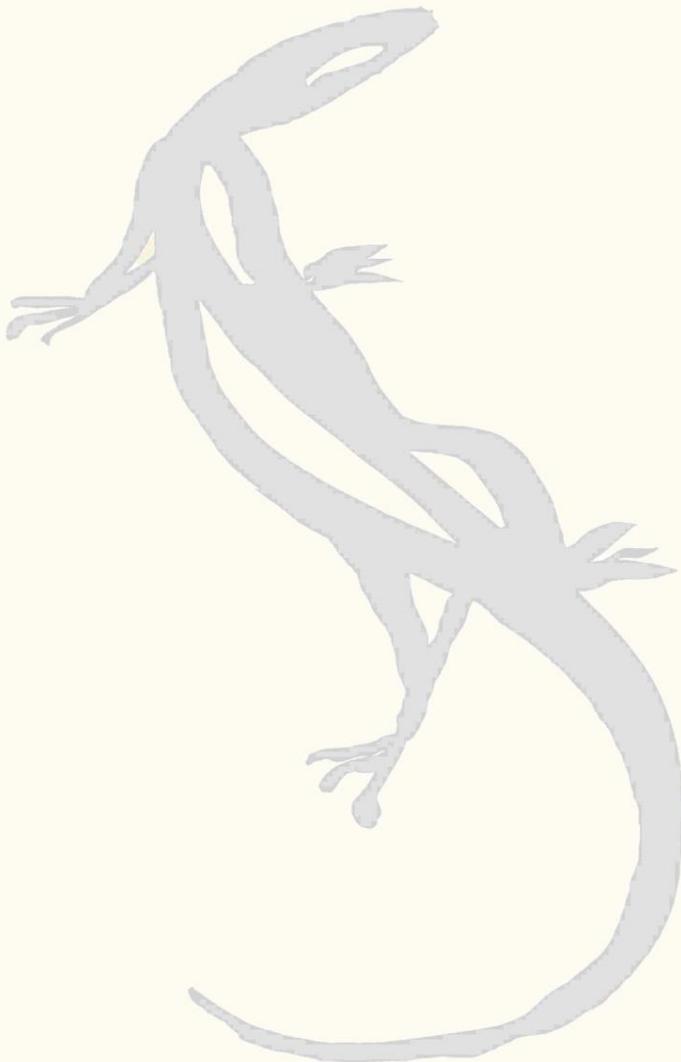


Barbara Preston Research

Civic Heritage and schooling

Presentation to the Independent Scholars Association of Australia
annual conference, Canberra

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Introduction

In this paper I am making a tentative attempt to consider schooling through the lens of 'heritage', and, in particular, to consider the differences between public and private schooling as reflecting the differences between civic and private heritage.

The issues and concepts are complex, and the reality of schooling is even more so. However, beyond the complexity and ambiguity at the level of detail, there is a clearer over-arching structure.

I first introduce heritage as either public (or civic) and private, then look at public and private schooling, with a little history of their dynamic and competitive relationship a century ago.

I then consider heritage as infrastructure in the dimension of time. The key feature of infrastructure is in what it enables – what goes beyond it because of it. Infrastructure can also be public or private – to a greater or lesser degree. And what it enables can be positively or negatively valued.

While infrastructure and heritage are not discrete commodities that can be simply aggregated and exchanged in a market, there are marketised and commodified aspects of schooling, especially in schooling and its outcomes as 'positional goods' that advantage some individuals at the expense of others. These aspects of schooling are less part of schooling as infrastructure or future heritage, and have been given prominence by political policies and cultural attitudes in recent decades.

I then document the fragility of the formerly robust heritage of public schooling, showing the declining enrolment share and the increasing concentration of low SES students in the contracting public sector while there is an increasing concentration of high SES students in the expanding Catholic and other nongovernment sectors.

Developing civic heritage tends to have an implicit responsibility and accountability beyond itself – for the wider community and for future generations. I consider some evidence and argument regarding responsibility, accountability and private schooling, including the impact of changes in school starting age in Tasmania and Western Australia.

The paper concludes with as many questions as answers.

Private heritage and civic heritage

When we think of heritage we often think of buildings – fine buildings or slab huts. Schooling is not about the buildings, but the building metaphor can be an illuminating starting point.

There is ‘private heritage’ and there is ‘civic heritage’.

When we consider fine old buildings as heritage, we can distinguish between the private and the civic. Private heritage is the grand home, owned and controlled by a family for whom it is powerful and deeply meaningful heritage, carrying within the physical fabric personal family traditions and memories. For those not part of that family there may be a weak connection with the building as heritage, and if there is still some personal connection (a ‘downstairs’ ancestor or other employee, and an association through the locality) there may be discomfort because even though a powerful connection was there, the ‘ownership’ of the heritage is not the same as that of the real (legal and proud) owners of the property. The grand home illuminates aspects of the social and cultural heritage of those who have a general connection with it and similar homes and the society and culture in which they are located. Slab huts can also be private heritage that may illuminate aspects of the heritage of those who do not have the private ownership connection.

