INVESTING IN AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE 2025

FOR EVERY CHILD
FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

The AEU acknowledges the Elders and Custodians, past and present, of our diverse Nations and Countries. They are the leaders, knowledge holders and the first educators of our Nations and Countries and we recognise the continuing connection to more than 65,000 years of teaching, learning and sharing. We pay respect to the lores, skies and waters of these Nations and will work together to ensure our future generations continue to look after Country. We genuinely commit to ensuring the voices, wisdom and knowledges of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are respectfully at the forefront of all decision making and all education workplaces are culturally safe and inclusive teaching and learning environments.

Meeting the need

Much has changed in the last two years since the release of our first report, *Investing in Australia's Future*.

Seven state and territory governments have signed a new national education agreement with the Albanese government.

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034, (BFSA) commits the governments to 10 years of guaranteed funding increases for public schools.

This investment of more than $20 billion presents a unique opportunity to build a stronger public education system that can better meet the needs of every child.

Over the last two years, the need for this additional funding has become more urgent.

The diversity and complexity of student needs has increased across the country. Schools are reporting far higher levels of student wellbeing, mental health and behavioural issues.

The teaching profession remains in crisis with unmanageable workloads, leading to high levels of stress, burnout and teacher shortages.

Achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations continue to widen.

The BFSA focuses improvement efforts in three priority areas: Equity and Excellence, Wellbeing for Learning and Engagement, and a Strong Sustainable Workforce.

To help achieve sustained progress in these areas the AEU has produced this updated version of *Investing in Australia's future*.

It is grounded in the evidence provided by our members working in 6700 public schools across Australia.

These are the views of the profession – the people in every school whose expertise and commitment are the primary reasons an underfunded public education system works as effectively as it does.

Acting on these recommendations will enable public schools to better meet the needs of every child and recruit and retain the teachers, specialists and education support staff that we need for the future.

Correna Haythorpe
Federal President
Australian Education Union

THE POWER OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public schools transform lives and open doors to a better future for every child, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.

They are, as former High Court Justice Michael Kirby said, the places where the future of the nation is chiefly written.

When governments invest in public schools we can do more than lift results, we can create a stronger, fairer and more prosperous Australia.

Investing in what works

FOR EVERY CHILD
FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Achieving excellence

- Establish a permanent small group or one-on-one tutoring program in every public school. Improve systemic support for teachers educating students with complex needs.
- Increase the number of trained education support staff in the classroom.
- Reduce primary classes from an average of 23 students to the OECD average of 21.
- Reduce out-of-field teaching in secondary schools.
- Increase the number of targeted intervention programs to assist students at risk of disengaging from school.
- Increase vocational education and structured workplace learning options as part of a more flexible pathways model.
- Ensure careers advice is available for every student by Year 9 and through to Year 12.

Every student succeeds

- Establish 150 full-service public schools in disadvantaged communities that include health and family services.
- Expand systemic support for teachers and principals to improve the education of students with higher needs.
- Increase the number of specialist teachers for students with disability.
- Increase the time teachers have to consult with students with disability and their family/carers, develop and implement individual education plans and make classroom adjustments.
- Increase allied health support in schools with high proportions of students with disability.
- Establish a curriculum guarantee to ensure that rural, regional and remote students can learn the same wide range of subjects as their peers in urban settings.
- Provide effective systemic support for regional, rural and remote schools to ensure that they are supported with frameworks for leadership, staffing, curriculum development, student wellbeing, early intervention, and teaching and learning.

Better support for Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children

- Increase the number of teachers, principals, specialist language teachers and education support personnel who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Enhance pathways for Aboriginal education support personnel and Torres Strait Islander education support personnel to transition into careers as teachers.
- Ensure that all Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities have access to public secondary schools in their community.
- Resource the provision of cultural competencies and responsive teaching practices for the teaching workforce and education support personnel.

Giving teachers time

- Increase the numbers of administration and support staff in schools to reduce teacher and principal workloads.
- Provide an additional two hours a week for teachers to plan lessons and collaborate with their colleagues.
- Establish a national early career guarantee that includes reduced teaching hours, classroom release time for mentors, an orientation program and structured networking opportunities for teachers in their first three years.

Improving wellbeing

- Expand the number of qualified school counsellors to a minimum ratio of 1:500 students in primary schools and 1:250 students in secondary schools.
- Boost school wellbeing teams with qualified social workers, nurses and Aboriginal health workers and Torres Strait Islander health workers.
- Provide greater system-wide support for the implementation of proven early intervention and wellbeing programs.

Building the future

- Establish 150 full-service schools.
- Create a permanent Commonwealth capital fund for public schools, indexed annually in line with rising costs and enrolments.
- Prioritise inclusive learning spaces and school facilities, including modified bathrooms and playgrounds that are accessible for all students with disability.
- Prioritise high-quality, state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities for all public schools, including science, technology, engineering, arts and maths (STEAM) centres.

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

Lifting results starts with lifting the investment in public schools.

Principals, teachers and support staff are doing an extraordinary job, but they are being asked to do too much with too little.

They are working in an environment where the community expectations of what schools can deliver are rising, along with the complexity and diversity of student needs.

In the AEU's 2025 State of Our Schools survey, 95% of principals and teachers said the complexity of needs in their school had increased in the last three years.[1]

The biggest contributors are student mental health and wellbeing issues, behavioural problems, the growing needs of students with disability and increased number of students with learning difficulties.

There has been a 50% increase in the number of students with disability in public schools since 2015. They now make up more than one in four students.[2]

The number of children who are fully on track with their development when they start school has fallen to just over half.[3]

The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of students in the classroom creates greater expectations and demands on teachers who need to cater to a widening range of needs.

But at the same time, the role and responsibilities of teachers outside the classroom have expanded rapidly, leaving them with unsustainable workloads.

> **Teaching is a complex, multifaceted task and even more so in a context of rapid societal change.**
>
> OECD Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity

Addressing rising student needs

Improving the capacity of teachers and schools to respond to the diverse needs of students requires greater systemic support for teachers and school leaders, and targeted support for students.

That starts with smaller class sizes and additional support staff.

Despite the rise in student needs, the average class size in public primary schools has not changed in a decade (23 students). It remains above the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average of 21 students. Only five countries and the UK have higher average public primary class sizes.[4]
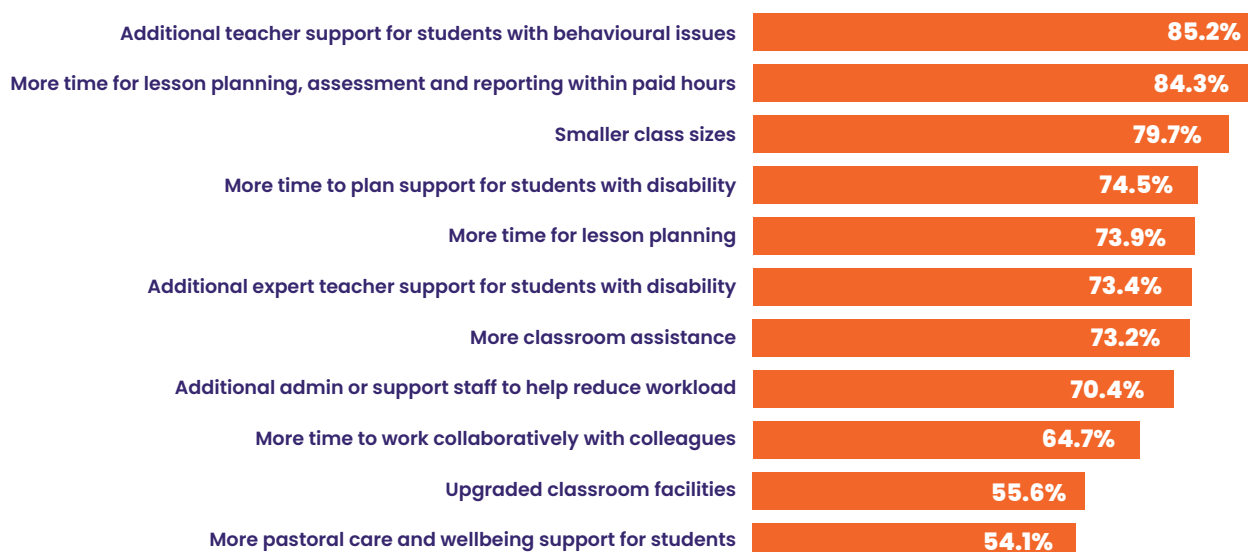
An Australian review of 112 studies conducted between 1979 and 2014 found that *"smaller class sizes in the first four years of school can have an important and lasting impact on student achievement, especially for children from culturally, linguistically and economically disenfranchised communities".*[5]

Analysis conducted as part of the OECD's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that education systems that reported lower student–teacher ratios showed higher maths scores, even after accounting for per capita GDP.[6]

The consistent message from the profession is that smaller class sizes allow for greater individual attention and support for students leading to higher engagement and fewer behavioural issues. When classes are smaller, teachers have more time to identify where students are in their learning and to tailor teaching, assessment and feedback to their individual needs.

