

**“The Nurture and Admonition
of the Lord”: Brethren
Schooling and the Debate on
Religious Schools in Australia.**

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Introduction.

1. Education Reform Agenda:
Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (ALP) – 2007-2010 (2013).
Prime Minister Julia Gillard (ALP) – 2010-2013.
Prime Minister Tony Abbott (Lib.) – 2013-Present.
2. Privatization of Public Infrastructure: 1996-Present.
3. State aid: Provision of state aid to non-government (aka private, independent schools). Post-1964.
4. Constitutionality: Constitutional challenge on s. 116 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia (1981):
Attorney-General (Vic); Ex Rel Black v Commonwealth (“DOGS case”) [1981] HCA 2; (1981) 146 CLR 559 (2 February 1981).
5. Political Opposition: Australian Greens Party.

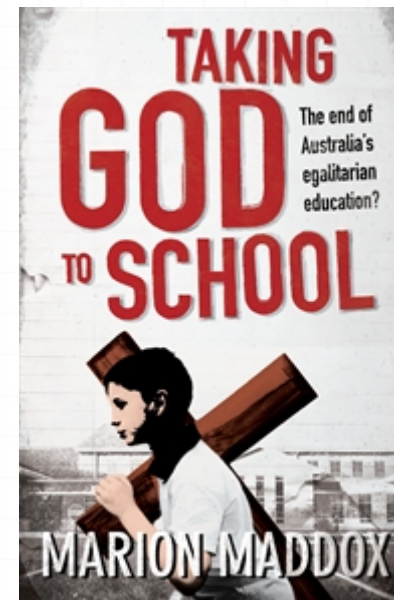
Polarization of Education Debate.

Pro-Privatization



Jennifer Buckingham, *The Rise of Religious Schools* (Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies Policy Monographs, 2010).

Anti-Privatization



Marion Maddox, *Taking God to School: The End of Australia's Egalitarian Education* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2014).

The Brethren and the “School Wars”



Since 1997, the PBCC have received generous government subsidies in Australia for the operation of their schools alongside other non-government schools. Since 2004, however, they have been the most heavily scrutinized of the recipients of state aid.

Historical Background.

Below: The Goulburn School Strike, 1962.



State Aid in Australian Education

1. 1870s: Australian Colonies settle on 'free, compulsory, and secular' education sector to avoid sectarianism.
2. Roman Catholic Bishops under leadership of Archbishop Roger Vaughan establish Catholic system without government aid.

Archbishop Vaughan



“[We] condemn the principle of secularist education and those schools founded on that principle...they are the seed plots of future immorality, infidelity and lawlessness.”

(1879).

Historical Background

1962 Goulburn School Strike.



1964 - Menzies' Liberal government passes *States Grants (Science Laboratories and Technical Training) Act 1964*.

1969 – Menzies' Government passes *States Grants (Independent Schools) Act 1969*.

1974 – Whitlam Labor Government extends recurrent federal government funding to all schools on a “needs basis.”

Every Federal government since has increased funding to non-government schools to some degree.

Political Differences in Approach to State Aid

Liberal Party of Australia
(Conservative)

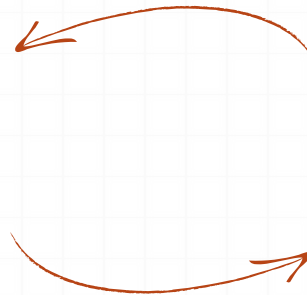


More favorable to non-government schools and increased privatization ("school choice").

Australian Labor Party
(Progressive)



More favorable to government schools and a "needs based" approach to lower socio-economic Catholic and independent schools.

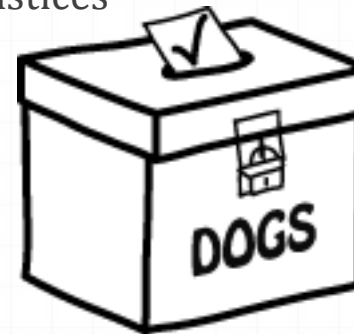


Constitutional Challenge: the “DOGS” Case [DOGS=Defend Our Government Schools]

Constitution of the
Commonwealth of Australia s.
116:

“The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.”

