

## Parents' Voice in Government School Education

### Inquiry into Public School Funding

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#### Introduction:

Parents Victoria is the peak body representing parents and carers in Victorian government schools. Founded in 1925, Parents Victoria is celebrating its **100th anniversary**, marking a century of advocacy for high-quality, inclusive and equitable public education.

Across generations, Parents Victoria has worked constructively with governments of all persuasions to support student wellbeing, educational opportunity and community confidence in public schooling. It is therefore with deep concern — and a sense of historical dismay — that Parents Victoria observes that **systemic underfunding of Victorian government schools persists into a second century**, despite repeated commitments to needs-based funding and despite the existence of a nationally agreed Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) for more than 14 years.

This submission is made on behalf of Victorian government school families who seek **fairness, transparency and accountability** in school funding — not at the expense of any sector, but in line with agreed principles of equity and need.

#### Context:

On 28 May 2025, the Legislative Council resolved to inquire into the impact of the Allan Labor Government's decision to delay increasing Victoria's contribution to public school funding to **75 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard until 2031**, effectively removing approximately **\$2.4 billion** from what had previously been committed to Victorian government schools.

With a final bilateral agreement unable to be reached at the end of 2024, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have relied on a one-year interim agreement, followed by a further two-year interim arrangement signed in December 2025. This ongoing delay leaves Victorian government schools stuck at the funding status quo, while non-government schools continue to receive full funding from both state and federal governments, perpetuating inequity and denying public school students the resources already promised.

### 1. State and Commonwealth Funding Per Student Relative to Other Jurisdictions

Victorian government schools are funded **well below the SRS benchmark** that governments themselves have endorsed as the minimum required to meet student needs. Current estimates place Victorian public schools at approximately **87–90 per cent of SRS**, depending on accounting assumptions.

By contrast:

- **Non-government schools in Victoria receive combined Commonwealth and state funding at or above 100 per cent of SRS.**
- This outcome is not disputed by governments and is widely accepted as legitimate within current policy settings.

Independent analysis by economist **Trevor Cobbold (Save Our Schools)** shows that this imbalance is not accidental but systemic. Public schools remain underfunded in every state, while private schools are fully funded or overfunded, even though public schools educate:

- The overwhelming majority of students from low-income backgrounds
- Most students with disability
- Most students requiring additional learning and wellbeing support

Other states have progressed more quickly toward full public school funding through long-term bilateral agreements. **Victoria's relative position has deteriorated due to delayed commitments and stalled negotiations.**

## 2. Impact of the Delay on Commonwealth Funding

The failure of the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to reach a long-term funding agreement for two consecutive years will have **real and compounding consequences.**

While interim agreements ensured basic continuity, they:

- **Locked in underfunding**, rather than reducing it
- Prevented growth in Victoria's state contribution toward SRS
- Created uncertainty for schools unable to plan staffing and programs

This stalemate effectively postponed Commonwealth funding growth linked to state effort. In practical terms, **Victorian public schools will lose two years of progress toward adequate funding**, while schools in other states moved forward.

Parents Victoria considers it unacceptable that unresolved intergovernmental negotiations — about terms, accounting rules or expectations — should be allowed to **override the educational needs of students.**

## 3. Impact on Students Enrolled Now and Those Starting Before 2031

Funding delayed is funding denied.

Students currently enrolled in Victorian government schools — including those starting Prep, Year 7 or VCE during this period — will complete substantial portions of their schooling **without ever experiencing full, needs-based resourcing.**

The impacts include:

- Reduced access to learning support staff and specialist programs
- Larger class sizes than would otherwise be required
- Fewer wellbeing, mental health and early-intervention services
- Reliance on parent "voluntary" contributions to fund basic activities

This undermines the principle that public education should be **free, high-quality and universally accessible**. It also entrenches inequity, as schools serving the most disadvantaged communities are least able to absorb funding shortfalls.

#### 4. Consequences for the Teaching and School Workforce

Chronic underfunding directly affects the capacity of schools to attract, retain and support staff.

Schools report:

- Difficulty employing additional teachers, aides and specialists
- Reduced capacity to offer permanent roles, increasing casualisation
- Less time and funding for professional development and collaboration
- Increased workload pressures contributing to burnout and attrition

The workforce crisis in public education cannot be separated from funding policy. Delaying adequate funding sends a signal that **the public school workforce is not being prioritised**, despite increasing expectations placed on teachers and school leaders.

#### 5. Impact on Resources, Materials, Equipment and Maintenance

Underfunded recurrent budgets limit schools' ability to:

- Purchase up-to-date teaching and learning materials
- Invest in digital technologies and specialist equipment
- Maintain ageing buildings and school grounds
- Plan capital works in a strategic and timely way

While capital funding streams exist, they do not compensate for insufficient recurrent funding, which is essential for day-to-day educational quality. Schools are forced to defer maintenance and rely on fundraising or parent payments, exacerbating inequity between communities.

#### Equity, Fairness and the Unanswered Question

This submission does **not argue against funding non-government schools**, nor does it seek to diminish parental choice.

It asks a simple, unanswered question:

***If the Schooling Resource Standard represents the minimum funding required to meet student needs, why are public schools — educating the most disadvantaged students — funded below that standard, while private schools are not?***

**No government has provided a clear, evidence-based explanation for this prioritisation.**

In the absence of such justification, the current funding trajectory cannot be considered reasonable or fair.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As Parents Victoria marks its 100th anniversary, it is deeply troubling that the same fundamental issue — **fair funding for public schools** — remains unresolved.

Parents Victoria urges the Committee to recommend:

1. **A clear public explanation** of the policy rationale behind delaying full funding for public schools
2. **Accelerated progress toward full SRS funding**, consistent with need and equity
3. **An end to reliance on interim agreements** that entrench underfunding
4. **Transparent reporting** on the real, classroom-level impacts of funding shortfalls

Victorian government school families are not asking for special treatment. They are asking that **public schools be funded to the standard governments themselves have agreed is necessary** — and no less. After a century of advocacy, it is time for that commitment to finally be honoured.

*Gail*

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