PISA highlights Morrison Govt's equity funding gaps for low-SES schools

The latest OECD report of international school system performance has shown the impact of six years of Federal Coalition government failure when it comes to properly funding and resourcing our public schools.

The OECD's PISA 2018 report points to extensive evidence that equity is a significant factor in student performance, with students from high socioeconomic backgrounds consistently performing better than students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Australian Education Union Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that the PISA report holds no surprises for teachers who work in disadvantaged settings.

"Resource gaps are evident in the Morrison Government's school funding architecture and this has a big impact at the school level in terms of staffing and learning programs," Ms Haythorpe said.

"The Morrison Government's claims of record school funding belies the fact that there are huge equity gaps in school funding in Australia. The PISA 2018 results highlight the impact of six years of Federal Coalition failure when it comes to properly funding and resourcing public schools," Ms Haythorpe said.

"The Morrison Government's policy of school funding inequity is short-changing a generation of Australian students by creating a system of 'haves and have nots'."

According to the report:

- the gap between the highest and lowest achievers in Australian schools is much greater than the OECD average.
- In Australia the average difference between 5th and 95th percentiles for Reading Literacy is 359 points and the OECD average is 327 points.
- For Scientific Literacy the difference between 5th and 95th percentiles in Australia is 330 points and the OECD average is 307 points.
- Australia's isolation index score of 0.20 for disadvantaged students is higher than the OECD average of 0.17 and higher than 51 of the 78 countries and economies included in PISA.This means that disadvantaged students are more concentrated in schools with other disadvantaged students in Australia than in most countries in the OECD.
- Across all domains students from high SES backgrounds performed better than those from low SES backgrounds.
- The proportion of high performers increased and the proportion of low performers decreased with each increase in SES quartile.

- **Science**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 82 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is approximately two and three-quarters years of schooling

- **Reading**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 89 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is three years of schooling
- **Maths**: The variance between average scores of highest and lowest SES quartiles was 81 points, with 30 points equivalent to one year of schooling, so the difference is two and two-thirds years of schooling

"Our teachers do a superlative job in teaching all students, but PISA shows that a gap persists in the performance of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds as compared to lower socioeconomic backgrounds," Ms Haythorpe said.

"The extra teaching resources that would become available by ensuring that all schools are funded at 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) benchmark is key in closing this performance gap."

"Our teachers' passion, knowledge, professionalism and their commitment to students remains strong in the face of the Morrison Government's public school budget cuts, funding inequity and general disregard of the teaching profession," Ms Haythorpe said.

“Prime Minister Scott Morrison will claim that his government is providing record funding for schools, but the reality is that Australia now has a new level of inequality in terms of school funding. The government has prioritised funding to private schools over public schools - there’s no funding equity, and this directly leads to a lack of equity in outcomes.”

Ms Haythorpe said the Federal Coalition’s scrapping of the original Gonski funding model, imposition of $1.9 billion in funding cuts in 2017-18 and capping federal contributions to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) for public schools meant that by 2023, 99% of public schools will be funded below the SRS whilst 99% of private schools will be funded at or above the SRS.

“These figures should be a wakeup call for a government which is ignoring the reality of the lack of equity in school funding,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“The Federal Coalition completely ignored the findings of the Gonski review. Gonski was about getting additional resources to those students who needed them the most. However the Federal Coalition abandoned the original Gonski funding model that set out a clear path to address disadvantage and inequality.”

Ms Haythorpe said that PISA showed that where school systems were funded to 100% of the SRS, results were much better than in states and territories that were funded well below the SRS.

“Western Australia and the ACT, the jurisdictions at the top of Australia’s PISA 2018 table for all three domains – reading, maths and science, are also the only jurisdictions in Australia where public schools were fully funded at or above 100% of the SRS for 2018,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“This shows that the Morrison Government is ignoring the evidence of what works, and is failing to implement the changes we know are needed to improve student outcomes and increase equity in Australian schools.”

“Federal Coalition budget cuts have had a deep impact on public schools. We need to invest in our schools to close the education gaps between high SES and low SES students,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“The teaching profession knows what needs to be done for high quality teaching and learning in our schools and they must be backed up by the government providing the necessary resources.”

MEDIA CONTACT: NICK BUCHAN, 0418 288 104

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