

Beyond Gonski: The Fight for Equity in Education

Trevor Cobbold

National Convenor, Save Our Schools

**Speech to the State Council of the State School Teachers' Union of
Western Australia, Perth, 19 November 2011**

My topic today is school funding and there is really only one thing to talk about – the Gonski Review of School Funding. In the coming weeks, the review is due to finalise its advice to the Federal Government on future school funding arrangements. It will be crucial to the future of public education.

Private school organisations representing the wealthiest schools in the country are in a state of apoplexy about the review. For them, it has not gone to plan – at least not so far. Government funding for parent choice has not been at the forefront of the inquiry as they wanted. Instead, the focus has been on inequity in education and how future funding arrangements can be designed to direct more money to where it is most needed.

Elite private schools are outraged at this because it threatens their privileged funding – remember 80 of the richest schools across Australia got nearly \$400 million in government funding in 2009.

The simmering discontent in these circles about the review was brought to a head by the publication at the end of August of four research reports commissioned by the review. Two extensively documented the extent of disadvantage in education in Australia and the inadequate funding provided for them. Another showed that it is possible to design a school funding system to direct more funding to improving equity in outcomes.

Apoplexy in elite private schools

The Independent Schools Council complained that “A number of reports strongly reflect an inherent bias against non-government schools...” and said they are “ideologically-driven attacks on non-government schools”.

Independent Schools Victoria accused one report of focusing “on the class warfare between low and high SES” and called another an “ideologically driven tract”.

The NSW Parents Council lambasted the Review, saying that the ‘politics of envy’ pervades much of its work. It said the commissioned research reports were a “shameful attempt to develop class war debate”.

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools said there is “...inherent bias against non-government schooling evident in the research papers.”

This hysteria has been brought on by the idea, increasingly gaining ground, that the disadvantaged should get a better deal in school funding. Raising the spectre of class warfare and the politics of envy is a standard response from the wealthy to protect their privileges.



Their hysterics are designed to preserve a funding system that is rigged to support the wealthiest schools in the country. It delivers millions and millions of dollars annually to schools that have two to three times the resources of government schools serving the most disadvantaged communities in Australia.

Independent Schools Victoria went so far as to even deny that socio-economic background affects student achievement. This is a sign of how desperate they are. I will come back to this.

Let's look at the facts about school funding, expenditure and achievement gaps.

Government funding increases have favoured privilege over disadvantage

Government funding priorities have favoured private schools over the last decade or more. The largest increases in total government funding (federal, state and territory) have gone to private schools. Schools serving the wealthiest families continue to receive large and increasing amounts of government funding. Much lower increases were awarded to government schools.

The most privileged school sector – Independent schools – received the largest increase. Between 1998-99 and 2007-08, government funding per student in Independent schools increased by 112% and 84% for Catholic schools [Chart 1]. The increase for government schools was only 67%.

In WA, the funding increase for government schools was slightly below that for Independent schools but greater than for Catholic schools.

Federal Government funding increases for many individual private schools has far outstripped the increases in total government funding for government schools. For example, Federal funding per secondary student in 22 NSW elite schools increased by an average of 118% between 2001 and 2011 [Chart 2]. This compared with a 70% increase in total government funding for NSW government schools in the nine years between 1998-99 and 2007-08

Chart 1: Increase in Total Government Funding for Government and Private Schools, 1998-99 to 2007-08 (% increase per student)

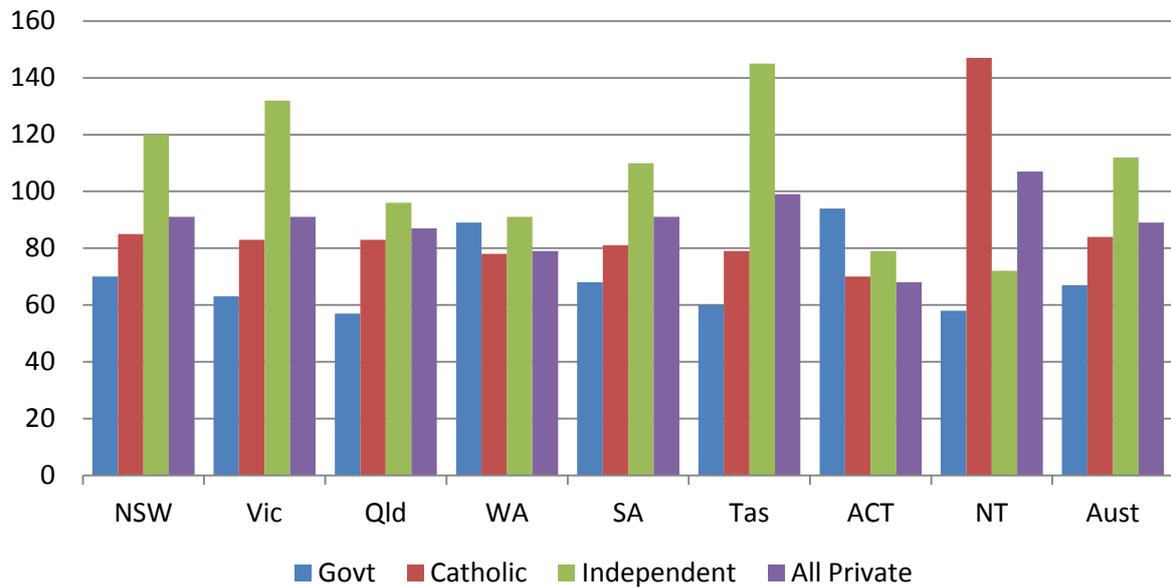
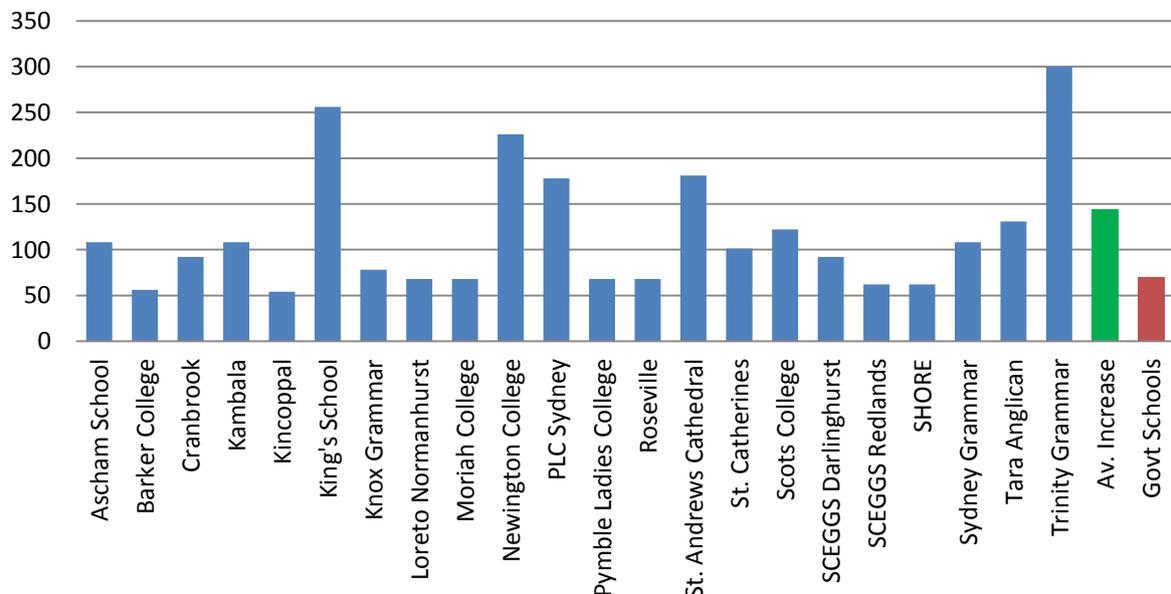


Chart 2: Increases in Federal Government Funding of Elite NSW Private Schools, 2001 - 2011 (% increase per secondary student)