Attorney-General (Vic); Ex R]el Black v Commonwealth (“DOGS case”) [1981] HCA 2; (1981) 146 CLR 559 (2 February 1981). Dismissed by $\frac{3}{4}$ High Court Justices *



* Justice Lionel Murphy dissented.

Additional Developments.

1. Significant shift in enrolments from government to non-government schools.
2. The rise of the 'New Christian Schools (NCS)'
3. Controversies over NCSs:
 - (a) Links with right-wing Christian lobby groups (e.g. the Australian Christian Lobby).
 - (b) Claims such schools are socially divisive.

The Brethren Schools.

Political Concern.



“[A] complete, total abuse of the funding system.” – Dr. John Kaye
MLC (New South Wales, Greens).

Media Headlines

‘Poor little rich school’

‘Sect in a class of its own’

‘Sect’s schools flush from
parents – and federal
funds’

‘Brethren school kids
“brainwashed”’



Australian Education Union (AEU)



Angelo Gavrielatos
President of the AEU
(Federal).

“How can the Federal Government justify handing over tens of millions of dollars to an organisation it believes is *a cult like the Exclusive Brethren* while public schools, which educate the vast majority of our children, are struggling for funds? Why are they *enriching a cult* rather than using the funding to improve the education of young Australians in public schools?”

-Press Release January 12, 2010
(emphasis added)

(**Note:** Gavrielatos is being rhetorical here. All government schools still receive around double the government funding of non-government schools)

Criticisms of Brethren Schools.

1. Preferential Funding.
2. Threaten Social Cohesion.
3. Restrictive Practices: curriculum content, IT, tertiary studies.

"Shocking and compelling, an eye-opening account of power and cruelty in a tiny Christian sect that enjoys a privileged existence in Australia."
DAVID MARK



Behind the
EXCLUSIVE
BRETHREN
Michael Bachelard

Religious Schools Controversy



Above: Jennifer Buckingham (Centre for Independent Studies – Conservative Think Tank)

“Not all religious schools generate the same amount of community disquiet. Two types of school in particular receive the most media attention – Islamic schools and the Exclusive Brethren schools. Arguably, much unease about these schools stems from the lack of information and, in some cases, misinformation... there is no reason to believe that these schools are the source of problems either for students or for society.”

The Rise of Religious Schools
(Australia: Centre for Independent Studies, Policy Monograph 111: 2010), p. ix.

Major Aims.

1. Overview of Brethren Schools: Structure, Funding, and Performance.
2. The Brethren School Controversy: The 2004 Election Campaign and its Aftermath.

Ministry of John S. Hales on the Foundation of Brethren Schools.

The generable reception we've had from the head masters has been very acceptable, and we need to be on our faces about that... But if we're established in the truth... and the value of the Scriptures, then the Lord will help us and support us in our approaches. *And we won't be difficult, we won't be holding a gun at their head, that's not our business. We're not trying to run the state or the education system or anything, we're just trying to run our own lives according to God.*

(May 13, 1989)

Well we must be reasonable with the authorities. *We don't want to be unreasonable or to try and run the schools, we can't do that.* But we can just state where we stand in serious matters. The administrators are at their wits' end, there's no question about that... so we want to be able to help where we can. *But we don't want our children defiled. Scripture is plain, to be simple as to evil, wise as to that which is good.*

(July 12, 1989)

The Brethren Schools.



1. M.E.T. School (New South Wales).
2. Glenvale (Victoria)
3. Agnew School (Queensland)
4. Oakwood School (Tasmania)
5. Woodthorpe School (Western Australia)
6. Meridian (South Australia)

No Schools in Northern Territory and A.C.T. (Australian Capital Territory).

James Taylor Junior on Value of Education and the University Environment

“There is nothing wrong with education itself. There is danger in it, of course, in these things that are being taught today, but there is nothing wrong in education itself. The point is, what is the trend of your mind, what is your bent of mind?”
(October, 1965).

“You want to keep your children at home, and *not let them leave your home to go to college to learn. That is the whole trouble.* We do not regard the household properly and then our children go out, and they get out of our control. If our children could go to college and not leave home, they would be that far safe.”
(December, 1960).

Overview



Above: M.E.T. Maitland
Choir perform at Nursing
home.

1. 413 Teachers.
2. 2733 Students.

Funding Structure (2013):

Federal Recurrent Grants: \$19.5 Million
AUD.

