

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

Press Release 756

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ARE NEVER SATISFIED

THE ONLY ANSWER TO THE STATE AID PROBLEM IS TO STOP STATE AID TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

The last few weeks has seen the Catholic education sector flexing its muscles , threatening any politician who refuses to give the religious lobbyists exactly what they want.

Senator Birmingham, sits on top of an Augean stables of bottom of the schoolyard schemes involving billions of dollars of public money. He, as Minister is ultimately accountable, and, to give him credit, has tried to do something. The Gonski Needs rhetoric had produced data on the social economic status of children attending Catholic and other private schools dependent upon public funding.

Currently, a school's Socio-Economic Status (SES) score is calculated by the income, education and occupation characteristics of the areas where students live. The School Resourcing Board, set up by the Government has been delving into the Augean stables. The higher the scores determined by the Schools Resourcing Board, the less government funding the schools receive.

This did not suit the Catholic sector since there had been ‘special deals’ going back to the Howard and Gillard years which provided their schools with extra funds. But it did suit the so-called Independent sector which had not been gaming the system as successfully as the Catholic administration.

So - the Government, under threat of the ‘Catholic vote’, promised yet another review of funding processes – the Chaney Review. On 11 June 2018 the news came through that the Catholic schools had had a win and the independent schools a loss. The National School Resourcing Board was going to recommend **“using powerful data-matching tools to link parents' tax returns with their children's school enrolment”**.

A fault line opened between the infamous Catholic/Protestant alliance.

In a statement issued **21 June 2018** , the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) stressed that the review of schools’ SES is yet to be finalised, despite “significant media speculation”.

“ISCA cautions that it is important to remember that any alternative methodology would require significant work to determine whether it would produce accurate and valid information at the individual school level,” the statement read.

“The current funding methodology took three years to model, trial and validate prior to its introduction and the Independent sector would accept nothing less than the same rigorous process prior to any move away from the current arrangements.”

Speaking on Sky News, Birmingham said he would not prejudge the report until he received the final copy, but said the Federal Government would “stick to its principals of treating all school systems and sectors fairly”:

“We don’t discriminate across state borders, we don’t discriminate between different parts of the nongovernment schooling sector, that we adopt a principled approach to ensure that it is needs-based funding as the Gonski panel recommended,” he said.

“That’s what we acted on last year. There was this one outstanding element, and which we undertook the review of. We’ll get that back shortly and we’ll act in response to those recommendations.”

Earlier this month, Australia’s private schools sent a stark warning to the Federal Government that funding cuts to their system would have “disastrous consequences”.

Geoff Newcombe, Australian Independent Schools NSW (AISNSW) chief executive, said the idea of school funding linked to parents’ income tax could see “a transfer of billions of dollars of government funding from the independent schools sector to the Catholic system over a ten year period”.

“This loss of funding, should it occur, would likely affect schools across the entire SES range, causing fees to rise and limiting school choice for parents,” Newcombe said in a letter sent to principals.

“There would also be an impact on government schools in NSW which are already struggling to accommodate increasing enrolments. We also understand that other options potentially under consideration would produce similarly disastrous outcomes for the independent sector.”

Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) chief executive, Michelle Green, said that if implemented, a funding windfall to Catholic schools at the expense of the private sector would be “an extraordinary turn of events”.

“If implemented, this would be an extraordinary turn of events, given that elements of the Catholic education sector have waged a strident campaign, not only against the current funding model and Independent schools, but against the NSRB review itself,” Green told The Educator.

“Any loss of funding to students in Independent schools is likely to have a damaging impact on students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds – not just those in high fee schools which receive limited government funding in any case.”

<https://www.theeducatoronline.com/au/news/private-schools-react-to-reports-of-new-funding-model/251456>

On 6 July The Federal Government finally announced the findings of its long-awaited review of the so-called Chaney report into the way non-government schools are funded. It appears to be much influenced by Mr Elder from the Catholic Education Office, Victoria.

The findings of the review into the Socio-Economic Status (SES) method found that the current funding system for non-government schools is flawed and requires a new system to be put in place.

The current approach – which took three years to model, trial and validate prior to its introduction – parents' capacity to contribute towards their children's schooling is calculated on the average SES score for the census districts in which the students at the school reside.

However, it has been criticised for creating too many issues that hinder a proper assessment of student needs in the non-government school system.

In its report, the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) called for further negotiations with the non-government sectors for the development of, and transition to, a new way of assessing schools' and parental capacity to contribute.

As a step towards resolving some of the issues, the Board recommended an annual residential address collection and data matching with income tax data to create a rolling average for a more stable measurement.

“The report makes it clear this direct measure of parental income can now be used without breaching privacy or requiring the collection of tax file numbers by a school,” Federal Education Minister, Simon Birmingham, said.

However, Birmingham said the current system remain in place for 2019 and any changes to the SES model begin no earlier than 2020.

The so-called independent sector appear somewhat mollified “This would provide schools certainty to plan and time for consultation and a considered government response later this year,” he said.

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) said it strongly supports the Board's decision not to use fees as a measure of capacity to contribute.

“*The analysis outlined in the report clearly demonstrates that fees are not an accurate or consistent measure of a school community's capacity to contribute,*” ISCA executive director, Colette Colman, said.

