

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

**Press Release 989**

## **POLITICISATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION**

On July 7, in the Sydney Morning Herald, Debra Hayes , the Professor of Education and Equity and Head of School at the University of Sydney's School of Education and Social Work wrote an article for the Sydney Morning Herald entitled [Political Incursion into Teaching the Teachers is a hard lesson.](#)

She was very critical of the Teacher Education Expert Panel' report, chaired by University of Sydney vice-chancellor Mark Scott. She believed that the institution of radical changes to initial teacher education was a perplexing place for governments to start addressing the twin crises of teacher workload and teacher shortage. She wrote:

*What we were delivered this week contains misrepresentation and an absurd overreach – a plan for the nation's education ministers to mandate the content of initial teacher education programs. I only wish that any of our ministers in the states or territories could understand what it is that new teachers need. And why single out teacher education? Will there be a politically appointed panel sometime soon to tell us about what should be in medical or engineering degrees? This report is a politicisation of higher education .....*

*While the panel is strong on what teacher educators at universities should do, it almost completely avoids the responsibility of governments and systems of education to improve the quality of the experience of graduates. The conditions of teachers must be addressed by reducing the relentless intensification of their work and by improving their pay. These are issues that education ministers can do something about.*

What few teachers, parents, principals and even those involved in teacher training understand is that since the Karmel Report in 1973 when the Commonwealth became substantially involved in the funding of both public and private education, administration of schools has become centralised in Canberra. This has been done, despite Education being a State matter under Section 51 of the Constitution. It has been engineered through specific purpose grants under

Section 96 of the Constitution, firstly through State Aid to the private sector, and then, after the Karmel Report in 1973, by grants to the public sector.

At the same time the support and career structures for teachers and principals built up in State administrations over the last two hundred years have been eroded if not completely demolished through demands for ‘decentralisation’ at the State level. The loss of these structures together with favoured funding of private schools has led to the current teacher crisis.

DOGS believe that this, in part is the reason behind the current teacher crisis in Australian public schools.

The Centralisation in Canberra /decentralisation in State administration development gained further momentum under the 1990s Howard Government in Canberra and the Kennett Government in Victoria. It reached its current structure under the Rudd Gillard Government in 2008

In December 2008 a new Act established the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority*,<sup>1</sup> (ACARA). The Authority was jointly owned, managed and funded by all nine Australian governments, with 50 per cent federal funding. Its responsibilities included: curriculum development; administration of NAPLAN; and national data and reporting. *The National Report on Schools in Australia* and the MYSCHOOL website have in the last decade provided data on every school in Australia. This data includes recurrent the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ; the recurrent and capital funding; NAPLAN assessment results; and curriculum details for every Australian school. These are publicly available on the internet and have been well mined by education researchers exposing continuing inequities in Australian education.

## **Teacher Quality**

The next addition to the national structure was establishment of the *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership* (AITSL) in January 2010. This federal organisation was not jointly owned by federal and state governments like ACARA but was established as a public company owned exclusively by the federal government, with the federal minister for education allocated power to directly appoint members to the governing board. Nevertheless, state and territory ministers endorsed the establishment of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) in 2011, along with the Australian Professional Standard for

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government 2008. *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008*, Canberra, Australian Government

Principals.<sup>2</sup> This structure now gives the current Minister, Jason Clare, the power to determine what teachers are taught in our Universities.

## **Education Resources**

The establishment of *Education Services Australia* (ESA) in 2010 completed the new national centralised structure. ESA was to establish resources to support national reform, rather than develop core policies. However, it was a crucial underpinning of new national policies and supporting policies that relied upon data collection and technological change.

There have been two Gonski<sup>3</sup> Reports in the last decade attempting to tackle the perennial issues of public and private funding together with growing levels of disadvantage in Australia. And the State Aid issue which the Karmel Report and Schools Commission were said to have buried continue to haunt Australian education. There are still a lot of restless natives making a noise in our Australian educational scene about inequalities and now we have a teacher crisis.

The curriculum, external testing, certification of teachers and principals and payment for these, as well as the partial payment of private school teachers and school infrastructure is now, largely, in the hands of the national government. The State governments, individual schools, and private sector administrations may employ and pay teachers. But conditions of employment are the subject of discrimination Acts, and funding for teacher remuneration, especially for the private sector are also the gift of the national Treasury.

There is now considerable unrest among teachers<sup>4</sup> at the uniformity in curriculum, assessment, teacher certification or data collection. Yet the structures initiated by the Rudd/Gillard Government remain in place. Although the private sector, and most particularly, the Catholic Education sector refused in the nineteenth century to tolerate State control, there is little concern that they have lost any apparent authority over core educational content in their schools. The

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<sup>2</sup> Glen Savage argues that the teaching standards mirrored those of New South Wales, while argument in favour of the national standard were also strongly influenced by Ben Jensen at the Melbourne-based think tank, the Grattan Institute, who led several highly publicised and widely-cited reports that strongly advocated for targeted investments to improve 'teacher' quality', Savage G. Ibid 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report* December 2011 at <https://www.dese.gov.au/school-funding/resources/review-funding-schooling-final-report-december-2011>; *Through Growth to Achievement Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* March 2018 at [file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/662684\\_tgta\\_accessible\\_final\\_0%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/662684_tgta_accessible_final_0%20(2).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> There is some evidence of disquiet in State administrations .....

‘decentralisation’ debate appears to have disappeared as all parties in the education community relate their demands to the federal government which, after all, holds the largest purse strings. Given the new kinds of intergovernmental ‘horizontal’ relationships developed in the past decades, in bodies like ACARA, with the blurring of roles and responsibilities, the centralisation/decentralisation debate has become irrelevant.

The Australian Constitution drafted in the 1890s left the majority of domestic governance responsibilities to the States, including education. The colonial delegates were quite clear about their desire for a decentralised union where the States would retain the bulk of the extensive powers and responsibilities they had exercised as self-governing colonies.<sup>5</sup> Education is not one of the powers of the Commonwealth listed in Section 51 of the Constitution<sup>6</sup> Yet the Federal Government, in 2022 appears to be the major decision maker in matters of funding, policy, curriculum, teacher training and evaluation, infrastructure and collection of data in Australian schools.

And now, instead of addressing the real issues confronting teachers in our schools: the lack of adequate State or regional administration; adequate funding; proper and secure salary ; relief from administrative tasks; security of tenure; curriculum support structures; and career opportunities – the Canberra Administration has taken the opportunity to politicise teacher education in the University sector.

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**<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>**

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<sup>5</sup> La Nauze J.A. , The Making of the Australian Constitution (1972), MUP, 40; Zines, L., The High Court and the Constitution, 1986, Butterworths, 76-77.

<sup>6</sup> Section 51 (xxiiiA) however was inserted by referendum in 1946 . This allows for the provision of maternity allowances, widows' pensions, child endowment, unemployment, pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, medical and dental services (but not so as to authorize any form of civil conscription), benefits to students and family allowances.