

Facta Non Verba

August 30, 2019

The Latin motto at my school, Punchbowl Boys' High School, was Facta Non Verba — deeds, not words. As young boys, we were told that people should be judged on their actions, not just their words.

A speech by the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has been leaked. Listening to it, I immediately thought of the old school motto. It was a speech delivered recently to a small gathering of wealthy Liberal Party supporters in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

"Let me be clear. Elites matter. You matter. Equality is for the weak. We stand for the strong. We support the lifters, not the leaners; the wealth-makers, not the wealth-takers. This is a foundation tenet of our Party," said the PM.



Later in his speech, Morrison connected these thoughts to the Federal Government's private school funding policies.

"The barristers, the judges, the stockbrokers, the company executives, the media owners, the corporate investors, the property developers: these are the types of successful, positive people we represent and that representation starts with funding the elite schools to which they send their children. Effort, ambition and loyalty will be rewarded by my government."

"No society that aims for equality among its citizenry has ever succeeded. This, after all, offends the natural order. Indeed, inequality is a great motivator."

The Prime Minister continued, "Some children, our elites, should be supported on their path to lifelong success as these will be our leaders of tomorrow. Some children, by virtue of their birthright, must remain privileged. And it is our duty to use our political muscle to defend that privilege."

He went on to say, "Of course, it should go without saying that children born into wealthy families are tomorrow's potential Party donors. And let us never forget that we have the means to secure their ongoing support from birth. If some individuals aren't happy with that, then their children need to make better choices as to which family they are born into!"

It was reported that this last comment was met with peals of laughter before sustained applause broke out.

Did the Prime Minister really make such a speech? No, but he didn't have to if we examine what he does in practice.

A recent ABC report revealed the impact of the Morrison Government's school capital funding policies. It showed that between 2013 and 2017, the four richest private schools spent more on building facilities and renovations than the poorest 1800 schools combined.

According to the ABC, “So far in 2019, the Commonwealth Capital Grants Program has allocated more than \$146 million to fewer than 140 non-government schools.”

It was back in 2017 when the federal Liberal-National Government put an end to Commonwealth capital funding for public schools. As a result, public schools do not receive a dollar of capital works funding despite increasing enrolments in the sector.

In contrast, private schools receive capital funding from both state and federal governments that has led to record funding for non-government schools. The amount of money now available for building programs in the private sector has been likened to an “arms race” as competing private schools build more and more lavish facilities in order to gain market share.

As national convenor of Save Our Schools, Trevor Cobbold, writes, “This arms race is fuelled by big increases in government funding. The luxurious facilities of elite private schools are in a league of their own — ultra modern science centres, libraries, auditoriums, theatres with orchestra pits, multiple sporting ovals, indoor Olympic size swimming and diving pools, gymnasiums, tennis courts, wellness centres, equestrian centres, rowing tanks, boat sheds and underground carparks.”

He poses the question, “What public school can afford a \$29 million new library designed to resemble a Scottish baronial castle with castellations, a tower, a turret and grand bay windows, as planned for Scots College in Sydney?”

This is the same school that has installed for its athletes a hyperbaric chamber that can simulate training at up to 3000 metres above sea level.

MySchool reveals that this private school has spent more than \$45 million on capital works in just the last three years. It is also a recipient of state and federal capital and recurrent funding.

Yet the NSW Auditor-General’s report from December 2018 revealed that the maintenance backlog for NSW public schools was \$679 million.

In an earlier 2017 report, the NSW Auditor-General stated, “Many schools have more students than can be accommodated in existing classrooms, and demountables are widely used for extended periods. The condition of classrooms has been declining due to insufficient maintenance, and many are not configured to support contemporary and desired future learning and teaching methods.”

The national Schooling Resource Standard for recurrent funding has exposed that the vast majority of private schools are being over-funded. But no such standard exists for capital funding.

So while state and federal governments fund the lavish building programs of private schools, too many teachers and students in our public schools have to endure ageing, run-down buildings with threadbare carpets, peeling paint, old furniture and leaking roofs. Too many of our public schools lack even basic amenities and services such as air-conditioning, adequate power supply, halls or wet-weather shelters.

The Prime Minister did not have to remind the faithful in words that some people’s children are more important than others. It is on his deeds that he should be judged.