In contrast to the grand home or modest slab hut as private heritage, civic heritage is the grand town hall or the mobile public library

A sense of the private, exclusionary ownership that prevents a property or institution being true civic heritage is powerfully evoked in the Kev Camody/Paul Kelly song in the fine Rachel Perkins movie, *One Night the Moon*¹. The white farm owner, played by Paul Kelly, sings,

This land is mine,
All the way to the old fenceline . . .
They won’t take it away.

He is answered in the distance by the dispossessed Indigenous man, played by Kelton Pell, singing of a collective connection to the land:

This land is me
Rock, water, animal, tree
They are my song,
My being is here where I belong.
This land owns me,
From generations past to infinity. . .

His words also end with, ‘They won’t take it away’. However, while the unsaid phrase at the end of the white farmer’s words would be ‘from *me*’, the unsaid phrase at the end of the Indigenous man’s words would be ‘from *us*’ or ‘from *our hearts and souls*’ or ‘from *our guardianship*’. This connection is not exclusionary possession, but rather ‘stewardship’ – taking responsibility for something one does not own in a narrow legal sense, and doing so for the benefit of others, especially future generations². Here there is a universalism in the stewardship – ‘infinity’ – that goes even beyond humanity.

The private and public in schooling

How, then, can we understand schooling in relation to heritage?

It should be noted that whether an institution or entity is private or public/civic is determined by ownership and control, not by sources of funding. According to the *Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics* (OECD):

An institution is classified as public if ultimate control rests with (1) a public education authority or agency or, (2) a governing body (Council, Committee etc.), most of whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise.

An institution is classified as private if ultimate control rests with a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a Church, Trade Union or business enterprise), or if its Governing Board consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency.³

While there is much complexity and ambiguity in social roles and relationships within and between school sectors, and much diversity within sectors, the matters of formal ownership and control are clear.

More than a hundred years ago, Frank Tate, the director general of education in Victoria, considered the private and the public in schooling, and drew on the metaphor of the fine building with storeys and stairways. He fought heroically against the powerful opposition of private schooling interests for the establishment of public secondary education providing matriculation access to the University of Melbourne. In his 1905 annual report he wrote:

[those who reject full state secondary schooling do so] because they regard such an extension as an attack upon their own class interest and privileges . . . At present we merely throw out a few ropes from the upper storey [to selected pupils, whereas what should be provided are] broad stairways for all who can climb.⁴

Tate returned to the theme of comparing public and private secondary schooling and the metaphor of the fine building and private and public stairways in his *Preliminary report of the director general upon observations made during an official visit to Europe and America; with recommendations referring to state education in Victoria*. He wrote:

At present we have no intermediate schools of the higher elementary type, and the secondary story is locked against the mass of the people, and can be entered only by private stairways for which a heavy toll is charged. . . . We need a broad open stairway accessible to all.⁵

Legislation allowing for state secondary schooling in Victoria was eventually passed in 1913. However, state secondary schooling was formally constrained for decades because of the power of the private schooling interests – no public secondary school could be located where it was in direct competition with an existing private secondary school. That is a heritage that has remained live in Victoria.

Heritage as infrastructure in the dimension of time

Of course heritage, especially civic heritage, is much more than buildings. Not only can heritage be private or civic, but we can also evaluate its nature and consequences according to certain criteria. And it can have some quite unexpected and unintended consequences.

‘Heritage’ can be thought of as ‘infrastructure’ in the dimension of time. Just as heritage is not just physical buildings and artefacts, infrastructure is not just capital works – roads, bridges and the physical components of telecommunications networks.

Infrastructure may have value in itself, but its significant value lies in what it **enables** – for individuals and for society as a whole.

Drawing from Alex Reid’s discussion of infrastructure in the context of new technology (e-infrastructure or cyber-infrastructure)⁶, institutions and entities can be considered infrastructure if they:

- are shared in some way – they are generally a ‘public good’
- are ongoing, not ad hoc, and are usually developed and modified incrementally and smoothly
- have a degree of invisibility – they are taken for granted, and are assumed to be there for use as required and can be relied on
- comply with relevant standards – they are not idiosyncratic
- are accessible and welcoming – they are not alien and alienating, and do not have an air of exclusivity and of being just for an elect group
- are available free or at low cost so that any cost of use is not a significant impediment to use.

Just as there is private and civic heritage, there is also private and public infrastructure. While we usually think of the public in reference to infrastructure, there is clearly also private infrastructure. The buildings, roads and mines of a large and long-standing mine site are private infrastructure for that enterprise. The fully private Pilbara rail line established and run by BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto for decades may soon be open to other miners (on a limited and full cost-recovery basis) after decisions of the High Court and the Treasurer⁷, which may make the line marginally more ‘public’ as infrastructure, the rationale largely being the significant public funds have gone into the line over the decades. Full cost recovery, but freely and openly accessible transport infrastructure, such as toll roads, may be partially public infrastructure in formal accessibility and partially private in ownership and control, and cost as an impediment to use.

