

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 884**

**SELECTIVE HEARING PROBLEM FOR
FEDERAL MINISTER TUDGE :**

HE CLAIMS THE EDUCATION FUNDING WARS ARE OVER

March 20 2021

The new Minister for Education, Alan Tudge, like his Prime Minister is too set in his Canberra Bubble to hear the anger of public school parents, teachers and advocates.

In a March 11 2021 speech entitled [*Being our best: Returning Australia to the Top group of education nations*](#), the federal Minister for Education and Youth

1. reiterated the egalitarian rhetoric, with its privatisation 'get out' clauses referring to 'excellence'. He said:

In 2019, the Education Ministers of every state and territory along with the then federal education minister came together to issue the Alice Springs Mparntwe Declaration.

The Declaration, the fourth of its kind, set out a clear ambition: "Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face."

I have a long-standing deep commitment to this vision, and as the federal Minister for Education as of late last year, I commit myself and our government to this central aspiration: to give every individual the opportunity to reach their potential. To achieve this aspiration, we must focus on excellence as well as equity in education.

2. Bemoaned the stark facts that Australia has fallen badly behind in the last few decades:

Since 2000, Australia's performance in reading has declined by 26 points, or the equivalent of nine months of schooling.

In maths, we have fallen 33 points since 2003, or by 14 months of schooling.

In science, we have fallen 24 points since 2006, or by 11 months of schooling.

This decline has been consistent across different groups of students. Our top students are less likely to score in the highest achievement bands and our lower performing students are more

likely to have fallen below the proficient standard. The problem is not a growing divide in student results; it is a decline in performance across the board.

As our student results have fallen, we have dropped behind more and more countries.

In the early 2000s, we ranked 4th internationally in reading, 8th in science, and 11th in maths. By 2018, we had fallen to 16th in reading, 17th in science and 29th in maths.

We are being significantly outcompeted in our neighbourhood. For example, Australian students are now, on average, about one and a half years behind Singaporean students when it comes to reading and science, and three years behind on maths.

But it is not just the Asian tigers that have leapt ahead of us. The UK, Canada and New Zealand – all countries we used to outperform in education - are now ahead of us on all three assessment domains.

If this was our economy, this decline would be a national topic of conversation. Perhaps the lack of attention is because the decline has been gradual rather than sudden. But when viewed over a twenty-year period, it is profound – and it will have consequences for our long-term productivity and competitiveness if we cannot lift our education performance.

3. But instead of looking at the growing inequalities in Australian education exacerbated by the corresponding inequalities in funding between public and private systems, the State Aid cancer in the body politic, blithely announced that

*I have watched or been involved in the funding debate for many years and **I am pleased that the school funding wars are now over.***

Funding for schools has increased by 38% in real per capita terms over the last decade. The School Resourcing Standard model for funding schools has been agreed by the Commonwealth with all State and Territory governments.

Since 2013, the Australian Government's school funding has increased in nominal terms by 80% to a record \$23.4 billion, and we have committed a further 40% increase to reach \$32.8 billion by 2029.The federal funding is locked in and agreed through to the end of the decade. The states and territories will need to live up to their side of the bargain also, but with record funding to all schools, our focus is now on how to use the money not how much schools should get or the distribution between the sectors.

The answer to Australia's schooling problems for Alan Tudge do not lie with equitable funding of a public system open to all children but in the conservative catch cry of 'discipline', 'standards' 'testing' and 'teacher quality'.

There is no consensus as to why our performance has declined over the last twenty years. It is certainly not because of a decline in funding. As outlined, our funding has gone up considerably in real per capita terms while at the same time our standards have declined.

Nor is it class sizes which have steadily declined over the past few decades and are now considerably smaller than other countries that significantly outperform us. Moreover, many of our schools are now brand new, with facilities that older generations look at with envy.

