

Labor's Plan to Help our Schoolkids Bounce Back

An Albanese Labor Government will deliver \$440 million to schools for better ventilation, building upgrades, and mental health support, as part of a new plan to help Australian kids bounce back after COVID.

The past two years have been hard for all Australians. But our kids have suffered a unique loss. They've been robbed of some of the simple joys of growing up – school camps, team sports, playground friendships and sleepovers.

Parents were worried sick about sending their kids back to school and now too many are caught in merry-go-round weeks of home isolation as their kids pick up COVID at school and it spreads through the family.

Labor's plan will help make sure our schools are safe places for kids to learn and our investment in mental health and school upgrades will make sure every kid can get back on track and benefit from a world class education.

Labor will:

- Invest in a \$240 million Schools Upgrade Fund to upgrade Australian public schools and make sure all kids can learn at world class schools with great facilities in a COVID-safe environment. The Schools Upgrade Fund will include grants for schools to improve ventilation and air quality by buying air purifiers, upgrading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, building outdoor learning spaces and replacing windows and doors so they can let fresh air in.
- Deliver a \$200 million Student Wellbeing Boost to get students' mental health and wellbeing back on track. This will mean more school counsellors and psychologists, and extra funding for camps, excursions, as well as sporting and social activities that improve kids' wellbeing.

- Develop a voluntary mental health check tool so primary school students who are struggling can get extra help.

Schools Upgrade Fund

The details

The Schools Upgrade Fund will improve school facilities to help keep students and school staff safe and get kids' education back on track after all the COVID disruptions.

In 2022, all Australian schools will be able to apply for grants to help improve ventilation and air quality and make small school improvements like building outdoor learning spaces, upgrading computing equipment and refurbishing classrooms.

A second grants round in 2023 will be open to public schools to make larger investments like new buildings and facilities, major refurbishments and upgrades.

The Schools Upgrade fund will mean that in 2023, public school systems will receive the same amount funding from the Commonwealth for new buildings and world-class facilities as private schools do.

Labor will work with the state and territory governments and school systems to distribute the grant funding based on need.

The problem

Health experts say improving ventilation is a top priority for a safe school re-opening.

Around the world school systems have invested in better ventilation so buildings are healthier and better for learning and provide a safer work environment for teachers and students as we face new variants and waves of coronavirus.

After the Liberals cut almost a billion dollars from public school building programs, there hasn't been recurrent Commonwealth funding for public school facilities since 2017.

The standard of school campuses and facilities is a clear indication of the deep inequities between Australian school systems. Many public schools don't have the basic facilities they need, especially in areas where population is booming. Private school capital funding will remain untouched.

Labor's Schools Upgrade Fund will mean schools can invest in new general classrooms and major upgrades; maintenance on toilets, painting and leaking roofs; and urgent upgrades of ICT equipment, heating, and air-conditioning.