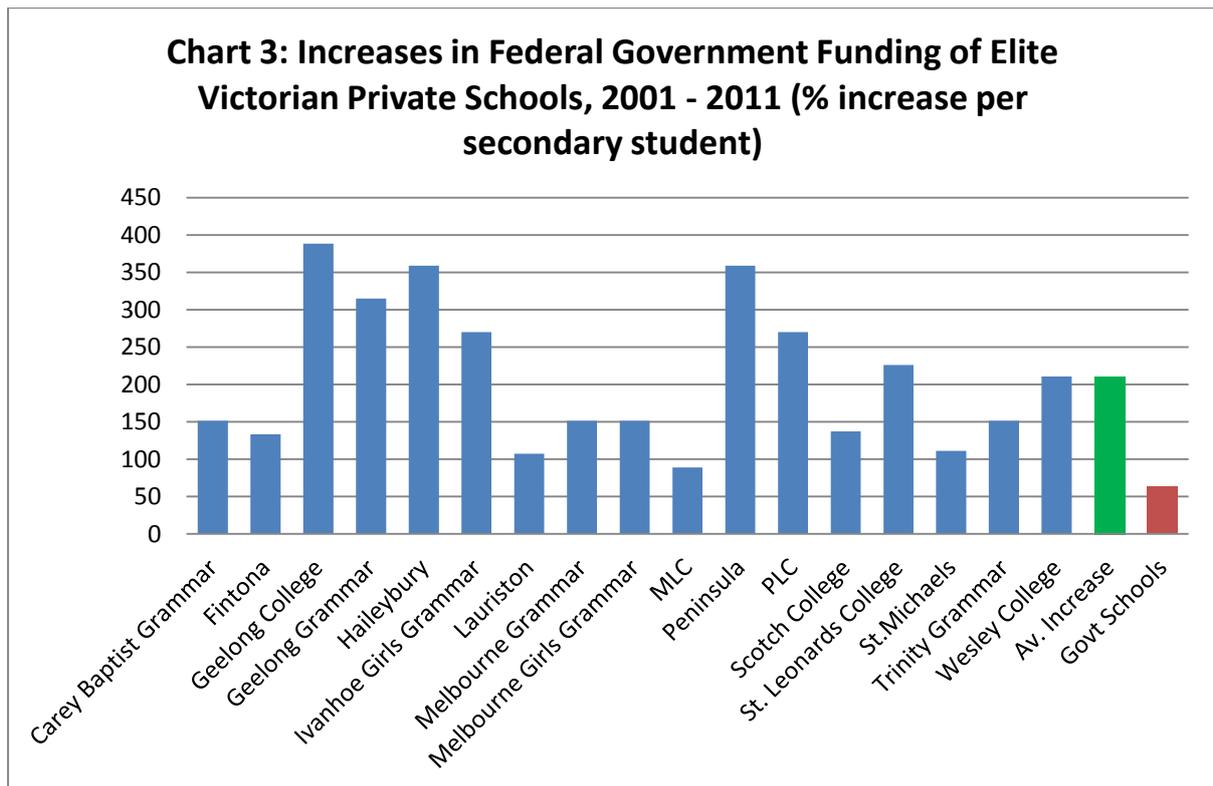


Some got massive increases. For example, the increase for the King's School was 256%, Newington College got a 226% increase and Trinity Grammar 300%. This was more than three times the increase in funding for NSW government schools.

Many of these schools get over \$4 million a year from the Federal Government, including the King’s School, Newington College, PLC and Pymble Ladies College. Trinity Grammar got \$7.4 million in 2011.

All these 22 elite schools have double or more the resources of the average NSW government school.

In Victoria, Federal funding increased by 211% for 17 wealthy schools compared to 63 per cent for Victorian government schools [Chart 3].

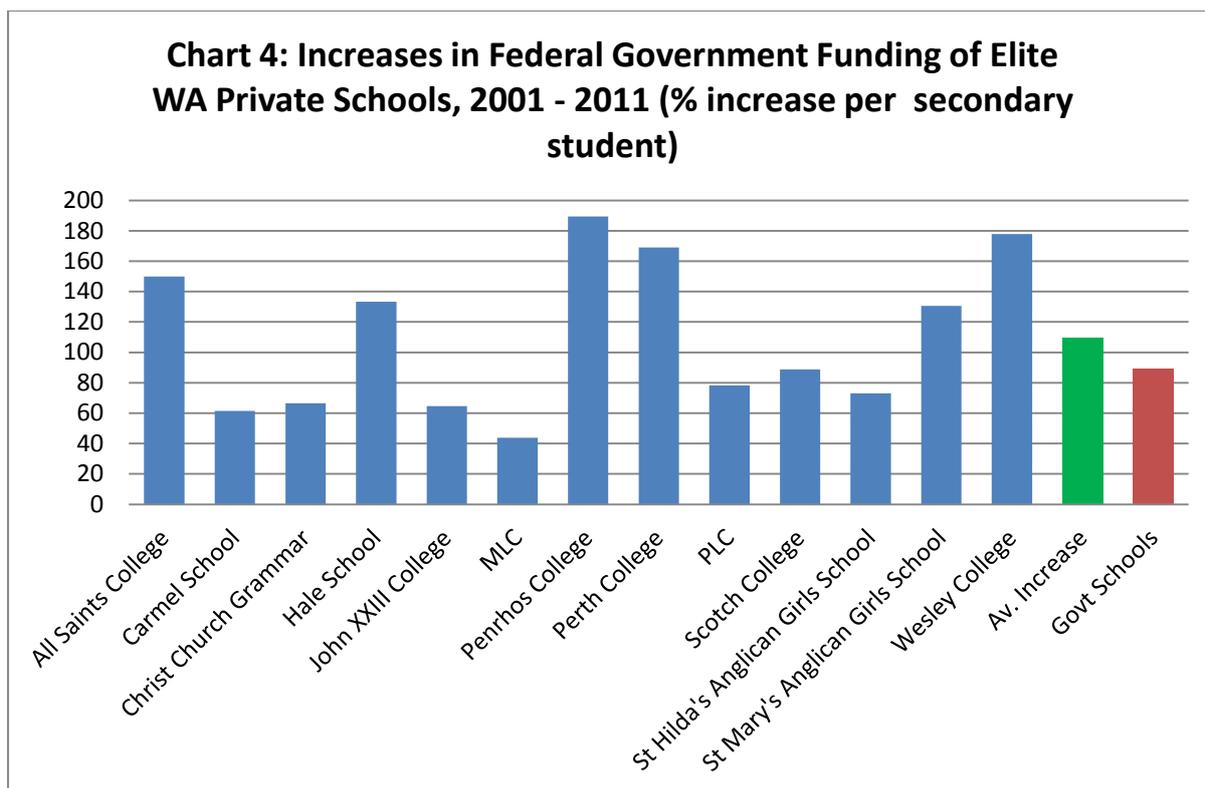


The increases for many were even higher than in NSW. For example, Federal funding for Geelong College increased by 389%, Geelong Grammar by 315%, and Haileybury College by 359%. These increases were about five times or more the increase in total government funding for Victorian government schools.

Many received over \$5 million in 2011, including Carey Grammar, Geelong College, and Methodist Ladies College. Haileybury College got a massive \$13.4 million and Wesley College \$8 million. Geelong Grammar, the most expensive school in Australia, got nearly \$5 million.

All 17 schools have double or more the resources of the average Victorian government school.

In WA, Federal funding for 13 high SES schools increased by an average of 110% between 2001 and 2011 compared to an increase of 89% in total government funding for government schools [Chart 4].



The increases for three schools were about double that for government schools. Several got around \$4 million or more this year, including All Saints College, The Hale School, Perth College, St. Mary's Anglican Girls and Wesley College. John XXIII College got a massive \$9.3 million.

The result of these increases is that the wealthiest schools and families in Australia are now being subsidised to the tune of \$3000 - \$5000 per secondary student.

