

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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WITHER CHARTER SCHOOLS ?

AUSTRALIA , AMERICA AND ENGLAND

Jennifer Buckingham is a members of the radical right wing think tank, the Centre for Independent Studies. She is also co-author of the report [Free to Choose Charter Schools: How charter and for-profit schools could boost public education.](#)

Charter schools are **privately managed but publicly funded schools** and Buckingham is promoting them as the answer to all of Australian education's funding problems.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-31/buckingham-'charter-school'-model/6736930> and <http://www.educationreview.com.au/2016/10/public-schools-have-had-plenty-of-time-to-improve-researcher/>

The English version of 'charter schools' are 'academies'. In Australia they have been partially introduced as 'independent' public schools by Christopher Pyne.

Australian Responses

Australian responses to the Charter school movement – this bold-faced attempt of profit multinational corporations and religious institutions to take over the public system – at public expense- have, to date, been less than enthusiastic. Christopher Pyne's half baked version of the English version– 'independent public schools' , was trialled in Western Australia and flopped. Australian commentators on the ABC website, in response to a Jennifer Buckingham interview said:

Any further foray into privatised education needs to address the epidemic of roting in the sector. Private institutions across the sector devour huge amounts of public money, pay their directors handsomely and deliver mediocre results, often concealed by cherry-picking their students. Disadvantaged or poorly performing students then become the exclusive purview of the state system, reinforcing the idea that it performs less well.

And

‘having a private school which is funded 100% by the state is a license to waste money.’

And

The underpinning assumption that anything the public sector can do can be done better by the private sector is unthinking and flawed.

But, given the almost slavish inclination of our politicians to repeat the mistakes of the United States and the UK a decade after they have failed, public school supporters need to inform themselves on American developments.

This outrageous attempt to take over public education has been tried in the United States and England and met opposition. The question is: What will happen after the Presidential election?

Obama’s legacy

Obama’s real education legacy, unfortunately, has been the promotion of charter schools. the growth of charter schools was a key priority in his administration’s overall school reform program. Promising to promote the expansion of charter schools was one of the ways that states could win some of the money in Obama’s signature \$4.3 billion Race to the Top funding competition. Today, 6 percent of U.S. public school students attend charter schools, up from [about 3 percent](#) when he took office in 2009. (It was 2 percent in 2004.)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/10/21/obamas-real-education-legacy-common-core-testing-charter-schools/>

Trump’s Policy

Diane Ravitch, on her blog, noted that at a policy forum in Miami before the Council of the Great City Schools, [surrogates for Trump and Clinton clarified their views, sort of.](#)

Carl Paladino, remembered in New York for his racist and sexist emails during his campaign against Cuomo, promised that Trump would not put an educator in charge of the Education Department. That’s no surprise. In other settings, both Trump and Paladino have promised to turn all federal funding over to charters and vouchers and to abandon public education.

Clinton’s surrogate said that she is a “big backer” of charter schools, but not for-profit schools. That is not at all reassuring, since some of the most rapacious charter schools are technically non-profit but are managed by for-profit EMOs. And some rapacious charter chains are non-profit but pay their executives obscene salaries. And some non-profits are agents of privatization, even when the profit motive is absent.

But

Where Does Clinton Stand on Charter Schools?

During her 2016 campaign, Clinton's position on charters became a bit less clear. During her time as a U.S. senator from New York, for example, Clinton was a supporter of charters. She's even taken some grief from the teachers' unions for that stance. But during this White House run, she also criticized charters for not necessarily accepting all the same students that traditional public schools do. And she's said charters should supplement what public schools do and not replace them.

Diana Ravitch notes: Clinton was right. Charter schools do not accept the same students that real public schools do. They can admit those they want and kick out those they don't want. And while it is admirable to say that charters should not replace public schools, the reality is that charters drain both resources and students from public schools, causing public schools to cut their programs and staff and to have even less capacity to serve the overwhelming majority of students.

The United States simply cannot afford to have a dual school system: one that chooses the students it wants, and the other required to accept all who apply. No high-performing nation in the world operates a dual school system.

If Clinton is to have an intelligent policy about public and charter schools, she must be better informed than she is now, and she can't rely solely on charter advocates for her information about the way charters are systematically eroding public education in America. She need only look at what is happening in Pennsylvania, Ohio, California, Arizona, Nevada, Florida, and a dozen or more other states.

She might learn that more than 90% of charters are non-union. She might bear in mind that her strongest supporters have been the NEA and the AFT, whose jobs will be lost as charters expand.

Profit is not the only issue, though it is one. The central issue is privatization and the danger to America's historic commitment to universal public education, doors open to all, not to some.

The good news is that one of the Podesta emails leaked by Wikileaks said that a group of billionaire reformers organized by Laurene Powell Jobs wanted to meet with Hillary [but she couldn't make time for them](#), and Podesta responded:

Probably worth the time. Not sure we can reassure them. Want to discuss by phone?

Note bene: she didn't make time to meet with them, and the staff was not sure it could reassure them. That's a good sign. Take that, reformers!

Meanwhile, What is Happening in England?

Politicians are discovering that privatising education means an open public funding cheque book with no accountability. And, at the end of the day, they, as elected representatives of the people, might be held responsible for inefficient and ineffective wastage of public money.

Neil Carmichael, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Education Committee on 25 October 2016 complained about the transparency of 'academy' funding.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/education-3776151>

He said there was "growing concern" about the value for public money among England's academies.

He also criticised the Department for Education for not giving his committee the necessary information, ahead of a hearing about finances on Tuesday. His comments came after an academy trust was stripped of its funding over concerns of financial irregularities.

In April, the [NAO criticised the DfE](#) for failing to properly account for spending by academies. "Possibly the Department [for Education] needs a bit more power to extradite proceedings when they find something that's not right," he added.

The spending watchdog concluded that there was a level of "misstatement and uncertainty" that meant the truth and fairness of the accounts could not be verified.

New Teachers Leaving the Academies

Meanwhile, the teachers are not happy in England's 'academies'. According to the BBC on 24 October 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-37750489> almost a third of the new teachers who started jobs in English state schools in 2010 had left the sector five years later.

Of 24,100 state school teachers to qualify in 2010, 30% had quit by 2015, Schools Minister Nick Gibb revealed in a written parliamentary answer. The Liberal Democrats say the figures are a "damning record" of Michael Gove's term as education secretary.

The figures were confirmed by Mr Gibb in a [written parliamentary answer](#) to a question from Liberal Democrat MP Greg Mulholland. They show that in November 2010 24,100 newly qualified teachers entered English state schools. After one year 87% were still there. This fell to 82% after two years, 77% after three years, 73% after four years and 70% after five years.

Liberal Democrat education spokesman John Pugh said he blamed [changes brought in by Mr Gove](#), who turned more than half of secondary schools into academies, reshaped the curriculum and rewrote the exam system.

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CONCLUSION: AUSTRALIA SHOULD RESIST A SLAVISH REPETITION OF AMERICAN AND ENGLISH PRIVATISATION FAILURE. WE SHOULD FOLLOW FINLAND, BUILD UP A GENUINELY PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM AND WITHDRAW PUBLIC FUNDING OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

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