New WA funding deal still leaves public schools underfunded

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Contrary to claims by the Cook and Albanese governments, the bilateral agreement signed by the state and Commonwealth governments this month will still leave public school students in Western Australia underfunded and not fully funded as claimed.

The agreement between the Cook and Albanese governments does not address the four per cent depreciation clause that allows state and territory governments to account for non-school costs, such as school transport, kindergarten expenditure, regulatory bodies and capital depreciation as part of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) share. This four per cent gap is valued at approximately $225 million this year.

“For Western Australia, this clause will leave state schools underfunded by $1.78 billion across the next five years and yet, there is an urgent need for this funding due to the increasing needs of the student population. There is also no guarantee this funding will make its way to school budgets where it is desperately needed. Fully funded claims made by both levels of government this [month] are in effect deceiving the public school community of Western Australia,” said SSTUWA President Matt Jarman.

“Western Australia has a high level of need, with state schools educating more than twice the number of students from low socio-educational advantage backgrounds and 2.7 times the number of First Nations students.”

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said: “The four per cent clause was introduced in 2018 by the Coalition Government as part of the last round of bilateral agreements and until that time, these costs were never intended to be counted as part of the SRS, in fact, they were explicitly excluded from the SRS when it was devised.”

The use of the four per cent additional allowance removes $225 million in funding from classrooms in 2024, an amount that will continue to rise year on year to $238.8 million by 2028 and will account for a total of $1.78 billion loss in funding.

At the same time, private schools in the state will continue to be overfunded by a total of $201.7 million over the next five years.

Full funding is the only way to ensure every child gets the support they need to succeed and that teachers have the resources that they need to do their jobs well.

While the four per cent depreciation clause remains as part of the bilateral agreement, there is not a true commitment to ensuring that all schools are fully funded at 100 per cent of the SRS level.

This must be addressed by the Albanese Government as a priority matter rather than facilitating agreements that allow for the diversion of funds from public schools.

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