# WHAT THE PROFESSION NEEDS NOW FOR THE FUTURE

**DISCUSSION PAPER TWO: PROVISION FOR VICTORIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

OCTOBER 2024

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

AEU

MONASH University

# Provision for Victoria's public schools

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This discussion paper was written on the lands of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and includes contributions from First Nations educators. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first educators of these lands and honour their continuous connection to Country. Sovereignty was never ceded. This always was and always will be Aboriginal Land. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Traditional Custodians throughout Victoria, including Elders past, present, and emerging First Nations leaders.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is the second of a series that aims to generate important discussions to achieve significant positive change that addresses the needs of Victoria's public school workforce. This second paper focuses on issues of provision, complementing *Discussion Paper 1: Work in Victoria's Public Schools* (referred to as Discussion Paper 1 in this report). The project that has informed this paper includes a survey of more than 8,000 AEU Victorian Branch school-based and school-focused members, as well as engagement with research and policy from other national and global settings.

### KEY FINDINGS
This report presents evidence across five themed areas of: funding; staffing; facilities; curriculum; and supporting diverse learners. These findings illustrate that Victoria's public schools are at a key juncture. Critical social, economic and political conditions are highlighting deficiencies of school and education system arrangements and practices. The evidence shows that *funding* and *staffing* are the underlying and entwined issues that are key to improved provision.

- FUNDING: Most solutions require additional funding. Key challenges will not be addressed without greater investment. More funding to pay school staff so they are attracted to, and retained in, their careers and so students have learning and wellbeing programs delivered by experienced and well supported teachers and support staff. More funding for resourcing and supports, as well as facilities, so that school staff and students can work and learn in safe, sustainable and effective ways. More funding for resources to ensure support for diverse students is needed to promote equity and excellence for all learners. Additional investment must come with more equitable distributions of funding. While the enduring inequities in school funding persist, there will be intractable provision issues that perpetuate disadvantage for the state's most vulnerable students and communities.

- STAFFING: Victoria is currently experiencing a significant shortage of available teachers. This makes the issue of appropriately staffing Victoria's schools both more crucial and more challenging. These shortages make it difficult to staff schools to the current levels and risk further attrition of education staff. Despite this, to achieve an improved future - through solutions such as smaller class sizes, more diversity in staff expertise (including support staff and allied health professionals), and more time so that workloads are manageable – even greater numbers of teachers, school leaders and support staff are needed.

It is time for a choice to be made that demonstrates Victoria's commitment to the education of our children and young people and to the future of our communities. It is time to fully commit to supporting the dedicated and highly-skilled, teachers, school leaders and support staff. It is time to consider bold solutions to unsolved problems. It is time to commit to educational equity for all.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fully fund Victoria's public schools to at least 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard.

2. Increase pay (including salaries and allowances) for Victorian school staff to levels that are competitive with other states, sectors and comparable professions.

3. Increase and diversify the school staff workforce – more teachers, school leaders and education support staff. This should include more allied health and wellbeing staff, and an expansion of education support staff roles to undertake administration and compliance tasks currently being done by teachers and school leaders.

4. Commit to the ongoing upgrade all school facilities to provide modern, healthy and safe teaching and learning spaces.

5. Explore options for the modernisation of school provision (e.g. school hours/days/term/year lengths) to better meet the needs of staff and student working and learning arrangements. This should include further research in to, and a trial of, a four-day work week for school staff.

6. Work with school staff to review curriculum provision and assessment practices, including senior secondary certifications. Such a review should particularly consider the volume of curriculum required to be taught and learnt. It could include a review of assessment and reporting to establish maximum requirements to limit workloads.

7. Improve capacity to support diverse learning needs which ensures the health and safety of students and staff in Victoria's schools and the individual rights of all students to education.

8. Review Disability Inclusion (DI) processes, especially in relation to associated workloads.

9. Reduce class sizes. This could include reducing class sizes where there are high numbers of students who require Individual Education Plans, or students with additional learning needs.

