

Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

19 December 2025

RE: Submission to the Inquiry into Public School Funding

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Public School Funding.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria and Tasmania. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. In Victoria, we represent around 150 community service organisations, students and individuals working across child and family services. Our member organisations work closely with children and young people in the public schooling system.

Insufficient funding perpetuates inequity

Every child and young person has the right to a quality education regardless of their postcode or background.¹ Public schools in Australia educate 90 per cent of children from low socio-economic backgrounds, 82 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, 71 per cent of students from language background other than English, more than 67 per cent of children with disability and more than 80 per cent of students from remote areas.² These schools carry the greatest responsibility for equity, yet they receive the least funding.³

Achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations continue to widen and inequality is entrenched.⁴ Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are six times more likely to have lower achievement in maths, four times more likely in science, and three times more likely in reading compared to their more advantaged peers.⁵ These disparities are driven by significant resource gaps and persistent underfunding of public schools.⁶ In 2024, each private school student in Victoria was projected to receive \$298 more than their full Schooling Resource Standard through combined state and Commonwealth funding, while public school students fell short by \$2,611 per student.⁷ The most significant gap was \$7,282 per student between a public and private school of similar size and community socio-educational advantage.⁸

¹ United Nations (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28.

² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2025). *School Profile 2024*, cited in *Investing in Australia's Future 2025: For Every Child*, Australian Education Union. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/5117/6225/0864/ForEveryChild_Brochure_2025.pdf>

³ Sahlberg, P. & Cobbold, T. (2025). What fully funded public schools could do. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 223(9).

⁴ Department of Education (2023). *Improving outcomes for all: The report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <<https://www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairereducation-system/resources/expert-panels-report>>

⁵ De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C. & Thomson, S. (2023). *PISA 2022. Reporting Australia's results. Volume I: Student performance and equity in education*. Australian Council for Educational Research. Viewed 16 December 2025. <<https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-725-0>>.

⁶ Australian Education Union (2025). *Investing in Australia's Future 2025: For Every Child*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/5117/6225/0864/ForEveryChild_Brochure_2025.pdf>.

⁷ Australian Education Union (2024). *A decade of inequity: How Australian governments have funded private schools above public schools since 2013*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <<https://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/9917/2543/1780/decadeofinequity.pdf>>

⁸ Ibid.



Without urgent and meaningful investment, these gaps will widen further, limiting access to quality teaching, resources and support services. It is a vicious circle – overfunding enables private schools to hire more teaching and ancillary staff and improve infrastructure and resources, which means the equity gap between public and private schooling continues to expand. This is not simply a funding issue; it is a question of providing a fair education system and limiting systemic inequity.

Lost opportunity for early intervention

Schools are uniquely positioned to identify and respond to emerging issues before they escalate. Teachers and principals are reporting that the complexity of needs in their schools has increased over the last three years.⁹ Poverty, housing insecurity and food stress are some of the growing concerns. One in six Australian children under 15 lives in poverty (over 750,000 children),¹⁰ housing affordability has pushed many families out of the private rental market and into precarious living situations,¹¹ and one in three Australian households experiencing food insecurity.¹²

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023) revealed alarming rates of adverse childhood experiences and child abuse. Before age 18, 32 per cent of Australians had experienced physical abuse, 28.5 per cent had experienced sexual abuse and 39.6 per cent had experienced exposure to family violence.¹³ Schools often provide the most consistent contact with young people affected by family violence and there is increasing recognition of the important role education settings play in early intervention and support for these students.¹⁴ Yet without adequate resourcing and training, staff cannot create environments to empower students to share, or confidently and capably respond to disclosures or provide timely support.¹⁵

Schools are often a trusted point of contact for families and must be better supported to respond early to families. Schools have strong potential to operate as family support hubs with allied professionals such as social workers and psychologists onsite. This approach would strengthen early intervention and reduce pressure on child protection and family services by addressing issues before they escalate. Investing in schools as community anchors could help break cycles of harm and improve outcomes for children and families.

Vulnerable cohorts need targeted support

The Victorian Department of Education aims to create safe and inclusive school environments where all students, including those with disabilities and additional needs, are supported to fully participate.¹⁶ Yet last year, over 75 per cent of school staff reported they did not have enough time to meet the learning needs of all students and more than 80 per cent said their workloads had increased due to inadequate support.¹⁷ In 2024, Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) conducted a survey of almost 400 students with disability who were at school or had recently left or finished school. Around 72 per cent reported being excluded from activities and nearly half felt that teachers and staff lacked training and knowledge to support students effectively.¹⁸

⁹ Australian Education Union (2025). State of our Schools survey 2025. Unpublished data cited in *Investing in Australia's Future 2025: For Every Child*. Viewed 16 December 2025.

