

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

Press Release 745

RECENT FUNDING DEBATES PROVE DOGS POSITION

UNASSAILABLE

The last two months — those leading up to the impending release of the Gonski 2.0 report — reveal the angst and frustration of those who have promoted a ‘Needs’ policy as a way of avoiding ‘sectarian’ problems in Australian Education. The evidence of this is found in the list of news and views from the Save Our Schools website listed below.

The proponents of the ‘Needs’ policy are still living in hope that, somehow, somewhere, politicians will realise, for hard, pragmatic reasons, that social and educational inequality is bad public policy. Religious sectarianism has been long overtaken by social stratification —as the DOGS predicted in 1964.

The figures tell their own story and Trevor Cobbold, Chris Bonner and the late Bernie Shepherd have done a magnificent job taking up the financial calculations where Ray Nilsen of the DOGS left off. Fighting for any money for the education of a growing population of disadvantaged children is a worthy enterprise under any circumstances. The recent 14 April story in The Guardian proves this : <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/14/the-state-school-turning-lives-around-for-disadvantaged-children>.

There has never been any substitute for teachers, parents, doctors and trained welfare officers of goodwill and skill. Their value to our children is without price. But they need proper funding, a supportive central administration, security of tenure and a career structure.

But the promoters of private schools and their divisiveness in our fragile communities need to be confronted and called out for what they are doing not only to our social fabric . They are depriving the majority of our children of educational opportunity.

In their latest academic rationale Jane Caro and Lyndsay Connors provide the following reasons for the current glaring inequalities in Australia’s educational provision:

‘ The complexity around school funding began with the entry of the Commonwealth as a significant partner with States in schools after the election in 1972 of the Whitlam Government. When the Catholic community could no longer staff its own schools with religious teachers, the divisive politics of ‘state aid’ for non-government schools became enmeshed with the problem of ‘vertical fiscal imbalance’ in Australia’s

federal system in ways that have led to a war of attrition against public schooling. With Gonski 2.0, the Turnbull government has just upped the ante.

Section 35A of the Australian Education Act 2017, headed Commonwealth Share, now reads as follows:

...the Commonwealth share for a school ...is:

For a government school – 20%; and

For a non-government school – 80%.

In Australia's federal system, the Commonwealth raises the lion's share of revenue. It has a larger Budget and greater flexibility in doling it out than States, where expenditure is largely locked into the provision of essential services. The Act now gives legal force to the cosy embrace between the powerful class and religious interests that dominate the private school sector and the level of government that raises the bulk of revenue.

Given that the Commonwealth also bears little or no responsibility for the practical consequences of its funding decisions, this has been a recipe for political opportunism, and for the unco-ordinated funding and planning of schools between both levels of government across the public and private sectors. As well, the confusion caused by the irrational way in which the Commonwealth and States have distributed the funding has been to the detriment of informed public debate.

Lyndsay Connors and Jane Caro bemoan the fact that the Federal Government gives priority to private schools while public schools go begging.

'Why, it's as if we are busily building a class system' they cry.

It is not good enough to blame the current crisis for public education on our federal system of government and taxation, and expect teachers and parents of goodwill to struggle with disadvantaged communities.

The problem is that the religious men worked out how our political and financial system worked, gained the balance of control and seized their favoured position fifty years ago. Archbishop Mannix worked out that power lay in a third party in the middle, as early as 1911.

The horse bolted and Lyndsay Connors for one, went along with a flawed Needs policy. It always was, it still is, and always will be, a Greeds policy. Private schools and their religious administrators need to be confronted, the schools which taxpayers are now subsidising up and to and beyond their resource standard should be taken over, and the operators of these schools should be expected to make their genuinely independent.

Our public system which is open to all and should be offensive to none, is the backbone of our fragile, enlightened democracy. It is a treasure that should be protected at all costs.

DOGS keep asking: when will Needs Policy advocates bite the bullet, confront the sectarians, lose your fear of being called sectarian yourself, and take up the State Aid for state schools only position?

Below is the list of recent commentaries on Australian school funding:

- Interesting report from *The Guardian* on disadvantaged schools
- Fairfax does a quick cut of *My School* school funding figures to tell us what we already know: 'Private schools getting \$6700 more per student than NSW public schools'. More interesting is 'Richest private schools get payment from \$7m government 'slush fund'. i.e. the fund to ease them into their new era of 'cut-backs' (?) Again on funding it appears (*The Age*) that Victoria is signing up to the 80:20 (actually 75:25) funding arrangement.
- The 80:20 / 20:80 Gonski 2.0 funding plan has come under deserved criticism and the problems won't go away. **For a clear explanation of these problems, read *When 20 and 80 don't add up***, by Lyndsay Connors and Jane Caro. Also from Lyndsay Connors, an outstandingly worded challenge to the Victorian Catholic Education Commission's robocalling stunt during the Batman by-election. Answers are needed!
- *Fin Review reports* (April 4) that the Gonski 2.10 review will be released later in April and will recommend stronger evidence-based teaching.
- David Hetherington (Public Education Foundation) has wrapped numbers around student underachievement and come up with a price tag of increasing inequality. Widely reported: *ABC*, *SMH*, *Guardian*. Adam Rorris did a similar exercise around retention rates two years ago.
- If you want to do well as school it seems you have to choose your grandparents as well as your parents. *SMH reports* on new research.
- Issues surrounding selective schools aren't going away. This time it is about the distances students travel to these schools. *SMH* April 4.
- More on the Barbara Preston's latest landmark *Social make-up of schools* report has just been released. Trevor Cobbold provides a useful summary
- 'Is it time to shut Goulburn's Catholic school doors...again?' I've done the calcs and it appears that the public purse might end up better off! Slightly longer version in *Inside Story*.

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855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS

<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>