

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF  
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

**PRESS RELEASE 948  
POLITICIANS BEHAVING BADLY –**

**REDEFINING THE MEANING OF MINISTERIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY**

On August 12, 2022, an article entitled [Australia's teacher shortage won't be solved until we treat teaching as a profession, not a trade](#)

By Larissa Davies and Jim Watterston from the University of Melbourne, : appeared on ***The Conversation***. They wrote:

*Friday 12 August, 2022, state and federal education ministers met in Canberra to discuss the teacher shortage.....*

*A recent survey found almost 60% of teachers in New South Wales plan to quit in the next five years.*

*Ahead of the meeting, numerous solutions have been offered by experts and advocates, including a teaching “apprenticeship”, and fast-tracking students or mid-career professionals in other fields into the classrooms.*

*As education academics researching the future of teacher education in Australia, we are concerned the current debate is missing the bigger picture.*

*While well-intended, the ideas on offer address the symptoms, rather than the complexity of the cause. We need a coherent and comprehensive plan to address the real problem: teaching is not being treated like a profession.*

DOGS contend that nobody has to date tackled the real, underlying problem of why public school teachers have been treated by Ministers of Education throughout Australia. like tradesmen rather than professionals.

DOGS suggest it is because Ministerial responsibility, particularly for the education of the public education systems and disadvantaged children have been turned upside down. Accountability for the more than \$24.5 billion of

public money, more than \$15.3 billion of which is spent on private schools has been pushed down the line to the principals and teachers. The gross inequities exacerbated by public funding of the private sector is sidestepped in a side swipe at teachers.

Numerous State and, in 2017, a federal Auditor General's Report have questioned proper accountability for public money spent on the private sector.

In response, Federal Coalition and Labor Ministers in particular, State Ministers in tandem, have re-defined accountability.

Since the 1980s, with the neo-liberal economic paradigm, Australian governments have preferred private to public and, in attempts to privatise the public system, forced administrative duties out of central bureaucracies down to the public school level.

They have defined accountability as accountability of principals and teachers to provide data, data, and more data to a federal administrative body called ACARA – the Australian Assessment and Reporting Authority. Some of this data, especially that from the private sector regarding enrolments and direct funding, is enlightening.

But in self managed public schools based on the privatised model, the burden has been placed upon public school principals to find and pay their own staff.<sup>1</sup> And teachers are expected to evaluate themselves by administering NAPLAN (National Assessment program for Literacy and Numeracy) and PISA (Program of International Student Assessment) tests. Teachers and students, are reduced, not to tradesmen, but to a production line of data collectors. And the data is used against them. If students' results fall behind the International comparisons, the teachers are responsible.

Meanwhile, instead of well qualified public school teachers being given the time to plan and teach in the fields of their expertise, they are overburdened with 'evaluation' procedures. To add insult to injury they are

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<sup>1</sup> . In 2004, the Coalition Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson pointed out that the federal *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* all public school principals were to be given 'significant say over staffing issues in their own schools' and State and Territory governments and school authorities were to commit to providing 'principals' [with] strengthened autonomy over, and responsibility for, education programs, budgets and other aspects of school's operations.' Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 23 June 2004, 31206 (Minister Nelson)

then abused by politicians like the previous Coalition federal Acting Minister Roberts at a Conference of their more fortunate private school peers.

Rather than accepting responsibility for unequal funding in favour of the private sector, and the lack of accountability for this funding, Federal Ministers have blamed the 'crisis' in education on our public school teachers. If Australian PISA results fall down the international scale then perhaps then wrong questions are being asked about the cause.

This blame game and teacher bashing is a dangerous distraction from the real meaning of Ministerial responsibility and accountability.