International evidence also shows that the effective use of support staff in the classroom increases the individual attention and assistance students receive, allows teachers more time to teach and can improve student wellbeing and learning outcomes.[7]

How helpful would additional targeted funding for each of the following be for you as a teacher in improving student outcomes? *(% very helpful)*

Additional teacher support for students with behavioural issues	85.2%
More time for lesson planning, assessment and reporting within paid hours	84.3%
Smaller class sizes	79.7%
More time to plan support for students with disability	74.5%
More time for lesson planning	73.9%
Additional expert teacher support for students with disability	73.4%
More classroom assistance	73.2%
Additional admin or support staff to help reduce workload	70.4%
More time to work collaboratively with colleagues	64.7%
Upgraded classroom facilities	55.6%
More pastoral care and wellbeing support for students	54.1%

Source: AEU State of Our Schools Survey 2025
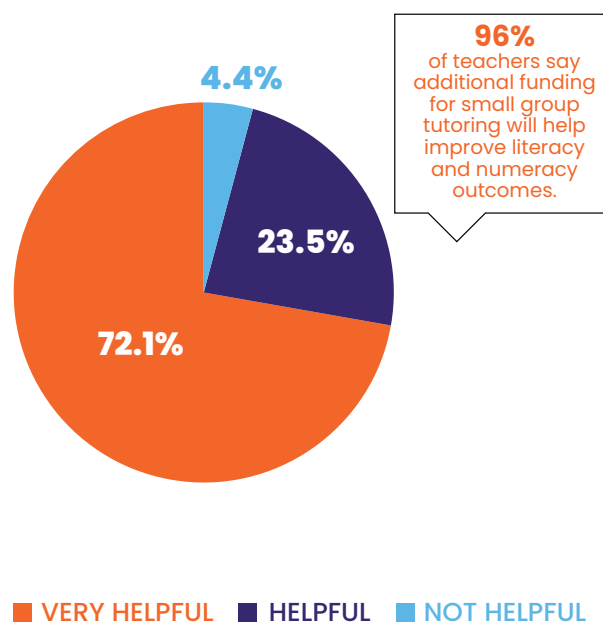
Small group tutoring

While teachers are skilled in the early identification of student needs via screening and assessments, the capacity of schools to respond to those needs must improve.

The benefits of small group and one-on-one intervention programs has been well established for students with learning difficulties and those who have fallen behind in literacy and numeracy. The Expert Panel that conducted a review of the school system in 2023 said every child who needed additional support to catch up should be able to access it.[8]

In the 2025 State of our Schools survey, 69% of teachers said small group or individual tutoring was available at their public school for children identified as needing additional support in literacy. Only 45% said similar intervention programs were available in numeracy.

However, only 14.5% of teachers said their school had the resources to assist every child who needed additional support in literacy and only 11% said there was adequate numeracy support.[9]

How helpful would additional targeted funding for small group tutoring for students with literacy and numeracy issues be in improving outcomes?

4.4%

23.5%

72.1%

96% of teachers say additional funding for small group tutoring will help improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

■ VERY HELPFUL ■ HELPFUL ■ NOT HELPFUL

Source: AEU State of Our Schools Survey 2025

Increasing year 12 completion rates

Success in education is closely correlated with positive outcomes in employment, earnings, physical and mental health, wellbeing and social mobility. Year 12 graduates earn $10,000 more per year than early school leavers and over $400,000 more in lifetime income.[10]

However, the proportion of Year 12 students who met the requirements of a senior secondary certificate or equivalent fell to 76.3% in 2022 – a return to 2020 levels.[11]

With nine out of 10 new jobs requiring post-school qualifications, a goal of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement is to lift the Year 12 completion rate by 7.5 percentage points by 2030. Achieving this would add an estimated $65 billion to the economy over the period to 2050.[12]

Getting more children to complete Year 12 requires a focus on foundational skills along with student attendance and engagement. Programs to assist students showing signs of disengagement need to be expanded.

Every student needs access to individual careers advice before senior secondary school.

A review found vocational education and training (VET) delivered to senior secondary students is *"of inconsistent quality, difficult to navigate and not well integrated into senior secondary studies".*[13]

Improving the quality and availability of VET and structured workplace learning options are essential components of a flexible model that avoids streaming students into academic or vocational pathways.

Children in rural and remote areas need access to a wider range of senior secondary academic subjects and VET programs to lift completion rates, which are significantly lower than in cities.[14]

The investments we need

- ☑ **Establish a permanent small group or one-on-one tutoring program in every public school.**

- ☑ **Increase the number of trained education support staff in the classroom.**

- ☑ **Reduce primary classes from an average of 23 students to the OECD average of 21.**

- ☑ **Ensure careers advice is available for every student by Year 9 and through to Year 12.**

- ☑ **Reduce out-of-field teaching in secondary schools.**

- ☑ **Increase the number of targeted intervention programs to assist students at risk of disengaging from school.**

- ☑ **Increase vocational education and structured workplace learning options as part of a more flexible pathways model.**

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS

Breaking the link between disadvantage and poor performance is the biggest challenge in Australian education.

The creation of a more equitable schooling system has been a primary goal of governments for more than two decades.

But the reality is the achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds and locations have only widened over that time.

The gaps are fuelled by the market-based nature of the education system and deep resource inequities created through the underfunding of public schools and the overfunding of private schools.

The Independent Expert Panel that conducted a review of the education system in 2023 was blunt: *"The equity gap in learning outcomes between cohorts of students is growing and inequality is entrenched".*

Australian schools, it said, *"have some of the highest levels of social segregation and this trend has worsened over time".*[15]

Although many children from rural and remote schools, as well as those who live in low socio-economic status areas, excel academically, the overall achievement gaps are vast.

Children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are six times more likely than advantaged students to be low performers in maths, four times more likely to be low performers in science and three times more likely to be low performers in reading.[16]

Year 9 students whose parents did not complete secondary school, on average, achieve lower literacy and numeracy scores than Year 5 students who have highly educated parents.[17]

Resource gaps drive the achievement gaps

The difference in the impact of teacher shortages between advantaged and disadvantaged schools is greater in Australia than in any other OECD nation, research shows.[18]

Rural, remote and disadvantaged-area schools also have a higher proportion of early career teachers, those working outside their area of expertise and greater shortages of instructional resources – such as textbooks and digital devices.

Australia is one of the few developed nations where class sizes in schools in low socio-economic areas are not smaller than those in schools in wealthy areas.[19]

The road to equity

Creating a more equitable school system can only be achieved with an increased investment in public schools.

Public schools educate 90% of students from low-socio educational advantage backgrounds, 82% of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students, 67% of students with disability and more than 80% of students from remote areas.[20]

The equity challenge must be addressed inside and outside the school gate.

