

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 763

The Business of Government Held up by

Dan Tehan and his \$4.9 billion Political Fix for Religious Schools

Church Tail wagging the Australian Government Dog

On Tuesday 18 September the Australian people were told that PM Scott Morrison has cancelled October COAG meetings.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/18/scott-morrison-cancels-coag-premiers-meeting-amid-policy-upheaval>

The Council of Australian Governments is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. Its cancellation means that the working of the Australian federation – federal and state - is on hold until Scott Morrison and his government have got their act together. A meeting is scheduled for December – but can Scott Morrison single handedly cancel that as well?

What is holding Scott Morrison up?

Federal officials have told their State counterparts that various reforms are not yet ready for detailed discussion.

What reforms? Australian citizens may ask.

The October COAG meeting was originally supposed to consider drought, health funding and measures to reduce family violence – but the leadership change in Canberra has blown the schedule off course. In particular senior officials confirmed the discussion would be deferred until the new government settled its revised position on health and education funding. The Guardian newspaper tells us that in particular, **the new federal education minister, Dan Tehan, is working up a political fix on Catholic schools. And it has now been announced!**

Catholic and independent schools will receive an extra \$4.6bn over the next decade ! But not all State Governments, and in particular the NSW State Government are not buying it.

So now we have it. A major problem holding up the government of Australia is the appeasement of the Catholic sector with billions of dollars of special deals. Public schools are kicked aside in the funding stakes.

Once again, the Church tail is wagging the Australian Government dog.

But as Scott Morrison's government staggers on, the non-Catholic non-government school sector, otherwise known, somewhat euphemistically as 'independent schools', is not leaving its eggs in the Liberal Party basket.

The former Turnbull government had done a \$4.4bn pre-spill deal with the Catholic sector contingent on its acceptance of a needs-based funding model based on individual parents' capacity to pay fees.

The deal would reportedly mean Catholic schools that benefited from the recommendations of the SES review could move to the new funding model sooner, while those that suffered from it could keep their existing socioeconomic status from 2011 until 2027.

The so-called independent sector are not happy at being left behind and accused of being rorting the system by the Catholic sector. While they cry 'poor' and demand more public money, they can find funds to employ a top level Labor-aligned lobbying firm to push their case in Canberra. *The Guardian* tells us that

Independent Schools Victoria and the Association of Independent Schools of [New South Wales](#) have both hired lobbying outfit Hawker Britton to represent them in Canberra.

Co-founded by the political strategist and former Kevin Rudd adviser Bruce Hawker and the former Labor staffer David Britton, the firm is one of the largest lobbying outfits in Canberra.

Currently headed by Simon Banks – a former adviser to Rudd and Mark Latham – it lists the Commonwealth Bank, AMP and Amazon among its long list of high-profile clients.

The Non-Catholic sector may be sensible to hire a Labor-aligned firm in the lobbying stakes of our corporate democracy, being "realistic" amid the government's instability and polls.

But amid all the hoo ha ha it should be noted that the majority of children in Australia, namely 64%, still attend public schools. The Coalition ignores them at its peril, while the Labor Party, sidling after the religious vote, should not take the public school vote for granted. The Public school 'Fair Funding Now' group are out and about, doorknocking for public schools in a number of swinging electorates.

So- if and when the Labor Government wins the next election, which school voting group will have put them in?

Watch this space.

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