

# FULL FUNDING FOR ALL VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

Submission to the Inquiry into Public School Funding

December 2025

Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body and leading advocate representing school-aged students in Victoria. We were created by students to be a voice for all primary and secondary school students at the highest levels of decision making in Victorian education. Our vision is an education system that is student-led, student driven and student-focused.



VicSRC respectfully acknowledges and recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the custodians of this land. We pay our respects to the ancestors and Elders past and present of all Aboriginal nations in Victoria and across the wider continent.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into public school funding.

As the peak body for primary and secondary school-aged students in Victoria, VicSRC believes all students deserve equitable access to quality education, which necessitates schools being fully funded to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).

This submission amplifies the lived experience of Victorian students through VicSRC's existing research, while also drawing on relevant external research. By centring student voice in this submission, VicSRC hopes to highlight the unique perspective students bring to education reform and emphasise the value of embedding student-led practices in policy-making processes.

The Victorian Government's decision to delay raising Victoria's school funding to 75% of the SRS until 2031 is not just a postponement, but a \$2.4 billion shortfall that significantly impacts students' lived educational experiences. This financial delay directly worsens the teacher workforce crisis, degrades inclusion efforts, reduces experiential learning, and causes chronic infrastructure issues.

## Key Recommendations

The Victorian Government must implement the following four student-centred actions:

**Immediate funding correction:** Reallocate the \$2.4 billion funding shortfall and commit to reaching the full 100% of the SRS for all Victorian public schools by 2028.

**Targeted needs-based allocation:** Implement an expedited, needs-based funding model to ensure schools with the lowest ICSEA values are funded to 100% of their SRS by the end of 2027.

**Mandatory specialist staff funding:** As part of full SRS funding, mandate that part of the additional investment be directed towards guaranteeing on-site, permanent specialist staff based on school needs (e.g. Mental Health and Education Support Officers) to improve student-to-support staff ratios.

**Student voice in capital works:** Students and representative bodies (such as VicSRC) must be consulted as key stakeholders on all capital works and infrastructure planning to ensure funding directly addresses student-identified needs.

## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPACT OF UNDERFUNDING

Across all areas of VicSRC's engagement, students consistently raise concerns about school funding and its impact on their learning and wellbeing. Students are uniquely placed to identify the everyday consequences of funding decisions. They see firsthand how limited resources shape their educational experiences, including learning quality as well as the capacity of schools to meet diverse student needs. Understanding these impacts from a student perspective is essential to forming effective and equitable policy responses.

Funding inequity remains a significant challenge for Victorian government schools. As outlined in the VicSRC Policy Platform, even the most well-designed policy initiatives will fall short if the system itself is fundamentally under-resourced.<sup>1</sup> Despite strong commitments to collaborative improvement, Victoria's education system continues to operate without the level of investment required to fully support all students and achieve the full 100% SRS.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Student Representative Council (2024), 'Policy Platform', [vicsrc.org.au](http://vicsrc.org.au) ([link](#)), p.29.

In 2023 alone, Victorian government schools were short an estimated \$1.6 billion due to an unresolved gap between actual funding and the national benchmark established over a decade ago through the Gonski review.<sup>2</sup> This shortfall places immense pressure on every part of the education system, forcing teachers, leaders, and school-based services to cope with insufficient resources. Students feel these impacts directly. Many students have reported that staff and essential services at their schools are constantly overstretched, limiting support and diminishing the quality of their educational experience.<sup>3</sup>

## Teacher Workforce Crisis

Students are concerned that the ongoing teacher shortage is having a profound impact on their day-to-day experiences at school. They described how limited teacher availability disrupts learning, heightens wellbeing challenges, and even discourages young people from considering teaching as a future career.<sup>4</sup> Students emphasised that teachers are central to their academic achievement and wellbeing, yet many educators lack the time and resources needed to provide this support effectively.<sup>5</sup> Regional students, in particular, highlighted the acute difficulty their schools face in filling vacant teaching positions.<sup>6</sup>

*“Students think worse of the system due to shortages, leading to mass demotivation” – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student Quote*

These insights are reinforced by recent findings from the Australian Education Union’s *Investing in Australia’s Future* (2025) report and the *State of Our Schools Survey* 2025. Of Victorian school principals, 73% have reported staff shortages in the past year with 61% still unable to fill positions.<sup>7</sup> Australian teachers themselves report strain, with 75% citing workload as a reason for intending to leave the profession, 52% citing insufficient pay and 68% citing stress, mental health and wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

*“Good teachers are overworked by classes and commitments” – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student Quote*

Students are well aware of these issues, sharing that available, and well-supported teachers form a crucial foundation for their success.<sup>9</sup>

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

Across multiple years of VicSRC’s research, students have emphasised the central role teachers play in their wellbeing. While appreciative of their teachers’ efforts, students noted that many educators lack the time and resources required to provide the support students rely on, reflecting broader

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<sup>2</sup> Cobbold, T (2023), ‘The Facts About School Funding in Victoria: An Update’, *Save Our Schools*, October 12, 2023, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>3</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.20; VicSRC 2025, ‘Melbourne Congress Snapshot’, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.19.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Education Union 2025, ‘State of Our Schools Survey’, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Australian Education Union 2025, ‘Investing in Australia’s Future : For Every Child’, p. 10 ([link](#)).

