

19 December 2025

Committee Secretary  
Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee  
By Email: [lsic.council@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:lsic.council@parliament.vic.gov.au)

## **YACVic Submission: Inquiry into Public School Funding**

Dear Committee Members,

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Inquiry into Public School Funding. Namely, the impacts of the Victorian Government's decision to delay raising Victoria's school funding to 75 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) until 2031, effectively cutting \$2.4 billion from what was previously committed to public schools.

As the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people and the youth sector in Victoria, we believe all young people deserve the opportunity to lead a well-supported and fulfilling life, underpinned by equitable access to quality education. This submission focuses on the significant impacts this cut has on current and future students, and on Victoria's teaching and school workforce.

**We ask that the Committee recommends that the Victorian Parliament urgently fully fund public schools to meet the SRS.**

The SRS is not an aspirational standard of school funding. It was designed as the minimum funding required so that schools can have at least 80% of their students achieving learning outcomes above the national minimum standards in NAPLAN reading and numeracy.<sup>1</sup> It is the minimum required per student to give every child, regardless of their background, the opportunity to access quality education and achieve their potential.<sup>1</sup>

### **Impact on students**

The decision to chronically underfund and under resource public schools disproportionately impacts students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, rural and regional students, disabled students, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds – who are largely educated by public schools.<sup>2</sup> Full funding to close the resources gap is critical to closing the widening achievement gaps between children from different backgrounds and localities.<sup>3</sup>

School is not just about academic learning and cognitive engagement, but also about support, emotional and behavioural management, and social connectedness. During periods of COVID-19 and remote learning, students' emotional and behavioural scaffolding by schools was limited.<sup>4</sup> In the Australian Education Union's (AEU) 2025 State of Our Schools survey, 95% of principals and teachers reported that the complexity of needs in their school has increased in the



last three years.<sup>5</sup> This includes a significant increase in the number of students with wellbeing issues and poor mental health, behavioural issues, and growing needs of disabled students.<sup>3</sup> The number of children who are fully on track with their development when they start school has fallen to just over half.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, since 2021, school attendance in Victoria has dropped by nearly 4%.<sup>2</sup> Student wellbeing has a direct impact on their school engagement and the results they achieve, making well-resourced schools critical to the long term success of young people.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the responsibilities and role of teachers has expanded rapidly, leaving them overworked and unable to navigate student wellbeing and increasingly complex behavioural needs.<sup>3</sup> Teachers report a lack of available support for students identified as at risk of poor mental health or disengagement from school, and limited ability to cater to students' diverse functional needs.<sup>5</sup> The average class size in Australian schools remains above the OECD average, making it difficult to provide individual attention and tailored support for students.<sup>7</sup>

There are shortages of school counsellors or other wellbeing staff, particularly in rural and remote areas.<sup>3,5</sup> Further, counsellors report unmanageable workloads, long waiting lists, and a need to prioritise support based on the risk of harm rather than early intervention when concerns are first raised<sup>3</sup>. In the State of Our Schools survey, 91% of teachers and principals reported that additional targeted funding for more wellbeing support would improve student outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

Children facing educational barriers without access to appropriate resources and support are more likely to experience unemployment,<sup>8</sup> enter the criminal justice system,<sup>9</sup> and experience poor physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Education is a critical protective factor to lift young people out of poverty, and positive attitudes towards and experience of schooling are strong predictors of success in higher education and employment.<sup>8</sup>

Creating a more equitable schooling system can only be achieved through fully resourcing public schools. Without this, schools, teachers, and other staff will continue to struggle to provide the tailored support young people need and deserve to remain engaged and to excel in education environments.

### **Teaching and School Workforce**

The ongoing failure of the Victorian government to provide adequate funding has had devastating impacts on the teaching profession – growing unsustainable workloads and creating a chronic workforce shortage. In the State of Our Schools survey, 73% of principals in Victoria reported experiencing a teacher shortage this year,<sup>3</sup> and multiple studies have consistently shown that teachers are working in excess of 50 hours per week.<sup>3</sup>

Unsustainable workloads and unequal distribution of resources impact the health and wellbeing of teachers, leading to skilled teachers leaving the profession or moving to the private sector – contributing to a worsening teaching crisis.<sup>5</sup>



Teachers require time to collaborate, plan, and to prepare high-quality teaching. Unless schools are fully resourced to reduce workloads, it will remain difficult to attract graduates to a profession where they are underpaid and overworked.<sup>3</sup>

The community expectations of what schools can deliver are also rising, along with the diversity and complexity of student needs. Schools are increasingly evolving into a place beyond formal education, but also where many young people access food, and health and wellbeing support on site.<sup>3</sup>

Quality teaching and learning relies on a mix of staffing and whole-of-school approach, including teachers, educational support staff, and specialist support to cater for diverse student needs.<sup>3</sup> Teachers and other school staff work hard to accommodate complex student needs especially for those who experience compounded disadvantage and require extra support at school. But they do this work by stretching the inadequate resources that they have to deliver teaching and learning programs.

At the same time, the Victorian government has recently defunded School Focused Youth Services (SFYS), providing targeted and tailored interventions that support young people to remain engaged in education. The program catches young people before they require more intensive and costly interventions. It also builds the capacity of teachers and staff to support young people. While YACVic understands that this service is intended to be replaced by the Mental Health Menu, it is unclear how this will roll-out, and we are hearing that schools are using the Menu funding to employ Casual Relief Teachers to circumvent the teaching shortage. In addition to fully funding public schools, we recommend the use of the Menu be audited to ensure it is being used in the best interests of student mental health and wellbeing. Our strong recommendation is for the SFYS funding to be reinstated however in the absence of this, we recommend work is done to ensure the Menu contains options for schools to access the life changing support provided by youth workers which was previously available through the SFYS.

Full funding will allow public schools to employ specialist support and to deliver the assistance many young people with additional needs require to fully engage in education and reach their potential.

### **Future impacts**

Achieving a better and fairer education system in Victoria is not a matter of aspiration, it is an imperative with significant implications for social equity, population health, and economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup>

Strengthening the social and emotional skills of young people, alongside academic skills, generates better outcomes in schools, employment outcomes and workforce participation, and life. Strong investment leads to strong economic returns, especially for young people facing disadvantages. Economic modelling reveals that investment in education to improve the social and emotional skills



across students could generate at least \$22 billion in long-term value through enhances learnings, mental health, productivity, and workforce participation.<sup>12</sup>

We have been heartened to hear the strong commitment the Victorian Government has made to the importance of education, including Premier Jacinta Allan's previous comments that "*Education is everything - it's how we keep kids on track and out of harm's way*" and "*We're making sure that every child - no matter where they live - can rely on a great public education.*"

We support the Victorian Government's mission of ensuring every student has access to a quality education, but this reality can only be achieved through fully funding public schools to meet the SRS.

A key part of YACVic's work is elevating the voices of young people to government and ensuring our advice is based on meaningful youth participation. Young people have a right to participate in decision-making that affects them. As such, we would welcome the opportunity to give evidence at any future hearings as part of this inquiry, including representation from young people directly impacted by these decisions.

For further questions or detail about this submission I can be contacted at [MNega@YACVic.org.au](mailto:MNega@YACVic.org.au).

Yours sincerely,



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CEO YACVic



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