Consider the following:

In 2021-22 direct federal funding for government schools was \$9.2 b while that for the private sector was \$15.3 billion. This projected to rise by 2025-26 to \$11.7b and \$18b respectively.<sup>2</sup> And, although the major reason for a centralised administration is accountability for expenditure of public money, a series of Auditor General Reports indicate that, at least for the religious sector, financial accountability is lacking.<sup>3</sup>

But since 1964, if not earlier, the federal government has influenced education policy through specific purpose grants. These are grants to the States, with conditions attached, under Section 96 of the Constitution.

This is not assisted by what appears to be the construction of an almost byzantine administrative structure in Canberra.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is answerable to Parliament through the Minister and is responsible for the administration of the Australian Education Act (2013) as amended in 2017. This includes accountability for the billions of dollars noted above provided through Section 96 specific purpose grants to schools.

But there is another piece of administrative structure which underpins the willing participation of all State government participants in Australian schooling enterprises. This is the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. (MCEECDYA). Membership of the

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<sup>2</sup> Budget 2022-23, Budget Paper No. 3

<sup>3</sup> Auditor General Report for 2017.

MCEECDYA comprises State, Territory, Australian Government and [New Zealand](#) Ministers with responsibility for the portfolios of [school education](#), [early childhood](#) development and youth affairs, with [Papua New Guinea](#), [Norfolk Island](#) and [East Timor](#) having observer status. Although similar structures had existed since at least 1993, the current structures were finally established in what has been termed the Rudd Gillard ‘revolution’ of 2009/2020.

Gillard was assisted in this piece of administrative architecture by Professor Barry McGaw, formerly from the ACER and the OECD who was appointed the first Chairman of ACARA. He was a major player in getting national curriculum reforms off the ground in the Gillard government and his work at the OECD enabled him to work with PISA data and NAPLAN testing. Terry Moran, who went from Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria to the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Canberra under the Labor Government was also influential ; and Peter Hill who was the Secretary of the Victorian Education Department under Kennett became the first Secretary of ACARA.<sup>4</sup> In 1998, at an ACER Conference Hill promoted Charter schools.<sup>5</sup>

There are three co-operative structures dealing with data collection, curriculum and assessment under MCEEC DYA. These are :

**ACARA** : the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority is a Board with a Chair, Deputy Chair and 11 other members, nominated by the Australian Government and all education streams (independent, government and Catholic) across states and territories.

**AITSL** The Australian institute of Teaching and School Leadership is governed by an independent Board of Directors appointed by the Minister for Education and Training. There are no teacher union representatives.

**ESA** Education Services Australia is a national, not-for-profit company owned by all Australian education ministers. The company was established to support delivery of national priorities and initiatives regarding technology for education in the schools, training and Higher Education sectors

the Australian schooling systems, and most particularly the private systems, have developed an overwhelming thirst for money from a cashed up central Treasury and, in recent decades both State and denominational systems have agreed to a

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<sup>4</sup> Glen C Savage, *The Quest for Revolution in Australian Schooling*, 2021, p. 38

<sup>5</sup> ‘Reshaping Schooling in Australia’ Paper presented to *Schools in Australia: 1973-1998 The 25 years since the Karmel Report* (ACER Conference Proceedings) [https://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference\\_karmel/1/](https://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_karmel/1/)

range of conditions which represent direct interference with matters not traditionally within the ambit of the Commonwealth. This has occurred with the willing participation of both the State and private sectors. Whereas in the nineteenth century the Catholic system rejected central control of their schools through inspectors by the State, their current situation is one of funding largesse with few quibbles.

The only group which are discontented with current controls are, understandably, members of the teaching profession. They complain of being scapegoats for lack of funding and declining standards; overloaded with administrative duties; underpaid and burnt out. Experienced teachers are either striking or resigning, while, to fill the gaps governments are resorting to placing university students in classrooms.

DOGS believe that Australia is returning to the pupil teacher system of the nineteenth century and is in grave danger of reverting to the much discredited denominational system of the 1830s.

Those who fail to learn from history.....

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**855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS**  
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