

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT
SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 809**

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL:
HINDU COUNCIL DEMANDS
PUBLICLY FUNDED RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS DO LIKWISE !**

The major feature which distinguishes religious from public schools - apart from their marketization of education as a commodity and expensive infrastructure – is their ability to ‘choose’ the children and parents they permit inside their gates. For these institutions are ‘gated’ schools. The principle of ‘choice’ is their prerogative and not that of the children that enter those gates. Their business model depends upon the principle of ‘exclusiveness’ and exclusion of those who do not fit their peculiar profile.

This lies behind their ‘independent’ brand. Except that these institutions are not ‘independent’ of taxpayer funding. Far from it. And, with the downturn in the economy there is a correspondence downturn in their enrolments. We are told that [‘private school enrolments have slumped as parents feel the economic pinch’](#)

Some – mainly in the middle fee charging range- are being forced into debt – to keep up with the ‘independent’ Joneses.

Hindu Council of Australia Questions ‘Exclusiveness of Religious Schools

But it is the exclusiveness of many of these exclusionist (lets forget about their being genuinely independent or religious) schools that is now under question from minority religious groups unable to get a slice of the education cake for themselves. We are told that the Hindu Council of Australia: [has proposed that faith-based schools be required to enrol a ‘certain percentage of students ... from other faiths’](#).

The council’s submission to the *Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC)* calls for it to expand the scope of its religious exemptions review so that it includes the ‘religious rights of other faith believers as well as of non-believers’. It says the review should consider whether faith-based organisations, including schools, should be required to publish their policy related to the enrolment of students and the hiring of employees, contractors, and suppliers of other faiths. It wants such organisations to explicitly inform those of other faiths that their participation in religious services is optional, that non-participation will not be viewed negatively, and they won’t be coerced into changing their religion.

The Hindu Council of Australia proposes that faith-based schools and employers be required to admit: a certain percentage of students, employees [and] teachers of other faiths so that

students, while learning about their own religion, do not grow without contact with students and people of other faiths, cultures, orientation and backgrounds. The submission says that as long as the organisation works within constraints such as these, it should have the 'freedom to profess, teach and practice their faith within the institute'. 'No faith-based institution' it says, should ever be forced to use resources 'in any way to promote, encourage or propagate teachings that are against the teachings and beliefs of that faith'. Council vice president Surinder Jain told *The Age* for example, that children in religious schools were growing up without meeting people of a different religion.

Fortunately for the growing members of our Australian Hindu community, Australian public schools are open to their children. There, they are welcome. They mix with children of all religions, race, culture and gender. Religious schools have fractured our multicultural society to the detriment of our society. It would be a tragedy if the children of Hindu belief were also separated out.

Meanwhile, the concerns of the Hindu Council of Australia reflect an economic reality which has long since undermined private school rhetoric.

Taxpayers are now substantially paying for both capital and running costs of many private exclusionist schools. It is time they were opened to all children and became public schools.

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