

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS**

PRESS RELEASE 705#

Has Birmingham Stopped the School Funding Wars?

Where is State Aid at in hard money terms?

It is at Tens of Billions of dollars of direct and indirect taxpayer funds - and rising, as gross inequalities are further entrenched in an apartheid, sectarian system.

According to a 2015 Report of Bernie Shepherd and Chris Bonner, on 2013 Myschool figures, **the median public school student will receive \$11,350 in public funding by 2018, \$380 less than the \$11,720 for the median Catholic school student, while a similar independent student will receive \$100 more than the comparable public school student by 2020**

There is no evidence that the 2017 Liberal and Labor Party policies or Gonski 2.0 will substantially alter this disgraceful situation for disadvantaged children in public schools, although a little bit more might trickle into the disadvantaged schools – including Catholic schools that game the system - and a little might trickle out of the wealthy Protestant schools.

How has Australia reached this parlous educational situation in which we find ourselves?

Menzies ameliorated that Catholic DLP vote that gave him one extra parliamentary seat in 1961. In 1964 with Sputnik as an excuse, he gave private schools science blocks and libraries. In 1969 he gave them per capita grants.

Whitlam came up with a Needs policy in 1973 and the flood gates have opened ever since. Australia is still chasing those “needs” which quickly transmute into ‘Greeds’ and everything that the DOGS predicted has come true. We are a socially segregated country with glaring educational inequalities with an ever increasing funding problem.

Then a week ago Federal Minister Birmingham, confronted with a rise in public school disquiet in the electorate, and confronted with ongoing public school research on social media, indicated that the time had come to drive a wedge into the inequitable funding system.

Finally, 44 years after Karmel, he indicated that some money would and could be taken from ‘overfunded’ private schools. The non-Catholic sector copped it sweet. But at the thought of losing control of their own expenditure of public money, the Catholic system, predictably reacted. But the only argument they could find was the threat of raising fees and ‘ppity the poor Catholic teachers’.

What one media outlet called the ‘old serpent’ breathed fire but it descended into a puff in the Liberal party room. Only Abbott and Andrews opposed Birmingham.

On social media public school supporters started to fall back on the no-state aid position,. They pointed to the ‘Top’ educational countries like Finland where charging school fees are illegal. The facts are in. As Trevor Cobbold from *Save Our Schools* says:

Thousands of private schools are over-funded because their government funding enables them to have more total income than public schools. [The over-funding amounts to \\$4-6 billion a year.](#) This is indefensible, especially when thousands of disadvantaged public schools are starved of resources. It is a complete waste of taxpayer funds. It means that less funding is available for schools serving the education needs of low income, Indigenous students and students with disabilities.

Re-directing this over-funding to less advantaged schools would be instrumental in reducing social segregation by ensuring that all schools are excellent schools. [As one of the OECD reports on PISA 2015](#) recommends, governments should strive to have excellent schools in all neighbourhoods and make them accessible and welcoming for all students in the area.

Meanwhile, in Victoria, public schools will actually be losing money. This is listed by the Andrews Government for all individual State schools as follows:

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeu/pages/1011/attachments/original/1494553298/Gonski_Funding_Lost_in_Victoria.pdf?1494553298

And once again, the noise from the Catholic sector has had some effect. [the Australian Financial Review reports](#) that Education Minister **Simon Birmingham** has offered Catholic schools a funding guarantee in a bid to defuse the [school funding row](#) which has seen church leaders claim the government's [Gonski funding plan](#) will cause school fee hikes of [thousands of dollars a year](#). http://www.afr.com/news/policy/budget/2017-budget-simon-birmingham-offers-concession-to-catholic-schools-to-defuse-funding-row-20170510-gw1jya?utm_source=TractionNext&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Worm-Subscribe-1105

In legislation to be introduced to Parliament on Thursday 11 May the government guarantees that the indexation rate for schools' Gonski funding entitlement will not fall below 3 per cent between 2020 and 2027.

On Wednesday 10 May, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), which represents Catholic school systems across the nation, said it was "encouraged" that the Turnbull government has responded to its concern about the indexation rate.

"The minister has recognised that the uncertainty schools and systems were facing from 2021 was causing significant concern," said NCEC acting director Danielle Cronin.

So it is business as usual for the Catholic church lobbyists. Or is it?

The funding guarantee will not cost the government any money unless the composite indexation formula, made up of 75 per cent of the AWE and 25 per cent of the CPI, falls below 3 per cent.

The government has estimated the average growth in the indexation formula from 2020 to 2027 will be 3.3 per cent.

Because of the way the Gonski school funding formula is constructed, the indexation guarantee does not mean that schools are guaranteed a funding rise of at least 3 per cent each year. The guarantee will also help the government deal with any unrest on its backbench about adopting the Gonski school funding policy as Catholic school systems try to mobilise parents to lobby their local members.

Senator Birmingham said he was "committed to stopping the school funding wars".

"I urge all parties to end their scare tactics and stop their campaigns for special treatment," he said.

Birmingham must forgive the DOGS if they are somewhat sceptical. We have heard it so all so often before.

The level and standard of public demand for a fairer education system is listed on our media section of the website as follows:

MAY 2017

- ['Catholic schools say we should trust them on funding. This is not good enough'](#) Grattan's Peter Goss and Julie Sonnemann in *The Guardian* with a comprehensive response to various claims.
- To fully understand the current campaign by Catholic school authorities we have to know the context. Lyndsay Connors provides [background notes on Catholic school funding](#). Rather than funding cuts, the changes are designed to **overcome the anomalies and inequities arising from previous deals**.
- Still on Gonski, Dean Ashenden has been quick out of the blocks with [Gonski is dead, long live Gonski](#) (*Inside Story*). Bernie and I have ['Gonski's second coming'](#) in *Pearls and Irritations* and in

