

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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THE OECD, DISRUPTIVE CLASSROOMS AND FUNDING

Media Commentaries on the [OECD Report on the problems with Australian education - *Education Policy Outlook in Australia*](#), have to date emphasised classroom disruption and the Albanese Government has established a *Senate Education and Employment Reference Committee Inquiry into The Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian School Classrooms*.

It is very disappointing that the Australian Media, including *The Guardian* have failed to read the whole of the OECD Report on Education Policy Outlook for Australia.

On 11 April 2023 The AEU noted that

“While the OECD makes it clear that Australian students perform well compared internationally, our PISA performance continues to decline and there are significant gaps in literacy and numeracy proficiency among 15-years-olds.

“There are also gaps in achievement for students with additional needs and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the majority of whom are enrolled in public schools.

“The OECD Outlook makes clear the urgent need to address the fundamental and enduring inequities in education in Australia.”

“It also highlights the need to consult and work with the teaching profession at all stages.”

Nevertheless, the emphasis upon disruption in some classrooms has lent both credibility and encouragement to the cult of teacher-bashing in the right wing think tanks of Australia. [An article by Greg Ashman on the website for Filling the Pail is a case in point.](#) Readers are invited to read this article which attacks the AEU Submission to the Senate Committee Enquiry into the Issue of Disruptive Classrooms. But rather than give it oxygen, DOGS will refer readers

to the very comprehensive [AEU Submission itself](#) . This submission is well researched and very comprehensive. The following are excerpts from it.

**Submission
to the
Senate Education and Employment Reference
Committee Inquiry into The Issue of Increasing
Disruption in Australian School Classrooms**

30 March 2023

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents over 195,000 members, most of whom are employed in public primary and secondary schools throughout Australia. These members educate over 2.6 million school students including the vast majority of students with disability, students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, students from households with low levels of English proficiency and student from low socio-educational backgrounds. Every child in Australia is entitled to a free, comprehensive, and secular education and public schools are open to all and do not discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation, academic achievement or the ability of parents to pay fees.

The AEU entirely rejects the assumptions made about “disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments” and the inappropriate interpretation of the OECD disciplinary climate index in this Inquiry’s terms of reference. We also note that whilst this Inquiry’s terms of reference presume that disruption is rife, there is no attempt made to investigate the factors that drive current conditions in Australia’s schools. This submission will seek to rectify the shortcomings of this Inquiry by addressing the litany of education policy failures over the last decade that have left

Australian public schools without the resources they urgently need to meet the needs of students.

Public education is a public good

Public education is a public good and a comprehensive education available to all benefits the

whole of society. Equitably resourced public education provides lifelong benefits through

improved health, wellbeing, and employment options, improves society by increasing equity and social cohesion and provides a myriad of economic benefits in terms of increased productivity and economic activity. It is the glue that holds together civil society and the economy, by developing the capacity of people to lead fulfilling and productive lives. The importance of public education as a driver of progress was first recognised in Australia from the 1830s onwards, and the education settlement in Australia continues to be that

every community in Australia should have well-resourced government schools open to all.¹

Prof. Alan Reid argues that public education is central to the principle of universalism: that there must be “free, secular and compulsory state schools funded by State and federal governments and available to all in every local community in Australia...that these schools should be inclusive,comprehensive, well-resourced and staffed” and that “public education should be understood not as a commodity to be used solely for the benefit of individuals but as a community resource to which everyone has rights of access.”²

Public education systems must be resourced to provide equality of opportunity

To fulfil its purpose as a public good, public education must focus on equity and equality in opportunity. This requires universal access to well-resourced public education from early childhood onwards including quality early childhood education, primary and secondary school, and the opportunity to access further or higher education.

The OECD, reporting the 2018 PISA results, stated:

“The principle that every person has a fair chance to improve his or her life, whatever his or her personal circumstances, lies at the heart of democratic political and economic life.

.....

The OECD concludes that “success in education can be defined as a combination of high levels of achievement and high levels of equity” and furthermore that “equity in education is also a matter of design and, as such, should become a core objective of any strategy to improve an education system.” The OECD consistently finds that high performance and greater equity in education are not mutually exclusive and has consistently concluded that the equity with which resources are distributed across schools has a significant impact on how the system performs overall.

Australia’s growing inequality manifests first in the classroom

Economic inequality has been steadily rising in Australia since the turn of the century. The GiniCoefficient, which measures the level of income inequality in all nations on a scale of 0 (perfectly equal) to 1 (perfectly unequal). Australia’s score has risen from 0.303 in 1997-98, to 0.318 in2021, which makes Australia the eleventh most unequal country in the OECD. At the same time, Australia’s performance in PISA is in long term decline and shows wide gaps between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. In PISA 2018 Australia scored higher than the OECD average in reading and science but not significantly different from the OECD average in mathematics. Performance in

mathematics has been declining for fifteen years and in science for six years. These results show the impact that educational inequity has on student outcomes:

- In Australia, students from socio-economically advantaged households outperformed students from disadvantaged households in reading by 89 score points in PISA 2018
- Some 24% of students from advantaged households in Australia, but 6% of students from disadvantaged households, were top performers in reading in PISA 2018.
- Socio-economic status was a strong predictor of performance in mathematics and science in all PISA participating countries. It explained 11% of the variation in mathematics performance in PISA 2018 in Australia and 10% of the variation in science performance
- Only 13% of students from disadvantaged households scored in the top quarter of reading performance within Australia.

