Expert panel says full funding of public schools is urgent and critical



An independent expert education panel has made clear to governments the full funding of public schools is “urgent and critical” and a precondition for improving results, equity and student wellbeing.

Released today, the report of the expert panel says 98 per cent of public schools remain resourced below the government Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) with implications for educational and wellbeing outcomes and teacher attraction and retention.

The government summary of the report states: “*The panel was clear in the report that full funding to 100 per cent of the SRS is a critical prerequisite for successful education reform and student learning and wellbeing improvement across the country.”*

The report states that “*all jurisdictions should fully fund schools within a comparable timeframe*” and the issue is all the more urgent “*because of the full funding arrangements that already exist in the non-government sector*”.

Australian Education Union Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the expert panel had expressed the urgent need for full funding in the strongest possible terms and it was now up to the Prime Minister to work with State and Territory Governments to deliver this vital investment.

“New school funding agreements were delayed 12 months so that the panel could conduct a review. Now it has made unequivocal recommendations about the critical need for full funding of public schools so there can be no excuse for further inaction and delay by governments.”

Ms Haythorpe said the report revealed the formidable challenges facing the education system: unacceptable achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations exacerbated by concentrations of disadvantage, declining student wellbeing and mental health and excessive workloads for principals and teachers leading to widespread teacher shortages.

“This report shows that Australia’s education system needs to be better and fairer and that starts with funding,” she said.

“We welcome recommendations for the expansion of small group/individual tutoring as part of an improved focus on early intervention and the development of full-service schools that include community and allied health services to help students overcome barriers to learning. A significant increase in the number of school counsellors is also required.

“The union supports the call for governments to work in partnership with First Nations educators and stakeholders to deliver a national First Nations Education policy and for an implementation plan to deliver on commitments in the national disability strategy. These reforms must be accompanied by full funding.

“The panel has emphasised that many teachers do not feel adequately supported or valued and that better employment conditions, improved remuneration and recognition are needed to attract and retain teachers and school staff.

“But recommendations on reducing teacher workload do not go far enough, given it is the number one reason teachers are leaving the classroom in record numbers. Teachers made clear to the review that the priority is not off the shelf lesson plans, it is more staffing support inside and outside the classroom and cuts to red tape, paperwork and data entry.

“We also believe the report places too much emphasis on a single instructional practice, explicit instruction, particularly given the Australian Education Research Organisation has found the vast majority of teachers are already using explicit instructional strategies in most lessons.

“Australia’s teachers are highly effective in using a range of teaching strategies to engage and challenge students, meet their learning needs and assess and monitor their progress and they must be supported to continue to do so.”

Ms Haythorpe also said the union believed the proposed 10-year timetable for a new National School Reform Agreement was too long, given the urgent need for increased funding and new strategies to improve the quality and equity of the education system and to attract and retain teachers now.

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