We can understand education, and schooling in particular, as infrastructure and **enabling** the development of individuals and society in many different ways – socially, intellectually, culturally, economically, and so on. Such enabling is not always in unambiguously ‘good’ ways, just as the use of telecommunications or transport infrastructure can be used for good – or ill such as facilitating war or organised crime, and can have negative unintended consequences such as pollution or disrupting communities. What schooling facilitates and enables, and who it enables to do and be what, are determined by much more than the formal curriculum and pedagogy. Also having an impact are the structured relationships within and between groups (classes) within schools, and between schools and sectors. This includes which students are participating where, who is welcomed, who is alienated, and who is excluded. And it goes beyond individual students and their families to communities and whole social groups and classes – defined by ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, or geographic region.

‘Infrastructure’ and ‘heritage’ are not discrete commodities that can be simply aggregated and exchanged in a market. Rather, infrastructure and heritage are best understood as integrated and coherent, connected over time with human society and culture, and not just there for the private desires of individuals.

In this sense, our civic heritage has formed our current society and culture. And the social infrastructure of today is the civic heritage of tomorrow. We have a responsibility for understanding the nature of what will be the heritages of the future generations, just as we sometimes would have liked those who came before us to have better understood what is now our civic heritage – or, if they understood, to have constructively acted on that knowledge.

Schooling has features other than being social infrastructure and potential heritage, which include meeting individual needs and desires. One significant aspect in the current context of a

consideration of relations between the public and the private is the value of schooling as a ‘positional good’ – that is, as providing a benefit in relation to others, such as a ranked tertiary entrance score. This very individual and time-limited aspect or purpose of schooling is not really part of schooling as infrastructure or the heritage of the future, though the learnings that lead to the provision of the positional good are so. That is, what a student learnt that led to being awarded a tertiary entrance score higher than that of certain other students can be considered a public good (and part of potentially public infrastructure), but the fact that the score was in a certain position in the ranking is a private, positional good. The role of schooling as providing positional goods has been privileged in national debates and Commonwealth policy in recent years, at the expense of schooling’s roles as providers of public goods, and forming learning communities that can extend into the wider society and into the future, which thus connects with schooling as creating a heritage. Schooling’s role as provider of positional goods ends with the desired credential (which may incorporate being alumni of a particular school). Seeing a priority role of schooling as providing ‘positional goods’ leads to an emphasis on a market in schooling, and giving policy priority to choice between schools, rather than ‘voice’ within schools or school systems.

A robust heritage becomes fragile

Our robust early heritage of public schooling has become fragile, and the dynamics that have made it so are powerful.

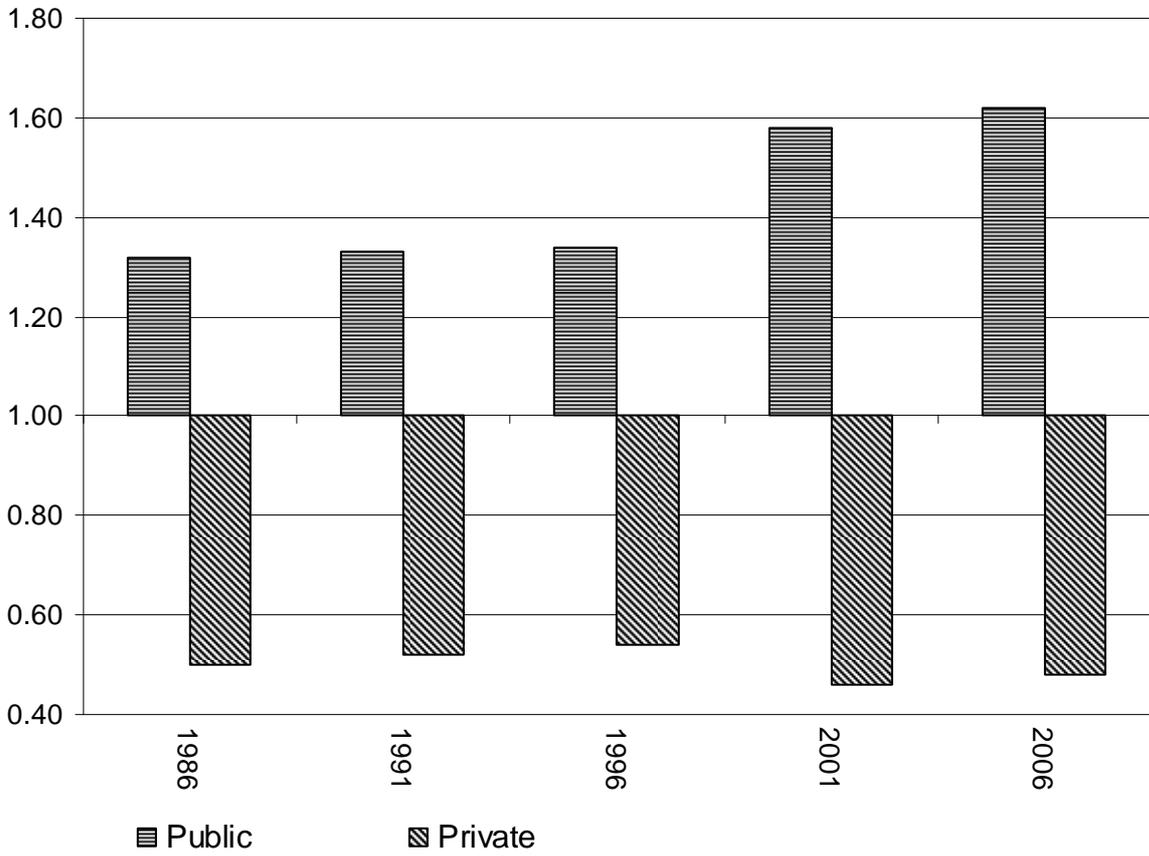
From 1890 to 1980 the public sector share of all school enrolments was within 4 percentage points of 80%. It was 79% in 1978. It’s now just 66% - 14 percentage points below the 80% level of nearly a century ago (see Table 1). This declining share is accelerating, primarily as a consequence of the Howard Government’s lifting of the Hawke/Keating governments’ New Schools Policy. The Rudd Government shows no sign of considering policies that might offset the trend.

