National education and union news



Schools for Our Future inquiry visits Perth

The Australian Education Union has brought its Australia-first national inquiry into public school infrastructure to Perth, focusing on how targeted investment can deliver world-class learning environments for every Western Australian student.

The inquiry, chaired by Sharan Burrow AC, is travelling the country to hear directly from teachers, governments and community organisations about how school infrastructure can support high-quality teaching and learning now and into the future.

The inquiry will also visit schools which have unmet infrastructure needs and those schools that have seen recent state government investment so it can ascertain what is working well and what needs to be improved.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said WA had a strong foundation to build on, but sustained investment was needed to ensure every school benefited.

“We know WA has public schools with facilities that are too often outdated, overcrowded or not fit for purpose. There are also examples of schools that have had significant investment,” she said.

“We see the incredible impact that high-quality facilities can have when schools are properly resourced. The challenge now is uplifting every public school, so all students have access to high quality learning facilities.”

Consultations in Perth began with the WA Education Minister Sabine Winton and brought together principals, teachers, and community organisations to identify practical solutions and long-term priorities for school infrastructure investment in WA.

New data highlights why action is needed. Commonwealth investment in public school infrastructure in WA has declined sharply over the past decade, falling from an average of 31.6 per cent of total capital funding between 2009 and 2017 to just one per cent between 2018 and 2024.

“In 2024, the Commonwealth contribution to capital works in WA public schools was effectively zero. That’s not sustainable if we are serious about delivering world-class public education,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“There is a real opportunity right now for the state and federal government to work together and invest in the schools our communities need.”

Ms Haythorpe said the inquiry is focused on solutions and long-term planning.

“This is about getting the settings right for the future. We must ensure our schools have the infrastructure to meet growing student needs and support high-quality teaching,” she said.

“Teachers in WA cannot be expected to deliver 21st century learning in facilities designed for decades past. With the right investment, we can ensure every child in Western Australia learns in a school that is safe, modern and built for success.”

The Perth roundtable formed part of a nationwide consultation process that will inform recommendations to governments on how to deliver equitable, future-focused public school infrastructure across Australia.

Australian Unions go after wage increase for lower-paid

Australian Unions will seek a wage claim of five per cent in the upcoming Annual Wage Review.

The ACTU’s claim will increase the minimum wage to $26.19 per hour, lifting the annual full-time rate by $2,465 to $51,761.

The five per cent wage claim directly helps nearly 3 million workers whose pay is set by awards, but also helps all working Australians, by setting a minimum wage floor under their pay.

A five per cent boost in wages will help Australia’s lower-paid workers get ahead of cost-of-living pressures that have gotten a lot tougher.

Even before the Middle East conflict, rents and power prices continued to put pressure on workers’ household budgets. Now working people have the added pressures of high petrol prices and a hike in interest rates.

Award-reliant workers are the hardest hit by increases in housing costs, such as higher mortgages and rents.

Around 41 per cent of award workers are renters, compared to 31 per cent of all adults. As many as 44 per cent of award workers are also paying off a mortgage, compared to 35 per cent of all Australians.

The current national minimum wage is not enough to get by on; and now falls $262 a week short of what a full-time worker living alone needs to make a healthy living.

The pay gap is based on the Fair Work Commission’s budget standards research that measures how much income is needed to ensure a basic but healthy lifestyle.

Workers on award wages are also still behind from the last spike in inflation after Covid-19 and despite progress over the last few years, they have yet to catch up.

A typical full-time award wage worker would be nearly $2,500 a year better off today, if wages had kept up with inflation from mid-2021.

ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus said: “Everyone knows the lowest paid workers in Australia are doing it tough because they have borne the brunt of cost-of-living increases as landlords put up rent and supermarkets and fuel companies pumped up prices to inflate their profits. Working Australians need pay rises that get them ahead of inflation so they can continue to catch up.”

“We will not accept the lowest-paid workers in Australia going backwards because of the Reserve Bank and Donald Trump,” she continued.

“Workers were the ones who felt it the most last time inflation spiked; we cannot let this happen again. This is why low-paid workers need and deserve a decent pay rise. Energy companies, the banks and the supermarkets continue to deliver their mega-profits. Hardworking Australians must not be left behind.”

NAPLAN a flawed assessment tool

Failures of the online NAPLAN testing platform earlier this year highlights that the system is riddled with problems and should be scrapped in favour of sample-based testing and teacher-led assessments.

The AEU has consistently expressed concern about NAPLAN as an assessment tool, the way data is used and the means by which it is collected.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the failures in March's tests should urge the Government to review NAPLAN as a whole.

"Assessment is a critical component of teaching and learning, but NAPLAN is a flawed system," she said.

"NAPLAN should be scrapped and replaced with a comprehensive program of classroom-based and teacher-led assessments, along with sample-based testing.

"[The] outages, coupled with the high-stakes nature of the assessment risks increasing student anxiety and will add to teachers' increasing workloads.

"There will also be questions about the accuracy of the NAPLAN results once these assessments finally take place.

"NAPLAN is not a suitable assessment tool, and the union and its members must be consulted to develop a framework that puts the needs of students, teachers and parents at the centre of assessment."

Private providers putting profit before safety: new report

The interim report of the Victorian Select Committee on the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector, released last month, has identified evidence that the rapid rise of for-profit early childhood education and care provision is undermining child safety and quality learning.

The Australian Education Union Victorian Branch has welcomed the Committee's interim report and called for strong findings and recommendations in the final report to ensure the safety of children and support for the workforce to enable high quality education and care to be at the heart of all early learning.

"Profit must never come before child safety and the provision of high-quality education," said Branch President Justin Mullaly.

"It's high time that governments take real steps to remove for-profit provision in the education of our children.

"There is also much more work for governments to do to ensure child safety and enhance the delivery of high-quality learning by supporting the workforce.

"The AEU Victorian Branch is calling for the establishment of child safety consultative committees at each service and mandated supported delivery for services that are at risk of not meeting higher level quality standards."

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