"The most equitable education systems have adopted a whole-child approach by building closer collaborations between education, health and other public policy sectors to support students," explains the University of Melbourne's Professor of Educational Leadership, Pasi Sahlberg.[21]

That is why the full-service school model is so important. Under this integrated service model, schools provide more health and

> **National data and international comparative reviews show that educational inequality is perhaps the most significant threshold that separates us from the pack of leading education nations in the world today.**
>
> University of NSW Gonski Institute of Education Policy Brief

wellbeing services – such as nurses, speech therapists and counsellors – on site. They also help families navigate a wider service system that can be complex and fragmented.
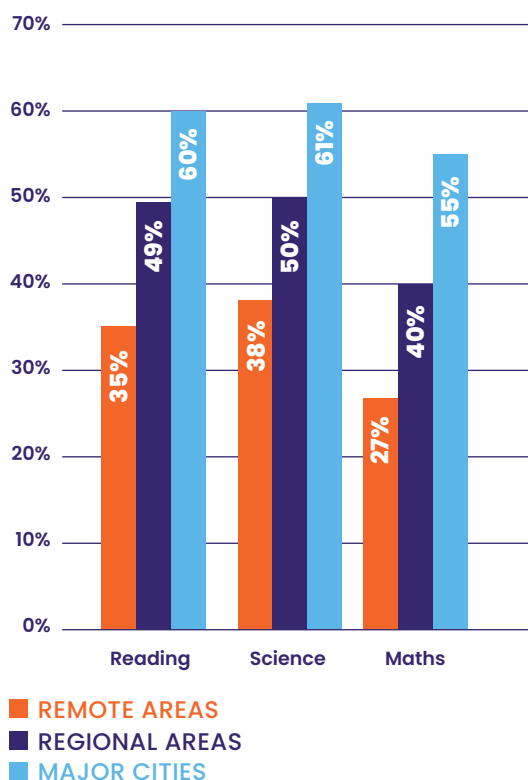
This approach helps students overcome barriers to learning. It also strengthens relationships with families and communities in a way that can build understanding of the value and importance of education and increase student attendance and engagement.

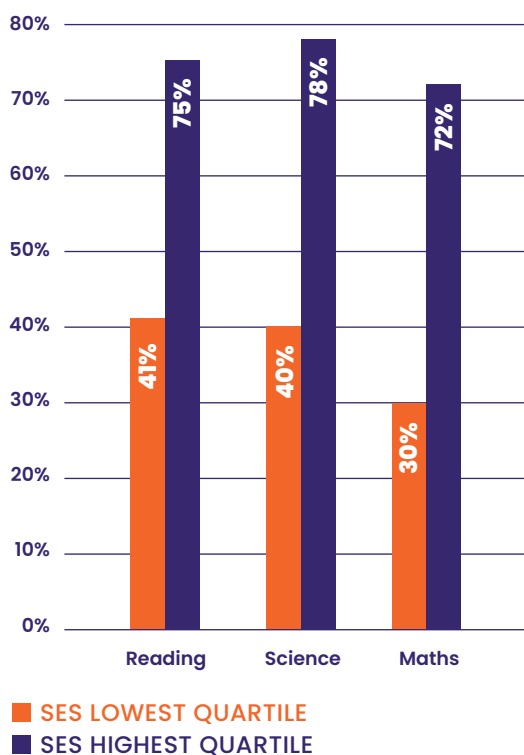### Difference in educational staff shortages between high and low SES schools
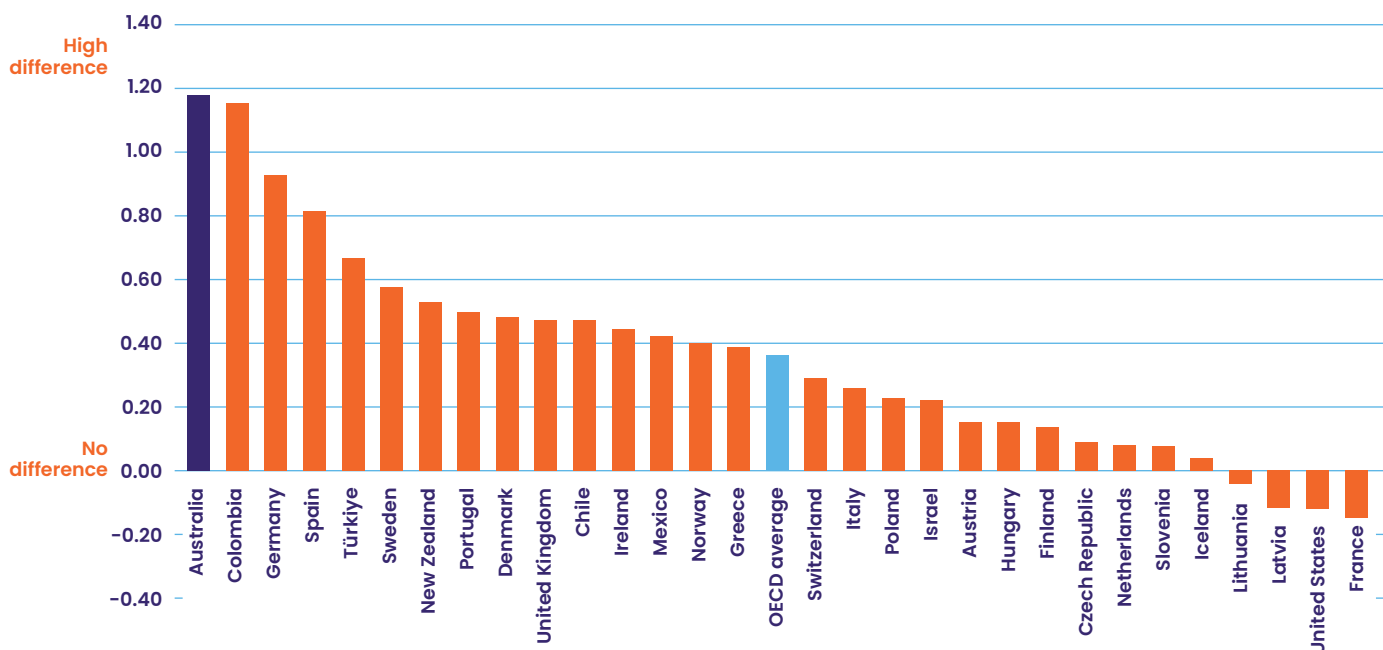
Source: OECD (2023) PISA 2022 Results Volume (II)Table II.B1.5.2 cited in Cobbold.

PISA 2022 % attaining the National Proficient Standard by geographical area

Reading — Remote Areas: 35%, Regional Areas: 49%, Major Cities: 60%

Science — Remote Areas: 38%, Regional Areas: 50%, Major Cities: 61%

Maths — Remote Areas: 27%, Regional Areas: 40%, Major Cities: 55%

- REMOTE AREAS
- REGIONAL AREAS
- MAJOR CITIES

PISA 2022 % attaining the National Proficient Standard by socio-economic status

Reading — SES Lowest Quartile: 41%, SES Highest Quartile: 75%

Science — SES Lowest Quartile: 40%, SES Highest Quartile: 78%

Maths — SES Lowest Quartile: 30%, SES Highest Quartile: 72%

- SES LOWEST QUARTILE
- SES HIGHEST QUARTILE

Source: De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Thomson, S. (2023). PISA 2022. Reporting Australia's results.
Volume I: Student performance and equity in education. Australian Council for Educational Research.

There are 150 public schools with high concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage that should be turned into full-service schools as part of a national partnership between state and territory governments and the Commonwealth.

Inside schools there needs to be concentrated support in the classroom, through smaller class sizes and additional support staff, along with additional time for teachers to develop and collaborate with their colleagues on differentiated instruction strategies.