*But these things don't have as much of an impact as what happens inside the classroom. **The quality of the teaching, the rigour of the curriculum and the discipline in the classroom matter most.***

Alan Tudge is right about one thing. 'There is no consensus'. But it is not only about the reasons for the decline in our educational performance. It is about his assertion that '**the funding wars are over**'. This has been the wishful catch cry of politicians since the return of State Aid to private schools in 1964. And Alan Tudge and the Coalition ignore the reality at their peril.

Trevor Cobbold agrees and has written a blistering attack on the Tudge contention in Michael West's Independent media as follows:

Disadvantage accelerates as private school funding rises six times public schools over the decade

by [Trevor Cobbold](#) | Mar 22, 2021 | [Government](#)

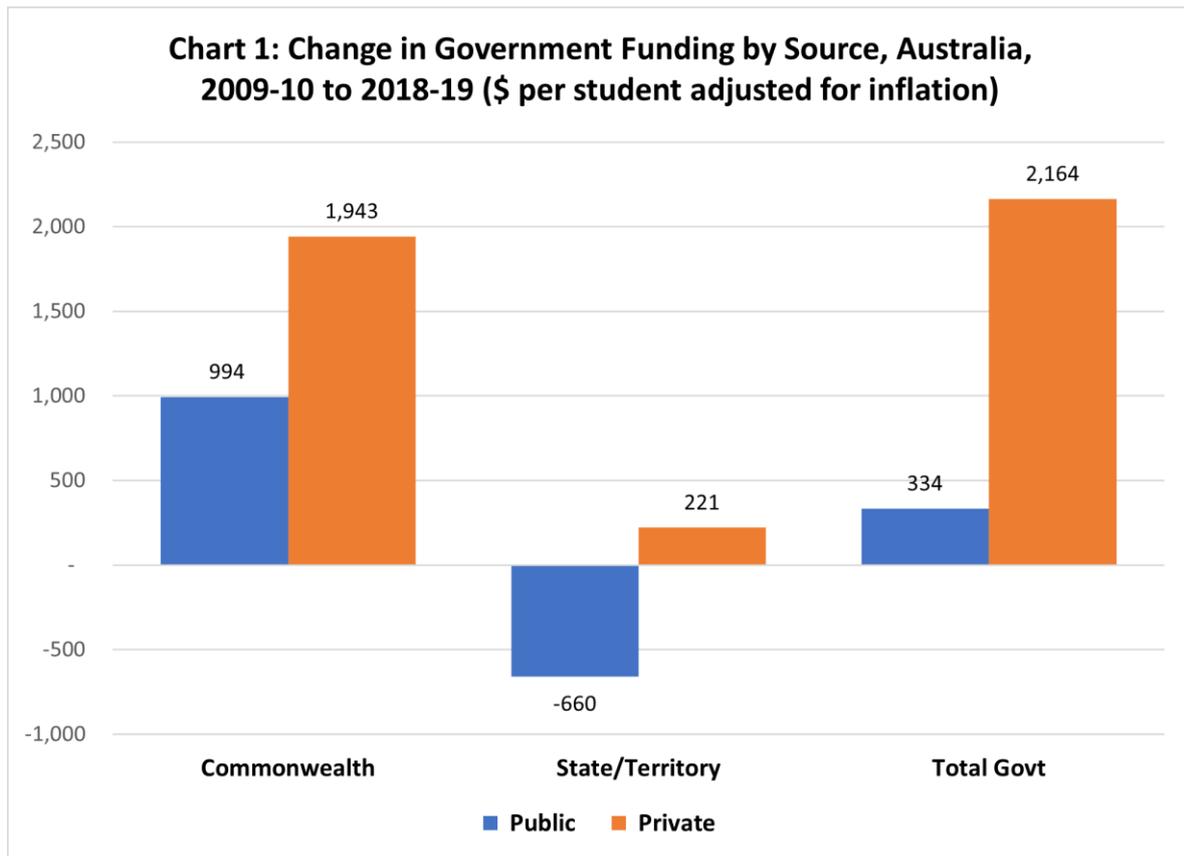
By 2029 public schools will be underfunded by \$60 billion; private schools overfunded by \$6 billion. In the decade to 2019, private schools received an extra \$2,164 per student, public schools just \$334 per student. The huge costs to society as a result of such disadvantage includes higher unemployment, poor health and low economic growth but Minister Alan Tudge claims the school funding wars over. **Trevor Cobbold** reports.