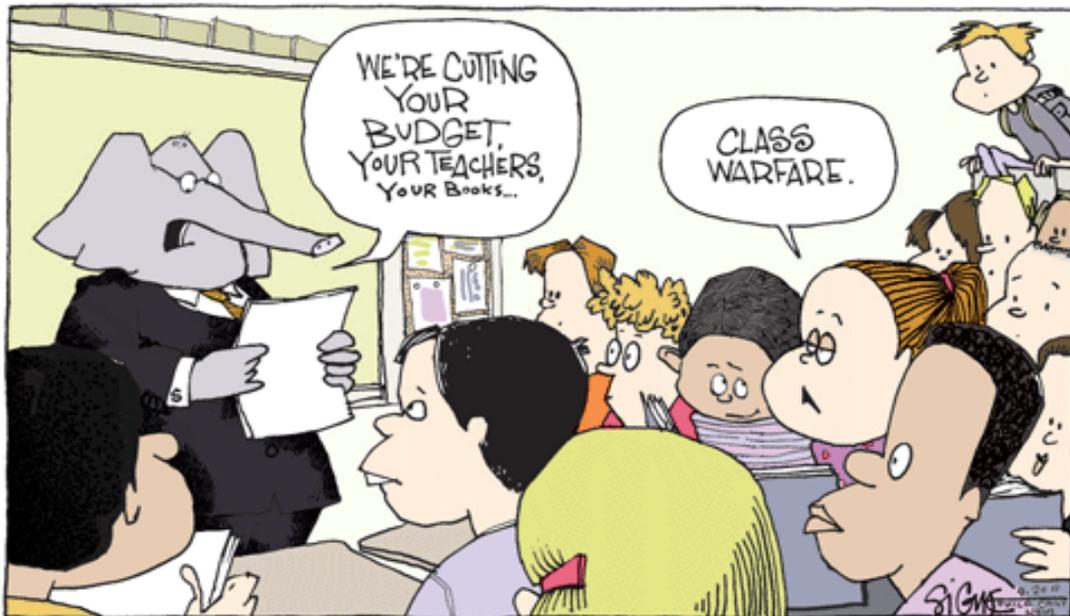
In contrast, the additional Federal funding provided to disadvantaged schools under the Smarter Schools National Partnership program is less than \$500 per student. Thus, Federal Government funding for high fee private schools is 6 to 10 times greater than the additional funding provided to disadvantaged schools.

It is a national disgrace and a scandal.

There can be no justification for providing millions in government funding to schools that are the preserve of the wealthy. It means that less funding is available for schools serving the education needs of low income, Indigenous students and students with disabilities.

It means fewer teachers, fewer support staff, lower salaries, fewer books and less equipment than is needed in schools serving low SES students and other equity groups. That is, less of everything that matters for those who need it most.

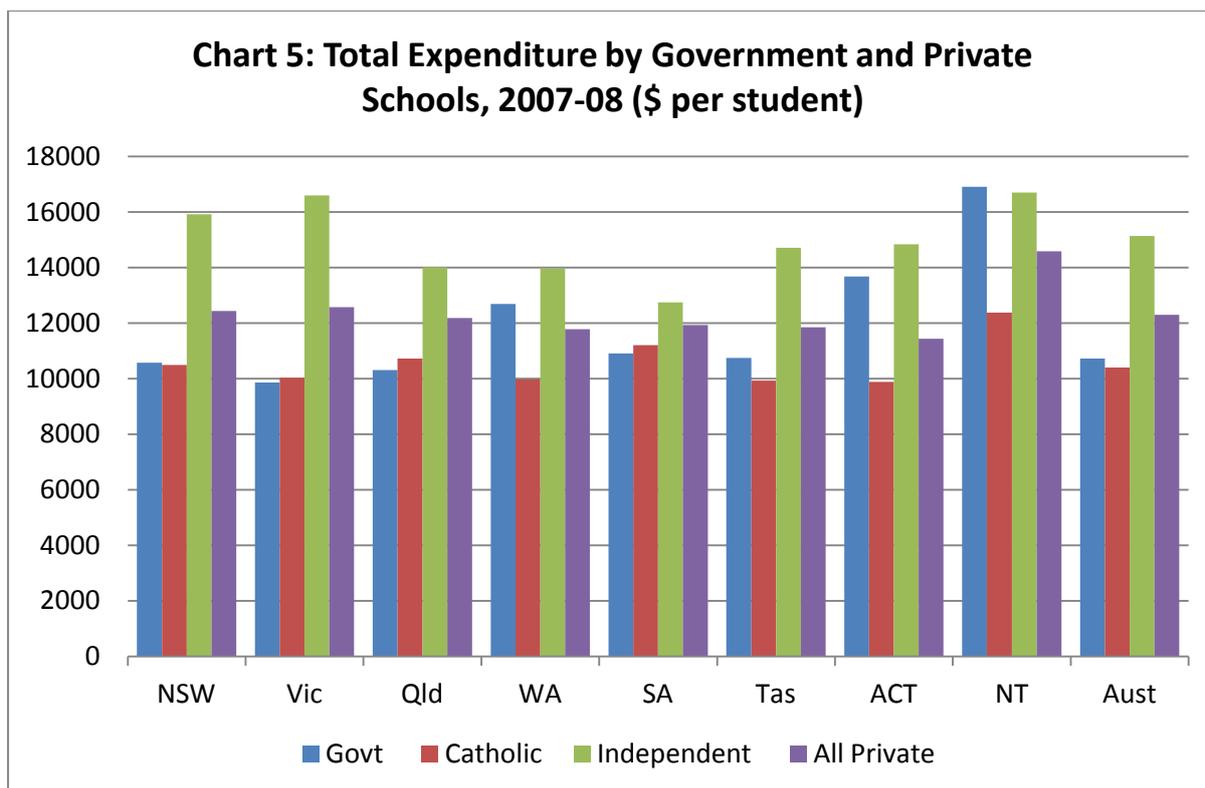
Private school organisations show their true Christian spirit by demeaning any criticism of these funding disparities as the "politics of envy".



Private schools are better resourced than government schools

Increases in government funding for private schools over the past decade or more, together with fee increases far exceeding cost increases, mean that they are now, on average, better resourced than government schools.

The average total expenditure for all private schools in 2007-08 (the latest year for which comparative figures are available) was \$12,303 compared to \$10,723 per student in government schools [Chart 5]. Average total expenditure in Independent schools was \$15,147 per student compared to \$10,399 per student in Catholic schools.



The total resources per student available for Independent schools are about 40% higher than for government and Catholic schools. In Victoria, Independent schools have nearly 70% more resources than government and Catholic schools and 50% more in NSW. Only in WA and the ACT is the gap much narrower.

These figures are derived from official statistics but are adjusted to exclude the user cost of capital and payroll tax from government school expenditure because they are not included in official private school expenditure figures. They still over-estimate government school expenditure because of other inconsistencies. For example, expenditure on school transport by governments is included in government school expenditure but not for private schools.