Additional systemic support is necessary to assist teachers in addressing behavioural issues, the needs of students with disability and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Enhanced student welfare services and a wide range of extracurricular activities can help improve wellbeing, engagement and academic performance.
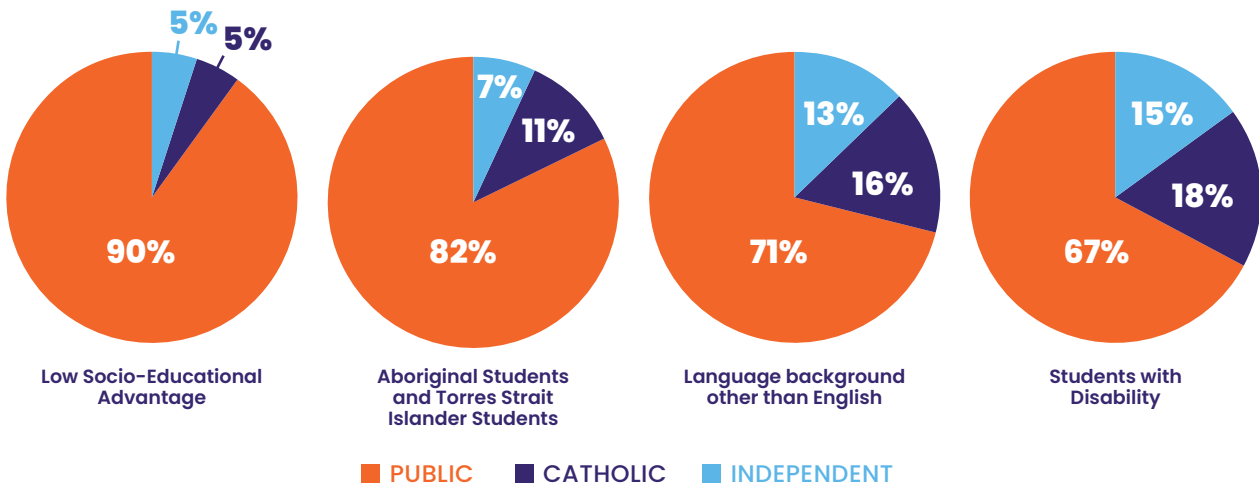
Helping students with disability succeed

Students with disability now make up more than one in four students in public schools – with the numbers increasing by 50% since 2015.[22] The vast majority are educated in mainstream schools as part of a commitment to an inclusive education system that caters to the needs of every child.

However, the legal framework, policies and practices in place to ensure students with disability can participate on an equal basis are yet to be matched by adequate levels of needs-based funding.

Every year for a decade, more than 80% of principals have reportedly moved funding from other areas to support students with disability because their dedicated funding is inadequate. The average amount per school in 2025 is almost $150,000 ($871 million nationally).

Percentage of students from priority cohorts by school sector 2024

Low Socio-Educational Advantage
- 90% Public
- 5% Independent
- 5% Catholic

Aboriginal Students and Torres Strait Islander Students
- 82% Public
- 7% Independent
- 11% Catholic

Language background other than English
- 71% Public
- 13% Independent
- 16% Catholic

Students with Disability
- 67% Public
- 15% Independent
- 18% Catholic

Legend: ■ PUBLIC ■ CATHOLIC ■ INDEPENDENT

Source: ACARA School Profile Dataset 2024

Case study
Full service

EXPANDING SUPPORTS for students and families is paying off for public schools in communities with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Challis Community Primary School in Perth offers health and education services from birth through a parenting and early learning centre located on the school's grounds. Staff build relationships with families and help address health and development issues before children begin school.

The school has a child health nurse and allied health staff onsite and a team that can help families access community health and social services. The approach is paying off and high proportions of children are starting preschool and school ready to learn.

Ashcroft Public School in Sydney's southwest has implemented an integrated service model, called Mirrung, in partnership with the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS).

Launched in August 2022, the emphasis is on a whole-of-family approach, with a dedicated team that coordinates support services and connects families with local health and social service organisations.

Mirrung has arranged the delivery of social support programs for small groups of students, allied health services including a psychologist, a speech therapist, and family counselling.

An impact report found the attendance rate increased by 23 percentage points between 2022 and 2024 and literacy and numeracy outcomes improved.[23]

The investments we need

✓ **Establish 150 full-service public schools in disadvantaged communities that include health and family services.**

✓ **Expand systemic support for teachers and principals to improve the education of students with higher needs.**

✓ **Increase the number of specialist teachers for students with disability.**

✓ **Increase the time teachers have to consult with students with disability and their family/carers, develop and implement individual education plans and make classroom adjustments.**

✓ **Increase allied health support in schools with high proportions of students with disability.**

✓ **Establish a curriculum guarantee to ensure that rural, regional and remote students can learn the same wide range of subjects as their peers in urban settings.**

✓ **Provide effective systemic support for regional, rural and remote schools to ensure that they are supported with frameworks for leadership, staffing, curriculum development, student wellbeing, early intervention, and teaching and learning.**

BETTER SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

Improving the education of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students starts with improving the investment in the schools that the vast majority of these students attend.

Public schools educate 82% of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students across the country.

Underfunding has made it harder for public schools to employ the staff and expand the programs and support they know make a real difference to their students. It also has limited access to the public schools that every child has a right to attend in their local community.

Positive change starts with an increase in the number of public schools in remote communities and by increasing the number of teachers and educators who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Aboriginal teachers and educators and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators are role models who can have a positive influence on inclusion and student wellbeing. They can strengthen cultural connections and a sense of identity and belonging for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

They can also help build trust and connection between schools, families and community leaders. This can lead to community-led and culturally responsive decision making to strengthen the attendance, engagement and achievements of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

Moving away from repetitive, short term funding cycles to flexible, ongoing resourcing would encourage an expansion of Aboriginal language programs and embed learning on Country as a transformative practice.

Increasing the support for students

Improved wellbeing support is essential for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students to address barriers to learning.

Community-based mentoring has been shown to develop resilience and lift school engagement and completion rates.

A greater investment in flexible, place-based learning pathways within secondary schools is also critical to increase Year 12 completion rates. These programs can support cultural identity and belonging and be developed with the support and involvement of Aboriginal community members and Torres Strait Islander community members.

More Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers

The number of Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers remains disproportionately low in schools.

Students who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander accounted for 6.2% of all students in 2021.[24] But in the same year Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers made up only 1.5% of the teaching workforce (1.8% of public school teachers and 1% of private school teachers).[25]

Just 1.3% of public school teachers in major cities are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander compared to 6.7% of teachers in remote and very remote regions.

Increasing the number of teachers and principals who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander must be a priority for all governments.

Australia had a comprehensive and effective teaching workforce strategy, called the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI), in place from 2011 to 2016.

Between 2012 and 2015 the number of Aboriginal teachers and Torres Strait Islander teachers increased by 16.5% due to recruitment efforts and increased recognition of cultural identity. The number in leadership roles in schools also increased.[26]

> **We know that education is the key to empowering young people to dream big and build great careers.**
>
> Former Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney

But the MATSITI strategy was discontinued by the former Coalition government. A comprehensive teaching workforce strategy that builds on the outcomes of MATSITI must be implemented as a priority.

As part of this strategy, enhanced and supported pathways should be created for Aboriginal education support personnel and Torres Strait Islander education support personnel to transition to careers as teachers.

Getting results

For too long there has been a deficit discourse around the education of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

But there are success stories in public schools and the broader education system that can be built on.

The target of having 95% of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in early childhood education in the year before school by 2025 is on track to be met. In 2024, the proportion was 94.2% - an increase of 32.9 percentage points since 2016.[27]

The proportion of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20–24 with a Year 12 certificate or equivalent was 68.1% in 2021. This has increased from 51.8% in 2011.[28]

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, struck between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments this year, includes a target of lifting that proportion to the Closing the Gap target of 96% by 2031.

The Year 7/8 to 12 retention rate for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students increased to 56.7% in 2024 but remains lower than the 59.4% figure in 2014.[29]

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples must be empowered to achieve their full learning potential, shape their own futures, and embrace their cultures, languages and identities as Australia's First Nations peoples.

Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019

MOUNT STROMLO HIGH SCHOOL

Case study

Mt Stromlo High

THE INDIGENOUS flora recently planted at Mt Stromlo High School are a visible manifestation of a cultural shift happening within the school.

