



ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

The parent voice on public education

Submission on the Better and Fairer Schools Bill

The ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (Council) is a non-profit, non-government representative organisation whose objectives are to foster a quality public education system, provide support services for affiliate parent & citizens associations (P&Cs) and make representations to government on behalf of parents and carers across all ACT public schools.

As representatives of public-school parents across the ACT who are deeply invested in the success of our public education system, I am writing to share our perspective on the Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 [Provisions]. Council believes that every child deserves a high-quality education, and this starts with proper funding.

Why Our Perspective Matters

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations represents thousands of parents across the ACT, all of whom have a vested interest in the wellbeing and education of their children. We see firsthand the impact that funding decisions have on our public schools—on their ability to provide adequate resources, employ skilled teachers, and support every student’s needs. Our role is to advocate for the best outcomes for public school students, and funding is a key part of that equation.

The ACT is unique in that our public schools receive 100% of the School Resourcing Standard (SRS), thanks to the commitment of our territory government. This makes us the only state or territory in Australia where schools are fully funded to the baseline standard that is deemed necessary to help 80% of students achieve a minimum national standard. However, even with full SRS funding, we see that this is a minimum requirement, not a comprehensive solution.

What We Want

We urge the committee to recommend that the Bill set a minimum funding amount for the Commonwealth Government for public schools of 25% of the SRS. Whilst the proposed Bill changes the 20% Commonwealth funding from a maximum of 20% to a minimum of 20% (a ceiling to a floor) in practice it doesn’t provide any guarantee of greater funding for the public education system. While removing the funding cap is a step in the right direction, it is not enough to ensure that public schools are adequately resourced to meet the needs of their students.

Our position calling for the Commonwealth to raise its share to 25%, aligns with all public education stakeholders including the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Education Union (AEU) and other state and territory P&C peak bodies. Bringing public school funding nationwide up to 100% of the SRS is crucial not just for maintaining basic standards, but for improving educational outcomes across the country.

Why We Want It

The underfunding of public education has persisted for too long, leaving many schools across the country without the resources they need to adequately support their students. This under-resourcing affects everything from classroom supplies and facilities to student wellbeing programs and extra support for those who need it most. By increasing the Commonwealth's contribution to 25% of the SRS, the government has an opportunity to address these gaps and make a meaningful difference in the lives of millions of Australian children.

Research consistently shows that a high-quality education can improve student outcomes, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A fairer and more equitable funding system would allow schools to invest in vital educational initiatives, such as early intervention programs, enhanced literacy and numeracy support, and wellbeing services, all of which have a proven impact on student success.

Well-funded public schools contribute to better educational outcomes, which in turn lead to a more skilled and productive workforce. They also promote social cohesion by ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have access to quality education. By committing to a higher level of funding, the Commonwealth Government would be supporting not only individual students but also the broader community and economy.

Specific Benefits of Increased Funding

If the Commonwealth were to raise its share of funding to 25%, it would enable schools to invest in crucial educational activities. For example:

- **Enhanced Learning Support:** Additional funding would allow for more individualised learning programs, especially in areas such as literacy and numeracy, where early intervention can significantly change a student's educational trajectory.
- **Wellbeing Services:** Schools would be able to expand wellbeing initiatives, ensuring that students receive the mental health and emotional support they need to thrive academically and socially and improve school attendance and completion rates.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Proper funding would enable upgrades to school facilities, creating safer, modern, more engaging learning environments that benefit both students and teachers.
- **Equity:** ensuring that all students, regardless of their background and life circumstances receive a high-quality education.

These are just a few examples of how increased funding could make a real, tangible difference in the lives of students across Australia.

The ACT Perspective: Why This Matters Nationally

As representatives of parents in the ACT, we have a unique perspective on the issue of school funding. In the ACT, our territory government has ensured that our public schools receive 100% of the SRS. This is an achievement that sets us apart from other states and territories, where most public schools are underfunded. Yet, even with full SRS funding, we see that it is just a minimum benchmark. Our schools are doing their best with the resources they have, but they could achieve so much more with additional support.

The ACT shouldn't be disadvantaged from the other states and territories just because our government has ensured that our public schools received 100% of the SRS. The extra funding that

could flow through from a higher Commonwealth contribution could be used for other supports in the system such as the implementation of the ACT's new literacy and numeracy initiative Strong Foundations, infrastructure upgrades and increased wellbeing supports in schools.

Public education, in the rest of Australia, needs as a minimum, the same baseline support that we have. The Commonwealth government has the power to make this a reality. Increasing its share to 25% would ensure that public schools nationwide reach the full SRS, setting the stage for a more equitable, effective, and resilient education system and better outcomes for the nation's children.

Conclusion

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations strongly urges the committee to recommend the Bill set a Commonwealth funding commitment for public schools as a minimum of 25% of the School Resourcing Standard. Public schools are the foundation of our society, educating more children than any other system. They deserve a fair share of funding that reflects their importance and supports the diverse needs of their students.

We call on the committee to recognise the importance of this issue and to recommend a funding model that sets up all Australian children for success, no matter where they live or what school they attend. This is an opportunity to create a lasting positive impact on the future of education in Australia, and we urge the Commonwealth Government to take the necessary steps to make it happen.