State Recurrent Grants:
\$6.4 Million AUD.

Fees:
\$6.4 Million AUD.

Private Sources:
\$30 Million AUD – Probably Deductible
Gift Recipient (DGR) donations.

Curriculum



1. National Curriculum and State Requirements (including evolution).
2. Instrumental rather than Expressive.
3. After Year 9 more gender specific.
4. Limitations on topics which might conflict with Brethren values (e.g. HSC Visual Arts).
5. IT usage (especially Video Conferencing Classes).
6. Self-Directed Learning (SDL).
7. Religion is not taught in Brethren schools.*

*Other than *Special Religious Education* (SRE) allowed in government schools for one hour every fortnight in certain state jurisdictions. During this time local elders will teach the students.

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

My School[®]

Areas Tested:

1. Reading
2. Persuasive/Narrative Writing
3. Spelling
4. Grammar and Punctuation
5. Numeracy

Results Publicly Available at:

www.myschool.edu.au

NAPLAN Results

Reading

Year 3

476 456 - 496	
SIM 421 412 - 431	ALL 418

Selected school's average is

- substantially above
- above
- close to
- below
- substantially below

Left (Top): NAPLAN Sample.

(Year 3 – Reading – Glenvale School)

Left (Below): Color-code

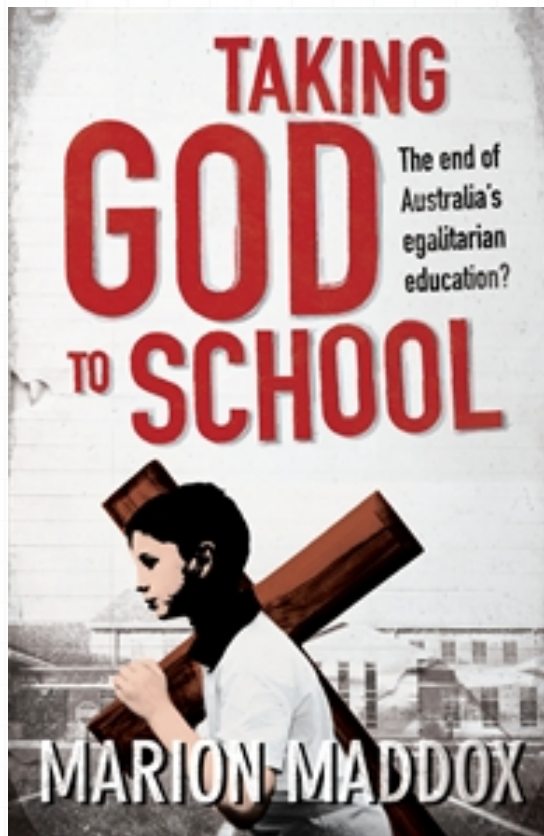
VET Courses.

School	Oatlands	Agnew	Oakwood	Woodthorpe	Meridian	Glenvale	Total
Management and Commerce	176	13		13	352	302	667
Engineering and Related Technologies	22	5		5			32
Architecture and Building	4	3					7
Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies	6						6
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services	2						2
	210	21	0	18	352	302	903

Postgraduate Studies

1. TAFE (Technical and Further Education) Courses
2. Distance University education

Funding Controversy.



“[Brethren schools represent] one-way church-state separation...where the church emphasizes its separation from the secular world as a key value, whilst ensuring the state foots many of the bills.”

Marion Maddox, *Taking God to School: The end of Australia's egalitarian education?*, p. 86.

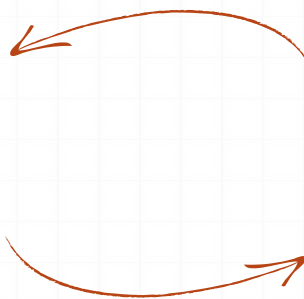
Developments Under Howard

Policy Changes

1996 – “Restrictive” New Schools Policy scrapped (making it easier for new schools to set up).

1997 – Brethren schools assessed as Category 12 (the highest level) under the ERI (Economic Resource Index) funding model.

2001 – Implementation of SES (Socio-Economic Status) funding model. Brethren received “funding maintenance” so that they did not lose any funding by transferring to new system (Brethren remain at this level today).