<sup>9</sup> VicSRC 2023, ‘Improving School-Based Support Services for Students with ADHD’, p.5; VicSRC 2023, ‘2023 Congress Report’, p.8; VicSRC 2025, ‘Melbourne Congress Snapshot’, p.12.

pressures within the system.<sup>10</sup>

*"Teachers can't make relationships with students because they are too busy or leaving school" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

These observations align with Monash University research drawing on survey responses from more than 8,000 Victorian Australian Education Union members. The study found that 55% of teachers felt their education programs were under-resourced, and 56% reported the same for their wellbeing programs.<sup>11</sup>

Students also reported hesitancy in approaching teachers with wellbeing concerns, largely due to the perception that teachers lacked the time and resources to recognise or respond to their needs. Many felt their concerns would add to teachers' already high workloads, and that stress sometimes limited teachers' capacity to offer empathetic support.<sup>12</sup>

Concerningly, in the AEU's survey of 1,371 Victorian public-school staff, more than 85% reported a decline in their own wellbeing and morale.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a 2023 Black Dog Institute survey of more than 4,200 Australian teachers also found that over half reported moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression.<sup>14</sup> In this context, it is understandable that students struggle to seek support from teachers.

*"The shortage of teachers not only effects students, but also other teachers" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

Students also reflected on the broader impacts that frequent teacher changes and reliance on Casual Relief Teachers (CRTs) have on their mental health, particularly in senior secondary years. They explained that the absence of stable academic support increases stress related to their academic performance.<sup>15</sup>

*"I feel behind in my core subjects because of things I've missed due to teacher absences" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

### **Casual Relief Teaching and Learning Outcomes**

Beyond wellbeing concerns, students have identified challenges with learning around frequent CRT-led classes. They noted that CRTs were often not provided with consistent or relevant information before taking classes, particularly in advanced or extension subjects.<sup>16</sup>

*"The teacher shortage is causing knowledge gaps" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

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<sup>10</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>11</sup> Monash University and the Australian Education Union 2024, 'Provision for Victoria's public schools', *Monash University*, October 2024, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>12</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Education Union 2024, State of Our Schools Survey, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.11.

<sup>16</sup> VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

Students also reported that lesson plans were not always used, making it difficult for CRTs to support learning in unfamiliar areas during their limited time with students.<sup>17</sup>

*“Due to the teacher shortage, substitute teachers are forced to [teach subjects outside their expertise], even when it’s out of their control” – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

### **Inclusive Education**

When it comes to delivering inclusive education, students have been concerned about how resource shortages and the workforce crisis limit schools' ability to prioritise inclusivity.<sup>18</sup> A major issue here is the limited one-on-one support staff can provide due to time constraints.<sup>19</sup> Students have also noted the need for teachers with the professional learning and capacity to address diverse learning needs within the classroom.<sup>20</sup>

*“Limited Education Support Officers makes it harder for me to learn and keep up with other students” – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

These reflections align with recent findings from Monash University, which show that more than 75% of primary and secondary teachers believe unequal funding and high workloads prevent them from providing reasonable adjustments for students with diverse needs.<sup>21</sup>

*“Students are behind in schoolwork and aren’t receiving the support they need to catch up” – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

Among other issues with the CRT process, students noted CRTs do not always use individual learning plans, even when these are available.<sup>22</sup> This significantly impacts students with disability who need accommodations and a tailored education.

The lack of funding and capacity to deliver inclusive education is especially concerning given 72% of teachers report more students with additional learning needs.<sup>23</sup>

### **Subject Offerings**

Students have noted that teacher shortages are directly affecting the range of subjects available at their schools. Many reported that subjects they are interested in, particularly in creative fields and humanities, are no longer offered or are offered inconsistently.<sup>24</sup> This is worse at small, rural schools and those with a high proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds schools, limiting

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<sup>17</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.20.

<sup>18</sup> VicSRC 2025, ‘Melbourne Congress Snapshot’, p.9.

