

# **AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

**Press Release 1008**

## **FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS: TIMID LABOR POLITICIANS ‘DIVIDE AND RULE’**

The private sector continues to laugh all the way to the bank and back again to their overfunded, over-resourced schools which produce under educated but over entitled students. Yet, many official and unofficial reports on funding later, the timid Albanese Government is using a divide and rule tactic between State Governments to minimise, if possible, funding for public schools.

The so called ‘funding wars’ have diverted attention from the public versus private debate into a state by state versus Commonwealth debate.

On 31 January the education writers from the Age, [Sherryn Groch and Robyn Grace](#)

wrote

[WA’s public schools will get an additional \\$777 million in Commonwealth funding over the next five years](#) in a deal announced Wednesday, raising the long-standing federal share of money from 20 per cent to 22.5 per cent by 2026.

But Queensland, NSW and Victoria are among states doubling down on calls for the Commonwealth to lift its share even higher to 25 per cent.

This masthead can reveal that education ministers from Victoria, NSW, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT have written to federal Education Minister Jason Clare rejecting a proposed 2.5-percentage point increase.

The states provide the lion’s share of public school funding in Australia – 80 per cent to the Commonwealth’s 20 per cent, under current agreements.

But all jurisdictions, except the ACT, are still [falling billions of dollars short every year of minimum resourcing standards, known as the Schooling Resource](#)

Standard, that were agreed under the Gonski reforms a decade ago to fund schools according to need.

The ABC reported on the issue, noting that the federal government had agreed to boost its share by 2.5% to Western Australia but this was rejected by the other states.

The Guardian took up the issue with Caitlin Cassidy, using the figures produced by Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools.

The Saturday Paper of February 10 printed a scathing article from Jane Caro entitled *Simple idea #22.5: Fully fund public schools*.

And the NSW Teachers Federation supported their Premier, Chris Minns and Education Minister Prue Car to secure full funding for NSW public schools from the Commonwealth Government. State Education Minister,

But perhaps the last word on this should be given to Trevor Cobbold himself from *Save our Schools* at <https://saveourschools.com.au/funding/wa-school-funding-agreement-defrauds-public-schools/>

## **WA School Funding Agreement Defrauds Public Schools**

Trevor Cobbold / February 3, 2024 / Funding

The new school funding agreement between the Albanese and Western Australian Governments is a significant step forward for the funding of public schools. It has several positives but the claim that WA public schools will be fully funded by 2026 is simply untrue. Public schools will under-funded by about \$1.6 billion over the next five years.

There are some strong positives in the Agreement. The Albanese Government has broken with the arbitrary limit placed on Commonwealth funding of public schools by the Turnbull Government. The Commonwealth is no longer restricted to funding only 20% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) of public schools and has agreed to put in an extra 2.5% in this agreement.

Another positive is that the WA Government has agreed to start clawing back the cuts it made to its funding share of public schools over the past five years. It cut its funding share from 84.4% of their SRS in 2018 to 75% in 2024. Its share

will now increase by 2.5% by 2026, but this is still far short of what it was in 2018.

The two governments claim these increases will ensure that public schools will be fully funded at 100% of their SRS by 2026. This is a deliberate misrepresentation. Accounting tricks in the previous funding agreement struck by the states with the Morrison Government defraud public schools, but are retained in the new agreement.

The accounting tricks allow the WA Government to claim non-school expenditures as part of its SRS funding share for public schools. The WA Government can claim e expenditures on school transport, capital depreciation and pre-schools up to 4% of its SRS shar. On top of this, it can also claim expenditure on the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and other regulatory functions as part of its SRS share. All these expenditures are specifically excluded from how the SRS is officially measured.

In Opposition, Federal Labor promised to end these accounting tricks. As Shadow Minister for Education, Tanya Plibersek promised that a Labor Government would end the “accounting tricks” that allowed the states to artificially boost their funding share of the SRS of public schools

Now in government, Labor has broken its promise. Labor’s Minister for Education, Jason Clare, has avoided re-affirming this promise and now we know why. The WA Minister for Education’s only justification for prolonging the fraud is that “every other state does it”.

This fraud was conjured up between the Morrison Govt and the states in the last agreement. The Morrison Government disowned any responsibility for public schools and State Treasury Departments opportunistically took advantage of the neglect to restrict funding for public schools.

These accounting tricks mean that the current funding share of the WA Government is actually only 70.6%, not 75%. The new agreement will only get its funding share to 73.1% over the next five years, substantially less than it was in 2018. Overall, with Commonwealth funding, WA public schools will only be funded to 95.6% of their SRS by 2026, not 100%. The cumulative under-funding over five years will be about \$1.6 billion.

The WA Agreement will be taken by other states as a benchmark for their own negotiation with the Albanese Government. The failure of the Federal Minister for Education to implement the promise of his predecessor in Opposition means that the defrauding of public schools will now be set in stone for another 5 years. It means public schools will have been defrauded by billions over 10 years.

Other states are now demanding that the Commonwealth increase its funding share to 25%. There is a case for a greater role for the Commonwealth in funding public schools.

While the States have primary constitutional responsibility for education, the national government has a responsibility to ensure that the rights of all citizens to a quality education are upheld. It has a responsibility to ensure that all children, whatever their background and wherever they live, receive an education adequate to prepare them for full participation in the community as citizens.

The Gonski Report emphasised the joint responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the states to ensure that all children receive a quality education and to improve equity across the nation means that the funding shares have to be negotiated, hopefully in good faith rather than in a cynical game of pass the parcel.

The future of public education is at stake in the negotiations of the bilateral funding agreements. The states must stop shirking their responsibilities to public schools as they have for at least the last five years. The states must disavow the fraud they have perpetrated on public schools. If they want the Commonwealth to put in an extra 5% they must end the 4% plus rort.

This article was originally published in [The Guardian](#) on 2 February.

## **DOGS COMMENT**

The Albanese government is more than half way through its term in office. The education funding issue is a running cancerous sore on our Australian democratic, taxation, and educational system. The figures have long spoken for themselves, with years of Coalition policies favouring a divisive, inefficient private sector and under funding of disadvantaged public schools.

Yet the Labor government appears frozen, almost unable to move an inch through the fear of offending strong religious, right wing lobby groups. They appear powerless to even ameliorate the situation in which Australia is falling well behind the rest of the OECD countries in educational achievement.

The only way forward is to acknowledge the mistakes created by the State Aid experiment, take over the private schools which are overfunded, - we pay for them anyway - and make them public schools.