Big infrastructure gap between WA public and private schools

Private schools in WA have outspent public schools on capital works by $3.2 billion over the past decade, including $515 million in 2023 alone, exposing a widening infrastructure divide driven by the absence of ongoing Commonwealth capital funding for public schools since 2017.

The building divide in Australian schools: How capital funding fuels educational inequity report shows that students in the most advantaged private schools in WA receive more than three times the per-student capital investment of students in the most disadvantaged public schools — a gap of $2,112 per student.

This inequity is fuelled by the lack of federal funding for capital investment in public schools.

Nationally, the report reveals private schools have outspent public schools on capital works by $38 billion over the past decade, including $5.4 billion in 2023 alone. Capital investment averaged $2,746 per student per year in private schools, compared with $1,237 per student in public schools.

Between 2017 and 2025, the Commonwealth's Non-Government School Capital Grants Program has delivered more than $1.6 billion to private schools, with a further almost $3 billion scheduled between 2025 and 2034. By contrast, public schools receive no permanent federal capital stream.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the divide is being driven by Commonwealth policy settings that has funded capital works in private schools, while leaving public schools without an ongoing capital stream since 2017.

"That is not an accident, it is the result of policy choices that keep directing public funding towards already wealthy private schools," she said.

SSTUWA President Matt Jarman said the funding imbalance is having real consequences in WA classrooms.

"Western Australian public schools are educating the overwhelming majority of children, yet they are doing so without the benet of a guaranteed Commonwealth capital funding stream," he said.

"When private schools are receiving more than three times the per-student capital investment of some public schools, it entrenches inequality across our communities.

"Western Australia needs long-term, predictable capital funding from the Commonwealth so public schools can plan, build and deliver the modern learning environments our students deserve."

The AEU is calling on the Commonwealth to provide an immediate injection of capital funding to public schools, establish a permanent capital works fund, and negotiate a joint partnership with state and territory governments to ensure all public schools have access to adequate and safe 21st century learning environments.

Key report ndings

- Capital investment by private schools in WA has outpaced investment in public schools by $3.2 billion over the last decade and by $515 million in 2023 alone.
- Students in the most advantaged private schools get more than three times the investment per student of students in the most disadvantaged public schools, a gap of $2,112 per student.
- The top five highest spending private schools in WA spent $90,483,770 total on capital works in 2023 – more than 2,418 public schools nationally combined ($90,476,056). This means that ve schools alone spent more than 37.7 per cent of all public schools in Australia.
- The top 10 highest spending private schools in WA spent $146,265,215 in total capital expenditure in 2023 – more than 2,859 public schools nationally ($146,153,218). That means that 10 private schools alone spend more than 44.6 per cent of all public schools in WA.

In the AEU's *State of Our Schools Survey* WA public school principals said:

- 24 per cent per cent of public schools in WA do not have adequate classrooms to meet enrolment demand and need an average of 7.8 additional classrooms each.
- 35 per cent per cent will run out of classroom space in the next three to five years.
- 50 per cent per cent say the external maintenance of their school buildings is inadequate and 47 per cent per cent say internal maintenance is inadequate.
- 44 per cent per cent say that the science facilities at their school are inadequate and 54 per cent per cent say their technology and design facilities are inadequate.
- 67 per cent per cent say that their school has temporary/demountable classrooms in use with an average of 6.3 per school.
- 71 per cent say their school lacks purpose-built structures to support the needs of students with disability
- Only 41 per cent per cent of WA public school principals are able to offer the full curriculum with their current infrastructure.

Figures provided by the WA Department of Education show there were 3,935 demountable and transportable buildings (3,096 classrooms) located on public school sites and in other locations in March 2025.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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