Table 1 Percentage share of all school enrolments in public and private schools, selected years, 1890 to 2007

Year	Public schools	Private schools	Year	Public schools	Private schools
1890	83%	17%	1981	78%	22%
1900	80%	20%	1986	74%	26%
1940	79%	21%	1991	72%	28%
1954	78%	22%	1996	71%	29%
1964	76%	24%	2001	69%	31%
1971	78%	22%	2006	67%	33%
1976	79%	21%	2007	66%	34%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, various publications; recent decades: *Schools Australia*, Cat. No. 4221.0

Figure 1 Ratio of the percentage of all students with LOW family incomes to the percentage of students with HIGH family incomes, public and private secondary schools 1986-2006, indexed to ratio for all schools (1.0)



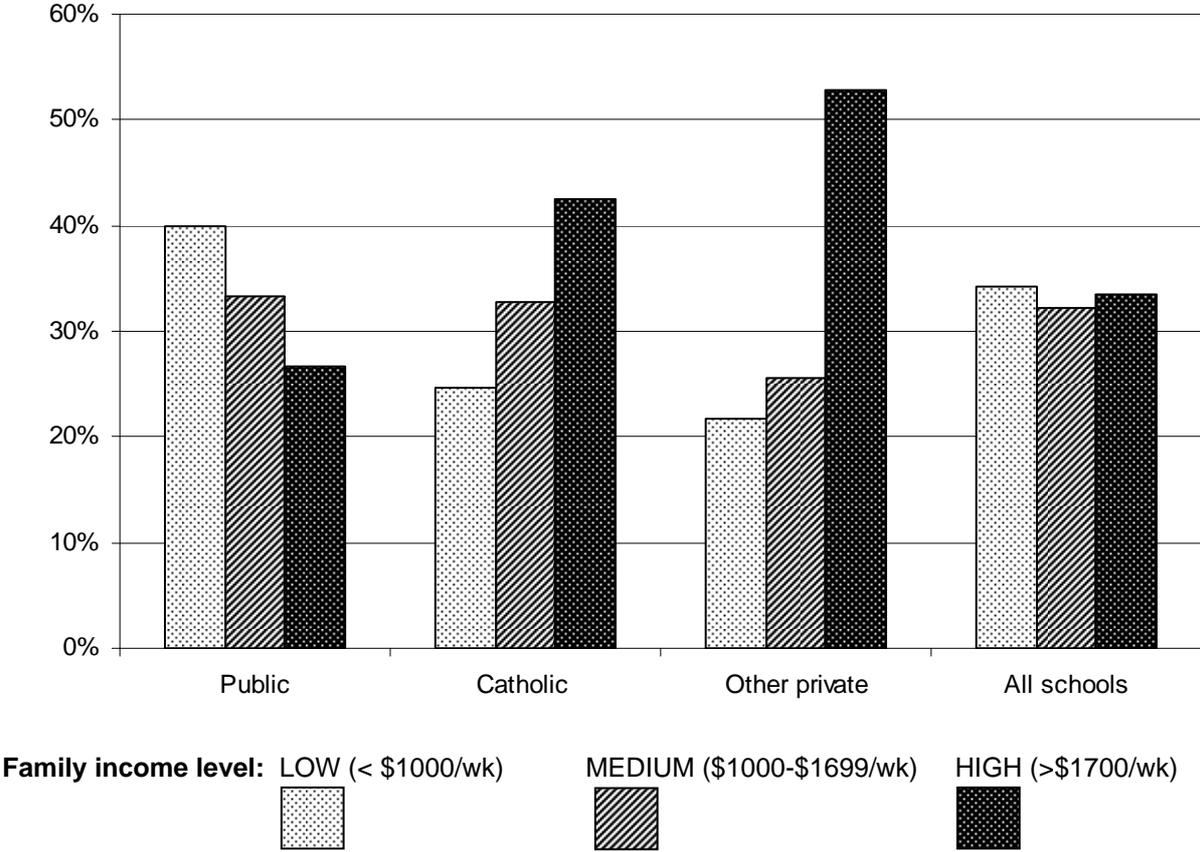
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census (1986-2006), custom tables.
 Note: LOW family incomes are those of the approximately one third of all Australian school students with the lowest family incomes; HIGH family incomes are those of the approximately one third of all Australian school students with the highest family incomes. For information about method and sources, and detailed data for 2007, see B Preston, *The social make-up of schools: Family income, religion, Indigenous status, and family type in government, Catholic and other nongovernment schools*, Australian Education Union, Melbourne, 2007.