<sup>19</sup> VicSRC 2023, ‘Improving School-Based Support Services for Students with ADHD’, p.11; Victorian Student Representative Council (2024), ‘Policy Platform’, [vicsrc.org.au](http://vicsrc.org.au) ([link](#)), p.31.

<sup>20</sup> Victorian Student Representative Council (2024), ‘Policy Platform’, [vicsrc.org.au](http://vicsrc.org.au) ([link](#)), p.31; VicSRC 2025, ‘Melbourne Congress Snapshot’, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> Monash University and the Australian Education Union 2024, ‘Provision for Victoria’s public schools’, *Monash University*, October 2024, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>22</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.20.

<sup>23</sup> Monash University and the Australian Education Union 2024, ‘Provision for Victoria’s public schools’, *Monash University*, October 2024, accessed 24 November 2025 ([link](#)).

<sup>24</sup> VicSRC 2024, ‘2024 Congress Report’, p.21.

students' ability to pursue areas of genuine passion.<sup>25</sup> In some cases, classes are suddenly cancelled or students are having to engage in unsupervised online learning.<sup>26</sup>

*"Classes are not going ahead due to not enough teachers" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

## Experiential Learning

Students have also raised significant concerns about the declining availability of experiential learning opportunities across Victorian schools. Students described circumstances in which they were hindered in establishing student-led initiatives due to the lack of support staff.<sup>27</sup> Many also reported that camps, excursions, and other enrichment programs are being reduced or withdrawn altogether, with schools citing escalating costs as the primary barrier.<sup>28</sup> Although the Victorian government has invested in this area through the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, this support does not fully address the underlying issue long-term. It is estimated that around 200,000 students across the state would have been able to access this support in 2025, highlighting the concrete need.<sup>29</sup> However, students and families facing cost-of-living strain should not have to source new funding every year to cover essential education experiences.

Students emphasised that experiential learning should not be an optional extra, but a meaningful and valued component of their education. They described these programs as critical for fostering personal development and providing positive experiences that enhance their connection to school. For many, these opportunities serve as important motivators that contribute significantly to their wellbeing and sense of belonging.<sup>30</sup>

*"Technology is out of date. Infrastructure is out of date. Extracurricular activities aren't being offered" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

The benefits of experiential learning are affirmed by research, including positive impacts on social development, confidence, and peer relationships.<sup>31</sup> These impacts are noted to be especially significant for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, who often gain additional value from learning experiences situated in diverse cultural or community contexts.<sup>32</sup>

Students also reported a growing expectation that they themselves raise funds for enrichment activities, including school social events.<sup>33</sup> Although many recognised that fundraising can offer useful leadership and teamwork experiences, students were clear that it should not become a substitute for adequate government funding of essential opportunities.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.12.

<sup>26</sup> VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>27</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>28</sup> VicSRC 2023, '2023 Congress Report', p.9; VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20.

<sup>29</sup> Victorian Government 2025, 'Help with the cost of living', updated 17 May 2025, accessed 8 December 2025, ([link](#)).

<sup>30</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20.

<sup>31</sup> Zyngier, D (2017), 'How experiential learning in an informal setting promotes class equity and social and economic justice for children from "communities at promise": An Australian perspective', *International Review of Education*, 63, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## Resources and Infrastructure

The ability of schools to purchase educational resources, teaching materials, capital equipment, and maintenance remains a critical concern for students across Victoria. Students at VicSRC's 2025 Congress noted that some school subject departments lack basic materials and equipment.<sup>35</sup>

While the Victorian Government has made significant recent investments in school infrastructure to support a growing student population, students at the 2023 VicSRC Congress were clear that these decisions are often made without sufficient student input.<sup>36</sup> They expressed a strong desire to have a say in the look, feel, and functionality of their learning environments, emphasising that infrastructure spending should reflect student needs and experiences, not just system-level priorities.<sup>37</sup>

*"Schools don't have the resources to repair aging facilities" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

Students also raised persistent issues regarding the maintenance and condition of school facilities, particularly in rural and regional areas. Many reported that basic infrastructure concerns frequently go unaddressed, creating environments that undermine learning and wellbeing.<sup>38</sup> Rural students described long-term reliance on portable classrooms which have become semi-permanent fixtures. They argued that these spaces do not provide an adequate or engaging environment and signal a lack of prioritisation for rural communities.<sup>39</sup> Students with disabilities were among those most affected, with some describing situations where their schools were unable to meet their accessibility needs. In some cases, essential features, including ramps and lifts were missing or outdated.<sup>40</sup>

More generally, students noted that many core facilities across Victorian schools are overdue for renewal. They highlighted classrooms, libraries, air-conditioning systems, and toilets as areas requiring urgent upgrades to ensure schools remain inviting, conducive to learning, and accessible.<sup>41</sup> These concerns reflect a broader sentiment that the standard of physical learning environments have a significant relationship with positive educational outcomes.<sup>42</sup>

