



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Schools

SPEECH

Monday, 12 February 2024

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 12 February 2024 Page 313 Questioner Speaker Archer, Bridget MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mrs ARCHER (Bass) (18:58): I thank the member for Pearce for speaking on this important topic and for bringing this motion to the chamber. I have five children and the four youngest are enrolled in fantastic public schools in my electorate of Bass. As the elected member in a region where there are more than 35 public schools, I have joined the fight to ensure that every school receives 100 per cent of its funding.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development says that success in education can be defined as a combination of high levels of achievement and high levels of equity, and that equity in education is also a matter of design and, as such, should become a core objective of any strategy to improve an education system. Ensuring equity of opportunity for all children is something that should be above politics. So I happily threw my support behind the Australian Education Union's campaign calling on the federal government to ensure that every public school is funded up to a basic benchmark level—known as the schooling resource standard.

As a proud former member of Ravenswood Primary in the 1980s and a regular visitor to the current school now known as Ravenswood Heights Primary School, I have seen firsthand the dedication of its amazing teachers and the passion its principal Jason Gunn has to provide the very best educational opportunities to their school community. But a funding shortfall of close to \$6,000 last year makes it extremely difficult to meet the needs of many of its students. What would addressing this funding shortfall mean to the Ravenswood's Heights Primary School community? It could mean employing an additional five teachers or teachers assistants or an additional school psychologist. However the funding was carved up, the opportunity exists to reduce class sizes, provide specialist support and improve student and teacher wellbeing. Lilydale Primary School is underfunded by \$700,000. Scottsdale High School and Youngtown Primary School are both underfunded by more than \$600,000.

Every single public school in my electorate of Bass—in fact, every public school across the state—is underfunded to the tune of \$118 million. That's a stark comparison to private schools which were found in a report by independent education economist Adam Morris to be overfunded by \$7 million. I don't want to turn this into a fight about public versus private. Independent schools most certainly have their place, and parents should have a choice, but let's be real and recognise that that choice is available only to those who can afford it. As the Tasmanian Association of State Schools Organisations have stated, they believe current funding practices are pitting government and non-government schools against each other.

Every child deserves their schooling to meet the minimum educational standards and the unfair division of funding is fostering unnecessary division. It's not just providing additional assistance for teachers and students and tackling the problem of overcrowded classrooms. It could also mean that other school funds could be diverted to upgrading school facilities. I visited many wonderful schools, both public and private, across my electorate over the past 4½ years, and I've witnessed a stark disparity between the haves and the have-nots when it comes to facilities and basic amenities. And I mean 'basic'. At a minimum they deserve classrooms free of mould, heating that works and functional bathrooms.

Addressing the funding shortfall will also go a long way to relieving the pressure on overworked teachers, who are leaving the profession in droves. An AEU survey found that, even with new teachers, 39 per cent were planning to leave the profession within a decade. As I said earlier today, there is a significant teacher shortage, and I commend the Tasmanian government for several initiatives that they are taking to recruit and retain teachers, but ensuring that public schools are funded a hundred per cent and giving schools the ability to hire additional teachers if they choose will alleviate much of the pressure that they're facing. I acknowledge the recent in-principle agreement between the federal government and the Western Australian government to deliver a hundred per cent of the SRS by 2026. While the funding is tied to reforms under the national schools agreement, there is a lack of detail as to exactly what these reforms are.

Research has shown that, for the period between 2008 and 2022, the gap between high and low socioeconomic status year 3 students has widened substantially and that low SES students are on average five years behind the

high SES students by year 9. None of us should be comfortable with these numbers or with standing by as this divide continues to grow. All of our children, no matter what their postcode or where they live, should have access to good-quality education. If the federal government delays taking further action to fix the gap now, we will continue to pay for the shortfall in outcomes for generations to come.