Education Minister Alan Tudge has now declared that [the school funding wars are over](#). But they are only over in the minds of the Morrison Government, which has demolished the Gonski fairer-funding model and lavished billions more on private schools.

The war is certainly not over for public schools, with new figures showing them falling further behind. Chronic under-funding of public schools presents huge costs to individuals, society and national economic prosperity.

Between 2009-10 and 2018-19, Commonwealth and state government funding for private schools increased by more than six times that for public schools. Private school funding increased by \$2,164 per student, adjusted for inflation, compared to \$334 per student for public schools [Chart 1].

The contrast is even worse in percentage terms. Funding per private school student increased by 22.4% compared to only 2.4% for public schools, that is, nearly 10 times the increase for public schools.



The Commonwealth Government increased funding for both public and private schools. However the increase for private schools was nearly double that for public schools – \$1,943 per student compared to \$994 per student in public schools.

States also favoured private schools

State governments have also favoured private schools over public schools.

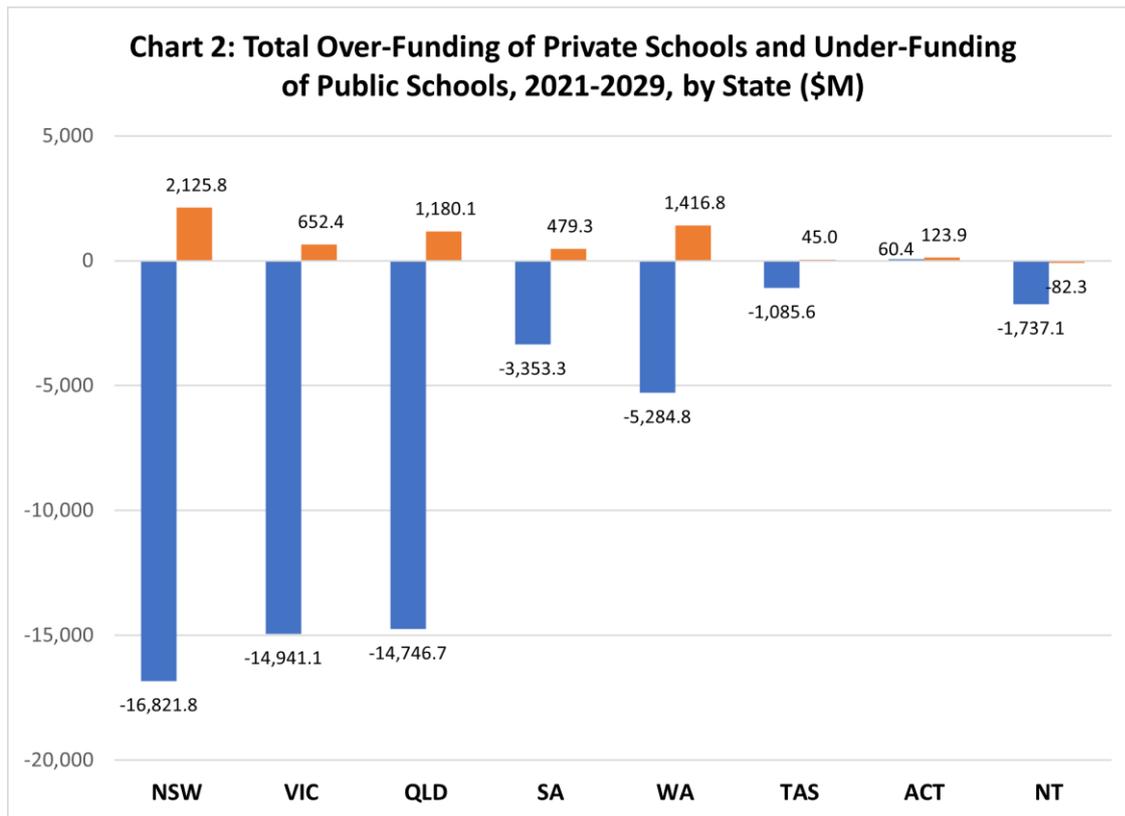
All state governments, both Labor and the Liberal-Nationals, took advantage of the extra Commonwealth funding to cut their own funding of public schools – by an average of \$660 per student.

