

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 997

CRITIQUE OF CHRIS BONNER AND TOM GREENWELL' PROPOSAL TO FULLY FUND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Australia is unusual in the western world for having three schooling systems: public schools, Catholic schools and 'independent' schools (actually, mostly Anglican schools). The emergence of these systems - and how they became funded by our governments - has long historical roots, but it's led to inequalities that are now so entrenched that people have lost sight of the history.

Chris Bonnor and Tom Greenwell have been spruiking their 'solution' to these inequalities for about a year now, including at an RSA (Rationalist Society of Australia) webinar. Their proposal is to fully fund Catholic and independent schools, allowing them to retain their religious character, but forcing them in exchange to open up their enrolments and stop charging fees.

Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools has hit back in a paper entitled :
[Fully Funding Private Schools is No Solution to Inequity in Education](#)

He argues:

The proposal of Tom Greenwell and Chris Bonnor to fully fund private schools. subject to them not charging fees and not enrolling students on the basis of ability, abrogates key long standing principles of public education, namely, that public schools are secular and do not discriminate on the basis of student background. The proposal explicitly permits private schools to promulgate their religious beliefs and values and to discriminate against students and teachers who do not share these beliefs. This is anathema to the founding principles of public education. Public schools must remain secular and take all comers, whatever their background, to provide access to education for all and to promote understanding and tolerance between different social groups.

Nor would it eliminate social segregation between schools as Greenwell and Bonnor claim. Government funding of private schools that charge fees and restrict entry is not the only cause of social segregation between schools. A basic cause is the economic and geographical segregation of households. Fully funding private schools will not eliminate the extensive social segregation between schools in the western and eastern

suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne or between remote regions and prestigious suburbs of metropolitan cities.

Greenwell and Bonnor state that families should not have to pay fees to ensure their child's education reflects their values and preferences. This represents capitulation to private school lobby groups. Families pay fees to access the special ethos and character of private schools, whether it be religious education, social status or an "old school tie" network. The role of government funding for private schools is not to subsidise the costs of such choices. It should only support the learning needs of students in under-resourced schools. Parents, not taxpayers, must bear the costs of choosing a "special ethos".

So far so good.

But then he goes on to promote the latest incarnation of the 'Needs' policy

There is an alternative way forward to increase equity in education. It is to introduce a Gonski Plus funding model. It would involve re-estimation of the base Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) and increased loadings for various categories of disadvantaged students and schools. Government funding for private schools would only be provided to fill the gap between private income and a revised base SRS. It would reduce social segregation between schools because it would end the over-funding of private schools and force them to increase fees which would likely lead to a greater number of advantaged students being enrolled in public schools

THE DOGS POSITION

DOGS congratulate Trevor Cobbold for distinguishing between public schools which are secular and private schools which are sectarian.

Inglis Clarke and Henry Higgins who put Section 116 in the Constitution also understood the principles underlying separation of religion from the State and its implication for public education

But Needs policies since 1973 have all foundered on the private sector gaming the system and the fear of sectarianism if the rich Protestant schools are not bought off .

The only way forward is to keep public public and private private and never the twain should meet. They are like chalk and cheese. And this is why only public schools should be the schools which are publicly funded.

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