OECD education report poses big challenges to Federal Government on funding for public schools

The latest OECD 'Education at a Glance 2017' report adds strong evidence to calls for increasing investment in public schools, posing serious challenges for the low-growth trajectory of the Federal Government's schools funding plan, according to the Australian Education Union.

'Simon Birmingham can claim increases in school funding, but the objective evidence in this report suggests his watered-down Gonski plan will fail to lift Australia in the international rankings, or meet the needs of thousands of children in Australian public schools,' said Correna Haythorpe, Federal President of the Australian Education Union, today.

'With the report showing Australian Government spending at 3.9 per cent of GDP being less than the OECD average, there is no doubt that our schools are under-resourced.'

Haythorpe said the trend was set to continue, with public school funding projected to fall well short of the levels provided by the original Gonski agreements that were now being replaced by the government to include cuts of $3 billion in funding that was due to be delivered over the next two years alone.

'The Federal Government is trying to sell their funding model as enough funding, when it falls far short of need, favours well-resourced private schools over public schools, and will leave far too many public schools below the school resourcing standard, and far too many private schools above it, even after ten years,' Haythorpe said.

She said the OECD report also highlighted continuing challenges for teachers.

'Australian teachers are teaching larger classes than the OECD average, which is a clear indication of resource shortages. When schools can provide extra staff, they can address larger classes and provide extra support for students who need it.

'Putting extra resources into schools is the best way to ensure that all students get the support and attention they need in the classroom,' she said.

The OECD report found that the proportion of public expenditure that goes to public education has been decreasing over 2010–14, increasing by only 6 per cent when total government expenditure on all services increased by 18 per cent.

'These trends do not take into account the slowing of Federal investment in public schools under the Gonski 2.0 plan. We don't need the Federal Government putting the brakes on investment in public schools, when that means putting the brakes on the future of our children,' Haythorpe concluded.

On Friday in Adelaide, an Education Council meeting of Federal, State and Territory education ministers will consider a

multilateral agreement for schools funding for 2018–19, with bilateral agreements to be negotiated after the Gonski 2.0 review reports in March 2018.

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