

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

## **Press Release 984**

### **LABOR POLICY PLATFORM DROPS SUPPORT FOR ‘UNIVERSAL, FREE, SECULAR’ SCHOOLING**

Si Gladman from the Rationalist society discovered on 2 June 2023 that

**The federal Labor Party has removed the word ‘secular’ from the section about education in its new draft national policy platform.**

The draft National Platform – released this week to party members as part of a consultation process, describes public schools as “among our nation’s most important institutions” and says they need to be “fully and fairly funded to deliver excellent education that meets the needs of every child”.

However, the new draft has removed the reference to “universal, free and secular” public education – a significant change, abandoning Labor’s long-held express commitment to secular public education in Australia.

[Page 32 of the previous National Platform](#), released in 2021, stated that the party “believe every Australian child in every community should have access to high-quality, universal, free, secular government schooling”.

The 111-page draft policy document now does not include any mention of the word ‘secular’.

Labor members have until 23 June to provide feedback on the draft National Platform, with further revisions expected before it is presented to the National Conference in August.

Rationalist Society of Australia president Meredith Doig said grassroots Labor members would be alarmed by the party’s walking away from ‘secular’ public education.

“I think Labor members across Australia would overwhelmingly want the Labor Party to stand up and defend secular public education. And we know many MPs in the party also value secularism and secular public education in particular. So it’s concerning that the party looks set to ditch its support for universal, free, secular government schooling,” Dr Doig said.

“The public school system should be secular. Yet it has been under sustained attack in recent decades, with the federal government funding religious agents under the guise of the chaplaincy program to go into public schools and with states such as Queensland and New South Wales continuing to segregate children along religious lines during class time to allow missionaries to deliver scripture lessons.

“We urge Labor MPs and party members to stand up for secular public education and make sure secularism is returned to the party’s national platform.”

In 2021, then Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese said it was important for Australia to have [“a separation between church and state”](#).

**DOGS suggest that if Anthony Albanese genuinely believes this, he should return to the Labor platform of 1970, before the Labor Party under Whitlam gave State Aid to private religious schools.**

**DOGS also note that the word ‘secular’ has a long history. It assumes that there is a distinction between the ‘saeculum’ or things of this world and the ‘spiritual’ or things of the spiritual realm. It does not mean anti- religious. But it assumes a distinction between the secular and the spiritual.**

**In the nineteenth century the Catholic church insisted that the ‘spiritual’ should ‘permeate’ education . Those promoting public education considered that education belonged in the realm of the secular and that the spiritual was a matter for the private conscience.**

**In the twenty first century however, those promoting religious schools appear to be more interested in running secular ‘businesses’ than promoting spiritual purity. Perhaps it has always been so.**

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