Table 2 Percentage of students in each of public, Catholic and other private school sectors, primary, secondary and all schools, with LOW, MEDIUM or HIGH family incomes, Australia, 2006

	Family income (per week)						
	<\$350	\$350- \$649	\$650- \$999	LOW All <\$1000	MEDIUM \$1000- \$1699	HIGH >\$1700	All income levels
Primary schools							
Government	8%	15%	17%	40%	34%	26%	100%
Catholic	5%	9%	12%	26%	34%	39%	100%
Other private	5%	9%	11%	24%	28%	48%	100%
All primary schools	7%	13%	15%	36%	33%	31%	100%
Secondary schools							
Government	8%	15%	16%	39%	33%	28%	100%
Catholic	4%	8%	11%	23%	31%	47%	100%
Other private	4%	7%	9%	19%	23%	57%	100%
All secondary schools	6%	12%	14%	32%	31%	37%	100%
All schools							
Government	8%	15%	16%	40%	33%	27%	100%
Catholic	4%	8%	12%	25%	33%	43%	100%
Other private	4%	8%	10%	22%	26%	53%	100%
All schools	7%	13%	15%	34%	32%	34%	100%

Source: B Preston, *The social make-up of schools: Family income, religion, Indigenous status, and family type in government, Catholic and other nongovernment schools*, Australian Education Union, Melbourne, 2007, p. 6. Original source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census custom tables.

Figure 2 Percentage of students in public, Catholic, and other private schools with LOW, MEDIUM and HIGH family incomes, 2006



Source: Table 2

Table 3 Percentage of primary, secondary and all students in each family income range who attend public, Catholic and other private schools, Australia, 2006

	Family income (per week)						All income levels
	< \$350	\$350- \$649	\$650- \$999	LOW <\$1000	MEDIUM \$1000- \$1699	HIGH > \$1700	
<i>Type of school attended by primary students in each family income range</i>							
Government	80%	80%	76%	78%	70%	58%	69%
Catholic	13%	13%	16%	15%	21%	25%	20%
Other private	7%	7%	8%	7%	9%	17%	11%
All primary schools	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Type of school attended by secondary students in each family income range</i>							
Government	75%	77%	72%	74%	65%	46%	61%
Catholic	14%	14%	17%	16%	22%	29%	22%
Other private	12%	9%	11%	10%	13%	26%	17%
All secondary schools	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Type of school attended by all (primary and secondary) students in each family income range</i>							
Government	78%	78%	74%	77%	68%	53%	66%
Catholic	14%	14%	17%	15%	21%	26%	21%
Other private	9%	8%	9%	9%	11%	21%	13%
All schools	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: B Preston, *The social make-up of schools: Family income, religion, Indigenous status, and family type in government, Catholic and other nongovernment schools*, Australian Education Union, Melbourne, 2007, p. 12. Original source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census custom tables.

The public sector's declining share of enrolments has been accompanied by an increasing concentration of low SES students in that contracting public sector, and an increasing concentration of high SES students in the expanding Catholic and other private sectors.

Figure 1 shows the changes in SES composition in the public and private sectors between 1986 and 2006. The tables and figure that follow provide detail for 2006.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show the **social makeup of each of the school sectors** according to family income. In both the Catholic and other private sectors it is students from HIGH family incomes who make up the largest group, while in public schools it is students from LOW income families who make up the largest group.

