

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF  
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS  
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THE ACER AND THE ART OF  
NEUTRAL RESEARCH  
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Academics and researchers in Australia have, for sixty years, avoided the private/public controversy. Being neutral has in fact, meant favouring the private sector. Avoiding the State Aid issue, has merely fuelled glaring inequalities.

Like Australia's 'Black history', the State Aid history has become almost invisible.

Take, for example, the track record of the **Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)**.

In 2015, ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters AO wrote an influential series of articles on [the 'big five' challenges facing Australian school education](#). Six years – and a global pandemic – later, what progress has been made towards meeting those challenges? In five webinars between February and May, experts from education research and practice around the world are discussing education's most pressing issues, and look to the future of education in Australia and beyond.

Despite reform efforts, regular government reviews and ongoing calls for change, the ACER progress towards improving the quality and equity of Australian education is often slow, Professor Masters wrote in 2015. The same is true on the international stage; progress towards meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 – to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all – was [too slow before COVID-19 hit, and what progress had been made was reversed by school closures caused by the pandemic](#).

Real reform depends on tackling the deepest and most stubborn underlying challenges facing Australian education, Professor Masters argued.

He identified the following 'big five' challenges:

- Raising the status of the teaching profession
- Reducing disparities between Australian schools

- Designing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century curriculum
- Getting all children off to a good start
- Reducing the ‘long tail’ of underachievement

Six years on, the ACER has revisited these ‘big five’ challenges.

The most obvious challenges from the DOGS point of view is the second one, **‘Reducing disparities between Australian schools’**. One would have thought that in this research paper, produced in 2021 by the Principal Researcher at ACER, Dr Ainley, we would finally see credible funding figures explaining the blindingly obvious differences between the infrastructure and resources of private and public sector schools. We expected at least a few figures, such as those produced by Trevor Cobbold of *Save our Schools*.

Imagine our astonishment when we read Ainley’s paper and found – not one funding comparison between the public and private sector. His paper is an interesting one, but, dare we say it, best noted, not for what it includes, but for what it merely refers to in code words like ‘disparities’ and ‘variance’ which is blamed on the ‘system.’ If you do not believe DOGS, here it is –reproduced for your perusal.

### **Reducing disparities between Australian schools**

I don’t know how much of this article our listeners/readers took in or understood . It certainly contains a lot of education ‘in talk’, but DOGS note that this career researcher is expert at ‘playing it safe’ in the political leadership game. Note that in ACER parlance reference is made to government and non-government schools, not public and private ones. What did however come out of this article, was that non-government schools, in spite of billions of dollars of State Aid are not performing as well as expected.

In the same series, the article by the Deputy CEO (Research) of ACER, Sue Thomson entitled **‘The Long Tail’ of underachievement in Australia** has produced some very startling figures. If only for this reason it is worth reading. But, once again, in true ACER tradition, there is a blanket refusal to bite the ‘funding’ bullet. There is mention of socioeconomic disadvantage. But the answers to the underachievement is put in the hands of the teachers rather than politicians favouring schools for those in the upper rungs of society. However, Sue Thomson is prepared to admit that:

*Our schools are increasingly characterised less by what they do and more by who they enrol. Our framework of schools has become more regressive, divided, and segregated,’ (Bonnor et al., 2021). Until the playing field is level, we cannot contemplate a ‘stage not age’ system.*

Here is her paper.

**[Big five' education challenges: The 'long tail' of underachievement in Australia](#)**

**COMMENT**

**DOGS find it fascinating that so much learned and indeed interesting factual research can be done by a publicly funded research body like the ACER without biting the Church-State, and inequitable taxpayer funding bullet.**

**There is no recognition for example of the simple fact, exposed by Trevor Cobbold of Save our Schools that [private school funding has risen six time more than public school funding](#) over even the last decade. And this, in spite of the fact that more than 80% of disadvantaged children attend public schools.**

**Aren't we lucky that, on 3CR and with the DOGS, we are not fearful for our jobs, our careers, our reputation. We can call a spade a spade and bite those funding bullets – hard.**

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855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS  
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