The ACT school has a well-established Buunji class, which is part of an evolving partnership between the school, Aboriginal families and Torres Strait Islander families, community members and local Elders to provide an integrated learning program for Year 7 to 10 Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

This year the school started a new First Nations Future class, which is open to all Year 9 and 10 students, and is helping to foster a greater recognition, understanding and valuing of Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture.
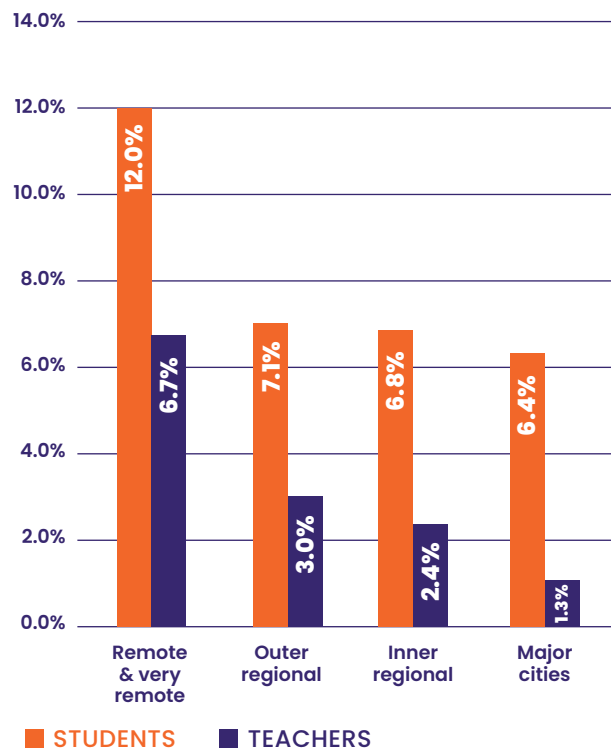
Deputy principal Greg Stirling says the student response to the new elective is overwhelming. The focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and artifacts, flora, culture and Acknowledgement of Country is building pride, cultural connections and enabling Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students to share their own stories.

"Our First Nations kids are just feeling on top of the world because their culture is front and centre and other kids are taking an interest in it," he says.

The school's Indigenous education officer, Brent Lamb, is the driving force behind the Buunji and First Nations Futures classes. Local Elders attend lessons and run an art program for all students.

First Nations Futures is also designed to provide additional leadership opportunities for Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students.

% of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers in public schools by location.

Location	STUDENTS	TEACHERS
Remote & very remote	12.0%	6.7%
Outer regional	7.1%	3.0%
Inner regional	6.8%	2.4%
Major cities	6.4%	1.3%

Source: Preston, The Australian School Teaching Workforce, 2023 p. 51 and ACARA School Profile Dataset

In Term 4, the class will look at curriculum documents from other faculties in the school and ensure all the learning outcomes have Aboriginal culture and issues and Torres Strait Islander culture and issues reflected in them.

Stirling says the school is looking at running the class over both semesters next year with a possible expansion of the time spent on Country. "This is still in its infancy. We will be listening to the kids and what they are interested in," he says.

The investments we need

✅ **Increase the number of teachers, principals, specialist language teachers and education support personnel who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.**

✅ **Enhance pathways for Aboriginal education support personnel and Torres Strait Islander education support personnel to transition to careers as teachers.**

✅ **Ensure that all Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities have access to public secondary schools in their community.**

✅ **Resource the provision of cultural competencies and responsive teaching practices for the teaching workforce and education support personnel.**

GIVING TEACHERS TIME

By any measure, Australia has a teacher workforce crisis.

Three quarters of public school principals report shortages of teachers in 2025. Four out of 10 had vacant teaching positions to start the school year.[30]

Only one in five teachers are committed to staying in the profession until retirement.

The primary reason teachers are leaving, and schools are struggling to replace them, is unmanageable workloads.

The rapid rise in student complexity has increased the workload of teachers, creating the need for additional lesson planning and assessments, individual education plans and increased documentation and reporting.

At the same time their role and responsibilities have expanded, including a huge increase in administration, compliance and data entry work, constant policy and curriculum changes, the introduction of new technologies and AI, higher community expectations about what schools can deliver, and increased communication with parents and students outside school hours.

Teacher shortages and the chronic underfunding of schools are also increasing workloads. More than 80% of public school teachers said they had been required to teach merged classes in the last year.[31]

Recent reviews of the teaching profession suggest, despite the efforts of school systems and approved authorities, teachers feel overworked and have an unsustainable work/life balance, complex workloads, high levels of stress, and a heavy administrative load

The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

The increased demands and excessive working hours are having a debilitating effect on the mental health of teachers and principals.

University of NSW research found 90% of teachers were experiencing moderate to extremely serious levels of stress. Teachers are experiencing mental health issues at three times the national norm. Almost 70% described their workload as largely or completely unmanageable.[32]

New research also shows more than half of all teachers feel some level of burnout.[33]

Cutting workloads to give teachers time

Reducing teacher workloads starts with reducing their administration and compliance responsibilities.
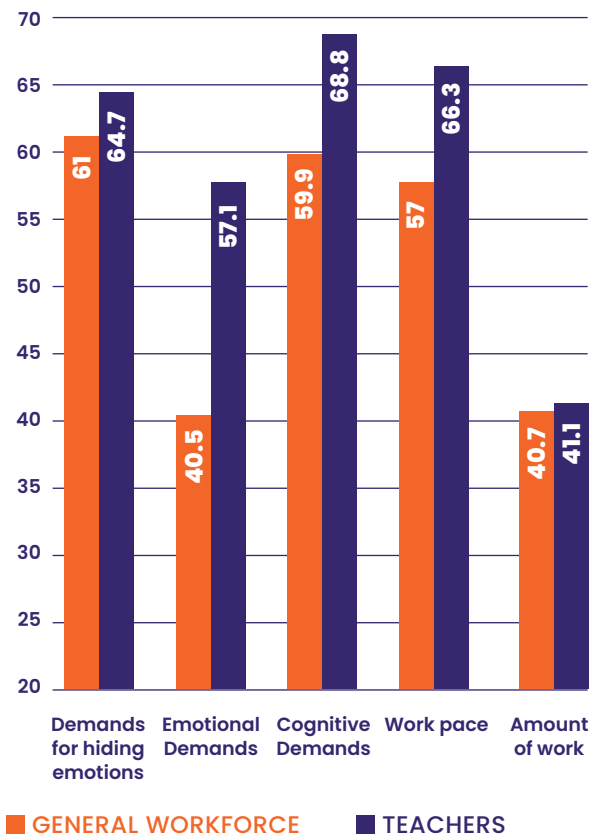
An independent review of administration and compliance activities in Victorian public schools found the administration and compliance workloads of teachers were unsustainable and taking up time *"that would otherwise be used for work more directly related to improving student learning and wellbeing of students".*[34]

A new report shows secondary teachers spent an average of 4.7 hours a week on general administrative work in 2024, well above the OECD average of three hours. Having too much administration work to do was the number one source of stress for Australian teachers.[35]

Australian research shows senior leaders in primary and secondary schools spent between 17 and 20 hours a week on administrative work, leadership tasks and in meetings in 2023 – around double the time they spent as instructional leaders.[36]
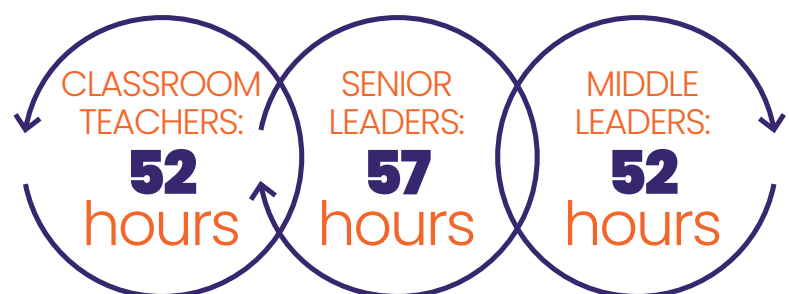
Cutting administrative workloads would have immense benefits for principals, teachers and their students. It would allow weekly working hours to be reduced while still giving teachers more time for lesson planning, assessment and the development of differentiated instruction strategies to better meet the needs of each child in their class.

