

Submission Text: Submission to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Public School Funding (2025)

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As a Victorian principal with more than 20 years in school leadership and 27 years in education, I am submitting this not as a politician, or an economist, but as someone who lives the impact of funding decisions every single day—on children, on staff, and on school communities. I write from the position of a government-school principal who has consistently delivered high-quality outcomes in a system that is increasingly being asked to do more with less.

The government’s decision to delay reaching 75% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) until 2031—and the resulting \$2.4 billion cut to previously committed funding—isn’t just a budgeting issue. It is a direct decision to deny Victorian children the resources they need right now. And those of us on the ground feel the consequences every day.

This submission addresses each point of reference, but more importantly, it articulates the lived reality: government schools are being starved of the very funding required to meet the needs of the children we teach, especially those with complex needs, trauma backgrounds, disabilities, or family instability.

1. State and Commonwealth funding per student

Victorian government schools already receive less per student than almost every other state or territory. We are already operating below the national benchmark, and this

decision pushes us further behind.

In practical terms, what does “less per student” look like?

- Larger class sizes that make individualised learning near impossible
- Fewer integration aides supporting some of the most vulnerable children in the system
- Teachers spread across too many roles, trying to plug the gaps left by funding shortfalls
- Principals forced into unsustainable workloads—carrying wellbeing, HR, enrolment growth, student behaviour management, WorkCover claims, and facility management simultaneously

The SRS exists because there is a minimum amount of money required to educate a child to expected standards. Victoria is now choosing to fund its government school children below that minimum. No principal can accept that as reasonable.

2. Impact of this delay on Commonwealth funding

Because of how bilateral agreements are structured, the state’s decision to withhold its component directly affects Commonwealth contributions. When one level of government underfunds, the other reduces its proportional investment.

In effect, Victoria’s decision is not only withholding its own dollars—it is triggering a compounding reduction from the Commonwealth.

This double-hit means:

- fewer specialist programs
- fewer mental health supports
- fewer literacy and numeracy interventions
- fewer staff to manage escalating behavioural and emotional needs

As a principal actively supporting students with complex behavioural, cognitive, and emotional profiles—including multiple students with ASD, ADHD, and PDA who require high-intensity support—the gap between what we are funded for and what these children need is widening rapidly.

3. Impact on the education of today's students and those starting school before 2031

The idea that we can “delay funding” until 2031 assumes that children can postpone their development, their learning, their social growth or their trauma recovery. They can't. Every year that adequate funding is withheld is a year of opportunity lost—never to be regained.

In my own school, I see:

- Children with severe emotional regulation needs who require daily intensive support
- A growing number of students presenting with trauma backgrounds
- Increasingly complex disability presentations, without a matching increase in funding

- Families experiencing financial stress, housing insecurity, domestic violence and mental health challenges

We are expected to meet these needs now—not in six years' time.

Educational opportunity has an expiry date. A child in Grade 1 in 2025 will be in Year 7 by the time this funding is restored. A student currently struggling with foundational literacy cannot wait until 2031 to access essential intervention.

4. Consequences for the teaching and school workforce

This is where the funding decision is most absurd and most damaging.

Victorian government schools are already facing:

- A workforce crisis, with staff burnout at unprecedented levels
- Rising WorkCover claims linked to psychological injury
- Increasing incidents of parent aggression, abuse, and vexatious behaviour
- A generation of graduates who are choosing not to stay in teaching due to workload and stress
- Experienced teachers leaving the profession early because they cannot sustain the demands

In my own experience, principals are now fulfilling roles previously held by whole leadership teams: wellbeing, disability and inclusion, operations, HR, behaviour, legal processes, WorkCover, facilities, and community management.

When the system fails to provide enough staff, the workload doesn't disappear. It lands on principals and teachers who are already running beyond capacity.

Reducing funding now guarantees:

- More staff turnover
- More burnout
- More decline in teacher supply
- More pressure on schools to “do everything with nothing”

And ultimately, a significant decline in student outcomes.

5. Effects on educational resources, materials, equipment, and facilities

This is where principals feel the cut in the most visible way.

Schools will increasingly be unable to afford:

- Updated technology
- High-quality literacy and numeracy programs
- Playground replacement and safety upgrades
- Repairs to ageing buildings
- Additional support staff
- Adequate supervision and yard duty coverage
- Air conditioning, heating improvements, and accessible infrastructure for students with disability

In my own school, I'm balancing:

- Ageing buildings
- Accessibility needs
- Playground safety requirements
- Water and drainage systems
- Ongoing capital maintenance pressures

All while trying to maintain staffing and support for the day-to-day learning needs of 580+ children.

Funding is not abstract. It is the difference between whether a child has a safe, clean, modern learning environment or not.

This is not sustainable

Every day I go to work to lead a community with pride, integrity and care. I see staff who give everything they have to support children who need more than ever before. I see parents struggling. I see students trying their hardest in circumstances that would break many adults.

Yet the message from government—intended or not—lands the same:

Do more with less. Do everything with less. And accept that “less” will be the reality for years to come.

Principals are dealing with the consequences of this funding shortfall on every front:

- Educational outcomes
- Student behaviour
- Family engagement
- Staff mental health
- Legal and compliance burden
- Workforce shortages
- Increasing community expectations

Government schools are not inferior schools—they are simply underfunded schools. They educate the children who need us the most. But they cannot continue to carry the weight of the system without being funded to the standard the government itself agreed was necessary.

This delay in reaching 75% of SRS is not responsible budgeting. It is a decision to keep government school children—and the people who teach them—in a state of permanent disadvantage.

The children of Victoria deserve better.

The staff deserve better.

And principals like myself cannot keep absorbing the cost of a system forced to run without the resources it requires.

I urge the Committee to recommend that the funding be restored immediately, not in six years' time. Our children cannot wait.

Thank you for your time, and in particular this inquiry.

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