

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 740

Federal Election year:

Has the state aid auction ritual has started already?

[Bill Shorten](#) has introduced the election year State Aid auction by promising to give the Catholic school sector an extra \$250m in the first two years of a new Labor government and billions over the decade. And *the Australian* on 19 March 2018 and Stephen Elder from the Victorian Catholic Education bureaucracy are even claiming that it enabled Labor to win the Batman by-election. As usual the Catholic lobby tries to muscle in on the winners, in the process bullying the losers.

Shorten wrote to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference chairman, Denis Hart, promising the sector would be \$250m better off in the first two years of a Labor government and billions over the decade.

“We are committed to funding all schools based on a proper assessment of their need, while also supporting parental choice,” he wrote. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/09/bill-shorten-pledges-extra-250m-for-catholic-schools-if-labor-elected>

Sorry to let you know Bill, but the Catholic vote isn't what it used to be and you can't reconcile 'looking after ALL the children and parental choice. These days education votes are to be found elsewhere, even within the savvy middle class in Batman. Ged Kearney won there because she was a good candidate and there was friction within the Greens.

It is interesting that the figure of \$250 million is that used by Stephen Elder of the Victorian Catholic Education Commission as a figure he thought should be taken from wealthy overfunded private schools and given to his struggling Catholic schools.

But the real question is: What struggling Catholic schools? The only schools struggling for funds in Australia at the current time are disadvantaged public schools.

The year is 2018, not 1969. And at least three doomed Needs policies later — Whitlam's in 1973, Howard's in 2004 and Gonski's 2011 1.0 currently being morphed into 2018 2.0 — the funding situation is more glaringly unequal than it has ever been since 1848. Even those who promoted Needs policies like Chris Bonner and Lyndsay Connors, are fed up.

Chris Bonnor is a Fellow of the Centre for Policy Development. Lyndsay Connors has held senior education policy positions at both Commonwealth and state levels. But she started out as a parent representative on the Schools Commission and assisted Joan Kirner when she changed the No State Aid position of the parent organisations into one supporting a Needs policy.

Bonner and Connors fulminate against ‘the special deals’ that have dogged all genuine attempts to introduce the concept of ‘Needs’ rather than ‘Greeds’ into Australian schooling. DOGS might take time out to say” We told you so fifty years ago’.

But what is of more interest is their presentation of plain funding facts that prove that it costs taxpayers as much if not more to support the private sector as it does the public sector. And even Connors is prepared to say that if there was a Goulburn so-called Catholic school ‘strike’ today, the cost factor would be quite different. Bonner and Connors write:

In dollar terms, the craziness unleashed by the special deals now reveal that if the Catholic school students in the New South Wales town of Goulburn went to the local public schools, Australian taxpayers would almost certainly [come out financially ahead](#). Why is Goulburn interesting? That is where state aid to church schools symbolically began back in 1962, after the bishops threatened to close their schools and send their flock to the local public schools.

Around Australia the vast majority of Catholic schools receive between 90% and 100% of the recurrent public per-student funding received by public schools. In financial terms Catholic schools, and large numbers of Independent schools, have become public schools.

It might make some sense if they had to meet the same (and often expensive) obligations as public schools, but they fall well short. They choose where and who they serve, their fees ensure that in almost every community they enrol students who are more advantaged. That’s easy to check on My School. While many Catholic schools do their very best, as a system they aren’t obliged to enrol or continue serving any student who might pose an extra challenge.

And the Labor party_wants to hand them an additional \$250 million.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/11/labors-250m-promise-to-catholic-schools-reveals-a-funding-horror-story>

The next obvious step is to take them over and decide that independent schools become just that – independent of the taxpayer and government.

But No. Unfortunately Connors and Bonner are still hoping that a government appointed National Schools Resources Board will come up with recommendations for the ‘genuine needs policy’ which will provide crumbs from the table of the wealthy for that of the disadvantaged.

When will they ever learn? The private school lobby groups, and most particularly that State within our State – the Catholic church, have an educational philosophy which is diametrically opposed to any kind of genuine Needs policy providing equal opportunities for ALL children. The only policy that has ever worked – and is working in countries like Germany and Finland, is public funding of public schools open to all, and private funding for private privilege.

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