Teachers report significantly higher demands than the general workforce (0–100 scale)

Category	General Workforce	Teachers
Demands for hiding emotions	61	64.7
Emotional Demands	40.5	57.1
Cognitive Demands	59.9	68.8
Work pace	57	66.3
Amount of work	40.7	41.1

■ GENERAL WORKFORCE ■ TEACHERS

Source: Arnold & Rahimi, The Australian Teacher Work, Health and Wellbeing Report: An Analysis of Teachers' Psychosocial Work Environments and Wellbeing in Government Schools, 2025

Average hours worked per week in 2023

CLASSROOM TEACHERS: 52 hours

SENIOR LEADERS: 57 hours

MIDDLE LEADERS: 52 hours

Source: AITSL Australian Teacher Workforce Data Dashboard

FOR EVERY CHILD
FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A NSW program to cut teacher workloads by employing additional administrative staff has been a resounding success (see case study). An interim report concluded that *"the addition of extra support staff in schools is an effective way to reduce administrative workloads for teachers to allow more time to focus on teaching and preparing quality lessons".*[37]

A national early career guarantee

The nationwide challenge to recruit and retain teachers underscores the need to provide early career teachers with the guidance and structured support they need to succeed.

This is especially the case with the complexity and diversity of student needs that public school teachers face when they enter the profession – instruction and classroom management challenges many feel their university course did not adequately prepare them for.

But the AEU's State of Our Schools survey has consistently found the support of early career teachers is inconsistent and, in many cases, inadequate.
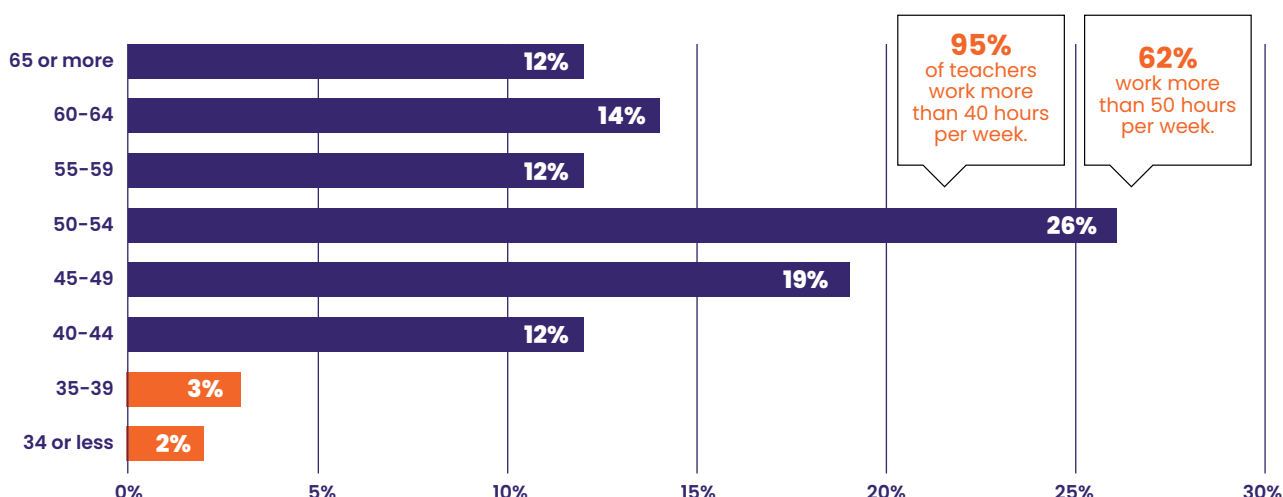
In 2023, over a third of teachers in their first three years in the profession reported they did not have a designated mentor. For those with a mentor, it is their guidance and support they view as the most valuable assistance they receive.

Almost 40% reported they did not have an orientation or induction program and half said they did not have the reduced face-to-face teaching workload that would give them more time to prepare lessons and collaborate with colleagues.

The inadequacy of this support, combined with unmanageable workloads and a lack of permanent employment, is contributing to high attrition rates. An independent review in 2023 reported that one in five teachers are leaving the profession within the first three years.[38]

All governments need to commit to a national early career guarantee that sets out the entitlements for teachers in the areas of induction, mentoring, classroom release time, professional development and networking.

Average weekly working hours during school term for full-time classroom teachers

Hours	Percentage
65 or more	12%
60–64	14%
55–59	12%
50–54	26%
45–49	19%
40–44	12%
35–39	3%
34 or less	2%

95% of teachers work more than 40 hours per week.

62% work more than 50 hours per week.

Source: AITSL Australian Teacher Workforce Data Dashboard

Case study

Cutting workloads

USING ADMINISTRATIVE staff to cut teacher workloads is getting results in NSW.

The program, which started in 2023, allows schools to employ additional temporary school administrative and support staff. In the first two years, 419 schools were funded to employ 621 full-time equivalent staff.

Some schools used their staff member as a teacher admin assistant, providing dedicated administrative support to specific classrooms and their teachers. The work includes preparing lesson resources and data entry, easing the workload of teachers.

In other cases, administrative staff took responsibility for excursion and event management, following up on absent students, coordinating parent payments and student medical/dietary information, booking buses, maintaining health and safety registers, constructing timetables for therapists, scanning documents, photocopying and laminating resources.

In a January 2024 evaluation report, over 80% of principals and teachers said the administrative staff had somewhat or significantly improved their workload. The average reduction in their administrative workload was 3.4 hours per week for teachers and 6.9 hours a week for principals.

91% of teachers surveyed said the additional administration staff member enabled them to spend one hour or more per week on teaching and learning activities. Two thirds of principals and teachers agreed that the program decreased their feeling of burnout.[39]

The NSW government has not yet agreed to make the additional administration positions permanent or extend the program to all public schools.

Top 5 reasons for intending to leave the profession

Reason	Percentage
Workload	75%
Work/life balance	69%
Stress/mental health/wellbeing	68%
Admin workload	63%
Insufficient pay	52%
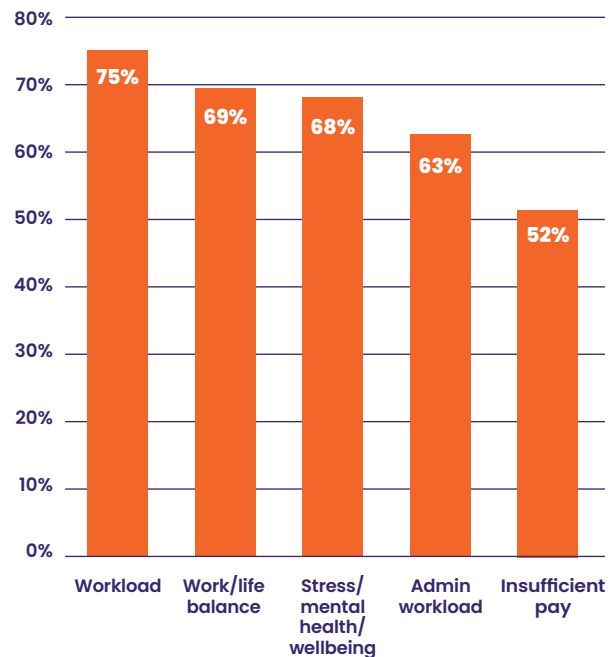
Source: AITSL Australian Teacher Workforce Data Dashboard

> **The time spent on work tasks unrelated to teaching practice undermines teachers' ability to improve student outcomes and meet students' learning needs.**
>
> NSW Department of Education

The investments we need:

✓ **Increase the numbers of administration and support staff in schools to reduce teacher and principal workloads.**

✓ **Provide an additional two hours a week for teachers to plan lessons and collaborate with their colleagues.**

✓ **Establish a national early career guarantee that includes reduced teaching hours, classroom release time for mentors,** an orientation program and structured networking opportunities for teachers in their first three years.

