

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 770

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION IN HOC TO FUNDING BASED ON RELIGION

The truth is out in stark reality. The Catholic hierarchy have never been concerned about poor parish schools and disadvantaged Catholic children. Again and again the hierarchy have bullied Australian politicians. The bishops demand control over their education system with minimal accountability for billions of dollars of public money.

In the nineteenth century the hierarchy were prepared to do without State Aid so that they could appoint and dismiss teachers; discriminate against students; and control the curriculum. They did not expect to be in the financial wilderness for 80 years, but, after 1964, the religious hierarchies have wielded unconscionable power in Australia.

The latest political scalp of the Coalition government was the erstwhile Minister for Education, Simon Birmingham, bless his little public school socks – who naively believed that the education funding landscape could assist disadvantaged children and a Gonski style ‘Needs’ policy. He was swiftly blindsided by a Catholic bishop and his Melbourne bureaucrat, aided and abetted by the Labor Party. Mr Shorten, -bless his little Xavier socks – knew exactly what he was dealing with.

Birmingham was only too happy to move sideways and give the chair to Dan Tehan who – bless his little Xavier socks – also understood the religious people he was dealing with.

The reaction of Birmingham to his being kicked sideways was outlined in The Guardian 6 November 2018 is instructive:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/nov/06/how-the-catholic-schools-sector-outplayed-the-coalition>

Birmingham now concedes, for the first time, that it was a campaign that cost him his job. The price of peace, he says, was his own head on a platter.

“I was confident we could agree to a principled implementation ... with the nine in 10 Catholic education leaders who had always engaged with me in good faith,” Birmingham told Guardian Australia.

“But if we also wanted peace with the one in 10, then a new face was clearly a prerequisite. I was happy to suggest a number of credible options, including Dan [Tehan].”

They had their priests preaching from the pulpit on Sunday about how terrible the NSW government was

The “one in 10”, Birmingham says, is the Victorian Catholic Education Commission’s Stephen Elder, a former Victorian Liberal MP. Recently, [Elder expressed his “regret”](#) for Birmingham’s “humiliation” while appearing to claim responsibility for his scalp.

Birmingham was a rare breed in Turnbull’s cabinet – out of 18 Liberal MPs, he was one of only four who attended public schools.

Tasked with the difficult job of securing Senate support for the Gonski 2.0 package, which would deliver more cash than Abbott but less than promised by Gillard, it was decided the best plan was to hang it on principle – the Senate lure was an end to special deals and one funding system for all schools, public and private.

Senior Liberals now concede the one funding model agenda was crafted to appeal to the Greens, but it set the Turnbull government on a collision course with Catholics.

The Coalition still have a problem. So do the Catholic hierarchy. So do other religious hierarchies. The DLP may have infiltrated the Coalition – and the Labor Party, but they no longer hold the balance of power. And the Catholic sector may have gained yet another ‘special deal’, but the public school vote is out and about with a vengeance. And it is looking at the options. State Governments know this, even if the Coalition has not yet woken up to what has just occurred.

The mainstream media are no longer prepared to run from religious issues as the economic realities of Australian education funding. The works of Trevor Cobbold from *Save Our Schools* is being taken up and given wide coverage in the Fairfax media.

For example on 13 November 2018 Ross Gittins, the economics editor of *The Age* bemoans the price we have paid for decades of school funding based on religion as follows:

What a country we live in. We can happily agree to same-sex marriage, but when Catholics put the frighteners on, politicians on both sides get weak-kneed.

Some relevant information has just arrived from Paris. A [report](#) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has used its PISA worldwide testing of 15-year-olds on maths, reading and science to assess progress on Equity in Education.

Prime ministers love boasting about our economy’s high standing in the world, so how about this: Australia now has the equal-fourth most socially stratified education system among the OECD’s 35 member-countries. Only Mexico, Hungary and Chile can claim to have a more social class-segregated school system than ours. For a country that still likes to think of itself

as class-free, that's quite an achievement. <https://www.smh.com.au/education/the-price-we-pay-for-decades-of-school-funding-based-on-religion-20181113-p50fof.html>

Ross Gittins, like many others, are prepared to romance about Gonski and 'sector blind' Needs policies, believing that religious men who say they follow Christ actually care about disadvantaged children rather than status, power and taxpayer dollars.

DOGS have never made that mistake. The only way forward for ALL the nation's children is to have publicly funded schools that are open to all without ANY discriminatory requirements.

This means schools that are free, secular and universal. If religious beliefs are important to some – and they are – then that should be a private, not a public matter. It should most certainly not be a matter for billions of dollars of public funding.

Australia is a pluralist, not a theocratic society. Why should any taxpayer be forced to pay for the propagation of beliefs to which they do not adhere?

It is outrageous , that in a democracy which claims to believe in separation of religion from the state, a Melbourne bishop and his education administrator can determine the fate of a Minister for Education and have him kicked sideways as they prize even more billions from the public Treasury.

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