Australia’s public education funding slashed during the pandemic

Australia’s public education expenditure declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of only nine member nations to cut funding, according to the latest Education at a Glance report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Australian Education Union Federal President Correna Haythorpe said Australia’s weak government support for public education was an outlier on the global stage.

“At a time when countries around the world sought to increase support for their respective education systems to help students and teachers navigate the uncertainties of the pandemic, Australia actually reduced funding for public schools by two per cent,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“It is astonishing that during potentially the most challenging time for teachers and students in recent history, instead of providing additional support, Australia’s funding for public schools declined.

“The reality on the ground of these cuts is chronic staffing shortages and intense workload pressures for teachers, principals and education support staff. The fact that we had one of the sharpest declines in public education funding in the OECD highlights the urgent need for reform.”

The report also shows that funding for the critical early years and late secondary years is not keeping pace with OECD member nations.

“These trends highlight that Australia’s investment in our children’s futures is far from optimal. Indeed, the vast majority of public schools have been denied the funding that they need for their students under the current National School Reform Agreement.

“Australia’s public schools have and continue to provide pathways to success for all students. However, they must be supported by governments to do this, with the delivery of a minimum of 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard.

“That is the challenge that Education Minister Jason Clare must urgently meet, along with all state and territory education ministers.

“It is high time that our public education system is recognised for the pivotal role it plays in our society and ensuring that it's fully funded is the first step in the process,” Ms Haythorpe said.

Education At A Glance 2022 is available on the OECD website, here.

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