

TCF Getaway 2018

5th - 7th October 2018

The Retreat Cottage at Stanwell Tops.

All welcome at this new time and location for a refreshing weekend away in a peaceful bushland setting overlooking Illawarra's northern coastline with magnificent views. Come for a relaxing time of fun, Bible input, fellowship, prayer, support and sightseeing.

\$130 (plus a plate for morning tea and a willingness to help with meal preparation).

An applications form is included on the web-site. Registrations close on 21st September.

Public schools fight back?

In recent weeks (July 2018), there has been considerable ideological debate about whether public schools should continue to support selective schools. This is partly a debate about whether public schools should be local and comprehensive or cater for specialist needs including intellectual superiority. In an education textbook, the debate would be along traditional lines, but today's arguments have a social context, with historical and political heritages, that are affected by the current makeup of the Australian population, social expectations about schools and, of course, funding. It's complex, and not a simple choice of ideology, nor is there a simplistic Christian position to be taken.

Australian schools to 1980s

In the colony of NSW, education was the responsibility of the churches until the 1880 Education Act when the state took over all church schools and allowed the then Christian churches to have access to students to teach special religious education (scripture) with non-denominational Christianity (general religious education) being part of the curriculum. Some church schools developed later and in the first half of the 1900s they were primarily out of a need for secondary education. However, in the midst of a sectarian society divided along catholic and protestant lines, the needs of Catholic parents for their children to have an education more focused on the Catholic faith led to the development of systems of primary and secondary Catholic schools.

By 1980, the school enrolment percentage by sector was Public 78, Catholic 18 and Independent 5. Even at this point of time, diversity in the schools was apparent with a growing Independent sector throughout the 1970s mainly due to increased funding provisions from the Commonwealth government, a static Catholic sector improving its resource base from additional Commonwealth funding and a declining public school sector as a more affluent society saw advantages in investing in independent schools for its children's education. Within public schools there was also diversity -

co-ed, single sex, specialist and selective high schools, specialist schools catering for disabilities and OC primary classes. While Catholic and public schools were “local” there was already considerable divergence from this norm.

The growth of Independent schools

Both the number of non-government schools and their percentage of enrolments have increased since 1980, (2018 - Public schools 65%, Catholic 20%, Independent 15%) There are a number of factors that explain this trend:

1. Increased affluence
The Australian population has had a growing middle class that has sort to advantage their children by providing an Independent or Catholic school education.
2. Perceptions of educational advantage
With only a small amount of data for most of this period, parents have perceived that an Independent school will provide a better education.
3. Increased funding from Australian and state governments
During this period non-government schools continued to receive ever increasing funding allowing them to set up systems with low fees or provide even more facilities and programs for students in existing schools.
4. Lack of flexibility in selection of public schools
Parents sometimes found that the school they wanted their child to attend is out of zone and alternatives were not as attractive.
5. Secondary school dissatisfaction
The percentage decline in enrolments into public primary schools has been slower than public secondary schools. Surveys indicate that parents are happy with their local primary school but if their child cannot gain entry to public selective school than they will enrol them in a non-government school.
6. The rise of low fee Christian/church/religious schools
During this period the Christian school movement continued to grow and Anglican schools came into full operation in the 1990s. The desire of many Christians to move their children from the secular public system to a faith-based school became an attractive proposition. In the same way other faith-based schools, including Islamic schools, prospered.
7. Political expediency
By the 1990s, the bleeding of students from public schools had reached a political crisis. Governments throughout this period knew that the cost to them of a student in a non-government school was less than in a public school. (NSW provided 25% of the cost of educating a student in a public school for each student in a non-government school.) Any increased funding to public schools meant more subsidy to the non-government sector from the state budget. This arrangement inhibited increased funding to public schools. Did they really care about the trend from public to non-government schools?

To be seen to be acting, additional selective schools were established and specialist schools including; creative arts and technology high schools. They were well sought after, but at the expense of comprehensive schools that were seen to be second best.

These actions in (7) above slowed the decline in sector share. One outcome of an increased number of selective schools and the reporting of HSC results has been the achievement of students in these schools which now rank in the top 20 schools helping to change the community perception of public schools. Yet, the community is also aware of the poor performance of many comprehensive schools in low socioeconomic areas.

The current dilemma

As recently reported, the number of students in public schools, including secondary schools, is continuing to increase and this is affecting the sector percentage share. The sector share would appear to have plateaued. The downward trend has ended and there is even the slightest hint of reversal. Some of the reasons for this change could be inter alia:

- Improved perceptions of public school results from NAPLAN reporting
- A tighter economic situation restricting consumer spending on education
- A questioning of value for money for non-government enrolment
- Improved funding under Gonski 2.0 for public schools.

The central issue is - where to now for public schools? Is it more of the same with improved funding leading to improved teaching and learning or a radical change to improve equity?

The move for change is driven by:

1. The high correlation between socio-economic area and achievement.
Sometimes called ranking by postcode, how can the achievements of students from low socio-economic areas be raised so that they have similar opportunities in further education and life to those students from affluent areas?
2. The aggregation of the best students into selective schools.
There is debate about whether selective schools provide a good environment for maximizing the achievement of all its students, especially given issues of under achievement. Selective schools have deprived the comprehensive schools of their brightest studies taking away the role models that could help lift performance.
3. Low teacher expectations.
The difficulties of raising teacher expectations of student achievement in comprehensive schools, particularly in low socio-economic areas, remains an issue. Countering the deep seated belief in some teachers that students from low socio-economic areas can't learn is difficult.
4. Unequal funding
Despite disadvantage attracting additional funding, the capacity of selective schools and those comprehensive schools serving affluent areas to raise funds is another disadvantage low socio-economic schools face.

