

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the Better Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024

Senate Education and Employment
Committee

23rd October 2024

About ACOSS

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national voice in support of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality and the peak body for the community services and civil society sector.

ACOSS consists of a network of approximately 4000 organisations and individuals across Australia in metro, regional and remote areas.

Our vision is an end to poverty in all its forms; economies that are fair, sustainable and resilient; and communities that are just, peaceful and inclusive.

Summary

ACOSS strongly recommends that the Commonwealth fully meets its responsibility to fund public schools in Australia.

The Commonwealth should set a floor of no less than 25% of the Schooling Resourcing Standard ("SRS") to ensure that every child has access to the high-quality education to which they are entitled.

Discussion

ACOSS urges the Commonwealth Government to put an end to underfunding of public education in Australia.

The proposed Australian Government's 10-year National Schools Funding Agreement would resign public school students to a decade of disadvantage as it fails to deliver on the necessary floor funding 25% of the SRS.

Public schools educate:

- two-thirds of all Australian students
- 80% of children from families of low socio-economic advantage
- more than 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children
- more than two thirds of children with disability and
- more than 67% of students whose families speak a language other than English at home.

If the Commonwealth Government fails to fully fund the 25% of the SRS, it is leaving these children in public schools behind.

If the Federal Government requires States to sign up to a ten-year deal that doesn't fund the 25% of the SRS, it will continue to grow the opportunity gap for the children who are the most disadvantaged in our communities, place more pressure on teachers and undermine the well-being of Australia's young people, communities and economy.

Despite all of the evidence demonstrating that long-term outcomes for children, communities and the economy improve when students do well at school, the Government's ten-year under-funding deal has no power to guarantee that additional funds will be spent ensuring that children who are disadvantaged receive the support they need to thrive.

The current funding gap for public schools puts children at risk of falling further behind their peers, further entrenching existing inequalities.

ACOSS is a proud partner in the national campaign "For Every Child" calling for the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments to fully fund all public schools to at least 100% of the SRS by 2028, with the Commonwealth contributing a minimum of 25% of the SRS.

On 21st February 2024, ACOSS joined with State and Territory Councils of Social Service in publicly calling for the Commonwealth to fund at least 25% of the SRS. See Joint Media Statement with NCOSS dated 21st February 2024 here: <https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/20240220-COSS-Network-Letter-to-Federal-Minister-for-Education-public-version.pdf>.

On 20th February 2024, the COSS Network wrote to the Commonwealth Minister for Education urging the Commonwealth to fund at least 25% of the SRS. See Letter to Minister Clare dated 20th February 2024 here: [Peak Body Calls for Action on Public School Funding - NCOSS - NSW Council of Social Service](#).

On 9th October 2024, ACOSS issued a Joint Community Sector Media Statement and spoke at a Press Conference in the Australian Parliament House. ACOSS proudly joined with ARACY, Community Council of Australia, and Settlement Services International in calling on the Commonwealth Government to fund at least 25% of the SRS.

See Joint Community Sector Media Statement dated 9th October 2024 here: <https://www.aracy.org.au/news/australias-children-dont-deserve-10-years-of-disadvantage-and-australia-cant-afford-it/>.

This submission is based upon that Joint Community Sector Statement.

ACOSS acknowledges the collaboration with its community sector partners in raising our voice in support of public schools being fully funded so all children can get the high-quality education to which they are entitled.

Children from lower income families and more disadvantaged backgrounds should be given high priority in our education system. We should be proud to ensure all children have an equally high-quality education.

Recommendation

ACOSS strongly urges the Commonwealth Government to properly fund public schools, so all students have access to a high-quality education. The Commonwealth Government should fund a minimum of 25% of the SRS to fully fund public schools.

Acknowledgements

ACOSS acknowledges the collaboration with our colleagues in the State and Territory Councils of Social Service, the COSS Network, in jointly urging the Commonwealth to fully fund its share of the SRS to a minimum of 25%.

ACOSS prepared this submission by reference to the joint statement it has previously issued in partnership with ARACY, the Community Council of Australia and Settlement Services International and is grateful for the contributions and collaboration with our community sector partners.

ACOSS also acknowledges the leadership of the Australian Education Union, the teachers in public schools, and all the partners in the For Every Child Campaign.

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