

**Submission Text:** The current state of things:

- Employment precarity for staff due to budget concerns. Dire staff shortages in certain areas resulting in a lack of continuity for students throughout the school year, heavily impacting the effectiveness of their learning.
- Inadequately resourced public schools. Young people at government schools are consequently not provided with opportunities to engage with important experiences and learning programs.
- High burnout rate for teachers and education support staff. Undervalued education support staff.
- Crucial literacy and numeracy support programs cut due to budget limits. This directly affects the most vulnerable cohort of students who are at risk of disengagement and being left behind. The impacts of a lack of literacy and numeracy programs compound; this results in detrimental behavioural, wellbeing, and educational outcomes. A lack of support for young people with different learning needs has a compounding impact on their peers, their teachers, and the whole school community.

Victoria's public schools are the lowest funded in the country and our teachers the lowest paid, and when you don't pay teachers properly it means you are undervaluing principals and education support staff as well. AEU members, our students, their families and the broader community have been failed by the state Labor government that says Victoria is the 'education state'. This cannot be even remotely true until full funding is delivered, and the work of teachers, education support staff and school leaders is valued and respected. Subsequently, if this means that the Federal government will not match state funding, it will have potentially devastating effects beyond the already sorry state of affairs. This delay will have lasting effects both on current students whose education will be impacted but on future students and the landscape of education itself in Victoria.

Currently schools and teachers are already struggling to effectively cater to students with disabilities and varying needs due to time and funding constraints. Without adequate funding and resourcing for these students they will languish and this will have ongoing effects. We need effective programs, full funding, and well resourced and trained educators and support staff in order to allow these students to thrive and flourish whilst in school and later in life.

Anecdotally we have myriad examples of young people with significant gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills. The reasons for this include but are not limited to: external traumas, diagnosed learning difficulties, chronic disengagement, and a lack of resourcing. We see young people in years 11 and 12 with grade 6 levels of literacy and numeracy who are without sufficient supports, who do not qualify for various other programs, and therefore either disengage from schooling entirely or complete schooling without appropriate levels of education required to successfully navigate the world.

The government cannot allow a generation of Victorian government school children to languish in under-resourced classrooms with overworked teachers. The consequences are incalculable and perceivably catastrophic without hyperbole.

There is already a dire teacher shortage across the state. Many positions are difficult to fill. Whilst this is being partially addressed with incentives for people to enrol in teaching courses, there is little to no focus or support on teacher retention or on luring experienced teachers back to the profession. We know there is a glaring shortage of “middle” career teachers due to the burnout rate where a large number of teachers leave the profession within five years.

Teachers and education support staff already have unmanageable and overwhelming workloads and are increasingly burdened with arduous and demanding bureaucratic, administrative, and pedagogical requirements to the detriment of schools, individuals, and subsequently students.

For too long the government has leant upon the good will of teachers and their desire to do right by their colleagues and students. They have taken advantage of the profession to paper over the cracks caused by inadequate funding. For example: the most recent AEU VGSA agreement finally acknowledged the unpaid labour teacher provided in facilitating school camps by requiring schools to recompense individuals for this labour. However this requirement was not supported with funding. The result of this is that schools cancel camps and extracurricular activities due to costs. Students miss out on crucial experiences due to a lack of funding and foresight.

Students at government schools are amongst the more vulnerable in the state. We know the protective factor offered by schools and the positive effects on the individual a safe, academically challenging and supported school environment can provide. Why do we continue to neglect young people?

We know what is required to provide excellent education for young people. That research has been done and imparted to us via higher education and years of classroom experience. However, we are inhibited by a lack of funds, time, and adequate resourcing.

We want to be able to provide excellent learning opportunities for students of all levels and abilities. We want to expose them to a vast array of diverse educational experiences with vibrant and stimulating opportunities in STEM, the Arts, their communities, and beyond. We want to foster lifelong learning and shape interested, critical, and curious young people who will contribute positively and compassionately to Victoria and our world. We want young people to be able to see their place in the world, have opportunities, and a freedom to explore intellectual pursuits. We want young people in government schools to have opportunities equal to that of their privately educated peers.

We need full funding. We need school staff to be valued by politicians and families. We need the government to invest in students, school programs and the workforce. We need to retain the current cohort of educators and entice former excellent educators back to the profession.

Delivering full funding would enable the statewide staffing shortages to be addressed through improved pay and working conditions to retain existing staff and attract the next generation to the profession, and ensure all students, no matter their learning and well-being requirements, can access the programs and supports they need to thrive.

This submission has been made on behalf of, and endorsed by, the Virtual School Victoria AEU Subbranch and its Members.