IMPROVING WELLBEING

Student wellbeing is a central focus for public schools today.

Higher levels of wellbeing and mental health are linked to increased school engagement, attendance and academic achievement.

Schools are also dealing with rapid increases in the prevalence of mental health issues and psychological distress.

In the 2025 State of Our Schools survey, principals said rising wellbeing and mental health issues were the number one reason for the increase in the complexity of student needs at their school.

This is the case in primary and secondary schools, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the area where the school is located.

Poor mental health can have a profound impact on academic outcomes with research showing that by Year 9, students experiencing poor mental health can be on average 1.5 to 2.8 years behind their peers in literacy and numeracy.[40]

> **There is a strong international evidence base to support the assertion that whole-school approaches to promoting wellbeing can have an effect on academic attainment.**
>
> Wellbeing Impact Study, University of Oxford

Principals and teachers understand the need for a structured approach to improving wellbeing that includes whole-school prevention strategies, targeted interventions for students identified as being at risk and intensive one-on-one support for those with mental health issues.

But they report inadequate resources and support in each of those three critical areas, as well as difficulties for families accessing external mental health services.

Too often schools are left with the responsibility of navigating through a maze of wellbeing policies and programs without the support, time and resources to select and implement the most effective ones.

Education departments need to play a greater role in assisting schools with the implementation of evidence-based wellbeing programs and the provision of wellbeing staff and school counsellors.

School counselling support

Teachers understand that supporting student wellbeing is part of their role. But they can't do it alone.

In a survey conducted for the Independent Expert Panel investigating schooling in 2023, two thirds of educators nominated additional school counsellors, psychologists or mental health support officers as the top investment governments should make to improve the health and wellbeing of students.[41]

The need for additional counsellors or school psychologists reflects the inadequate numbers currently working in the public school system.

In the 2025 State of Our Schools survey, only 23% of principals said the level of counselling support at their school was adequate. There was a significant difference between the adequacy of support in primary (15.3%) and secondary schools (37.6%).

The lack of counsellors is leading to unacceptable waiting times. Almost four out of 10 students wait more than four weeks to see a counsellor.

Counsellors report crippling workloads, high rates of burnout and a need to prioritise the students they assist based on the risk of self-harm, rather than the emergence of mental health or wellbeing issues.

Principals also report that the caseloads of counsellors leave them unavailable to assist in the selection and implementation of whole-school wellbeing programs.
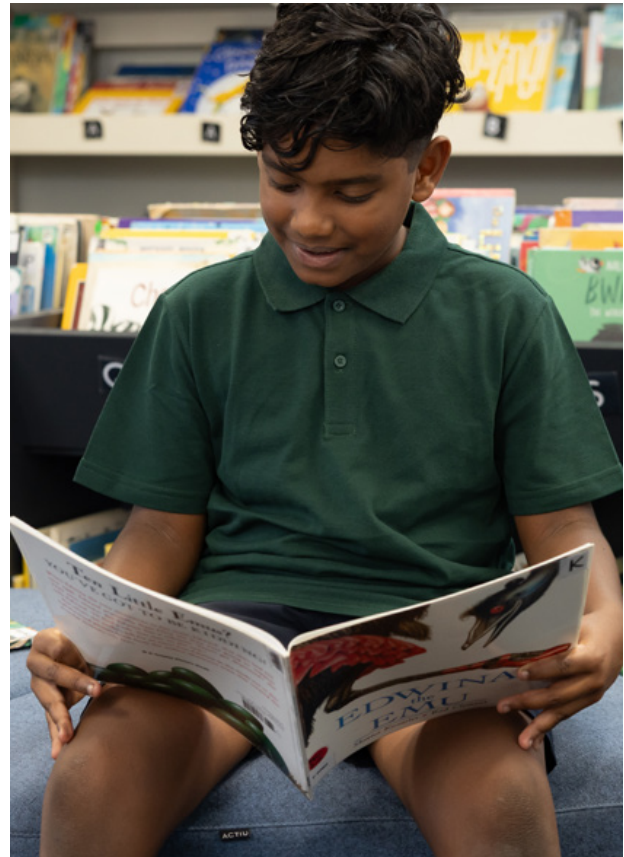
> ## We know that mental health challenges often begin during childhood and if left unattended they can lead to poor outcomes in adulthood.
>
> National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

What is student wellbeing?

Student wellbeing refers to the holistic state in which students feel safe, supported and able to thrive – emotionally, socially, physically and academically – within their school.

It's not only about mental health, but also about fostering resilience, inclusion and a sense of belonging.

> **Among children aged 8 to 13 years, one in six have symptoms of anxiety and one in four have symptoms of depression.**
>
> Source: Royal Children's Hospital National Child Health Poll

Case study

Broome Senior High School

A GROWING INVESTMENT in student wellbeing is an essential part of the success at Broome Senior High School.

"We get a lot of students who just aren't school ready anymore," explains the principal Mathew Burt.

"We are picking kids up, we are feeding kids, we are clothing kids. Providing all sorts of emotional supports and connections with agencies outside of school, psych services and health services."
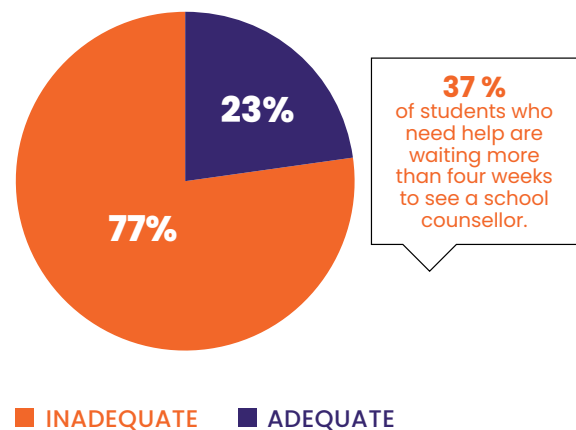
In a school community facing high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, the support includes two school psychologists, three student services coordinators and a school-based attendance officer.

With 40% of the 797 students either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, there are six Aboriginal education officers, an Aboriginal support officer and an Elder in residence/Cultural advisor (shared with Broome Cluster schools).

The school also has five mentors from the Stars Foundation for female Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students and five from the Clontarf Academy for male Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students. It maintains close links with families and the local community, running programs during school holidays and checking in with families.

Burt says the level of support provided would be even greater if the school had the funding. The caseloads of the psychologists limits their capacity to get involved in the expansion of whole-school wellbeing support, which is an essential part of building resilience among the students and creating a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Student services is also the area with the highest turnover of staff, as a result of the challenge of working with students with highly complex needs, including those who have experienced trauma.

Burt says the big investment is paying off in higher student attendance and engagement. "We would have so much more disengagement from school if we weren't providing the supports for students," he says.

Do you believe the level of counsellor support you currently have at your school is adequate?

23%

77%

37 % of students who need help are waiting more than four weeks to see a school counsellor.

■ **INADEQUATE**　■ **ADEQUATE**

Source: AEU State of Our Schools Survey 2025

The investments we need

✔ **Expand the number of qualified school counsellors to a minimum ratio of 1:500 students in primary schools** and 1:250 students in secondary schools.

✔ **Boost school wellbeing teams with qualified social** workers, nurses and Aboriginal health workers and Torres Strait Islander health workers.

✔ **Provide greater system-wide support for the implementation of proven early intervention and wellbeing programs.**

BUILDING THE FUTURE

High-quality public schools are important for student success. The quality of school buildings can influence the attendance and behaviour of students and what they achieve.[42]

They can also have an impact on the capacity of a school to attract and retain teachers, and their effectiveness in the classroom.

Twenty-first century learning, with the focus on meeting the diverse needs of students and equipping them all with the knowledge and skills to be successful, requires safe, high-quality teaching and learning environments.

