

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Media Release

School Funding Review Compromised by Overwhelming Conflict of Interest

The public education group, Save Our Schools, has criticised the appointment of the chairman of Sydney Grammar School to head up the school funding inquiry announced by the Federal Education Minister. National Convenor of SOS, Trevor Cobbold, said the appointment of Mr. David Gronski has compromised the independence of the review.

“It is absolutely absurd that the chairman of an elite private school has been appointed to decide the future funding of private and government schools. The conflict of interest is overwhelming.

“It is scandalous that Julia Gillard has appointed such a partisan committee to review school funding. It is dominated by vested interests. Partisans of private schools are a majority on the review panel. It is not an independent review.

“The review will be a complete whitewash. Its membership signals that the Federal Education Minister is not interested in an impartial review. Her appointment of Mr. Gronski and other private school partisans is a way of reassuring private schools that their privileged funding is not under threat.

“John Howard and David Kemp could not have done better to ensure their program of massive over-funding of private schools by the taxpayer will continue well into the future.

Mr. Cobbold said the test of Mr. Gronski’s impartiality is whether he is prepared to recommend that the massive taxpayer funding of Sydney Grammar be diverted to low income government and private schools.

“Sydney Grammar’s Year 12 fees are over \$23 000 a year – it is the preserve of some of the wealthiest families in Australia. Who else can afford such fees? Yet, this year it will get nearly \$3.5 million from the Commonwealth Government. By 2012, it will be getting nearly \$4 million a year.

“This is the ultimate in upper class welfare, diverting huge taxpayer funding to the wealthiest families which could be better used to meet the learning needs of low income, ethnic and Indigenous students.

“Total funding (from private and government sources) per student at Sydney Grammar is over double that of the average government school in NSW.

“This massive disparity in funding is an outrage and a scandal. It highlights the major flaw in the current funding approach which delivers massive taxpayer funds to schools least in need and provides them with a massive resourcing advantage over other schools

“Is Mr. Gronski prepared to divert taxpayer funding which is not needed at Sydney Grammar and other elite schools to those schools, whether government or private, serving high proportions of low income, immigrant and Indigenous students? This is the test he faces.”

Mr. Cobbold accused the Education Minister of a massive back-flip on her previous criticisms of the SES funding model.

“When the legislation for the SES scheme was introduced in 2000, Ms. Gillard said that the large increases in funding delivered to the wealthiest private schools by the scheme “...ought to concern anybody in this place who is worried about fairness and equity in our school funding models”.

“She said the model has “a gaping flaw” because it makes no allowance for the amassed wealth of many prestige schools and that this flaw is “....one that needs to be addressed”.

“Well, these cogent criticisms still need to be addressed. But, her appointment of a partisan committee to review school funding gives no confidence that they will be addressed. Once again, it will be government schools which lose out.”

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SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education

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