Table 3 shows the **school types attended by the children of families of different income levels**. This takes account of the different sizes of the sectors (the column on the far right in the table). Even though 61% of all secondary students attend public schools, only 46% of students from HIGH income families attend government schools. Thus the majority of HIGH income families with secondary school level children are associated with private schools, and the majority

of those are associated with Catholic schools. In contrast, three quarters of LOW income families with children in secondary schools are associated with public schools.

The fall in the public sector's share of enrolments and the changing balance of social makeup should have come as no surprise. Matters such as 'choice' play only a small part, and disguise the reality: individual families (and communities) make decisions about schooling within the context of history and the framework of policy – including capital and recurrent funding levels and conditions, and regulation and accountability requirements.

These developments in enrolment share and social makeup were anticipated in widely read government reports. In 1972, in the report that laid the foundations for the current system of public funding of private schools, the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission (the Karmel Committee) wrote:

There is a point beyond which it is not possible to consider policies relating to the private (school) sector without taking into account their possible effects on the public sector whose strength and representativeness should not be diluted . . . As public aid for non-government schools rises, the possibility and even the inevitability of a changed relationship between government and nongovernment schooling presents itself. ⁸

The Commonwealth Government ignored this caution – largely because of the power of the Senate during the Whitlam years, and the political orientation of the Fraser Government.

A little over a decade later the Schools Commission again expressed a warning:

A continuing significant decline in the government school sector's share of overall enrolment is likely to change substantially the social composition of the student population in government schools, with potentially significant negative consequences for the general comprehensiveness of public school systems. The cumulative effect of these financial, educational and social consequences could, in the long term, threaten the role and standing of the public school as a central institution in Australian society. Such a development would be unwelcome to most citizens and is inconsistent with the stated policies of governments, as well as the major school interest groups, government and nongovernment. ⁹

The Hawke Government sought to take some action in response, and was in small part successful with the implementation of the New Schools Policy, that had some constraint on the establishment and expansion of private schools where they might damage existing public and private schools. But this pales beside the impact of the private school interests in Victoria around 75 years earlier. Anyway, the constraints of the Hawke and Keating Governments were cast aside by the Howard government. The Rudd Government shows no sign of really understanding the dynamics of the macro structures of schooling, whatever may be their rhetoric of 'inclusion' and 'equity'.

What sort of civic heritage is being created by an increasing concentration of low SES students in the contracting government sector and an increasing concentration of high SES students in the expanding Catholic and other nongovernment sectors?

While so much of public schooling is vibrant and rich, the trends outlined here are threatening.

Responsibility and accountability in civic heritage

'Civic' has connotations of responsibility and accountability to the public, including the future public. This is especially the case for a 'stewardship' of the heritage. In contrast, the private has responsibility and accountability to owners and immediate clientele, including former clientele (alumni) in the case of schooling. Private corporations similarly have primary responsibility to shareholders – the 'triple bottom line' tends to have little substance when it cannot be ultimately rationalised by shareholder interest.

‘Civic’, by implication, treats externalities or unintended consequences as effectively internalities that are part of responsibility and accountability.

For a private enterprise, such as an individual private school or a private school system, externalities generally are not their responsibility and they are not accountable for them, even if certain individuals may care very deeply about them. Governments have sought to regulate many aspects of private schooling - with some success in some areas such as compliance with curriculum and assessment requirements, teacher qualifications, health and safety – but there are limitations in each of these areas. Regulation is not accountability. The public rhetoric of requiring accountability from private schools has tended to shrivel to quantitative data (on teachers and students at the school) and partial and misleading financial audits¹⁰.

It was noted earlier that there is much complexity and ambiguity in social roles and relationships within and between school sectors, and much diversity within sectors. Thus how responsibility and accountability actually operate in complex social situations varies. For example, a selective public school may operate with limited responsibility and accountability beyond its own clientele, while a private school that has a long standing commitment to the wider community around it and beyond may have much greater effective responsibility and accountability than would be formally expected. That said, private schooling’s responsibility and accountability are generally limited by their constitutional nature – reinforced or ameliorated by their history, current circumstances, and future aspirations.

A private schooling sector that is not responsible or accountable in any serious way to the wider society and the future is not of great significance if that sector is relatively small – this is consistent with the traditional liberal principle: they can do what they like in private as long as they are not detrimentally affecting others. When private schooling, as a sector, was relatively small and had little significant over-all social impact (in the 1890s or 1970s, say) it could be seen as ‘residual’, not the main game.

But that has now been reversed. As we have seen, since the 1970s the trend has been for the public system to become increasingly residualised, in both size and social role. Yet, as the private sector – both Catholic and non-Catholic subsectors – have moved towards dominance in their social role, there is no sign of them becoming more responsible and accountable.

There is much evidence for this lack of wider responsibility, but most is subtle and ambiguous, and, of course, not the outcome of any intention to be **ir**responsible or **un**accountable.

