

## Deal is slush fund for rich schools

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**A federal parliamentary hearing has confirmed investigations by the Australian Education Union that the Morrison Government's \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund is the antithesis of needs-based funding — it's a slush fund for private schools**

The Government's admission that Australia's richest private schools can access additional the \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund — while public schools cannot — is further proof of its blatant disregard for public schools and preference for private schools.

Senate Estimates was told on 24 October that under the still-to-be-published guidelines for the fund, every private school in Australia, regardless of their financial wealth or exorbitant fees, would be able to access the \$1.2 billion fund.

The revelations contradict the Government's previous position that the purpose of the fund was to help provide access to low-fee Catholic and independent schools. It also confirms that the Morrison Government has absolutely no plans to provide an equivalent for public schools.

Federation President Maurie Mulheron said the Coalition Government had abandoned the concept of needs-based school funding in Australia.

"Prime Minister Scott Morrison forced funding deals on the states and territories that will leave 99 per cent of public schools under the Schooling Resource Standard by 2023," Mr Mulheron said.

"Public schools are also prevented from applying for

additional funding from the \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund. Yet elite private schools, some of which charge \$70,000 a year for board and tuition, have unrestricted access to this additional funding. It is nothing but a Morrison Government private school slush fund."

Federal Department of Education officials told Senate Estimates that the Department will not control how the money is distributed. This will be left up to private schools.

"The Department itself won't be assessing any applications for funding under the fund," deputy secretary Alex Gordon told Senate estimates.

During the Estimates hearings, Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi asked whether Geelong Grammar School — one of the nation's richest schools — would be banned from applying for the cash. It charges \$42,792 a year for day students and more than \$70,000 for borders.



“The guidelines don’t set out any eligibility criteria, so they don’t rule any schools in or out,” Mr Gordon said.

As public school enrolments rise dramatically, Mr Mulheron asked how these school funding figures and the current arrangements can be called fair.

“This fund speaks volumes about the approach of the Morrison Government to school funding and how it has abandoned any pretence of needs-based, sector-blind funding,” Mr Mulheron said.

“It’s a shocking situation to have a Prime Minister who is so blatantly in favour of the private sector when the vast majority of students are in public schools.”