

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS**

PRESS RELEASE 802

**THE LONG TERM PRICE OF STATE AID TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS:
INEQUALITY**

Historically, the concept of 'Equality' is a recent one. It was expressed in the Bills of Rights crafted as a result of the French and American Revolutions.

' Liberty, Fraternity and Equality' they trumpeted.

In Britain, the wealthy gave a little, in the Reform Act of 1832, and much later, the extension of sanitation and education to the unwashed but 'deserving' poor.

But the old oligarchies, the aristocracies, the technocrats, and in more recent times, the multinational corporations, have always found a way around having to pay for the extension of opportunities to the 'lower orders'. Their own children have always been given an educational head start in life's relay race.

In these latter days of neo-liberal theology, large corporations – religious and for-profit, have realised that there are huge financial, political and ideological advantages to be made from insecure parents and educational billions of dollars of taxpayer subsidies on offer - with minimal strings attached.

Not unsurprisingly, reality has deviated somewhat alarmingly from the rhetoric. In our own time, the old 'enlightenment' rhetoric has changed, in education from 'equality' to talk of the 'disadvantaged.' Yet in the last 50 years, the more politicians have pontificated, the more Reports have been written, and the more taxpayers' money has been spent, the more disadvantage has increased.

As the DOGS told Karmel of School Commission fame in 1973, you cannot have 'equality of opportunity' if the running field is stacked against the disadvantaged. You cannot assist disadvantaged children if the schools are unequal to begin with and disadvantaged children are rejected by wealthy schools.

In 1969 DOGS opposed the opening of the flood gates of State Aid to private, religious schools because they believed this would encourage a division of our democratic society along religious, ethnic, and class lines. They were not wrong. These days, a child's educational opportunity depends more and more on their postcode and parental bank balance. Unfortunately, what the DOGS predicted is now come to pass.

The Latest Reports :

1. Follow the Money

Trevor Cobbold, from [Save Our Schools](#), has exposed the systemic overfunding of private as opposed to public schools. In his recent papers he studies deals done between the Federal Coalition and State Governments. He found that

[New figures show that total government funding per student in public schools adjusted for inflation \(“real funding”\) was cut between 2009 and 2017 while funding for Catholic and Independent schools increased massively. Even during the Gonski funding period of 2013-2017 the funding increase for private schools was over three times the increase for public schools....the total income per student of Independent and Catholic schools is now significantly higher than in public schools – \\$14,215 in public schools compared to \\$15,740 in Catholic schools and \\$22,108 in Independent schools](#)

For Victoria he notes that:

[The new funding agreement between the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments signed last month will rob the state’s public schools of billions over the next ten years. Cumulative under-funding will amount to over \\$17 billion by 2028.](#)

As with the [other Commonwealth/State agreements](#), the Victorian agreement is heavily biased against public schools and in favour of private schools. Public schools will be under-funded indefinitely while private schools will be fully funded by 2023.

2. What has happened to Disadvantaged Children?

When State Aid was introduced in the 1960s, it was to assist the ‘poor parish schools’ of the Roman Catholic Church. That church, alongside Protestant churches owned and ran many independent wealthy schools, while poorer parish schools had been left to languish. Even so, the majority of genuinely disadvantaged children have always been enrolled in the public system. State Aid was always about existing wealthy and new ‘poor’ religious schools being funded, rather than money for the genuinely disadvantaged. After all, religious schools selected children at the gate, while public schools were open to all children.

Billions of dollars later, the ‘trickle down’ effect is becoming startlingly obvious. The vast proportion of Australia’s disadvantaged children—and they are a growing segment of the population — are in public, not private schools. Billions of dollars are now diverted to selective religious schools while disadvantaged public schools go begging.

Karmel, Schools Commissions, and Gonski 01 and 02 Reports later, our school system is worse at addressing inequality. A more recent international study

finding that the proportion of [Australian students who are overcoming their disadvantage has fallen](#) from 36.3 per cent in 2006 to 28.6 per cent in 2015.

3. Success Stories in Public Schools

Meanwhile, public schools teachers fight against the odds, and [a new Australian study](#) has found that only three high schools and 21 primary schools are both disadvantaged and high-achieving. The study, which looked at 8145 schools across the country, classifies disadvantage as being in the lowest quartile of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) scores and high achievement as performing above the national average in NAPLAN tests between 2015 and 2017.

The significantly higher number of primary schools that are overcoming their disadvantage compared to high schools highlights the compounding effect of falling behind, according to the study's author Blaise Joseph, a research fellow in education at the Centre for Independent Studies.

What is particularly interesting about this study is that the Centre for Independent Studies is a right wing think tank. So it is not unsurprising that they discovered that 'an analysis of the teaching methods used in the high-achieving disadvantaged primary schools finds that school discipline, direct instruction and data-informed teaching practices are common elements that have been shown to lead to higher achievement.

The study also finds evidence of teacher collaboration and professional learning, experienced and autonomous school leadership and comprehensive early reading instruction across the 21 schools.' Embedded in this report is a recommendation that:

"Programs like Best Start Year 7 should be more common and it's even more important for disadvantaged schools to have that positive school culture."

It will be important to watch this space for recommendations related to for profit educational enterprises.

What is more interesting is what the principal of one of the 'successful public High Schools has to say:

Peter Rouse, the principal at Canley Vale High School, which has been one of the highest value-adding schools in NSW for five years despite 68 per cent of its student population coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, attributes their success to targeted teaching and high levels of support.

"We explicitly build literacy and numeracy into the students' timetables and we have a highly-intensive 12 month professional learning program for teachers from day one," he said.

"We also have a lot of individual management for students, if they arrive on the first day of year 7 without a uniform, we help them get one, if they're not fed, we run a breakfast club every day, we have supports in place for every aspect of their journey."

Congratulations should go to Peter Rouse, and his teachers. But he should be careful of Right Wing think tanks bringing gifts. Christina Ho, a senior lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney, went to the nub of the problem: the Coalition's private school shibboleth of 'parental choice'.

She said

The fall in the number of high schools that are overcoming disadvantage most likely relates to school choice.

"It probably reflects the fact that in secondary school, a lot more parents are more anxious about where they send their kids, while in primary school parents are more willing to send their kids to the local primary school," Dr Ho said.

"Some people are able to avoid schools that have bad reputations by going to a non-government school while others are left behind, so in secondary school you've got a clustering of advantaged kids with other advantaged kids and disadvantaged kids with other disadvantaged kids.

"If we didn't have an education system that was so divided, we wouldn't have schools that have such high levels of disadvantage.

DOGS note that Australia will not overcome disadvantage in educational opportunity for large numbers of Australian children, until the common good and the choice of the children themselves becomes a national, not a parental responsibility, and State Aid to private, religious schools is withdrawn.

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