A number of private schools (‘leading independent boarding schools’) recently have taken initiatives in providing scholarships for Indigenous students, and have received much positive publicity for doing so. Yet it is the public system that overwhelmingly educates the Indigenous students of Australia, especially those from LOW¹¹ income families:

- 84% of all Indigenous secondary students attend government schools
- while 90% of LOW income Indigenous secondary students attend government schools, only 70% of HIGH income Indigenous secondary students attend government schools
- in contrast, while only 10% of all Indigenous secondary students attend Catholic schools, 20% of HIGH income Indigenous secondary students attend Catholic schools
- similarly, while only 6% of all Indigenous secondary students attend other private schools, 10% of HIGH income Indigenous secondary students attend other private schools.¹² (The pattern is similar at the primary level.)

Dr Chris Sarra, of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute and former principal of Cherbourg state school in Queensland, is critical of the 'boarding solution'. On ABC TV's 'Four Corners', 16 June 2008, he said:

You know, it doesn't make sense to me to take children with a very strong sense of belonging away from the places they belong. The bulk of Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children aren't ready for that option. The boarding school option is an option for a sliver of kids and of that sliver of kids who access that, only a sliver of that sliver survive, you know? ¹³

He went on to give some qualified support to local boarding schools – closer to the students' home communities. The schools making much of their provision of scholarships for selected Indigenous students (and the corporations and individuals donating funds), would, in most cases, make the greatest positive difference to Indigenous education if they supported the local schools most Indigenous students attend, and worked with governments and others to improve education in those schools – at a very basic level: it is difficult to recruit experienced and highly competent teachers to many such schools because of the very poor quality of accommodation available.

Another illuminating area of responsibility and accountability is the pattern of responses to major fluctuations in school enrolments.

In general private schools can manage their enrolment numbers to suit their administrative and other requirements. Private schools have no obligation to serve localities and communities with unpredictable enrolments (or clientele they do not wish to serve); they have no obligation to take in extra students beyond the number that suits them; they can ensure they have a waiting list and put resources into marketing and recruitment when demand for places may otherwise fall.

How, then, have the private school sectors and individual private schools responded to the sharp enrolment fluctuations arising from changes in school starting age?

The evidence indicates that they have taken advantage of such fluctuations, leaving the public sector to bear the brunt of disruption, and ratcheting up their existing advantages in increasing enrolment shares. Consider what has happened, and may happen, in Tasmania and Western Australia¹⁴.

In Tasmania a **class** (or year level) cohort that was 80% the **age** group cohort size moved through schools following a change in school starting age in the early 1990s. The public sector bore almost the full brunt of the reduced enrolments. For example, at the year 8 level (the second year of secondary school), between 1998 and 2000, public sector enrolments fell by nearly a quarter but private sector enrolments fell by only 8% (Catholic schools by only 6%). The private sector was able to take on-going advantage from the disruption in the public sector, increasing its share of year 8 enrolments from 27.5% in 1998 and 1999 to 29.2% once total year 8 enrolments had again stabilised in 2001.

A much greater enrolment fluctuation is occurring in Western Australia, where a year level cohort only around 55% of the age cohort is passing through following a change in starting age. This small cohort passed through year 2 in 2004. Between 2002 and 2004, enrolments in the public sector fell by 50%, while they only fell by 30% in the private sector. If the drop in enrolments has been shared equitably all sectors would have fallen by 45%. The public sector's share of all year 2 enrolments fell from 75.6% in 2002 to only 69.0% in 2004, and only partially recovered to 74.2% in 2006.

This reduced size cohort will enter secondary level (year 8 in Western Australia) in 2010. Currently fewer than 60% of all year 8 enrolments in Western Australia are in public schools. The fall in total enrolments at year 8 will not be as great as it was at year 2 (because of the effect of student movements between Western Australia and other jurisdictions and variations in progress from one year level to the next) – a fall of around 35% rather than 45%. However, the relative large size of the private sector will result in a most damaging and disruptive impact on the public sector if the enrolment fall is not shared equitably (that is, around a 35% reduction for all sectors, shared equitably among individual schools). If the private sector is able to fully maintain year 8 enrolment numbers, then the public sector must take the full effect of the small cohort passing through, with year 8 enrolments falling by 67%. If the Western Australian private sector at year 8 protects its enrolments to the same degree that it did at year 2, then its year 8 enrolments in 2010 would fall by just 21% while the public sector's year 8 enrolments would fall by 46%. As private primary schools tend to be more susceptible to enrolment fluctuations than private secondary schools (because many more private primary schools are locality-based, and thus do not have the wider catchment areas of private secondary schools), it is likely that public secondary schools will experience an enrolment drop in 2010 at year 8 (and every subsequent year level in every subsequent year) of more than 50%, while private schools will experience drops of less than 20%. Such a drop in enrolments in the public sector would be very disruptive and create an appearance of chaos and disorganisation, further disadvantaging public schools in their competitive relationship with private schools.

