

Fair go? Not likely

Australia has one of the most segregated school systems in the world, it's about a culture of elitism, *ET Staff*



Australia used to think of itself as an egalitarian place but that doesn't seem to extend to its schooling system, here the country is stubbornly elitist. The reasons are many and among those reasons is the idea that a private education and the stratification of education are good things to have.

It's a cultural thing and thus is rusted on and it has resulted in some pretty questionable outcomes with research indicating that Australia's education system is now one of the most socially segregated in the world; we're forging a chasm between the rich and less rich and that's

only growing wider. The positive effects of going to a private school are well documented as are the negative effects of sending children to a less well funded institution and we seem to see that there is nothing wrong with that which is odd.

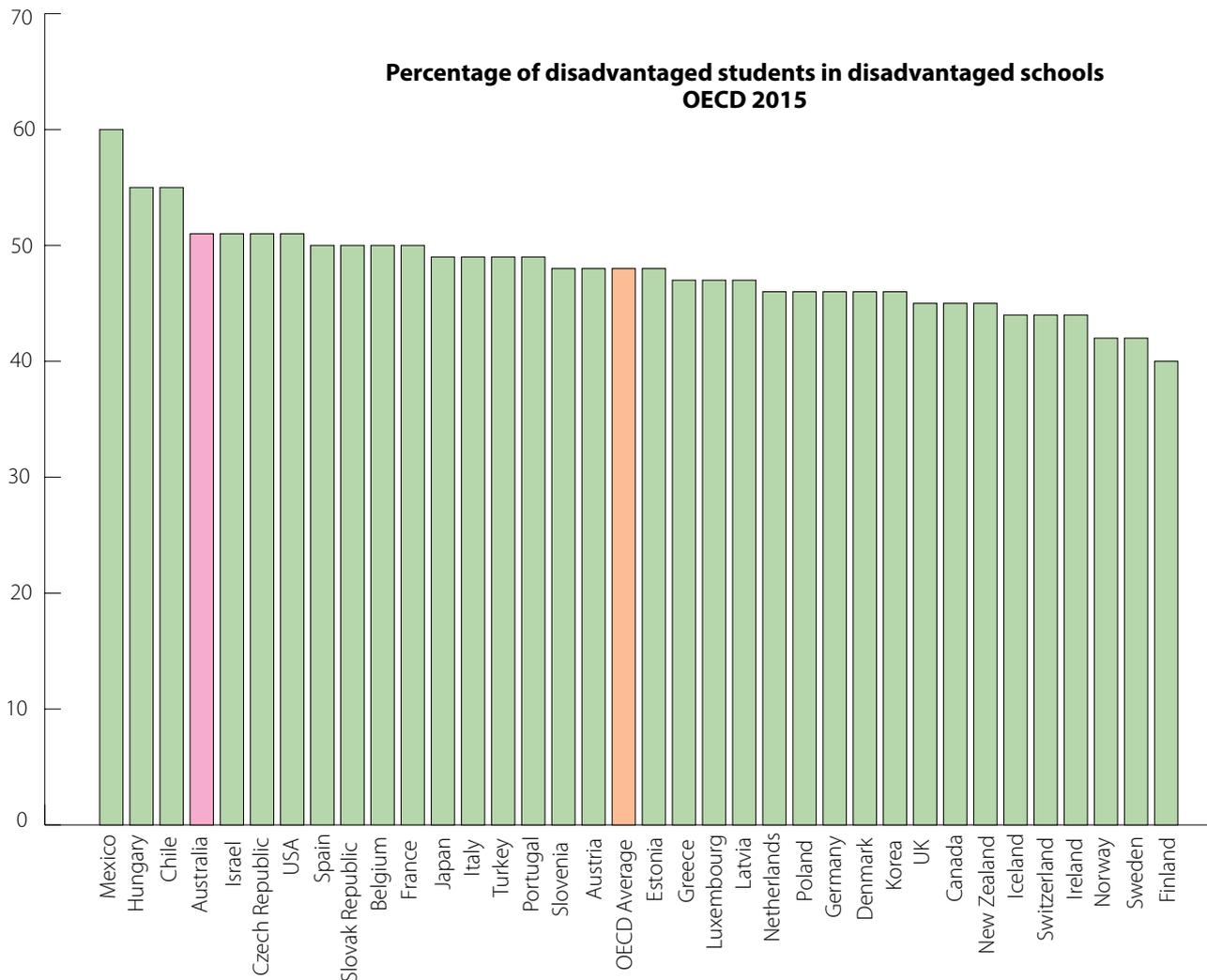
A recent OECD report has shown that Australia has the equal largest increase in social segregation in the OECD and the world since 2006, we have the equal fourth most segregated school system in the OECD with 51% of disadvantaged students concentrated in disadvantaged schools.

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Only 16 countries out of 73 participating in PISA have a great greater concentration of disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools than Australia, and we have very few disadvantaged kids in advantaged schools, only five out of 35 OECD countries have a lower percentage than Australia; Chile, Spain, Mexico, Hungary and Luxembourg.

There is a very unvirtuous cycle here, students from low SES families tend to be disadvantaged because of their family backgrounds and that disadvantage increases because they are placed in

Percentage of disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools
OECD 2015



disadvantaged schools, setting the scene for a country divided by access to opportunity.

The OECD report says; ‘Addressing these school disparities with a focus on disadvantaged students is particularly important from the standpoint of equity because disadvantaged students who attend disadvantaged schools face a ‘double disadvantage’. In addition to the disparities in learning opportunities they already face as a result of their family’s socio-economic status, they are often confronted with more difficult learning environments that tend to be found in schools with a lower socio-economic profile. Such doubly disadvantaged students are particularly likely to perform poorly in school. Equity in education can be compromised as a result.’

The results back that up with kids in less advantaged schools under-performing those that aren’t. And attending an advantaged school really has its advantages;

the disadvantaged students who attend advantaged schools in Australia scored 86 points on the PISA science scale above their disadvantaged peers in disadvantaged schools which is equivalent to nearly three years of learning at age 15, kind of shocking no? The score gap was slightly higher than the average across OECD countries of 78 points.

Without ranting, another problem is that disadvantaged schools have less resources, disadvantaged schools have more students per teacher, more teachers teaching out of field, more inexperienced teachers, more teacher turnover, and more teachers on short term contracts than advantaged schools, this is also one of the largest gaps in the OECD.

In Australia 95% of disadvantaged schools are public schools and the money earmarked for these schools has been on the decline, which cannot be good

The ability to choose a school for your

child is viewed as a right in Australia and there is some merit to choice but in an education setting it has the effect of increasing social segregation; better educated and more motivated parents are likely to take advantage of this choice, concentrating advantaged students in what are perceived as the best schools. The OECD report says; ‘Such segregation can be amplified if schools are allowed to select students on the basis of either academic and or financial criteria.’

If this sounds familiar it should, the various state and federal governments have put an emphasis on choice and competition between schools in the public and private education systems. Choice is a good thing but maybe not in education when it is not freedom but advantage that is being accessed.

This piece was based on a report by **Trevor Cobbold** of Save our Schools.