Government schools are left ill-equipped to cope with their challenges

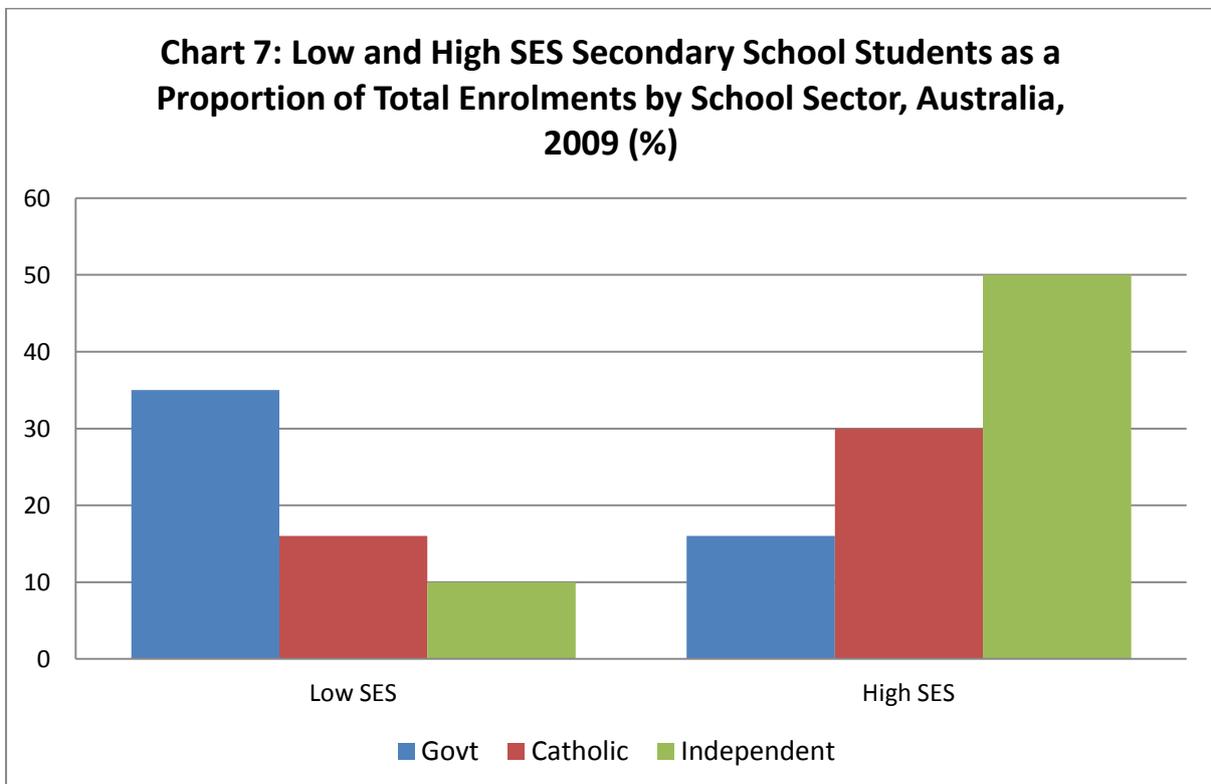
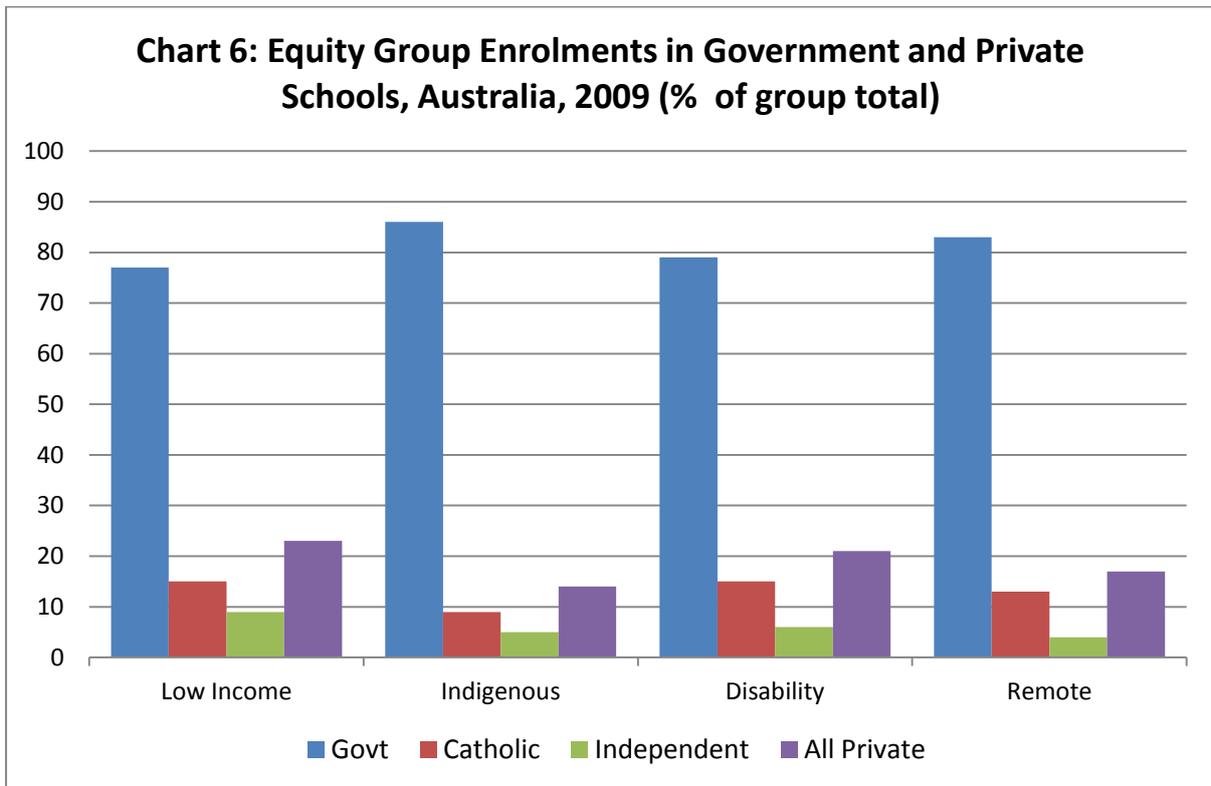
Yet, it is government schools that face the greater demands on their resources. Government schools enrol the vast majority of students whose family backgrounds are associated with low levels of school achievement.

Census data shows that 77% of low income students attend government schools and the latest enrolment data shows that 86% of Indigenous students, 79% of disability students, and 83% of remote area students attended government schools in 2009 [Chart 6].

Data from the 2009 PISA study shows that 35% of government secondary school students are from the lowest SES quartile, compared to 16% of Catholic students and 10% of students in Independent schools [Chart 7]. On the other hand, only 16% of government school students are from the highest SES quartile compared to almost 30% of Catholic students and almost 50% of students in Independent schools.

The proportion of Indigenous, disability and remote area students in government schools is about two to three times that in Catholic and Independent schools.

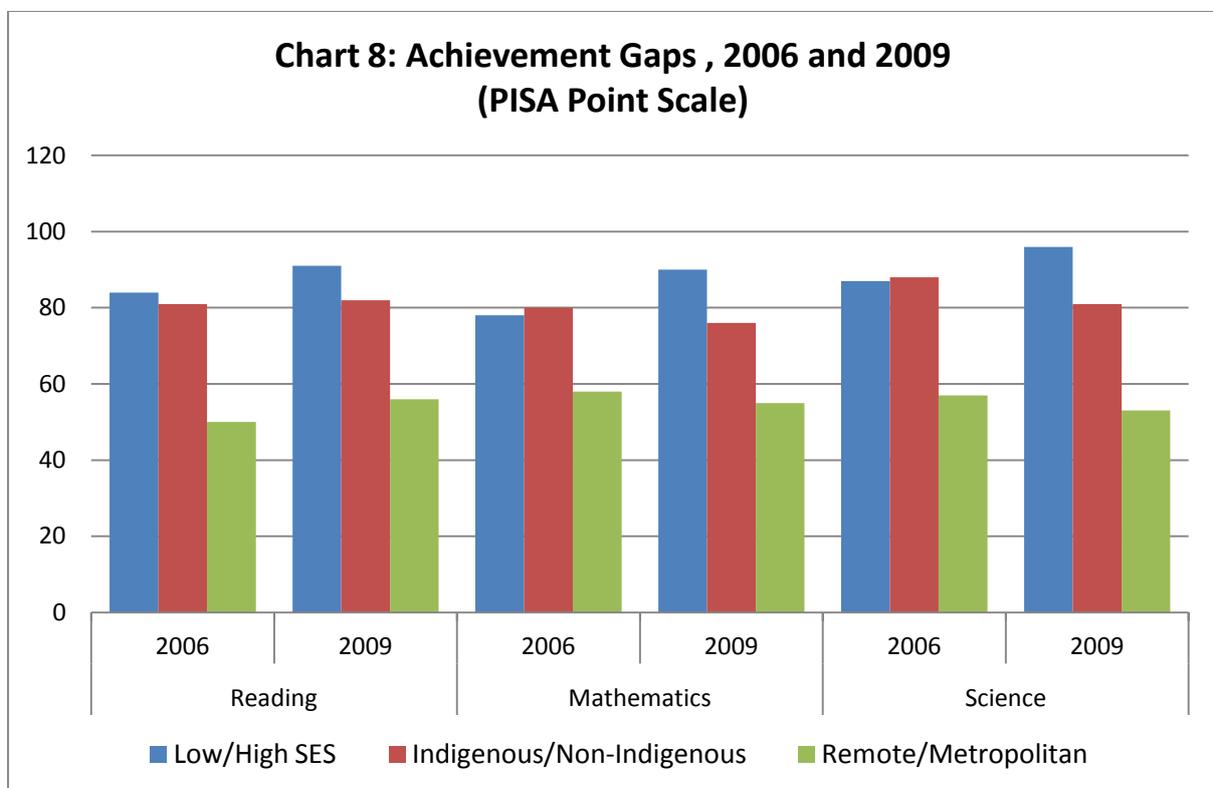
It is clearly a myth that Catholic schools have a similar social composition to government schools.



