New OECD report highlights public education inequity



The latest Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) *Education at a Glance* report shows that Australia significantly underperforms against most OECD countries when it comes to investing in public schools.

The report found that Australia has the highest level of expenditure on private educational institutions in the OECD, at 0.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is more than double the OECD-wide average of 0.3 per cent of GDP spent on private schools.

The report also found that Australia spends 3.3 per cent of GDP on public schools, just scraping above the OECD average of 3.2 per cent of GDP. Twelve countries invest more in public education than Australia does (Belgium, Costa Rica, Finland, France, Iceland, Israel, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK).

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that the OECD's report was yet another indicator pointing to the urgent need for full and fair funding of public schools across Australia.

"The fact that Australia has the highest level of expenditure on private education which is more than double the OECD-wide average needs to be urgently addressed," she said.

"Funding inequity for Australia's public schools is a direct result of a deliberate undermining of the Gonski review's school funding reforms by the Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison Governments."

The report also found that Australia has the worst record on First Nations attainment when compared to Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States, with a 31 per cent point gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous students. The gap is almost double the next largest in Mexico.

According to the report:

- Australia barely scrapes over the OECD average for this indicator with 57 per cent of SES (Socio-Economic Status) disadvantaged students reaching proficient level in maths by the end of school – floundering in the middle of the pack of OECD nations.

- Eighty-eight per cent of advantaged students are above proficiency level in maths – a 31 per cent point gap between the top and bottom quartiles of advantage/disadvantage.
- Across the OECD: “Since 2016, the share of 18–24 year-olds not in employment, education or training has fallen from 16 per cent to 14 per cent on average across the OECD. At the same time, the share of 25–34 year-olds without an upper secondary qualification has decreased from 17 per cent to 14 per cent.” Meanwhile completion rates in Australia are going backwards, down to 76 per cent last year.

“This report makes it clear that Australia is a global outlier in its failure to fully fund public education – it’s a shocking position for our country to be in,” said Ms Haythorpe.

“Currently only 1.3 per cent of Australian public schools are funded to meet their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) entitlements. That means over 98 per cent of our public schools are not funded to meet the most basic student requirements.

“Years of inaction and underfunding of Australia’s public education system has resulted in a situation where our students risk falling behind compared to their peers globally.

“At the same time, private schools continue to benefit from ever-increasing governmental support.

“We have a responsibility to ensure every Australian child has the opportunity to thrive and achieve their full potential. This data shows we are lagging on fulfilling that responsibility in comparison with other OECD nations.

“These findings have renewed our call for the Albanese Government to right these wrongs and deliver on full funding for all students in Australia. Anything less will fail students and their teachers in public schools.”

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