



MINING & ENERGY UNION

16 October 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email to: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Mining and Energy Union is pleased to make the following submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee (Committee) inquiry into the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 (Cth) (Bill).

1. The Mining and Energy Union represents about 23,000 members nationally from across the mining and energy sectors, key industries that underpin the economic and social fabric of many regional communities across Australia.
2. Our members and their families predominantly live in regional areas such as Central Queensland, the Hunter Valley, Illawarra and Central West in NSW, the Latrobe Valley in Victoria and the Pilbara region and Collie in Western Australia.
3. We understand firsthand the importance of community support and investment in regional areas, where public education plays a crucial role in ensuring that children have opportunities to thrive, despite the geographic and economic challenges that can impact their access to resources.
4. Furthermore, these regions are facing economic transition due to the challenges of decarbonisation. Quality education is essential to setting up the next generation to navigate the challenges and grasp the opportunities of the future.
5. Children in public schools in regional areas already fall behind their city counterparts in many educational outcomes, and public schooling is essential to ensuring they have the opportunities they need to succeed in life. It is vital that these schools are adequately funded, not just for the students themselves but for the future of the communities in which they live.
6. The Mining and Energy Union welcomes the opportunity to make this submission and acknowledges the importance of this Committee's work in ensuring a brighter future for public education in Australia.
7. It is impossible to overstate the need for secure and ongoing “full funding” for public schools.
8. Right now, only 1.3% of Australian public schools are receiving full funding.

9. 98.7% of public schools are resourced below the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) – the minimum level required to meet the needs of every child.
10. Australian teachers and students, particularly those in regional and remote areas, are being shortchanged.
11. For students, full funding means smaller class sizes, more support for children with additional needs, and better results. It's the only way to ensure every Australian child, including those in regional areas, receives the opportunities they need to succeed.
12. For teachers, full funding means more support in the classroom and more time for lesson planning and collaboration, which is desperately needed to address unsustainable workloads and the growing teacher shortage. Right now, Australian teachers are being asked to do too much with too little.
13. The Mining and Energy Union is strongly supportive of full funding for Australian public schools. It is clear that the Federal Labor Government is, too. At the last election, the Labor Party promised “to work with all states and territories to get all public schools on a path to 100 per cent of the SRS.”
14. While we acknowledge the Federal Labor Government's current funding offer of 22.5% of the SRS, two primary difficulties remain:
 - 14.1. Firstly, the current funding offer of 22.5% of the SRS is below the amount required to fully fund Australian public schools.
 - 14.2. Secondly, the proposal in the Bill to set the minimum funding contribution at only 20% means that a future government could revert to the 20% funding contribution, resulting in funding cuts to Australian public schools.
15. The Bill is a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. A funding gap remains.
16. We submit that the Bill must set the Federal Government's minimum funding contribution at 25% of the SRS, rather than 20%.
17. Fully funded Australian public schools will change lives for the better, particularly for students in regional areas who depend on public education for a fair chance at success.

Yours sincerely,

Grahame Kelly
General Secretary
Mining and Energy Union