There is a strong correlation between low SES and education outcomes in Australia, despite what Independent Schools Victoria says. The latest PISA results show that, on average, low SES 15 year-old students are two to three years behind high SES students in reading, mathematics and science [Chart 8]. One year of schooling is equivalent to approximately 35 points on the PISA point scale.

The gaps have increased since in 2006. Other results from PISA 2003 and 2006 show that low SES students enrolled in schools with a high proportion of students from low SES families are nearly four years behind students from high income families in high SES schools.

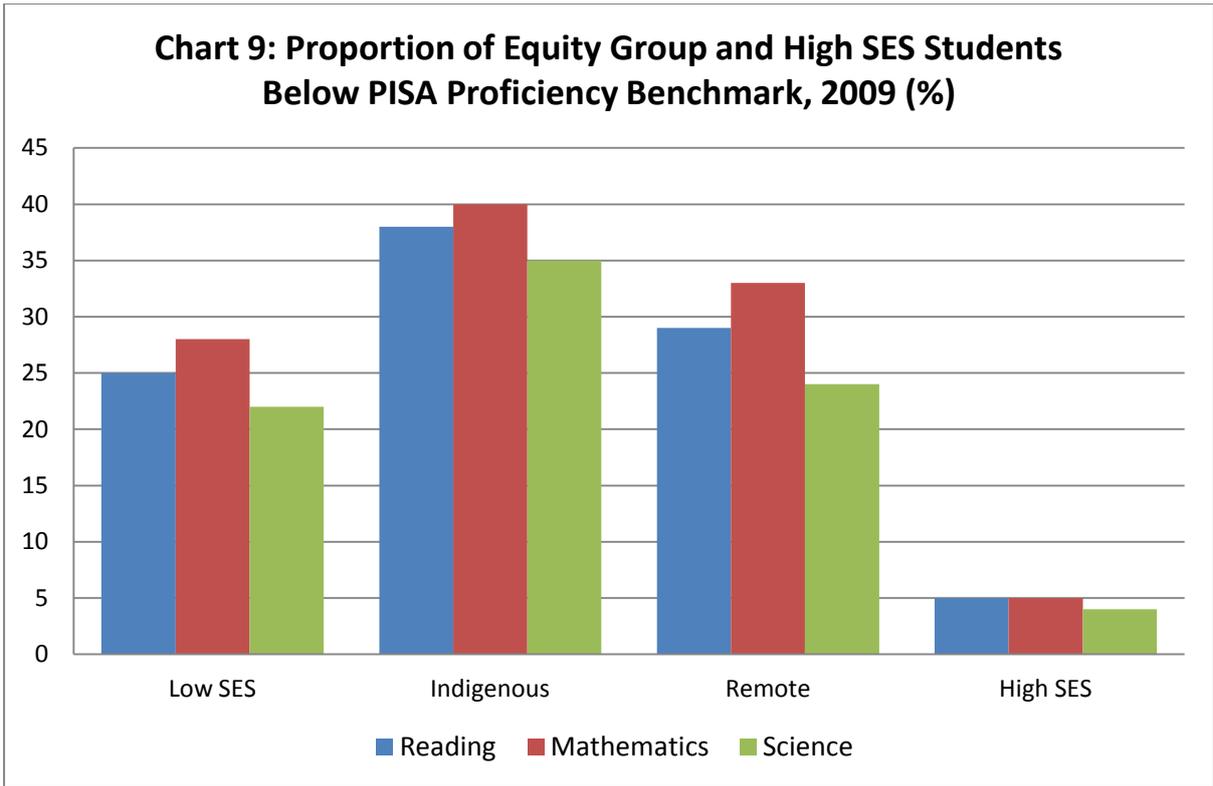
Fifteen year-old Indigenous students are 2-2½ years on average behind non-Indigenous students and are three to four years behind high SES students. Remote and very remote area students are about 18 months behind metropolitan students, and are two to three years behind high SES students.



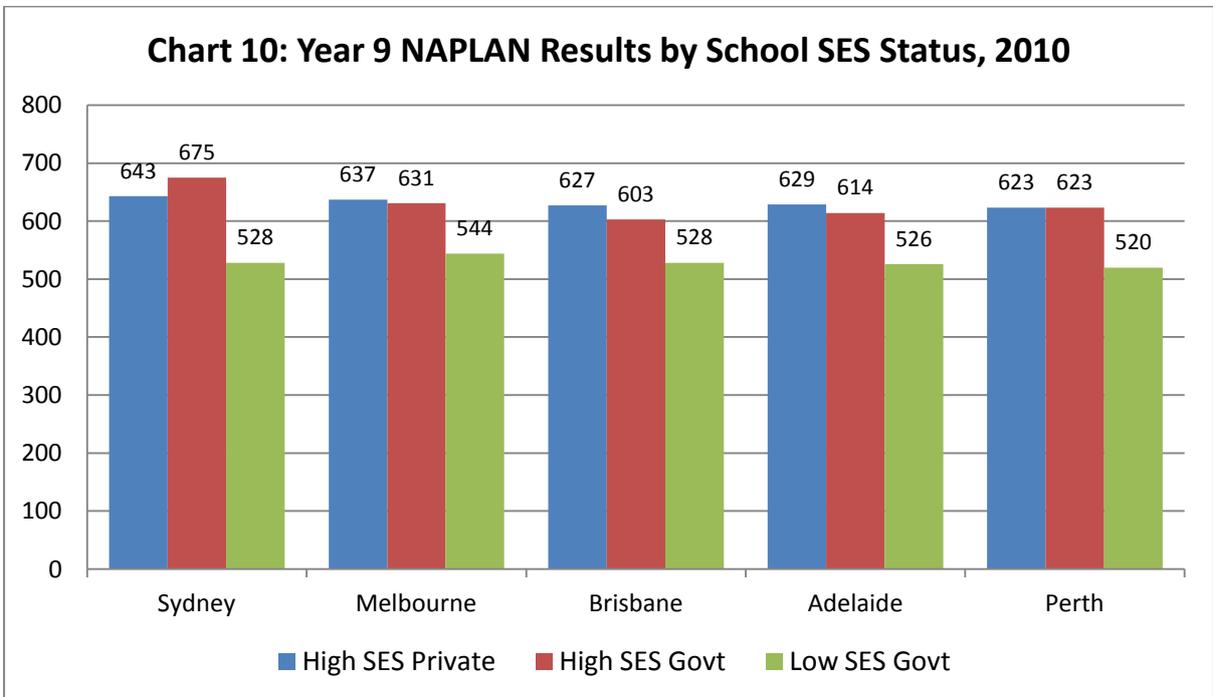
High proportions of low SES, Indigenous and remote area students are performing at the lowest levels. In 2009, 22 to 28% of low SES students did not achieve international proficiency standards in reading, mathematics and science compared to only 4-5% of high SES students [Chart 9]. The gaps have increased since 2006.

Thirty-five to 40% of Indigenous students did not achieve the benchmarks compared to 14% of all students. One-quarter to a third of remote area students did not achieve the benchmarks.

Similar large achievement gaps are also apparent in NAPLAN results. For example, a recent report by the COAG Reform Council shows that 18% of low SES students in Years 5 & 9 did not achieve the national reading benchmark in 2010 compared to 2% of high SES students.



Our own research on the My School website found large achievement gaps in average Year 9 NAPLAN results between high SES government and private schools on the one hand and low SES government schools in each major metropolitan city in 2010 [Chart 10].



These are huge gaps and amount to four to five years of learning (one year of schooling is equivalent to approximately 20-25 points on the NAPLAN scale). In Year 5, the gaps amount to three to four years of learning.

The average literacy and numeracy results of Year 9 students in low SES government schools in Sydney and Perth are actually below those of Year 5 students in high SES government and private schools. In Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, the Year 9 results of the low SES government schools only just match the Year 5 results of the high SES schools.

The other notable feature of this chart is students in high SES government schools are doing just as well as high SES private schools and they do so with less than half the resources of the private schools. It should be noted that the average SES of the high SES government schools in each city is significantly below that of the high SES private schools. It indicates that government schools are more efficient than private schools in producing high outcomes and that much government funding is being wasted on high SES private schools.