*"We have a bad bathroom situation, resulting in students feeling unsafe" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

These student reflections align with broader evidence pointing to systemic inequities in school capital funding. The AEU's *Ending the Capital Funding Divide in Australia's Schools* report shows that between 2012 and 2021, average annual capital investment for public school students was just \$1,004 per student, compared to \$2,631 per student in private schools.<sup>43</sup> During the same period, public schools received only 38.2% of the capital investment directed to private schools, despite educating the majority of Australia's students.<sup>44</sup> This long-term underinvestment has direct and tangible

<sup>35</sup> VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>36</sup> VicSRC 2023, '2023 Congress Report', p.13.

<sup>37</sup> VicSRC 2023, '2023 Congress Report', p.13.

<sup>38</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20.

<sup>39</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>40</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21.

<sup>41</sup> VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

<sup>42</sup> Edgerton, E. et al. (2011), 'Students' perceptions of their school environments and the relationship with educational outcomes'. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 28(1), p.33–45,

<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2011.28.1.33>; Tanner, C. K. (2008), 'Explaining Relationships among Student Outcomes and the School's Physical Environment', *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 19(3), p.444–471.

<sup>43</sup> Australian Education Union 2024, 'Ending the Capital Funding Divide in Australia's Schools', p.24.

<sup>44</sup> Australian Education Union 2024, 'Ending the Capital Funding Divide in Australia's Schools', p.24.

consequences for students, limiting access to the safe, modern, and fully resourced environments they need to thrive.

*"It seems unfair that some schools are equipped with the best equipment and top-quality infrastructure while other schools are not" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student*

## Prioritising Equity

VicSRC advocates for full funding of all public schools to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard. However, the current funding delay disproportionately harms schools with the greatest concentration of disadvantage, necessitating an expedited, equity-focused solution.

### Defining Priority Need through ICSEA

An effective funding model must be predicated on a robust, data-driven assessment of need. Priority Need is defined by the systemic and cumulative challenges faced by schools with a high concentration of students whose circumstances require funding for nuanced educational delivery. This need arises from the convergence of factors like:

Socio-economic disadvantage

Students living with a disability

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students

Students with low English proficiency

The literature on needs-based funding confirms that the concentration of need at an institutional level provides the strongest rationale for resource allocation<sup>45</sup>. These public schools, operating with the highest complexity, are the most acutely impacted by the current SRS shortfall.

### The Role of ICSEA

To ensure objective targeting, VicSRC stresses the necessity of using the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

Developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the ICSEA is the nationally recognised metric that reliably measures socio-educational background. It is purpose-built to quantify the influence of factors (including parental occupation/education and Indigenous student proportion) on educational outcomes.

Schools with the lowest ICSEA values are the definitive and objective identifier of the highest concentration of educational disadvantage. Directly linking urgent funding to this metric is crucial to ensure resources are targeted where the socioeconomic disparities are most pronounced.

Given the documented underfunding of Victorian public schools, an immediate equity-based intervention is crucial. A commitment to first allocate resources to schools with the lowest ICSEA distribution is a fundamental act of equity and social justice, ensuring chronic resource deficits are addressed where student need is highest.

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<sup>45</sup> Hurley, P., Nguyen, H., Tham, M., Prokofieva, M., & Knight, L. (Mitchell Institute). (2023). *Needs-based funding: Lessons from the school sector*. Victoria University.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The education system exists, at its core, to serve students. . Without full funding, new policy can only stand to fulfill this student-centred purpose to an extent. Along with the passion of educators, schools need the financial resources to deliver equitable access to education. Not only will this provide urgently needed relief to schools and teachers, but full funding will also support inclusive education and high-quality experiential learning, delivering student-centred investment.

The Victorian Government must implement the following:

- **Immediate funding correction:** Reallocate the \$2.4 billion funding shortfall and commit to reaching the full 100% of the SRS for all Victorian public schools by 2028.
- **Targeted needs-based allocation:** Implement an expedited, needs-based funding model to ensure schools with the lowest ICSEA values are funded to 100% of their SRS by the end of 2027.
- **Mandatory specialist staff funding:** As part of full SRS funding, mandate that part of the additional investment be directed towards guaranteeing on-site, permanent specialist staff based on school needs (e.g. Mental Health and Education Support Officers) to improve student-to-support staff ratios.
- **Student voice in capital works:** Students and representative bodies (such as VicSRC) must be consulted as key stakeholders on all capital works and infrastructure planning to ensure funding directly addresses student-identified needs.