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Inquiry into Public School Funding Victorian Principals Association (VPA)

Introduction

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA), representing the leaders of the 1147 government primary schools across Victoria, with enrolments just under 382,000 students, welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Public School Funding.

We are seriously concerned by the Allan Labor Government's decision to delay the process of raising Victoria's funding contribution to 75% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) until 2031. This decision effectively cuts \$2.4 billion from what was previously committed to the Victorian government schools that are in every town, city and suburb in our state.

This submission outlines the implications of that decision against each of the Terms of Reference established by the Legislative Council.

1. State and Commonwealth Funding Per Student Relative to Other States and Territories

Victorian government schools are the lowest funded in the country on a per-student basis. Compared to New South Wales and Queensland, where State governments are closer to or at 75% of the SRS, Victorian students are being short-changed.

Non-government schools remain fully funded (or above) across Australia. This entrenches inequity, particularly for students in the government system who are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The delay until 2031 worsens and will continue to compound the national gap. Victorian children will continue to be funded less than peers in other states for at least another six years, denying them equal educational opportunities.

2. Impact of this Delay on Commonwealth Funding

Commonwealth contributions are calculated as a percentage of the SRS. If the State delays its uplift, the Commonwealth's contribution is effectively constrained.

This means that Victoria is not only reducing its own investment but also limiting the amount of federal funding Victorian students would otherwise receive.

The Commonwealth's share should rise in tandem with State commitments. A delay on the State side delays the full benefit of federal contributions.

3. Impact on the Education of Students Today and Those Starting Prior to 2031

Current students miss out: Every year until 2031, students enrolled in Victorian government schools will be denied resources equivalent to \$2.4 billion in cumulative investment. This shortfall translates directly into fewer teachers, less support staff, and programs that enable personalised and targeted learning, wellbeing, and enrichment opportunities for every child.

Missed intervention opportunities: Evidence consistently shows that investment in the primary years yields the greatest return in learning, wellbeing, and lifelong outcomes. A delay until 2031 denies thousands of children the targeted literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing support they urgently need, particularly those already at risk of falling behind.

Intergenerational consequences: Students starting school in 2025 will progress through most of their primary education before the uplift is realised, meaning an entire cohort will pass through underfunded schools. The effects will be long-lasting, not only in academic achievement but also in social, emotional, and wellbeing outcomes.

Building future readiness: Without swift and immediate action, delayed funding undermines the Victorian Government's stated goals for equity and excellence and jeopardises the Education State's core promise.

4. Consequences for Victoria's Teaching and School Workforce

Teacher shortages: Schools already face significant recruitment and retention challenges. Funding cuts reduce the ability to employ additional teachers and support staff to ease workloads.

Burnout and attrition: Principals and teachers continue to face unsustainable and overwhelming workloads. Deferring investment undermines workforce morale and drives attrition.

Professional learning: Without resources, schools cannot adequately invest in staff development to meet contemporary student needs.

5. Effect on Educational Resources, Teaching Materials, Capital Equipment and Maintenance

Classroom resources: Schools will continue to rely on parent contributions and fundraising to purchase basic teaching materials, undermining equity between communities.

Specialist programs: Funding shortfalls limit schools' capacity to provide arts, music, language, and STEM enrichment, which are increasingly expected as part of a modern curriculum.

Facilities and maintenance: Many schools face outdated buildings, leaking roofs, inadequate heating/cooling, and unsafe grounds. Without the delayed \$2.4 billion, these problems persist.

Digital infrastructure: Investment in ICT devices, modern technology, software, and connectivity is critical for contemporary teaching but will remain underfunded.

6. Importance of Co-Design with Education Professionals and Funding Early Skill Development

Any reform or improvement initiative in education must be co-designed with the professionals who work every day in schools, principals, teachers, and support staff, rather than being developed in isolation from practice.

Co-design genuinely brings together those who understand the lived realities of schools with those undertaking research, with those shaping policy design, ensuring that reforms are practical, effective, and sustainable. It is grounded in co-accountability, co-responsibility, and co-achievement, principles that foster shared ownership, trust, and collective impact.

When educators are authentically and collaboratively involved in shaping the initiatives they are asked to implement, outcomes are stronger and more enduring. Such collaboration enhances innovation, increases buy-in, and ensures that solutions are tailored to the real needs of students, staff, and school communities.

The Victorian Principals Association strongly advocates that any future funding, workforce, or curriculum reforms must embed genuine co-design with school leaders and practitioners from the outset, not as an afterthought. This approach ensures that educational improvement is driven by the people who understand both the challenges and opportunities within schools.

Equally critical is ensuring sustained investment in early skill development during the primary school years. Economist James Heckman's extensive research demonstrates that the highest returns on educational investment come from the earliest years of learning where cognitive, social, and emotional foundations are established. Investing in primary education not only improves lifelong learning outcomes but also yields significant economic and social returns for society.

A co-designed approach to early intervention, informed by educators and supported by adequate resourcing, ensures that every child receives the targeted support needed to thrive in literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing from the earliest stages of their schooling journey.

Recommendations

The VPA calls on the Committee to:

1. Urge the Victorian Government to reinstate the full \$2.4 billion commitment and lift its contribution to 75% of the SRS no later than 2028.
2. Work with the Commonwealth to ensure Victoria's share of federal funding is not constrained by State inaction.
3. Ensure all Victorian government schools reach 100% of the SRS by 2030, aligning with the principle of national equity.
4. Address teacher and principal workforce pressures through targeted investments in recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and workload reduction.
5. Ring-fence funding for teaching resources, capital works, and maintenance to ensure schools can deliver safe, modern learning environments.

Conclusion

The decision to postpone Victoria's full contribution to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) until 2031 carries significant and far-reaching implications for students, educators, and school communities. This

delay perpetuates systemic inequity, limits educational opportunity, and intensifies existing challenges related to workforce capacity and infrastructure.

Since the landmark Gonski Review in 2011, the Victorian education community has waited with anticipation for government schools to be funded at 100% of the SRS. More than a decade later, that aspiration remains unfulfilled.

The Victorian Principals Association strongly urges the Committee to recommend that the Government reverse this deferral and commit to full SRS funding for government schools in alignment with the principles of the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2024–2034*.

Every child in Victoria deserves access to a high-quality, fully funded, and equitable education system—one that is future-focused and reflective of our shared values as the 'Education State'. Further delay is not only unjustifiable, but incompatible with the promise of educational equity.



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