The class divide in North Geelong

The extremes of wealth and poverty and its effects on education are nowhere more clearly on show than in north Geelong. Here the most expensive and luxurious private school in Australia sits alongside schools serving some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country and it shows in their comparative results. Here also starkly revealed is the monstrous unfairness of school funding in this country.

Geelong Grammar is a bastion of privilege serving the wealthiest families in Australia. Remember, it is the school of Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer. Seventy-three per cent of its students come from families in the top SES quartile and 2% from the bottom quartile. Next year, its fees for Years 11 & 12 will be \$30,820.

Table 1: Comparative Resources of North Geelong Schools, 2009

School	Enrolments in Lowest SES Quartile (%)	Enrolments in Highest SES Quartile (%)	Gross Income per Student (\$)	Total Capital Expenditure (\$)	Total Non-Fee Private Income (\$)
Geelong Grammar	2	73	26,031	7,755,776	3,408,919
Norlane PS & SS	76	0	11,306	458,334	147,705
Corio PS & SS	71	2	12,198	525,535	442,697

The nearby suburbs of Norlane and Corio are amongst the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia. Norlane is in the 2nd percentile of the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage for suburbs across Australia. Corio is in the 7th percentile.

Some 76% of students in two matched primary and secondary schools in Norlane are from families in the lowest SES quartile and there are none from the top quartile. Seventy-one per cent of students in matched primary and secondary schools in Corio are from the bottom quartile and only 2% are from the top quartile.

On average, Geelong Grammar has over double the resources per student available to government schools in these suburbs. In 2009, its average gross income per student was \$26,031. The average total income per student in the matched primary and high schools in Norlane was \$11,306 and \$12,198 in the Corio schools.

Geelong Grammar also receives substantial income from private sources other than fees and charges. In 2009, it raised \$3.4 million in other private contributions compared to less than \$150,000 by the Norlane schools and about \$450,000 by the Corio schools.

Geelong Grammar's capital expenditure in 2009 was \$7.8 million compared to less than half a million in the Norlane schools and just over half a million in the Corio schools.

Geelong Grammar has a private foundation to raise funds. It has raised \$15 million in recent years towards new buildings, including a \$16 million Wellbeing Centre. The Centre comprises a multi-purpose sports hall, an indoor swimming and diving pool, a fitness centre, a dance studio, a medical centre and classroom facilities. The foundation is now raising another \$3 million for a new indoor cricket centre and an indoor equestrian centre.

The massive differences in resources and the socio-economic status of families in these schools are reflected in their education outcomes. Year 5 students at the government schools in Norlane and Corio are two to three or more years behind their peers at Geelong Grammar in average literacy and numeracy results while the Year 9 students are four to five years behind.

Despite all its luxury, Geelong Grammar will get \$5.2 million in Federal Government funding in 2012 plus about \$1 million from the Victorian Government, which amounts to over \$4600 per student.

It is difficult to comprehend how governments can live with such enormous inequality in resourcing and education outcomes. Why Geelong Grammar should get \$6 million a year in government funding when neighbouring schools do not have enough resources to deal with their challenges defies belief and any sense of social justice.

Yet, this government largesse for the privileged is defended aggressively by the Independent schools organisations. It says that wealthy families are equally entitled to government funding.

There is indeed class warfare out there, but it is being conducted by the wealthy and it has been going on for a long time. As the multi-billionaire business magnate, Warren Buffett, so famously said:

There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.
[New York Times, 26 November 2006]

Private school voucher bonanza

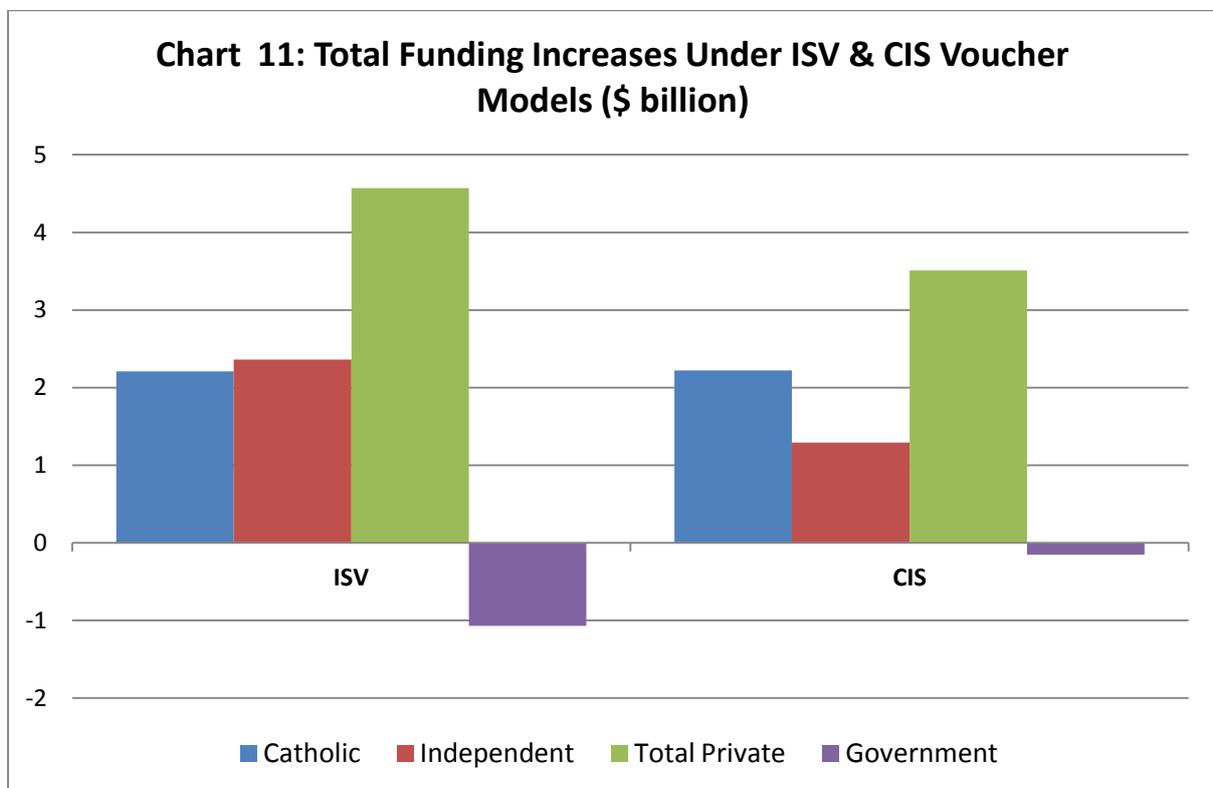
Having made massive gains in the last 15 years, private school organisations representing the wealthiest schools now want even more. They are making another brazen grab for more government funding.

Several organisations advocate the introduction of student entitlement funding models, which is code for vouchers. For example, Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) and the Centre for

Independent Studies (CIS) have proposed that all students in government and private schools should receive the same base government funding entitlement topped up by equal loadings for students in certain categories of disadvantage.

Neither has given any indication of the overall impact of their model on funding for government and private schools. There can be little wonder at their reticence. Both models will provide a massive funding increase for private schools but no increases for government schools. Indeed, under particular assumptions, they will result in a massive reduction in funding for government schools. However, it should be noted that the figures in the following charts are preliminary estimates at this stage.

