

FULL AND FAIR FUNDING

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (January 2025) ties the additional 25% Commonwealth funding to reforms that will help students catch up, keep up and finish school. But what do these reforms look like in practical terms and how can they be achieved? As the national voice for primary school leaders across Australia's 7,600 primary schools, the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) is uniquely positioned to provide evidence and practice-informed recommendations that reflect the diverse needs of our communities.

PRIORITIES

To maximise government investment and improve student outcomes, funding should be distributed to primary schools based on the following priorities. They include enhanced support for students with additional needs, strengthened teacher capacity, reduced administrative burden on school leaders, and expanded access to early intervention and wellbeing services.

- 1 **Needs-based allocation** Direct funding to schools based on student disadvantage, including socio-economic status, Indigeneity, English as an additional language, and regional or remote locations. Targeted, needs-based funding, delivered directly to schools, empowers school leaders to make evidence-informed and practice-informed decisions that maximise learning opportunities and outcomes for every student, regardless of their geographic location or background.
- 2 **Early intervention and wellbeing** Invest in early childhood supports and school-based wellbeing programs to address barriers to learning from the outset.
- 3 **Workforce capability** Fund targeted professional learning, mentoring, and induction programs to attract, retain, and upskill teachers and school leaders.
- 4 **Digital equity** Support quality learning by ensuring that students and staff in all primary schools have access to reliable digital tools and the professional learning and support needed to be confident, capable and innovative users of technology.
- 5 **Support staffing** Resource schools to employ additional support staff to better meet diverse learning needs and student complexity.
- 6 **Disabilities resourcing** Provide resources to students who have undiagnosed disabilities and/or learning disorders that are not funded through other means, to ensure every child has equitable access to education, support, and the opportunity to thrive.

REVIEW THE SCHOOLING RESOURCE STANDARD (SRS)

An urgent review of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is also needed, to address the significant and widening per-student funding gap between primary and secondary schools in Australia. High-performing education systems such as Estonia, which was the top performer in the world in Science, Reading and Mathematics in the PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) in 2018¹, demonstrate that maintaining a minimal funding differential across school levels can lead to stronger and more equitable student outcomes.² Estonia invests strategically in early and primary education, recognising that strong foundations are critical for long-term success both for learners and the nation.

Australia's future prosperity depends on ensuring that every child, regardless of age or stage, is equally supported to achieve their full potential through fair and needs-based funding. At the 2025 APPA Primary Summit (May 26) Professor Frank Oberklaid shared data showing that Australia spends less than 0.6% of its GDP on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), which is lower than the OECD average of 0.8%. Countries performing higher on PISA spend more of the GDP on ECEC: Iceland 1.8%, Sweden 1.7%, Norway 1.6% and France 1.3%. ►

KEY ACTIVITIES

Here are 12 high impact strategies that full and fair funding would allow schools to more fully implement, to ensure best outcomes for all students

- 1 Implement **targeted literacy and numeracy programs** for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, regularly tracking and adjusting progress.
- 2 Engage **cultural liaison officers and community elders** to support Indigenous students and embed culturally responsive teaching practices.
- 3 Support **early intervention** for students with developmental needs.
- 4 Deliver **structured wellbeing programs** such as social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and mental health support.
- 5 Provide **mentoring and induction programs** for teachers and school leaders to build capacity and reduce attrition.
- 6 Facilitate **ongoing, high-impact professional learning** aligned to student needs and evidence-informed pedagogy.
- 7 Employ **additional learning support staff and teacher aides** and build their capacity to work to support teachers in schools.
- 8 Create **flexible groupings and timetables** to enable smaller, needs-based instructional groups and help cater for students who are school refusers.
- 9 Support **strong digital environments** to ensure digital infrastructure, devices and pedagogy are elevated and maintained.
- 10 Enhance **learning environments** through upgraded facilities that support inclusive, collaborative, and future-focused education.
- 11 Strengthen **instructional leadership** by providing primary schools with additional middle leaders to respond to the intensity of the work, strengthen curriculum development, enhance pedagogy, and reduce teacher workload for improved student outcomes.
- 12 **Collaboration time** for primary school teachers is essential to enhance planning, share expertise, and tailor teaching strategies to better meet the diverse needs of students.

SUMMARY

Primary schools form the bedrock of Australia's education system, and strategic investment at this foundational level delivers the greatest long-term benefit to student achievement and national equity. Funding from the Better and Fairer Schools Agreements must be delivered directly to schools, as research clearly shows that money flowing through the school gate, positively impacts student learning outcomes.³ Schools must have the autonomy to use this funding to meet the unique needs of their students and communities.

APPA calls for funding mechanisms that recognise and leverage the professional judgement and contextual wisdom of school leaders, ensuring that resources are directed where they are needed most. By empowering local leadership and targeting investment, we can ensure every child, regardless of their postcode or background, receives the high-quality education they deserve.

1 'Brief on high-performing systems: Estonia'. *NCEE Legislative International Education Study Group* (2020-2021). <https://documents.ncsl.org/wwwncsl/Education/Study-Group/1.EstoniaProfileNCEE.pdf>. Accessed 18 June 2025.

2 'ESTONIA: Overview of the education system (EAG 2024). *OECD: Education GPS*. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=EST&threshold=10&topic=EO>. Accessed 19 June 2025.

3 Sohn, H., Park, H. & Jung, H. 'The Effect of Extra School Funding on Students' Academic Achievements under a Centralized School Financing System'. *Education Finance & Policy* [January 01 2023]. <https://direct.mit.edu/edfp/article/18/1/1/109966/The-Effect-of-Extra-School-Funding-on-Students>. Accessed 19 June 2025.