“*The proposed methodology will require significant work to determine whether it would produce accurate and valid information at the individual school level.*”

Colman said that because the majority of Independent schools are stand-alone entities, it is critical that any methodology is valid “not only at the sector or system level but also at the individual school level”.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) agreed that the Board’s recommendation to use family income in place of SES scores was a “major shift”.

However, ISQ executive director, David Robertson, said any funding changes “must be applied consistently to all non-government schools”.

“The importance of each non-state school being treated in the same way for funding purposes cannot be over-emphasised. Unlike past funding arrangements, any new model must be applied on an equal basis to each individual school,” he said.

“This is critical because the amount of government funding non-state schools receive is a key determinant of the level at which schools set their tuition fees.”

<https://www.theeducatoronline.com/au/news/govt-releases-review-into-private-school-funding/252086>

This spat between Mr Birmingham and the private sector is all very infotaining for readers of *The Australian* Newspaper and private school networks. It has been largely ignored by the Fairfax Press.

But what does it mean for public schools and the vast majority of taxpayers who will never set foot inside the expensive if not hallowed halls of a private school?

But how much is it going to cost the taxpayer? Will this on-going mess up just continue the ongoing privatisation disasters of the neo-liberals as they scamper after ever more disillusioned voters?

We are told by *The Australian* that

Malcolm Turnbull faces a showdown with the nation’s Catholic leadership over his government’s bungled education funding policy that could cost taxpayers between \$2.5 billion and \$3bn to fix.

The Prime Minister will meet the church’s national leadership to discuss the Coalition’s targeting of the faith and attempt to repair the political damage ahead of the federal election.

Mr Turnbull’s office has confirmed Education Minister Simon Birmingham will attend the talks.

Analysis of the Chaney review of school funding has shown the cost of fixing the policy is likely to be dramatically higher than reported last week, with the church worried that school closures are inevitable without a massive injection of funding.

The Australian reported weeks ago that the Catholic sector would need an extra \$1bn over four years but this figure blows out to between \$2.5bn and \$3bn across the decade.

Archbishops Mark Coleridge and Anthony Fisher will attend this month's meeting, which will also discuss the \$4bn child abuse redress scheme and probably the government's position on the seal of the confessional.

Church sources said Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne's decision to slam the church as liars over the school funding issue continued to incense senior figures as well as Senator Birmingham's decision to disadvantage its schools through the non-government school funding system.

It is understood the Archdiocese of Brisbane has recently discovered a budget hole of at least \$40 million for its schools and that Labor leader Bill Shorten is preparing to campaign on funding in Queensland.

Mr Turnbull's spokesman confirmed the meeting: "It's a pre-existing meeting that will discuss a number of matters including schools funding. The Minister for Education and Training has been invited to the section of the meeting relating to schools funding."

Liberal elders including former prime ministers John Howard and Tony Abbott are bemused by Senator Birmingham and Mr Pyne's attacks on church officials and the Education Minister's failure to listen to warnings about the existing socio-economic status score system, which was biased against the Catholic sector.

An Australian Catholic Bishops Conference spokesman said its president, Archbishop Coleridge, would attend the meeting, along with Archbishop Fisher. He did not comment further.

The Australian understands the Catholic sector wants to repair its relationship with the government but has decided to pour more resources into keeping Senator Birmingham and his department accountable for decision-making.

Coalition MPs also are railing against Senator Birmingham because of concerns that any school closures or fee rises would cause a backlash in marginal seats.

In March, Senator Birmingham accused Catholic Education Commission of Victoria executive director Stephen Elder of being open to being bought for a "few pieces of silver" from Mr Shorten after the Labor leader pledged to provide extra money to Catholic schools.

This biblical reference angered many in the church and government, but it was Mr Pyne's claims the church was lying over the funding issue that remained a white-hot topic of conversation.

Mr Pyne said last year of his constituents: "Not one of them has complained about it, so I'm not sure how significant an issue it is outside the pages of The Australian newspaper ... We aren't getting any heat in my electorate office about it at all, and I think that's because the Catholic education system really is running a very dishonest campaign."

On Friday, Senator Birmingham released the Chaney review that proposes using confidential family income data to create a new funding model, a plan that would lead to parents at hundreds of independent and Catholic schools facing big increases in fees.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/turnbull-olive-branch-to-catholic-leaders-over-education-policy/news-story/5d7820881fbc04971a769aa5543090e1>

Where will these funds come from?

We discover from the Australian Education Union that Turnbull's secret education reform plans for public schools involve a decision to cut \$1.9 billion from public schools. And these decisions are being taken without any consultation with teachers.

It seems that the only consultations being held by Mr Turnbull and his running scared MPS in swinging seats are Stephen Elder, Archbishop Coleridge and Archbishop Fisher.

DOGS have been here many many times before. Mr Turnbull might be about to discover that Mr Birmingham and Christopher Pyne have their finger on the pulse of the Australian electorate and they are in danger of following Catholic vote down the pathways of deception, not only to perdition, but to irrelevance and political oblivion. “

The only way forward for Australian education is back to first principles. ALL children - regardless of their parents' taxation certificates and/or minimisation schemes - should have the opportunity for a free secular and universal education in well - funded schools open to all children. Only public schools can fulfil this objective. Private, religious schools never have, never can and never will do so.

On a practical level, if charging fees should be illegal – as in Finland, Mr Birmingham's problems with the Catholic bishops and Stephen Elder would be solved overnight!

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