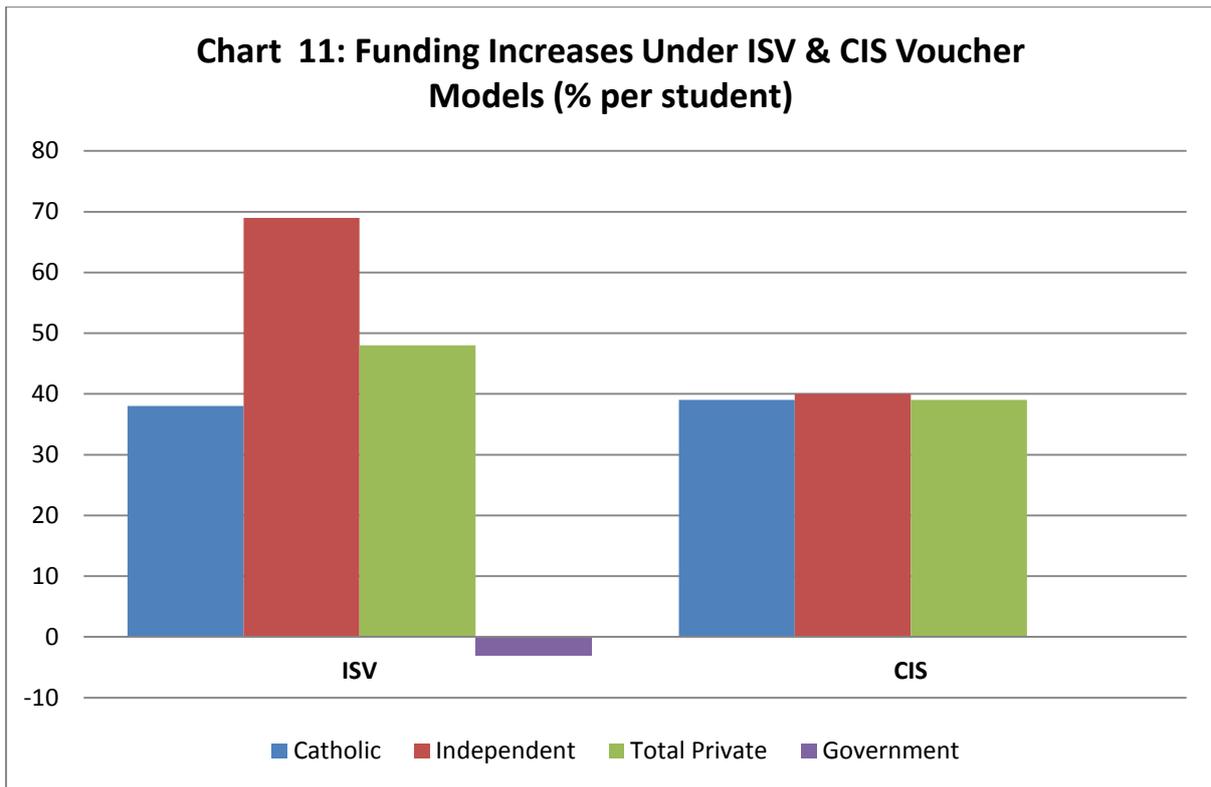
The Independent Schools Victoria voucher model would provide a funding increase of about \$4.6 billion a year for private schools compared to their actual funding in 2009 [Chart 11]. The Centre for Independent Studies model would provide a funding increase of \$3.5 billion.



Not surprisingly, the increase under the Independent Schools model would be much larger for Independent schools - they would receive an increase of \$2.4 billion a year while Catholic schools would gain \$2.2 billion. In contrast, under the CIS model, Catholic schools would receive the largest increase - \$2.2 billion compared to \$1.3 billion for Independent schools.

Government schools would lose \$1.1 billion a year under the Independent Schools model compared to their actual funding in 2008-09 and \$150 million under the CIS model.

In both models, government funding per student in Catholic schools would increase by just under 40% [Chart 12]. The Independent Schools model would provide an increase of nearly 70% to Independent schools while the CIS model gives a 40% increase. There would be little change to government school funding in percentage terms.



This is sheer greed in play. Well-off private schools have already received some \$6 billion in over-funding under the SES funding model since it was introduced. Having done its job, they are now prepared to ditch it in favour of another scheme which will give them billions more. Their greed is insatiable. It is a graphic case of power and privilege at work.

Despicable attack by the wealthy on the poor

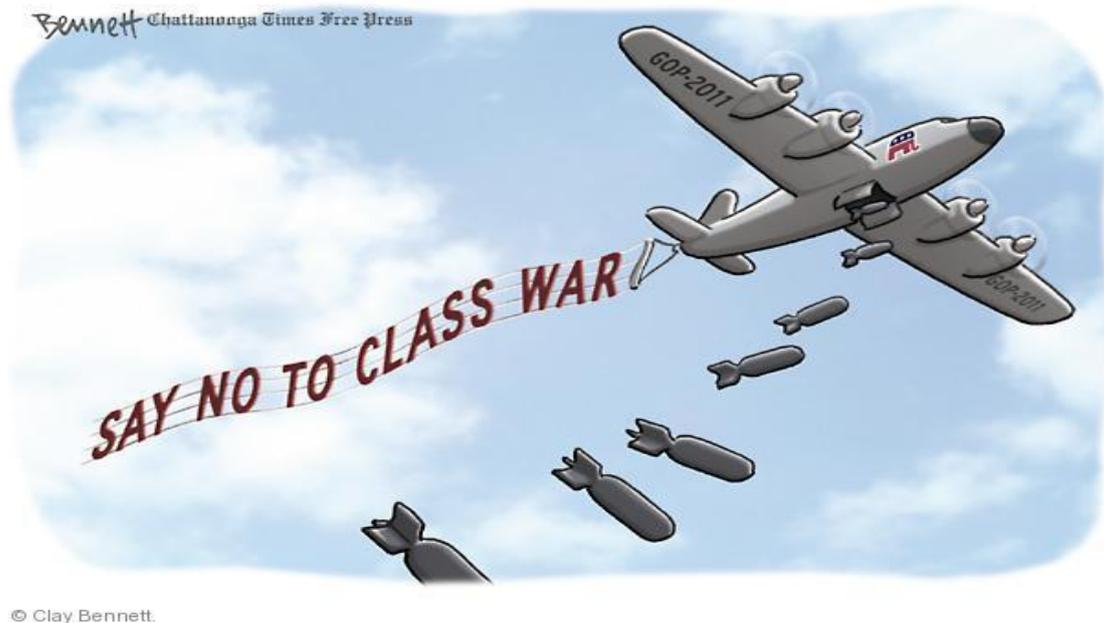
The greed is so unremitting that some want to deny disadvantaged students any additional funding. Independent Schools Victoria says that low SES students should not receive extra funding because the relationship between low SES and education outcomes is “weak” and “inconclusive”. It claims that “low SES has a minor influence on student performance”.

This is a despicable and outrageous attack on the least well-off families in our communities.

It goes against all the evidence from literally hundreds of studies that show a strong relationship between low SES background and student achievement. This is not the place to review that evidence but one only has to go to the recently published Educator’s Handbook for Understanding and Closing Achievement Gaps to see its extent. A report published this week by the Productivity Commission says that SES background is the most important influence on student achievement.

Save Our Schools has estimated that an additional \$6 billion a year is needed to close the achievement gap between low SES students and the average for all students. Instead, Independent Schools Victoria want a funding model that will deliver private schools an additional \$4.6 billion a year without any increase in funding for government schools.

So this is their position – decry class warfare and continue the bombing.



Its intent is to restrict access to higher education, higher paying occupations and positions of power and status in society to children of more privileged families. It is a way for the rich to remain a privileged social group.

Gonski on equity

But, things are not going to plan. The Gonski Review appears to be committed to reducing the achievement gap between rich and poor. It said from the outset that it will focus on improving equity in education, and that differences in outcomes should not be based on wealth and income. It has said this repeatedly:

It believes that equity should ensure that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions. Integral to this is ensuring the funding that is available is equitably distributed among schools; that is, directed to where it is needed most so that students are supported to overcome barriers to achievement, regardless of their background or where they go to school. [Emerging Issues Paper, pp. 5,8]

Of particular concern to the panel, is that it must overcome the equity and performance challenges facing this country and fully support the opportunity for all students to achieve their potential regardless of their background or the school which they attend. Looking at students with disadvantage is a clear focus of the review and the panel is continuing to examine all the ways a funding model can address disadvantage. [Press Conference, 31 August 2011]

These are strong commitments. The Review has set its own standard by which its recommendations will be judged. It is going to be very hard for the committee to walk away from this commitment.

If it does, it will look like the vested interests of privilege have prevailed again. After all, three of the six members of the committee represent private school interests and a fourth is on record as advocating markets in education with more choice and competition.

Mr. Gonski himself faces a stern test of commitment. Is he prepared to recommend that the \$4.5 million in taxpayer funding for his old school, Sydney Grammar - and of which he was

chairman before being appointed to head the Review - be diverted to low income government and private schools?