Within these arguments is a strong case for abandoning selective schools and returning to the local comprehensive school which, with the exception of OC classes, is the case in primary schools. There are strong equity and funding arguments to support this change.

However, faced with these issues the government is unlikely to abandon what parents want - selective schools. But they could modify the current pattern by introducing a local enrolment

stream into all selective schools which might account for half their enrolments. This would reduce the number of places for selective students in existing schools but could lead to an expansion of this model so that there are more comprehensive schools with a selective stream. Given the location of existing selective schools, this would not be an easy solution but has merit for a government faced with dealing with two extreme educational positions and trying to win their favour.

The more difficult problem is not this structural one. Changing deckchairs on the Titanic won't help. The real issues to be addressed are teaching and learning. How can the learning of students from low socio-economic areas be improved and the issues associated with this question I have tried to address in a recent article "[Going backwards: 20+ years of a literacy and numeracy focus](#)"

Where are the Christians in all of this?

Christian parents are going to want what is best for their children. They know the fundamental importance of education for their children's future. In a Christian philosophy of education, they know that education through all the subjects has the capacity to help their children know God. For some, they see this as being better achieved through a Christian school and are willing to sacrifice to see that this opportunity is available.

However, this choice is not clear cut. Some parents cannot afford an independent school for their children. Others are committed to their children *being in the world but not of the world*, and chose for them to attend a public school and ensure that more explicit teaching about God and living as a Christian occurs through their family and church relationships.

Those Christians that highlight the secularism of public schools and increasing anti-Christian positions, need to understand that the withdrawal of students over the last forty years has left public schools short of students from Christian homes, left public schools with fewer Christian teachers as they have either moved to or found first appointments in Christian schools and lost Christian parents who might have influenced parent groups and school policies. It could be argued that the light has been dimmed and the salt has lost its savour as Christians have abandoned public education. Public school secularization (see previous articles about the struggles of SRE and the demise of GRE [Religion in Schools](#). - a future less certain) is as much an outcome of Christians leaving the space to others as it is to any unchallenged anti-Christian secularism.

A broader issue is whether Christians will support any move towards greater equity in funding where equity means addressing disadvantage, not equal resources for all. This will especially be the case if Christians lose any advantage that the current system offers - be that access to selective and specialist schools or local comprehensive schools in affluent areas.

The bottom line

The recent figures indicate that in sector share, public schools are fighting back. But this might be putting too much emphasis on the figures. An accurate interpretation is that the sector share has plateaued, and its next move is unpredictable. An improved economy with a mini mining, or something else, boom may well see a move towards non-government schools as improved consumer spending and less value-added concerns, have parents seek non-government schools for their children. While an ideological shift in which public schools abandon selective schools may result in greater equity, but a strong reversal of the sector share to favour non-government

schools is likely as the parents of the brightest students abandon public schools. Such a result would negate the very advantages sought by dispersing the students from selective schools.

I am unconvinced that public schools are “fighting back”. They are just holding on and the future is uncertain. I am also not convinced that governments are prepared to tackle the teaching and learning issues as well as structural issues to address inequity in schooling in Australia.

As Christians, we live in an imperfect world, but are called to be its light and salt. Care for the poor features strongly throughout the scriptures. How can Christians best support equity in education so that advantage is not enshrined as privilege for the wealthy and disadvantage embedded for the poor.

John Gore.

TCF new phone number - add to your contacts.

From 1st September it will be 0490 148 249.

Vale Reg Becker

(Extracts from eulogy by Jim Becker at Reg's Thanksgiving Service at Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church on 11th May 2018.)

Reg led a life that was very different from today. His journey on earth began in the family home at Belmore on 27th February 1933 (a date he never let anyone forget) during the Great Depression. Always, his enterprising spirit came to the fore, in a family (of seven) that was supplied food parcels to survive, he collected cow pats from the dairy to sell for two pence a wheelbarrow load to gardeners in the area. He worked as a paperboy and in a fruit shop with funds directed to his mother to run the household. He was sent to Sunday School although his parents did not attend church and he gained his first knowledge of God.

Doing well at school, he attended Fort St Boys High. Always working to support himself in an era of little government assistance, he worked in a foundry and at Peek Freans biscuits to make his way through Teachers College.

National Service followed where he was the Quartermaster, so everyone was his friend. His first full teaching appointment was at Menindee, 110 km from Broken Hill. Here the single, out of town teachers all boarded at Maidens Hotel, the only accommodation in town. Among those at the same meal table were the Principal and a Beverley Kirkham, on her first teaching job. On 14th May 1955 Reg and Beverley were married at Epping.

In time, Reg decided to pursue the Principal's role in Primary Schools and subsequently the family moved to Coolamon where he became Deputy Principal. His first Principal's position was at Bogan Gate, a four-teacher school. Next posting was at Chipping Norton where his two daughters were in his class, a situation that he later claimed led to many a success for both of them! Reg moved to bigger schools in Birchgrove, several in the St Ives/Kenthurst area and then to Beecroft where he

finished his teaching career in 1990 having had heart by-pass surgery. Reg and Jim entered the printing business as 50/50 partners in The Printing Department. After a few years Reg retired from this and he and Beverley travelled widely together and later on with family. In 2016/17, Beverley increasingly became Reg's carer doing a sterling job managing him at home. In early 2018, after several nocturnal falls, doctors recommended 24 hour care for his own safety and he saw his days out at Lansdowne Gardens, just 9 days short of his 63rd wedding anniversary.

(Reg was a happy, fun, generous, encouraging and caring person, committed to serving his Lord and Saviour in all he did. His previous contributions to TCF were greatly appreciated. He is now enjoying his reward.) Pam Griffin.

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