<https://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/5117/6225/0864/ForEveryChild_Brochure_2025.pdf>.

¹⁰ Davidson, P. & Bradbury, B. (2025). *Poverty in Australia 2025: Overview*. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) & UNSW Sydney. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Poverty-in-Australia-2025-V4_screen.pdf>.

¹¹ Launch Housing (2025). *Building Futures: A new support system for families with children experiencing homelessness*, p.4. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Launch-Housing-Insights_BuildingFutures.pdf>.

¹² Ipsos Public Affairs (2025). *Hunger Report 2025: Prepared for Foodbank Australia*. Viewed 19 December 2025.

<https://reports.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Foodbank_Hunger_Report_2025_Ipsos_WEBCOPY.pdf>

¹³ Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023). Viewed 16 December 2025, <<https://www.acms.au>>.

¹⁴ Stewart, R., Fitz-Gibbon, K. & Roberts, S. (2025). Examining the Impact of Domestic and Family Violence on Young Australians' School-Level Education. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. <<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.70028>>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Department of Education. *Inclusive education for students with disabilities*. Viewed 19 December 2025.

<<https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-education-for-students-with-disabilities>>.

¹⁷ Australian Education Union (2024). *What the Profession Needs Now For The Future: Discussion Paper Two – Provision For Victoria's Public Schools*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/5032_WPNNF_Paper2_v2.pdf>.

¹⁸ Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2025). *Disillusion and Delay*, p.4. Viewed 16 December 2025, <https://cyda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/DOC_Final_EducationSurveyReport_DisillusionandDelay_20250710.pdf>.



Attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Victoria have fallen from 87.8 per cent in 2015 to 79.7 per cent in 2025, compared to 89 per cent for non-Indigenous students.¹⁹ Children and young people in out-of-home care experience significantly greater school disengagement than their peers.²⁰ These statistics reflect systemic failure to meet the needs of these priority groups.

When teachers lack time, resources and expertise to meet students' individual learning needs, it often results in punitive responses rather than addressing the underlying causes of behaviour.²¹ For example, students in care are also five times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school.²² Investing in teacher training, specialist staff and workload reduction is essential to create safe, supportive learning environments. Without this, vulnerable cohorts will continue to be excluded from the opportunities education should provide.

Social and economic costs of educational disengagement

School attendance in Victorian public schools is falling. In 2025, only 55.9 per cent of students in Years 1-10 attended 90 per cent or more of the time, down from the previous year.²³ By contrast, attendance in Catholic and Independent schools in Victoria rose to 63.6 and 72.8 per cent respectively.²⁴

The cost of non-attendance is profound. It affects not only the educational progress and attainment of individual students, but also their long-term employment, health and income outcomes.²⁵ Families and carers experience additional stress, with parent and carer mental health and workforce participation impacted.²⁶ Young people who disengage from education are more vulnerable to risky behaviours, including substance misuse, crime, as well as abuse and exploitation.²⁷ Education is a proven protective factor against these risks.

Underfunding public schools jeopardises this safeguard. Every missed day of school compounds disadvantage and increases future social and economic costs. Investing in equitable education is not just a moral imperative, it is a sound economic strategy that benefits the entire Victorian community.

We thank the Committee for considering this submission and would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence or appear in person to speak to these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michele Lonsdale

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¹⁹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2025). *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2025*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://dataandreporting.blob.core.windows.net/anrdataportal/ANR-Documents/ANR2025/nationalreportonschoolinginaustralia_2025_Chapter4Section2.pdf#page=1>.

²⁰ Commission for Children and Young People (2023). *Let us Learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people living in out-of-home care*, p.22. Viewed 16 December 2025, <<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Publications-inquiries/let-us-learn/CCYP-Education-inquiry-report-FINAL.pdf>>.

²¹ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2021). *Barriers experienced by students with disability in accessing and obtaining safe, quality and inclusive school education and consequent life course impacts*. Viewed 16 December 2025. <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/report-public-hearing-7-barriers-experienced-students-disability-accessing-and-obtaining-safe-quality-and-inclusive-school-education-and-consequent-life-course-impacts>>.

²² Commission for Children and Young People (2023).

²³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2025). *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2025*, p.7. Viewed 16 December 2025. <https://dataandreporting.blob.core.windows.net/anrdataportal/ANR-Documents/ANR2025/nationalreportonschoolinginaustralia_2025_Chapter4Section2.pdf#page=1>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Institute for Government (2025). *Reducing school absence: Innovation lessons from the last Labor government*. Viewed 16 December 2025, <<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/School-absence-innovation-lessons-last-labour-government.pdf>>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