Below: John Howard – Prime Minister of Australia 1996-2007
(Australian Liberal Party)



The 'Brethren Cult Controversy'

Below: Brethren-funding political flyer 2004.

For more details see:
Doherty, Bernard. 2013. "The 'Brethren Cult Controversy': Dissecting a Contemporary Australian 'Social Problem'." *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 4:25-48.

Doherty, Bernard. 2012. "Quirky Neighbors or the Cult Next-Door? An Analysis of Public Perceptions of the Exclusive Brethren in Australia." *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 3:163-211.



Mark Latham's "Great Australian Schools" Funding Package



Above: "The Infamous Handshake" - Mark Latham (L) and John Howard (R).

1. The 'Hit List' of Private Schools.
2. Great Australian Schools Policy:
 - \$2.4 billion AUD in funds for education; \$1.9 billion earmarked for government schools.
 - Redirection of \$520 million from 67 elite non-government schools.
 - Freezing of recurrent funding of 111 other elite non-government schools at 2004 levels and redirection of money to 2500 poorer Catholic and independent schools (i.e. other non-government schools).

Opposition to Latham's Education Policy.

Below: Cardinal George Pell –
Archbishop of Sydney



Opposition.

“Nineteenth Century Class Warfare” - Michelle Green (Chief Executive of the Association of Independent Schools Victoria).

(**Note:** Pell went against other Catholic bishops and National Catholic Education Commission).

Kevin Rudd on Brethren (2007)



I believe this is an extremist cult and sect...I also believe that it breaks up families; I also believe that there are real problems with the provision of modern education to kids under their system where they, for example, are not given the full range of access to information technology.

Further Criticism.



Above: Nick Xenophon
-Independent Senator and
“cult” critic.
(**Note:** Xenophon has also
attacked Scientology and the
Jehovah’s Witnesses).



Above: Dr. John Kaye
– NSW Greens MLC and
Brethren critic.



Above: Michael Bachelard
- Journalist and Brethren
Critic. (**Note:** Bachelard
has since involved himself
with the ACM in Australia).

Rudd and Gillard Labor Governments (2007-2013)

- **More funding for Brethren schools (and more controversy over this funding).**
- **Massive increases in public spending by Federal Government (related to GFC):** Building the Education Revolution (BER), the Digital Education Revolution (DER).
- **Development of compulsory National Curriculum** (implemented 2015).
- **Increased Transparency and Accountability:** Founding of ACARA (2009).
- **Increased funding for Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.**
- **'Gonski Review'** (2010, final report December 2011). Calling for "student-based" funding with loading rather than "sector-based" funding. A transfer away from "funding maintained" schools (like Brethren schools) without disadvantaging them economically.
- *Australian Education Act 2013* ("Better Schools Plan"): shift to a "student centered" rather than "sector centered" funding, slow removal of "funding maintained" schools as not to disadvantage schools (Brethren are under this category).

Conclusion

Brethren schools are controversial not because of their educational standards, which even critics admit are impressive, or for being socially divisive or harmful (for which little evidence exists), but because a combination of the group's poor public image, past connections to conservative politics, and generous public funding has made them an ideal target in the politics of envy.

The New “Folk Devils” of Australia’s School Wars?



Above: Michael Hogan – Australian Historian and Political Scientist.

“Among the liberal enemies of the denominations Catholics were frequently singled out for special scorn because of their alleged superstition and rejection of scientific or rationalist ideas. From the 1860s on, the role of Catholics in the dispute became even more central, and explicit sectarianism was closer to the heart of Australian politics than it had ever been.”

Future Prospects

2013-

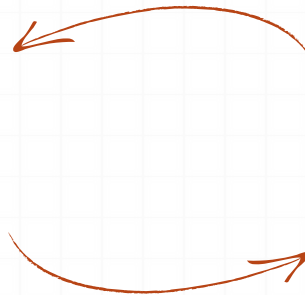
2013 – Abbott Coalition elected, education debate shifts to University-sector.

2017 – Gillard government Better Schools Plan expires with no further commitment to “Gonski Reforms.”

Mitigating Factors:

1. School Performance
2. Community Engagement
3. Accountability and Transparency under Better Schools Policy and National Curriculum
4. Slow liberalisation

Below: Tony Abbott – Prime Minister of Australia (2013-



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