

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 910
A NEW 'FAIRER EDUCATION PARTY' ESTABLISHED
IN NSW POLITICS**

New South Wales public education supporters have had enough. They are taking political matters into their own hands. It has been tried before and it is to be hoped that they succeed. But they need better leaders than Morrison and Perrottet. This is what Chris Bonner has to say. Further information can be found on their website at <https://www.fairereducationnsw.org.au/>

It's party time again: this time for fairer education

Over the last decade or two public educators have flirted with the idea of putting up candidates for election. The idea faded during the post-Gonski decade, maybe we believed that Gonski and the politicians might deliver. Or given that everyone now believes in equity, other things might change. But the Gonski process didn't deliver, and equity remains little more than a belief.

In the meantime, a minority party in the NSW Legislative Council is pushing education policy in very regressive directions. They know that, armed as they are with the balance of power, they can strongly influence the direction of policy. It's hardly new: there is no shortage of those elected to keep the bastards honest, thence to turn bastardry itself into an art form. So, what should be done? Years ago, in a former life, I would spend endless hours sitting across the table from those who made or implemented policy. On our side of the table would be school principals who were exceptional operators and formidable advocates for public education. We were very well armed with policy proposals, developed by those who not only ran schools but devoted endless time to creating better policy.

It was some time before I realised that we lacked two things. The first was a large crowd of advocates in Farrer Place, loud enough for their message to reach the tin ears amongst those on the other side of the table. The second was well-placed powerbrokers who could twist arms up Macquarie Street, or better still, actually be elected to twist arms and push buttons.

It is well beyond time to get into the fray, and get some people committed to restoring the 'public' in education, elected into the NSW parliament. In specific terms, for someone to put up an upper house team for the 2023 state election. That's one of the objectives of a newly formed political party, **Fairer Education NSW**, recently formed by senior experienced educators and community members. In the words on its website,

'In 2021, Fairer Education NSW is launching a campaign to contest seats in the NSW Upper House at the 2023 state election. Fairer Education NSW intends to become a force for significant advocacy in NSW public schools, and to promote public education as a first choice for high quality, secular and comprehensive education. Their immediate need is to attract at least 1000 members, by January next year, so they can establish as a registered political party in NSW. There is no impediment for anyone to join providing they are enrolled to vote in NSW, are at least 18 years old, have lived at their present address for at least one month, and are not a member of another party.'

At a pinch that probably describes the readership of the Save Our Schools Website. But the appeal has to go wider. Current NSW teachers and staff are free to become members of Fairer Education NSW, as the NSW Department of Education's Employee Code of Conduct allows employees to freely belong to any political party. Membership of Fairer Education NSW is free of charge. What the founders of Fairer Education NSW would like is for those interested to check out their website, Fairer Education NSW, and share the news with all likeminded people.

You can find out a lot more on the website, including some of the people involved, policies, membership etc. I've referred to 'they' when it should be 'we', as I joined up in late August. I confess to being a compulsive non-joiner of organisations, but this one is an exception. Already I've been a member of this group for much longer than my ten days as a member of the Tumut branch of the ALP in 1971.

The Fairer Education NSW party seems like the right thing at the right time. Given the tenor of the times some might say it could be better to support independents rather than a political party, but I feel the advantages of scale and the right branding strongly favours the party idea. I also feel that the candidates selected, whenever that is, will be absolutely committed, high profile, with excellent networks.

Yes, it is currently hard to get oxygen for any issues other than COVID, submarines or global heating (a tick for the last one) – but that won't always be the case. The pandemic has raised awareness of the need for better social policy, with a collective focus.

Fairness in education should always be a priority. I've just spent the last 18 months co-authoring a book on the post-Gonski era, a period in which so many indicators point to a slow-moving but inexorable disaster in school equity and fairness. The last chapter of the book includes a 'what if we do nothing' section. At so many levels, doing nothing isn't an option.

I know it's been said before, but if not this, then what; if not now, then when?

Chris Bonnor is co-author, with Tom Greenwell, of the provisionally titled *Waiting for Gonski*, how Australia failed its schools, forthcoming from New South Publishing, February 2022. He was President of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, 2001-2005.

DOGS are reminded of the heady times of 1969 when the DOGS was formed in NSW by the State school parents and teachers federation. Alan Horton, the Head Librarian from the University of NSW was the first President and Kath Taylor was the Secretary. Other prominent members were Stella Bath, Ernie Tucker and Joyce Jones. They stood candidates in several elections and were prepared to take on the sectarians. They were labelled 'sectarian' for their trouble.

The DOGS equalled and in some cases did better than the DLP vote. But, muddying the waters of separation of religion and the State, Whitlam's 'Needs' policy was supposed to ameliorate that DLP and solve the 'State Aid' problem. The DLP, with Prime Ministers like Abbott jumped onto the Conservative side of politics, and the State Aid' problem has mushroomed from millions into billions of dollars.

Time and again DOGS have been proved right.

The major education problem in Australia is a group of private institutions who wish to segregate our children by class, creed and colour. They have used so-called 'needs' policies to rort the system again and again. They are not and never have been interested in 'fairness'.

LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM
855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS
<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>