

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 936

## Australia's schools are in crisis, so why isn't education a national priority?

This is the question asked, not only by Brett Henebery in the 9 May issue of *The Educator* but also by Dr Doherty, the AEU, public school parents, teachers, and supporters. They are looking on, gobsmacked as the Coalition brazenly favours private schools and denigrates public school teachers. The Labor party, falling into the 'no private school will lose a dollar' slipstream, concentrates on post war second world war strategies for solving urgent teacher shortages – scholarships.

The arguments used by Henebery, the AEU, and financial researchers like SOS are economic. Henebery refers to recent research as follows:

*Over the years, a growing body of research has highlighted how [greater funding for public education can deliver long-term economic benefits for Australia](#).*

*However, we approach a crucial election at a time when the economy is reeling from [pressures such as rising inflation](#), interest rates and global supply chain disruptions, Australia's leaders are instead prioritising the lowering of living costs – an action item they rightly argue cannot wait.*

*Prominent economist Adam Rorris points out that capital investment in the poorest 20% of Australian public schools, along with targeted increases to recurrent spending, [could help generate approximately \\$5.2bn every year in economic activity](#).*

*"More than \$100 billion in benefits over the next twenty years. An additional annual investment of \$3.8 billion per annum would bridge the gap between public and private schools in per student capital investment," Rorris said.*

*“Closing this gap would deliver an ongoing annual return of 37% above investment and an additional 37,000 full time construction jobs – many more than the 1,000 or so jobs that the much-vaunted JobMaker has been able to provide to date.”*

*Some influential education leaders say education should not only be a priority for government, but our top priority as a nation.*

*But [Pasi Sahlberg](#) the Professor of Education at Southern Cross University previously the deputy director at the Gonski Institute for Education at UNSW, takes a wider view.*

*He says it is no surprise that education is viewed as the most important key to sustainable recovery from current global crises.*

*“Whether it is about economy, environment, health, or peace of the world, we won’t be successful in the end without education,” Professor Sahlberg told The Educator.*

*“Now, it is not enough to just repeat education as a national priority in election time. No politician would think that education is unimportant. What we need is common understanding of what kind of education we need for recovery for a better world for all of us.”*

*Professor Sahlberg said there are several long-term benefits of prioritising the creation of a system that provides everyone a fair opportunity to adequate, high-quality education.*

*“These are stronger faith among young people of the value of education in their lives; a stronger public education system that can better tolerate external shocks like those experienced in Australia during recent years; and a nation that is able to collectively change the course of current developments for brighter future for next generations.”*

*Professor Sahlberg says another way to understand why education should be a national priority in political elections is to predict some of the immediate consequence of not doing so.*

*"Australia has clearly been in a downward trend in both quality and equity of education longer than a past decade now. Without refocusing education better*

*on combatting current inequalities will only make situation for increasing number of children worse," he said.*

*Professor Sahlberg said that other harmful consequences of failure to make education as a top national priority include accelerating nationwide shortages of qualified teachers, further educational segregation of children to schools based on their socio-economic backgrounds, and, as a result, growing frustration among parents due to "broken promises of giving all Australian children a fair go through education."*

*"Evidence for changing the course of these national education priorities is clear, and so should be a road ahead after this election."*

### **DOGS position**

Pasi Sahlberg makes much of growing inequities in Australian education and society, but is not prepared to tackle the private school interest - the major promoter and perpetuator of these inequities - head on.

Nor are the Labor or Coalition parties. They are just downright frightened of the religious education lobby.

DOGS are not. They are prepared to spell it out. The denominational system failed in the nineteenth century to educate all the children. The denominational system in the twenty first century is dividing one third of our children on the basis of class, creed and colour and is parasitic on the main, public system which takes responsibility for the vast majority – two thirds of Australian children. It used to educate more than 80% of our children, It has taken billions of dollars of State Aid over half a century; special deal after special deal with religious lobbyists; political blackmail by religious lobbyists at election after election; and a string of failed ‘Needs’ policies to lure 14% of insecure Australian parents into a myriad of overfunded religious schools. And these religious schools do not even do a good job of ‘churching’ the children they educate. The fastest growing religion in Australia is – ‘no religion’.

Those with genuine religious beliefs are usually prepared to put their money where their beliefs lie. But the church pews are no longer full and churches lie empty.

DOGS believe that education is a ‘right’ - not a charity. It should not depend on religious patriarchs all claiming to have the spiritual ‘truth’. It should not be provided at their behest but paid for by all taxpayers - to those who can afford to pay.

**The current situation in Australia is at a crossroads.** Private religious schools are now overfunded by taxpayers while public schools are deprived of funds. Private schools are duplicating public facilities. It is time to make private schools open to all children, teachers and employees with offence to none. Religion should be the domain of churches, mosques and the family. Fees should be made illegal as they are in Finland. And independent schools should be just that – independent of taxpayer funding.

Public schools are public in purpose and outcome; public in access to all children, teachers and employees; public in ownership and control. The public system should be the only one publicly funded because it is the only one which is publicly accountable.

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