While the secondary level will suddenly drop numbers in 2010, the primary level will gain in total enrolments as full size cohorts return to each primary year level. This will require a sharp increase in primary teachers – of around 5%, which numerically is around three quarters the annual number of primary graduates from Western Australian teacher education programs. Again, private schools are generally in a position to ensure adequate staffing in times of teacher shortage – making the most of the competitive advantage they usually have over the public sector.

The private sector (especially at the level of individual schools) has control over enrolment numbers because the public sector can be treated as a buffer – to take in the students not wanted by the private sector, and to be drawn from if more enrolments are sought. Given that control, how responsible should the private sector be for the consequences for the public system of its protection of its enrolment numbers in such circumstances? How accountable should it be?

How can and should the effects of enrolment fluctuations be shared? This would also be a question if all schools operated in a market where all competed for enrolments with no system management or identification. Then the proportional loss of enrolments for those schools in a weak market position (which may in no way reflect the quality of education provided) may be devastating – imagine if three out of four schools in a local area could ensure no loss of enrolments, so all the local enrolment decline affected just one school, leaving it with no students at the relevant year level. All schools may be required to conform to starting age regulations, but then are left to fend for themselves as the changes in starting age take effect and the wave or trough in enrolments moves through the year levels.

Conclusions

In this paper I have sought to use the lens of 'civic heritage' to examine issues about public and private schools, their social roles, and the long term heritages that are being created by the

schooling systems that have been created since the 1970s through Government policies and the actions and attitudes of individuals and communities. Sometimes it has been ‘through a lens darkly’, and, perhaps, at other times the illumination has been stark.

In conclusion, I believe that we must be vigilant that the heritage that we are creating now for coming generations is the best we can do for them, and we must take the trouble to understand the complex social dynamics that are now at play in creating that heritage. Not only should policy for our own times be evidence-based, and take account of externalities, but we should also take on the hard task of working out the likely longer term outcomes. Governments, organisations, communities and individuals should have no excuses when the future confronts us.

Acknowledgement

This paper draws in part from a presentation to ‘The public good & the education of children: The 2020 school education summit’, 28 June 2008, Sydney.

¹ *One night the moon*, motion picture, MusicArtsDance Films, Melbourne, 2001

² Thanks to Gretchen Poiner for raising the notion of ‘stewardship’ during discussion of my paper.

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics: Concepts, Standards, Definitions and Classifications*, OECD, Paris, 2004, section 4.5.3, p 58, viewed 14 November 2008, <<http://browse.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9604031E.PDF>>.

⁴ R J W Selleck, Frank Tate: *A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p 157

⁵ Selleck, p 186

⁶ T A Reid, ‘The New Holy Grail: an Australian e-Infrastructure’, a paper presented at the Educause Australasia 2007 Conference, 29 April to 2 May 2007, Melbourne, viewed 26 April 2008, <http://www.caudit.edu.au/educauseaustralasia07/authors_papers/Reid-238.pdf>.

⁷ For detail about the case, see F Williams, ‘BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto angry on open Pilbara rail line’, *Herald Sun*, 28 October 2008, viewed 23 November 2008, <<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,24561882-664,00.html>>.

⁸ Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission (Karmel Committee), *Schools in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra, 1973, para. 2.13

⁹ Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Planning and Funding Policies for New Non-Government Schools*, Commonwealth Schools Commission, Canberra, 1985, para 20

¹⁰ One of the reasons given by the Howard Government for the introduction of the current ‘SES’ funding system for nongovernment schools was that the previous ‘ERI’ system, operating with some variations since the mid 1970s, was that the ERI was ‘manipulable – schools could be relatively advantaged or disadvantaged depending on their familiarity with the ERI’ (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), *SES Funding Arrangements for Non-Government Schools (Q&A)*, DEST, Canberra, 2004, viewed 14 June 2004, <<http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/ses/index.htm#How%20can%20we%20be%20sure%20that%20the%20SES%20model%20is%20better?>>), which is a polite way of making a damning indictment. The SES system is itself open to serious corruption (B Preston, ‘Choice and national schools policy’, a paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, 28 November to 2 December 2004, viewed 19 November 2008, <<http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/pre04381.pdf>>).

¹¹ The categories of LOW, MEDIUM and HIGH are the ranges of family incomes of all Australian school students in 2006 when divided into thirds (LOW, MEDIUM and HIGH). The data is from B Preston, 'Choice and national schools policy'.

¹² This data understates the number of Indigenous students at, especially, other private schools because the methodology of Census data collection requires that family income is 'not applicable' for boarding students. Therefore the percentage of HIGH income Indigenous students at other private schools is likely to be greater.

¹³ ABC TV *Four Corners* 'Educating Kimberly', broadcast 16th June 2008, program transcript, viewed 19 November 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2008/s2276187.htm>>

¹⁴ The data on enrolments in Tasmania and Western Australia are from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools Australia* (various years), Cat. No. 4221.0.