School funding agreement a first step



The Australian Education Union has called on all governments to commit to ending the underfunding of public schools as a matter of urgency saying the future of the teaching profession is at stake along with the quality of education delivered across the nation.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe welcomed the news that WA is going to be the first state to commit to fully funding public schools by 2026.

But Ms Haythorpe said there needed to be a bigger investment than the one proposed by the Commonwealth and the WA government to achieve that goal.

“Right now, only 1.3 per cent of public schools are funded to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) which is the minimum level governments agreed over a decade ago was required to meet the needs of their students,” she said.

“We applaud the commitment by the Federal Education Minister Jason Clare and the WA government to get schools to 100 per cent of the SRS by 2026. However, (the) agreement will only see WA public schools reach 96 per cent of the SRS.

“WA’s SRS funding share is artificially inflated by four per cent through the inclusion of costs not directly related to the education of students in schools, such as capital depreciation, transport and regulatory costs. That four per cent of the SRS was worth $230 million for WA in 2023 and that money still needs to be delivered to WA public schools before schools are truly funded at 100 per cent of the SRS.

“This has to be the first step rather than the final agreement.

“With full funding principals and teachers can change the lives of students across the nation. It will mean more help for children at risk of falling behind and more support for teachers inside and outside of the classroom to cut their workloads and help address the growing needs of students.

“Short-changing our schools is short-changing our students at a time when we can least afford it. The challenges are too great and the human costs too high not to fully resource our schools.

“We have a teacher shortage crisis caused by crippling workloads, unacceptable achievement gaps between children from different backgrounds and locations and a worrying decline in student mental health and wellbeing.”

Ms Haythorpe said all public schools across the nation should reach a genuine 100 per cent of the SRS by 2028 with the Albanese Government lifting its share from 20 per cent of the SRS to 25 per cent of the SRS for states and 40 per cent of the SRS in the NT.

There also needs to be a significant investment of capital funding in new bilateral agreements struck this year.

“The Commonwealth has underfunded public schools for decades while overfunding private schools. Only 1.6 per cent of the federal budget is spent on public schools,” she said.

“The Albanese Government’s current offer of 22.5 per cent of the SRS should be revised to 25 per cent of the SRS for all states and 40 per cent of the SRS for the NT by 2028.”

Parliamentary Budget Office figures show that an average annual investment of just over $1.8 billion is required if the Commonwealth is to lift its funding share from 20 per cent of the SRS this year to 25 per cent by 2028.

Ms Haythorpe said an Expert Panel convened by education ministers in December warned the need for full funding in every state and territory was “urgent and critical” and the first step towards ensuring all students receive the support they need.

The panel said full funding must be delivered across the country “within a comparable timeline”.

“As the Expert Panel found, funding gaps are fuelling unacceptable achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“Disadvantaged secondary students are six times more likely to be low performers than those from advantaged backgrounds.

“Declining student mental health and wellbeing is a major source of concern and there are acute teacher shortages across the country caused by unsustainable workloads.

“We don’t have a level playing field in education that ensures every child gets every opportunity to succeed. Fixing that starts with funding.”

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