Deloitte of six schools affiliated with the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. In total these schools received about \$41 million in funding in 2015, up to 75 per cent of their funding. But this is a private, not an Auditor General's Review.

The Deloitte audit last year found all of them failed to meet basic standards required to qualify for this funding. It found ongoing concerns about the schools' independence, financial management and governance arrangements.

They are all required to operate as financially viable, not-for-profit organisations, under the Australian Education Act 2013. They were found to be 'for-profit'. In addition to this the funding must only be used for school education. The Education Department issued notices to the six schools in November asking them to "show cause" why their funding should not be cut off. The responses of two schools were unsatisfactory and the department decided in February to stop funding them.

The management of the Malek Malek Fahd Islamic School in Sydney has been in disarray for years and the government reportedly found evidence of a phantom loan, mystery payments and undeclared conflicts of interest during its investigation. Last year the [ABC](#) got leaked documents that alleged some representatives at the school's parent body, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, profited from taxpayer funds given to the schools. The documents revealed senior administrators were paid up to \$500,000 for "unidentified services". A loan of more than \$1.4 million was also given to the AFIC but no one knows what the money was used for and there is no agreement covering the terms.

Police were called to the school in March after a [meeting to discuss its future turned chaotic](#). Microphones were reportedly snatched, a lawyer was allegedly assaulted and delegates were blockaded by "burly looking men" as delegates blamed each other for the mismanagement. More than 2000 students have been left in limbo as the school based in Greenacre fights to stay open. Malek Fahd was receiving about \$20 million from the government so the decision could see it close. But it has pledged to stay open for another term while it appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

It lodged the appeal after an internal review this year backed the Department's original decision. Interim board chairwoman Miriam Silva said the school would seek re-registration and had made "good progress" towards meeting the government's strict funding requirements.

The Islamic School of Canberra, which caters to 217 students, was also due to have its funding withdrawn on April 8 but has been granted extra time to apply for an internal review. It could lose \$1 million in government funding. Mr Birmingham said the Department decided in February to cut funding to the two schools as they "did not acknowledge the issues, did not engage their own independent support, had limited engagement with the Department and did not put forward amendments to their constitution".

Meanwhile three other schools will continue to receive funding.

The Islamic College of Brisbane, Langford Islamic College in Perth and the Islamic College of Melbourne were given the news on Tuesday. A decision about the Islamic College of South Australia has yet to be made but the minister acknowledged the response of all four schools.

“I am committed to ensuring that all school authorities meet the requirements of the Education Act to ensure that our taxpayer dollars and any private investment by parents is being spent to benefit Australian students,” he said.

There are a number of differences between the Roman Catholic and the Islamic sectarian education systems. The Roman Catholic system is hierarchical, authoritarian and, when under threat, closes ranks. The Islamic system is exposed to its own whistleblowers.

\Mr Birmingham appears to adhere to the principles of Ministerial responsibility when it comes to Islamic schools that have undergone the review by a private consulting firm – Deloitte’s.

“Australians rightly expect that every taxpayer dollar committed to school education is genuinely expended on school education.”

And

“School governance should be of the highest standard and funding should be exclusively used for the education and welfare of students.” For further information see : <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/school-life/islamic-schools-stripped-of-federal-government-funding-after-review/news-story/3778acc8147da61e6b79e01fdf59204e>

BUT DOGS note the following:

- 1. Mr Birmingham is withdrawing money from the Islamic but not the Roman Catholic sector although billions more in public money and more discrimination against children is involved in the Roman Catholic sector . In addition, the Victorian Review was that of an auditor General, not a private multinational consulting company.**
- 2. DOGS note that Australian children would be better served if all State Aid was withdrawn.**
- 3. Our politicians refuse to admit, to their peril, that giving public money to sectarian systems of education makes a nonsense of ministerial responsibility, accountability, transparency, and education of a nation’s children.**

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