Building investment but little else

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2023-24 state budget

Through the release of the 2023-24 state budget earlier this month, the McGowan Government claims a total of $6.4 billion has been allocated to school education in 2023-24, an increase of $532 million.

In its media release the state government says public education funding will continue to increase over the forward estimates to accommodate growth in student enrolments. An extra 3,962 (1.2 per cent) students enrolled in public schools in Semester 1 2023 compared to Semester 1 2022.

Additional funding has been allocated to ensure schools will have the necessary teaching staff and resources to accommodate enrolment growth and provide high-quality programs for all students.

The 2023-24 budget also continues to increase support for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, with an additional $137.6 million allocated over the forward estimates. On top of this, from 2023, an extra $8.5 million will be provided to public schools per annum to support more students with additional learning needs in developing their literacy and numeracy.

A total of $12.4 million has been allocated to provide additional regional incentives to teachers and school leaders to work in locations where demand for staff is the greatest.

From 2023, public school secondary students at more than 220 public schools will have access to free period products, with $6.4 million allocated over the forward estimates to improve students' access to period products to support student engagement and outcomes.

A total of $24.3 million has been committed to support improvements to the WA Curriculum, including adopting and adapting version nine of the Australian Curriculum for WA schools and the development of resources to support teachers in the classroom.

In addition to these vital services, the state budget includes a total of $626.8 million for building and upgrading schools and school facilities.

An additional $12.4 million will be provided to establish a new inclusive education support program and facilities at Wanneroo Secondary College to accommodate 80 students.

A $100 million funding package will enable major upgrades for the ageing Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School. This new multi-million-dollar commitment will deliver a wide range of significant improvements to both schools, which were constructed in the 1970s.

An additional investment of $11.6 million for an offsite early learning facility will benefit families of young children at the growing Brabham Primary School. The offsite facility will alleviate accommodation pressures at Brabham Primary School.

A total of $53 million will be spent on new and improved school infrastructure in regional WA.

An additional $20.4 million investment has been committed for the major redevelopment of Roebourne District High School, building on the $52 million already provided for the project.

As part of the state government's continuing investment in new and improved public school infrastructure across WA, construction has started on two new schools, including the $27.2 million Wattleup East Primary School and the $27.1 million Henley Brook Primary School.

Additional funding of $27.2 million will deliver high-priority preventative maintenance programs to improve a number of public schools. This will include upgrades to improve fire safety and alarm systems, and roof replacement and remediation.

Another $41 million will be allocated to allow the purchase of additional transportable buildings, as part of the department's ongoing transportable accommodation program.

Education not a priority in budget

By Matt Jarman
President

The McGowan Government delivered its 2023-24 state budget on 11 May. This was not a budget where education was a priority.

There are some commitments to better support students with learning needs. There is at least some further investment in GROH and an extension of the rent freeze.

The increase in per student funding and in the overall budget, when measured against the actual spend last year rather than what was budgeted, is disappointing.

What we know from the review into public education being led by Dr Carmen Lawrence is that there needs to be a far bigger investment in public education.

There needs to be consultative change to reduce workload. Addressing red tape and unnecessary paperwork will give teachers the time and space to actually teach and to also reduce the burden on school leaders.

We need extensive support for pupils who struggle because of background and health issues so that we don't leave kids behind.

As the SSTUWA and the federal minister have repeatedly said, public schools need 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard. In WA, which needs it more than most states, we get around 91 per cent. This has to change.
Education can be the key to addressing a whole range of community issues – but only with full funding and consultative change with the real education experts – teachers.

It is our role at the SSTUWA to initiate a broad community debate to convince the state government that investing in education absolutely supports the Premier's desire to set WA up for the future.

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