That means the capacity to offer a full curriculum, to meet the diverse needs of a growing number of students with disability and provide intensive support to children who need it.

With schools doing far more to support student wellbeing, dedicated spaces are needed for counselling and therapy.

In secondary schools, educators need the space and facilities to prepare every child for further education, training or the workforce.

School buildings need to be accessible and energy efficient with good ventilation, acoustics and light. The capacity to fully use technology is also critical.

> **The capacity to innovate and to meet the changing needs and complexity of learners is often limited by a lack of physical and technological infrastructure, or a lack of resources to adapt existing physical and technological infrastructure.**
>
> **South Australian government**

Well-equipped libraries, halls, gyms and performing arts spaces help increase parent and community engagement. They allow schools to stage productions, run a full range of extracurricular activities and host community events and cultural showcases.

There also needs to be an investment in 150 full-service schools in communities with the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Existing schools should be modified and new ones purpose-built with the facilities to provide a wider array of health, early-childhood and family supports.

Meeting the demand

The good news is that almost 40% of principals told the 2025 State of Our Schools survey that there had been recent capital works at their school, which had a positive impact on student learning.

The upgrades making a difference are as basic as air conditioning, a sensory garden or a dedicated space for Year 12 students.

Principals also report bigger investments such as new classrooms blocks with breakout and withdrawal spaces, upgraded gyms, new buildings for science, technology, engineering and maths teaching, and new performing arts centres.

But there is far more that needs to be done.

Too many public schools are relying on demountable classrooms as long-term solutions to rising student numbers and increased services.
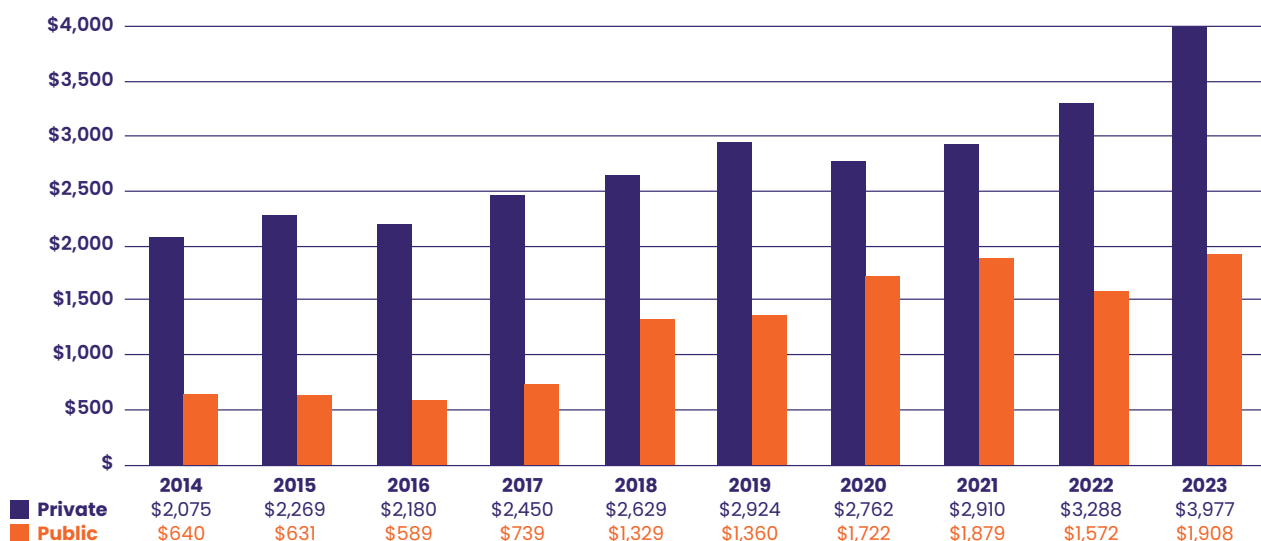
Educational infrastructure is an important determinant of student outcomes.

Commonwealth Department of Education

Almost 40% of principals said they didn't have enough permanent classrooms to cater for an expected increase in students over the next three to five years. The average number of additional classrooms they require is 5.5 – up from 4.6 in 2024.

More than 60% of principals said they lacked adequate purpose-built or modified learning spaces to meet the needs of students with disability. Over half said they lacked adequate spaces for small group tutoring or dedicated areas for student counselling and therapy.

Total Capital Expenditure Per Student 2014–2023

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Private	$2,075	$2,269	$2,180	$2,450	$2,629	$2,924	$2,762	$2,910	$3,288	$3,977
Public	$640	$631	$589	$739	$1,329	$1,360	$1,722	$1,879	$1,572	$1,908

Source: ACARA School Finance Dataset

A modern learning environment at Adelaide Botanic High School.

The federal government needs to step up

There is a growing divide in the amount of money being spent on classrooms and facilities in public schools compared to private schools.

An AEU analysis of My School data shows that over the decade from 2012 to 2021 capital investment in public schools averaged $1110 per student per year. In private schools the average spent was more than double at $2401 per student per year.[43]

The federal government has an important role to play in addressing this inequity.

Prior to 2017, capital funding was provided for public schools by the federal government as part of grants to state and territory governments.

The Turnbull government put an end to that capital funding for public schools in 2017. It was restored by the Albanese government, but only for a single year.

That $216 million investment in 2023/24 was welcomed, but it was a fraction of the $1.9 billion private schools received over a decade from the federal government.[44]

One elite private school spent more on capital works in 2021 than the governments of Tasmania and the NT spent on all their public schools.[45]

Department of education figures show that private schools will get $1 billion in additional capital funding from the federal government over the next four years.[46]

Unless things change, public schools will get nothing.

Case study
Vertical school

ADELAIDE BOTANIC High School is South Australia's first vertical secondary school. The building's purpose-built design has shifted learning from something contained, to something dynamic and connected.

The school has dedicated wellbeing spaces that many students use. In these spaces, students are supported by either a youth worker or wellbeing leader.

"Our spaces are designed to support the diverse needs of all students, including those who are neurodivergent," Principal Sarah Chambers says.

"The design includes smaller retreat areas where students and staff can step away from the main learning environment when it becomes overwhelming, while still feeling connected to others. These spaces provide much-needed regulation spaces for all students, particularly in a vertical single-building school."

The school's specialist labs, creative studios, open collaboration zones and quiet nooks all support different ways of thinking, while integrated technology ensures innovation is part of everyday learning.

"For students, this means that learning feels more like real life, fluid, interactive and relevant, preparing them for the world beyond school," says Chambers.

How adequate are your school buildings for small group tutoring?

54% INADEQUATE 46% ADEQUATE
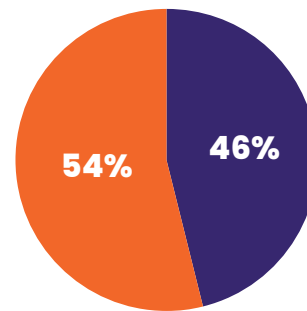
- INADEQUATE
- ADEQUATE

Do you believe you will have enough permanent classrooms to meet enrolment demands over the next 3-5 years?
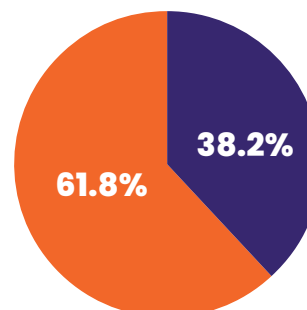
61.8% YES 38.2% NO

5.5 additional classrooms needed on average.

- YES
- NO

Source: AEU State of Our Schools Survey 2025

The investments we need

✅ **Create a permanent Commonwealth capital fund for public schools indexed annually in line with rising costs and enrolments.**

✅ **Prioritise inclusive learning spaces and school facilities, including modified bathrooms and playgrounds, that are accessible for all students with disability.**

✅ **Prioritise high-quality, state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities for all public schools, including science, technology, engineering, arts and maths (STEAM) centres.**

✅ **Establish 150 full-service public schools.**

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