

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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KEN BOSTON OF GONSKI FAME MOURNS THE LOSS OF NEEDS BASED FUNDING

BUT WHAT ELSE DID HE EXPECT?

Ken Boston, an ex- public school administrator, was a key member of the Gonski School Funding Review. In a speech last week to the [NSW branch of the Australian Council of Educational Leaders](#) commemorating the eminent educator, Dr. Paul Brock, he complained that the system that has emerged from the political process is not sector-blind, needs-based funding as recommended by the review panel, but continues to discriminate between public and private schools.

Neither he or his supporters are prepared to take the next step. They have evidence, again and again, that any attempt at implementing a fair, needs based system is stymied by private school interest groups. The private sector *create* inequalities. **The only way forward if the nation's children are to ALL be educated is through the sole public funding of a system open to all children - namely the public system.**

But unfortunately, neither Boston, nor many public school supporters have yet developed the intestinal fortitude to take on the private religious interests and demand a stop to any public funding for their institutions.

The numbers are on the national and international score boards. Give them time and public school supporters **might** get there before the hedge funds, with the help of religious interests privatise the public system entirely. The REAL problem is – Do the next generation have the time to be anything else but clients of those in search of power and profits.

Trevor Cobbold of *Save Our Schools* has provided a summary of the Boston lecture at <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/funding/ken-boston-lambasts-political-failure-on-gonski>

It is full of information and worth a read. He writes:

‘Boston was particularly scathing of the secret deals negotiated with Premiers, bishops and private school organisations by the Labor Government in the lead up to the 2013 election. These side deals were also criticised recently by the Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia, [Jennifer Westacott](#), who said that they should be phased out.

Boston singled out the continuing use of average government school recurrent costs (AGSRC) to determine funding for private schools, a mechanism that was heavily criticised by the Gonski Report. As a result, increased funding for disadvantaged students in public schools automatically generates extra funding for private schools without any consideration of disadvantage and need. As Boston says: “Funding for the non-government sector will therefore continue to grow regardless of need”.

This is most apparent in the decision of the Victorian Labor Government to legislate that private schools receive a minimum amount of per student funding equal to 25 per cent of per student state recurrent funding in public schools. However, the abandonment of needs-based funding is also implicit in the guarantee given to Catholic and Independent schools by the Gillard and Rudd governments to at least maintain their existing shares of government funding of schools – as funding for public schools increases, all private schools, even the most wealthy, are guaranteed increases without regard to need.

Boston was highly critical of continued government funding of wealthy private schools. It is totally unacceptable, he said, that the 20 most expensive independent schools in NSW receive more than \$110 million per year in government funding when the gap in reading performance between the top 20% and the bottom 20% of 15 year-olds is equivalent to five years of schooling.

Both Labor and the Coalition contributed to the corruption of the original Gonski plan. Boston excoriated the Gillard and Rudd governments for the secret side deals that protect private school funding, for the immediate rejection of the concept of a National Schools Resourcing Body and for the long delay in implementing the funding plan. Another failure was to impose the “no school will lose a dollar” condition on the Gonski review, which protects government funding of the wealthiest private schools in the country.

The Coalition wrecked the plan for a national school funding system in several ways. It incited three state Coalition governments (Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory) not to participate in the plan; it refused to accept two other Coalition governments (Victoria and Tasmania) as participants on the technicality that they did not sign bilateral agreements with the Federal Government before the 2013 election even though they had signed the National Education Reform Agreement; it reneged on funding the final two years of the plan when some \$7 billion was due to flow to schools in 2018 and 2019; and it released participating state governments from their commitments to increase funding so that they remain free to substitute Federal funding for their own as they have been doing for many years.

The Federal Government claims that funding the \$7 billion for the last two years of the Gonski school funding plan is not sustainable given the state of the federal budget. But, as the Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia, [Jennifer Westacott](#), recently said, it is a “false perception that there is a funding shortfall preventing us from implementing a needs-based approach”.

The consequences of the political failure on Gonski are disastrous, as Boston spells out. By failing to divert funding currently being spent on low need students to high need students “we are consigning thousands of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to the dust-bin of underachievement, never realising their full potential, and ensuring that our national performance in education will continue to decline”.

Boston called for a new national sector-blind, needs-based funding system:

Trevor Cobbold agrees:

My view is that Australian education will not recover until we have a government prepared to establish an entirely new basis for our school funding arrangements. We need an educationally-driven, sector-blind, needs-based School Resourcing Standard for all schools; based on hard evidence; designed to achieve specified and measurable outcomes; applied to all school sectors; agreed by the states, territories and Commonwealth; accepted nationally as the affordable, efficient and effective price of building our national stock of human capital.

Says it all really!

DOGS DISAGREE. It does not say it all.

Boston’s historical account represents a failure of the administrators and politicians to confront the private religious sector, most notably the Catholic church.

‘Sector-blind’ arrangements are not and never were any answer to glaring inequalities of opportunity for children and national failures. Our institutionalised religious institutions have been playing the power game for millennia while our public systems have only been with us for less than two centuries.

Some schools and some systems are more equal than others whether you like it or not. Either private religious schools which are publicly funded are taken over, rationalised, and made into genuinely public schools, or they should have their funding taken away! This happened in the nineteenth century. It should occur again if the education of ALL the nation’s children is a priority.

A democratic nation cannot allow the wealthy to have their cake, eat it and then tell the poor to eat cake!

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette discovered that simple fact the hard way.

And that next generation, that ‘human capital’ and their parents are getting restless.

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