To counter this inequity, it is imperative to restore the basic notion of education as a public good with equitable access to the resources of the state, and where the benefits spread across society in terms of employment, economic prosperity, health and social cohesion. These benefits, as provided by a well-resourced public education system, allow students to engage successfully in school, reinforces egalitarianism in Australian society, and provides the economy with the productive capacity it needs to grow. For society to gain the most benefit from public education it is necessary for schools to be well and equitably resourced.

Public school students have been denied full and fair funding for over a decade

The 2012 *Review of School Funding: Final Report* determined that a needs-based, sector-blind model, the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), was the minimum recurrent funding required to ensure that the majority of students reached minimum achievement benchmarks. The Review concluded that adherence to the full SRS was essential for fairness and equality of opportunity in education.

Since 2013, delivery of the full SRS to public schools has been consistently and deliberately undermined by the former Commonwealth Coalition Government. Changes to Commonwealth funding arrangements to the *Australian Education*

Act as amended in 2017 dismantled the coordinated needs-based approach to schools funding initiated by the *Australian Education Act 2013*, and in the five years since the *amendment* there has been further destruction of the original aims and focus of the 2013 Act. \$3.4 billion of additional funding was provided to private schools over ten years from 2020 to accommodate the transition to the Direct Measure of Income in the calculation of parental capacity to contribute. Coupled with the euphemistically named \$1.2 billion “Choice and Affordability Fund”, both announced as one of the first acts of the Morrison Government in September 2018, they demonstrate that the former Government’s funding priorities were neither needs based nor sector blind. In addition, the failure of the previous Commonwealth Government to honour signed National Education Reform Agreements (NERA) with the states and territories resulted in public schools not receiving \$1.9 billion of funds that were expected under these agreements in 2018 and 2019, and the imposition of new National School Reform Agreements (NSRA) on states and territories in 2018 and 2019. The combined impact of all these changes, along with depreciation write offs that the previous government allowed jurisdictions to make in their individual funding agreements have resulted in public schools in Australia being underfunded by more than \$20 billion since 2018 and by \$6.6 billion dollars in 2023 alone.

The legacy of this entrenched funding neglect is that, on average, every public school student in Australia is missing out on \$1,800 of funding every single year. In an average class of 23 students, this amounts to \$41,000 per year that is not available for specialist support with literacy and numeracy, English language support and specialist support and timely assessments for students with disability.

Students labelled as disruptive are often neurodiverse or have disabilities and need appropriate resources to meet their needs

Many students labelled as disruptive are neurodiverse or have disabilities. A well-resourced public education system that values diversity, understands social and cognitive development, engages all learners through inclusive processes and is responsive to fundamental human needs has the potential to develop all students into highly literate, numerate, actively engaged, resilient and connected members of the wider community.

Resourcing for students with disability is by its very nature intensive. This resourcing must continue to ensure adherence to philosophies of equity, social justice and inclusivity. Despite numerous official reports and State and Commonwealth government reviews over the past two decades identifying serious deficiencies in the resourcing of the education of young Australians

with disability, and recent changes to funding and loading arrangements, there has been little

AEU Submission – The Issue of Increasing Disruption in Australian Schools

Governments have continued to talk about the problem whilst many thousands of children with disability have started and finished primary school without seeing any improvement in the resources provided by governments to them.

The AEU's 2021 "State of Our Schools" survey found that 89% of public school principals surveyed said they have had to divert funds from other parts of school budgets in the last year because they do not have the resources to provide adjustments for students with disability. This figure has consistently been above 80% over the decade that the survey has been conducted and has increased over time. In 2021, principals said that they divert an average of \$101,000 per year from other budget areas to cover funding shortfalls for students with disability.⁷ This burden of a lack of resource is clear in the responses of the more than 9,000 teachers who responded to the survey. 43% of teachers said that the needs of students with disability were not able to be met at their school with the vast majority saying that the main resources lacking were those reliant on staff resource including classroom assistance (71%), specialist support (58%) dedicated programs (53%) and professional development (50%) being the most frequently selected areas in need....

DOGS congratulate the AEU on their submission to the Senate Enquiry.

The gross inequity in Australian education caused by the public funding of a parasitic, wealthy private system has placed enormous pressure on our dedicated public school teachers and parents.

The time has come to say, Enough is Enough and lay the blame for teacher burnout at the feet of the real culprits – greedy private operators, market ideologues, and timid politicians.

The State Aid experiment has failed our children, our teachers and our nation.

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