

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 801

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION :

THE PEOPLE

Supporters of public education in Australia are, understandably, both concerned and weary at the thought of the battle to be fought for three years under a penny pinching, unsympathetic, Coalition Government.

Yet public education, like democracy, is like an onion, with many layers of protection. It is genuinely public, open to all children. Given government neglect, to call a public school a government school is fast becoming a misnomer. But genuinely “public” our State system is.

In this it is unlike its opponents which depend upon a mask of false rhetoric, greed, misrepresentation and downright lies, not to mention billions of dollars of taxpayers money, for their survival. The opening up of private schools to the children of ALL Australian citizens – who pay for them after all – is long, long overdue.

The most pervasive lie peddled by religious private school interests, is that public schools are dominated by an ‘overcentralised, autocratic, bureaucratic ‘Department’. This may be the pot calling the kettle black, given the political and financial centralisation of the Catholic and other religious systems. In fact, The Education Department of Victoria has been emasculated by many ‘re-structures’, and undermined by private school operatives since the 1980s.

But public education does have a future in Australia. Corena Haythorpe, the President of the AEU, in a speech to the SA Future of Education Conference tells us why, and then, provides us with a moving example from her own experience.

Corena says:

The future of public education has always been about its people; the principals, leaders, teachers, support staff, students and families in preschools, schools and TAFE.

[Then she tells her own story:](#)

‘At the age of 15 I dropped out of school and went fishing. My school, Streaky Bay Area School, about 750km from Adelaide on the West Coast of South Australia, didn’t offer year 12 so I lost interest and got a job on fishing boat as a deckhand instead.

My life could have taken a very different course if it wasn’t for a small group of committed public school teachers who became frustrated by the lack of options for kids in our rural community.

These teachers successfully lobbied the SA Education Department to offer a year 12 curriculum and six months after setting sail, I found myself back in the classroom with teachers who dedicated themselves to making sure that a few country kids had the opportunity to reach their potential. They gave us a future that we did not know was possible. Their ability to influence government and inspire disengaged teenagers left a deep imprint on me. It’s the reason I became a teacher and the reason I joined the union.

Now, as AEU President, I see teachers like mine every day. Teachers with a passion for sharing knowledge and changing lives. Yet I also see teachers impeded by the impact of increasing workloads. Members commonly tell us that not only are they being expected to work too many hours, but the increased work that is asked of them makes little or no contribution to student learning. It’s a case of not only too much work but the wrong work.

Australian public school teachers are amongst the most innovative and enthusiastic adopters of new ideas and approaches to education according to the OECD’s *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) 2018 report. However, the report also reinforced that school time spent teaching has fallen in the last five years while time spent on administration has increased, and is now 33% higher than the OECD average. This is also impacting on professional commitments with 60% of Australian teachers reporting that their own development is being curtailed by conflicts with their work schedule.

This is our reality, but it doesn’t need to be our future. **The SA Future of Education Conference** offers us the opportunity to take some time out for professional development - to ‘look-up’ and contemplate how we want to shape the future so that we can re-frame our reality.

As we face three more years of a Coalition Government, it’s more important than ever that we take this time now.

While we didn’t get the result we wanted at the election, I’m proud that we put public education on the national agenda right across the board; from pre-school funding to addressing the inequality between public and private school funding arrangements to the defunding of TAFE.

Our campaign will continue to shine a light on public education issues until we reach our objectives. I know this negative government agenda won’t suppress the passion of the teaching profession. The future of public education has always been about its people; the principals, teachers, support staff, students and families.

Like my teachers who came together to lobby for change for Streaky Bay students, our collective strength will make us stronger too.

I feel encouraged for the future when I see passionate and committed people (who know that education is about more than ticking boxes) stepping up to share ideas.’

DOGS note that public education has always survived and flourished because Australian parents and taxpayers, confronted with the reality that communities and the next generation matter, reject misrepresentations and mantras of the privatisation sector.

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