# AEU inquiry into public school infrastructure




The AEU has launched Australia's first national inquiry into public school infrastructure, marking the beginning of a nationwide consultation process to ensure every child learns in a safe, modern and inclusive public school.

The inquiry, chaired by former AEU and ACTU President Sharan Burrow AC, will examine the current state of public school infrastructure across Australia, assess future needs and recommend long-term funding and policy reforms to deliver future-ready schools in every community.

Launching the inquiry in Adelaide, AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said public schools are essential national infrastructure and must be treated as such.

"Public schools are at the heart of every community. They shape our nation's future and they deserve long-term, coordinated investment that matches their importance," she said.

"This inquiry will gather the evidence of unmet needs across Australia. We want to ensure every child, no matter their postcode, has access to high-quality learning environments that support their success."

The inquiry will consult widely with principals, teachers, education support staff, families, governments and community organisations through roundtable meetings and visits to schools in every state (at time of print the inquiry would have held its WA events). It will also engage with groups representing Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities, students with disability and rural and remote Australians.

Submissions can also be made to the inquiry until 30 June by visiting schoolsforourfuture.org.au

Chair Sharan Burrow AC will lead the national consultation process, bringing decades of experience in advocating for equity, strong public institutions and long-term nation-building reform. She will be joined by Deputy Chair Maurie Mulheron.

The AEU has released an issues paper to guide the consultation process. The paper can be accessed here.

Ms Haythorpe said the inquiry came at a critical moment.

“While we have a national framework for recurrent school funding, there is no equivalent national strategy for public school infrastructure and no permanent Commonwealth capital funding stream,” she said.

“With the Commonwealth abandoning capital works funding in 2017, states and territories are going it alone. Investing in public school infrastructure is one of the most effective ways to lift outcomes and strengthen equity across the system.”

More than 2.6 million students attend Australia’s public schools. Enrolments have grown significantly over the past decade and population projections point to continued growth in school-age children. Student needs are becoming more complex, with rising numbers of students requiring additional learning, wellbeing and disability supports.

Ms Haythorpe said infrastructure must keep pace with these realities.

“Teachers are delivering extraordinary work with increasingly diverse and complex student needs. They deserve state of the art facilities that complement the high-quality teaching they provide,” she said.

“Improved capital works are not just about buildings. It’s about inclusion, wellbeing and opportunity. If governments are serious about improving student educational outcomes, then investing in infrastructure must be on their agenda.”

Ms Haythorpe said the launch in Adelaide signalled the start of a constructive national conversation.

“This is a nation-building project. It’s about planning not just for the next budget cycle, but for the next generation,” she said.

“Investing in public school infrastructure is one of the most effective ways to lift outcomes and strengthen equity across the system.

“Every child deserves to learn in a school designed for the future, not the past. Through this inquiry, we are inviting governments and communities to work with us to make that vision a reality.”



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