Australian schools under-resourced, class sizes above average

A new OECD report has shown Australian governments spend less on schools than the OECD average, and has higher class sizes, the AEU said today.

The OECD's annual "Education at a Glance" report found that Australian government spending on schools in 2012 was 3.4% of GDP, below the 3.5% OECD average. Average class sizes in Primary Schools in 2013 were 24 students, compared with an OECD average of 21.

The Report, which tracks trends in education across the developed world, acknowledged for the first time the link between bigger classes and behavioural issues. It states that: "Larger classes are correlated with less time spent on teaching and learning, and more time spent on keeping order in the classroom."

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that the report, which covered the period before Gonski funding started, reinforced the Gonski Review's recommendations for needs-based funding of Australian schools.

"In the years leading up to the Gonski agreements Australia was spending less on government funding to schools than the OECD average, and this led to bigger class sizes and higher workloads for teachers," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Australia's government spending on schools as a percentage of GDP was lower than the OECD average and our reliance on private funding far higher, something which has worsened inequity in our schools.

"This report provides more evidence to support the Gonski Review's recommendations for a needs-based increase to schools funding, and the urgent need for full implementation of the six years of the Gonski agreements.

"Australian teachers are doing more face-to-face teaching than the OECD average, and teaching bigger classes, because our school system is under-resourced. We need extra needs-based funding to ensure that all students get the attention they need.

"Malcolm Turnbull needs to fund the full six years of Gonski, so that all schools have the resources they need to give their students the education they need for the 21st century. Reducing class sizes and providing extra support benefits teachers and allows students to have more individual attention.

"Schools that have got Gonski funding are already using it to make a positive difference for their students. This may be through reduced class sizes, extra literacy and numeracy programs, support staff like speech therapists or more one-on-one support to students. All of these things are lifting results.

Key facts:

- In 2012 Australia's government spending on public schools was 3.4% of GDP, below the OECD average of 3.5%
- Spending per student on primary schools in 2012 was $US7705, below the OECD average of $US8247
- The percentage of education funding provided by governments dropped from 83.7% in 2000 to 82.4% in 2012.
- In 2013 Australia had higher than average class sizes for Primary Schools – 24 students versus OECD average of 21. Average class sizes for Secondary Schools were 24, the OECD average.
- Australia had higher than OECD average for number of hours of teaching: Primary Schools were 879 hours per year versus the OECD average of 772, Lower Secondary 821 versus 694, Upper Secondary 812 versus 643.

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