However, they increased their funding for private schools – by an average \$221 per student.

The new figures are drawn from the Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2021 but are adjusted here to provide like comparisons between public and private schools and to adjust more accurately for cost inflation ([see here](#) for details of adjustments).

Other official government figures show there is little prospect that public schools will be adequately funded over the next decade unless there is a dramatic change in Commonwealth and state government funding policies.

Under the bilateral funding agreements between the Commonwealth and state governments, public schools in all states except the ACT will only be ever funded at 91% of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which is the total government funding that schools need to meet the educational needs of their students. The cumulative under-funding to 2029 is [estimated at \\$60 billion](#) [Chart 2].



In contrast, private schools will be funded at more than 100% of their SRS until at least 2029 because of munificent special deals for private schools by the Morrison Government and continuing over-funding by several state governments.

The cumulative over-funding to 2029 is [estimated at \\$6 billion](#). However, this is just the tip of the iceberg because [flaws in the new Direct Income Measure](#) method of funding private schools mean that their financial need is over-estimated and they receive much more government funding than is warranted.

Coalition waged war on Gonski model

The dire straits of public school funding today is the result of the war waged by successive Coalition governments against the Gonski funding plan to direct more government funding to those most in need.

Education Minister Alan Tudge has been an active participant in all stages of the war. He opposed the Gonski plan at the outset because it would [“penalise” Catholic and Independent schools](#).

He and his colleagues are fulfilling what Tony Abbott called the Liberal Party’s [“proud history of funding independent and Catholic schools”](#) to “protect them” and ensure they “continue to flourish”.

[Tudge has even claimed](#) that we have “very good social mobility and social equity in our school system...” It is so far from the truth as to be ludicrous. The [PISA 2018](#) results show a three-year learning gap between 15-year-old students from high and low socio-economic status (SES) families. Much higher proportions of high SES students complete Year 12 than low SES students.

The vast majority of low SES and other disadvantaged students attend public schools; only a small proportion attend private schools.

Figures provided to Senate Estimates by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority show that 85% of low SES students attend public schools compared to 12% in Catholic schools and only 4% in Independent schools.

More than 90% of disadvantaged schools in Australia are public schools.

Moreover, [an OECD report](#) shows that Australia has one of the most segregated school systems in the OECD and the world. Australia had the equal largest increase in social segregation in the OECD and the world since 2006. Government education and funding policies are major factors behind the increase in social segregation.

All this demonstrates severe social inequity in schools. The flagrant favouritism in funding private schools can only be described as outrageous and obscene. It makes it virtually impossible to reduce the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged and advantaged students.

Society pays a huge price

The failure to address disadvantage in education presents [huge costs to society](#) including higher unemployment, low earnings, poor health and low economic growth. The pattern is all too familiar as other government policies such as [housing](#), which purposefully favour the already better off and contribute to stagnating economic productivity and growth. School funding policies desperately need to change if our economy is going to thrive especially in the wake of the Corona recession.

Increased funding for public schools is fundamental to improved education outcomes for disadvantaged students because it provides the human and material resources needed to make a difference in learning. This is supported by numerous overseas and Australian studies and most recently by a [comprehensive analysis of the most rigorous studies](#) of the relationship between school funding and student outcomes.

Tudge is in dream world if he thinks the fight for a well-funded public school system is over. The fight for equity and justice in school funding and education will continue.

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