If the Review is to meet its own standard, it has to deliver two things:

- A new funding model which will support greater equity in education; and
- A massive boost in funding for government schools

A new funding model

The current system of funding private schools must be overhauled. It is time to give priority to funding real need rather than greed.

The SES funding model is inequitable, wasteful, capricious and incoherent. It is a canker on Australia's egalitarian ethos. It has diverted millions and millions of dollars in taxpayer funds to the wealthiest families and schools in Australia while those most in need are denied adequate funding.

Only about half of all private schools are funded according to their measured SES. The rest are over-funded and this costs the taxpayer over \$700 million a year. The over-funding goes to higher SES schools. No low SES private school is over-funded. The total over-funding between 2001 and 2012 amounts to about \$6 billion.

SOS funding model

Save Our Schools has recommended to the Gonski School Funding Review a new integrated funding model for government and private schools which also integrates funding by federal and state/territory governments.

The model has three main components: a community standard of resources, baseline funding, and equity funding [see Box].

Main Features of Save Our Schools Funding Model

- ▶ **Community Resource Standard**
 - Set by high SES government schools
- ▶ **Baseline Funding to community standard**
 - All government schools
 - No govt. funding for private schools with private resources above standard
 - Top-up for private schools below standard - subject to enrolment & curriculum conditions
- ▶ **Equity Funding**
 - Available to all government and private schools
 - Funding loadings for different equity groups
 - Funding loadings for highly disadvantaged schools

Community resource standard

We propose that a community standard of resources be established which enables all government and private schools with minimum levels of disadvantage to achieve an adequate education across a comprehensive curriculum to Year 12.

For immediate practical purposes, the community standard should be set as the resources currently available to high SES government schools where a very high proportion of students - close to 100 per cent - achieve an adequate education. An expert task force should be established to develop a community resource standard for the longer term.

Baseline funding component

Baseline funding should ensure that all government and private schools meet the community standard. Baseline funding for government schools should be fixed at the community standard because government schools are free and have little access to other income.

Private schools whose private-sourced income exceeds the standard should not be entitled to baseline funding. Public funding should not be provided to these schools because it would give more privileged students additional advantages over those with less privileged backgrounds. It would also be inconsistent with the Gonski panel's goal of improving equity in education outcomes.

For other private schools, baseline funding should fill the gap between the community standard and funding from fees and donations. Private schools operating at below the standard should receive government funding to ensure that they can provide an adequate education. No private school should operate with fewer resources than the community standard.

However, the extent of baseline funding should be conditional on eligible private schools fulfilling the same social role as government schools. The full difference between private-sourced funding and the community standard would be provided only to private schools that meet similar social obligations as government schools.

Schools that adopt discriminatory enrolment policies or provide less than a comprehensive curriculum would not receive their entire eligible baseline funding. For example, schools which select students on the basis of ability, income, or religion would not be entitled to the full baseline funding for which they are eligible. Neither would schools which fail to provide a comprehensive curriculum which includes, for example, teaching evolution instead of creationism in science, adequate sex education and vocational education.

Private schools which insist on being able to discriminate against some students or deny access to a comprehensive curriculum may therefore find themselves with less than the community standard of resources. These schools would face three options. One is to increase their fees to cover the gap. The second is to adopt the community standard enrolment and curriculum policies. The third is to have their registration annulled on financial grounds because they do not meet the resource standard.

Equity funding component

The third feature of the SOS funding model is equity funding for eligible students in both government and private schools. All students not making expected progress should be supported to achieve an adequate education wherever they are enrolled. Low SES, Indigenous

and remote area students in either sector should be supported to achieve similar results to high SES students. Students with disabilities should be similarly supported in both sectors.

Different funding levels will be required for students with different background characteristics as their average results differ. The weightings currently applied for disadvantage in Australia are much too low. This is one reason why we are not making progress on reducing the achievement gap.

The funding weighting should also be higher for schools with higher proportions of low SES, Indigenous and remote area students. These schools face additional challenges. Overseas and Australian studies show that a student attending a school where the average SES of the student body is low is likely to have lower outcomes than a student from a similar background attending a school where the average SES of the student body is high.

Criticisms of the model

Two criticisms might be made of this model.

First, the proposal that disadvantaged students in government and private schools should get the same funding could be seen as the thin edge of the voucher wedge.

Vouchers have a bad name in education because they have been used to undermine public education. However, vouchers can be a means to a worthwhile end; for example, the pharmaceutical benefits scheme is a voucher scheme – you take a voucher called a prescription from your doctor to get free or subsidised medicine. It all depends on how vouchers are used. In effect, we already have a voucher model in government schools where funding is largely determined on enrolments and funding follows the student.

Private schools should be entitled to supplementary government funding on a needs basis. Students who are failing to progress satisfactorily towards achieving an adequate education should be given funding support whether in the government or private sectors.

There is no case to deny supplementary funding to these students just because their parents have chosen to enrol them in private schools. How can we possibly argue for equity in education if we deny adequate funding to low SES, Indigenous, disability and remote area students in private schools? Society has an obligation to ensure that all children receive an adequate education, whether enrolled in the government or private sector.

Another possible criticism is that the “top-up” funding for lowly resourced private schools could lead to a proliferation of low or zero fee private schools. However, the conditions attached to top-up funding are designed to minimise this. In the SOS model, access to top-up funding is conditional on schools adhering to open enrolment policies, reasonable policies on suspension and expulsion of students and an adequate curriculum. Their funding is reduced if they do not meet these standards.

A massive boost in funding is needed for government schools

The other major task of the Gonski review is to support a massive boost in government funding for government schools. Much more funding than is currently being provided to the educationally disadvantaged is needed to close the achievement gaps.

Research studies show that the additional expenditure required for low income students to achieve at adequate levels is double or more the cost of educating an average student. On the basis of current average expenditure in government schools, this means an additional \$11,000 per student. Overall, this would require total additional funding for government schools of \$6 billion a year, a far cry from the current \$266 million a year being devoted to the low SES and the Literacy and Numeracy Smarter Schools National Partnership programs.

This is an enormous figure, but it reflects the long neglect of the education needs of disadvantaged students by successive Australian governments. It is a measure of the enormity of the task facing Australia to bring the achievement of low SES students up to average levels of achievement. Even greater increases in funding are needed to eliminate the achievement gap between low and high SES students.

The political battle ahead

Even if the Gonski Review delivers on these tasks it is only the beginning. It then goes to the political sphere with an election just around the corner. All those who support public education and improving equity in education must be prepared for this.

There is cause for hope. There is evidence that the tide is turning. Government funding of wealthy private schools is under fire as never before. There is widespread revulsion about millions in government funding going to the wealthiest schools and families in Australia, even in the conservative press. For example:

“Elite private schools do not deserve to continue to receive generous federal taxpayer handouts. It’s time to fund need rather than greed.

The Gillard Government must use the current school funding review to turn off the gravy train for Australia’s richest private schools.”

[Susie O’Brien, Herald-Sun, 28 February 2011]

“It’s a brazen case of resources greed, not education need - evidence that the education class divide is widening, with the help of governments.”

[Daily Telegraph, 5 March 2011]

“There is growing concern that the gap between our poorest schools, and our richest, is growing thanks to government funding...the fury over school funding is reaching boiling point.”

[Today Tonight, 8 March 2011]

“The great divide between what Australia’s richest and poorest schools spend on educating their students has now been revealed.”

[Courier-Mail, 4 March 2011]

We need to build on this in the battle ahead. There is a huge untapped potential for teachers and parents in government schools to make a difference.

There are over 6,700 government schools across Australia, including 768 in WA, and they exist in every local area. Each one is a base for parents and teachers to organise together to harass politicians and write to the local media highlighting the social divide in student achievement and school resources.

We need to learn from the Independents and Catholics – we need to mobilise our base. It means challenging the gags governments have placed on government schools about campaigning for better funding – gags which don’t apply to private schools funded by governments.

We have to be organised. The national day of action this week was a great start, but it is just the beginning. Every local government school must become a stronghold in the fight for equity in education. It is a fight for social justice and democracy. We have to be in it. The future of public education in this country is at stake.

Thank you. I wish you a successful state council.