# 1. Introduction

This paper is the second of a series that aims to generate important discussions to reimagine Victoria's public school system. Since the upheavals in Victoria's education landscape in the 1990s, much has changed for teachers, school leaders, and education support staff in our public schools. These changes - which have been framed by trends in digital technologies, globalisation, neoliberal education policy approaches, social and political transformations, commodification of education, and evolving climate and health emergencies - have radically altered school work and community expectations of schools and school employees. These changes have seen school leaders, teachers, and education support staff challenged to provide high quality public education and students, as well as families, challenged to engage with Victoria's schools.

The priorities and arrangements for the provision of the necessary funding, staffing, and resourcing for high quality education need to be reviewed and reconsidered if the current challenges are to be addressed.

This second discussion paper considers challenges and possibilities for provision across five themed sections: funding; staffing; facilities; curriculum; and supporting diverse learning needs. These sections enable discussion of the most significant concerns relating to education provision raised by respondents to a survey of over 8,000 AEU Victorian Branch school-based members, including teachers, principals, and education support staff. In what follows, the paper steps through some of the research relating to these themes and highlights how participants engaged with them in their survey responses.

The project that has informed this paper consists of the survey, as well as engagement with research literature and policy from other national and global settings. Please see Discussion Paper 1 for full details of the participants in Appendix A and methods of the study in Appendix B.

# 2. Funding

Australian schools are some of the most highly segregated amongst the OECD, ranking in the bottom third of nations for equity in primary and secondary schools – 30th out of 38 nations (UNICEF, 2018). This is not a matter of national income. Some of the poorest countries in the OECD rank highest in relation to equity (Latvia - number one), whilst Canada, a comparator country to Australia when it comes to income and demographics, ranks ninth (UNICEF, 2018).

Australian schools have some of the highest levels of social segregation, and this trend has worsened over time. This has a direct impact on outcomes. Students from educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be behind in learning when enrolled in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students than when enrolled in schools with a more diverse student profile (O'Brien et al., 2023).

Needs-based funding was introduced by the federal Gillard Government in 2013, along with the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), a needs-based funding arrangement that forms "the basis for general recurrent funding for all students in all sectors" (Rorris, 2023, p.7). Despite commitments by states and territories to reach 95% of the SRS by 2023 (Rorris, 2020, p.4), in 2024, currently "private schools across Australian are funded at 104.9% of their SRS while public schools are funded at only 87.6%" (Cobbold,

2024a, p.2). Further, Cobbold (2024b) reported that the national average income per student per year in all Independent schools was almost $6,000 more than that of students in public schools.

In Victoria, funding for public schools from all government sources increased by $1,696 per student between 2009 and 2022, a rate of just over $100 per student per year (Cobbold, 2024b). Over the same period, government funding for Catholic and Independent schools increased by $3,092 and $2,709 respectively. Much of this increase in public school funding was spent on system-based support staff, with a 72.3% increase in central and regional office staff between 2002 and 2019, during which time public school teacher and student numbers increased by 26.3 per cent and 18.2 per cent respectively (Cobbold, 2020). While some of these extra system resources provided an extension of support for teaching and learning activities in schools (e.g. regional curriculum support staff) this period also saw an increased emphasis on accountability and compliance, even where government policy has been framed around notions of autonomy (Keddie et al. 2023). In other words, increases in funding for public education did not, on balance, provide adequate resources and support for schools or sufficiently improve conditions for school staff to effectively address workload.

Despite major increases in teachers' work demands and the complexity and responsibility of their work over the past two decades (Longmuir & McKay, 2024), Australian teachers' salaries have declined in relation to other professions and teaching has become a less attractive career (Gallop et al., 2021). The salary of a profession has a relationship with the attractiveness to graduates and is a consideration for those deciding whether to leave or stay (Gallop et al., 2021). Given the severe teaching shortages being experienced by public education systems across Australia (Australian Government, 2022a), this is a crucial point. A comparison of teachers' salaries found that in the bulk of OECD nations, including Australia, teachers are "paid below the average earnings" of "tertiary educated workers in other occupations" (OECD, 2005, as cited in Gallop et al., 2021, p. 119). A comparison of Australian public school classroom teachers' salaries with comparable occupations (such as accountants, solicitors, ICT professionals and engineers) found that teachers earned less on average when they commenced their professions, and that this gap increased with age (Preston, 2023). A study of NSW public school teachers found that based on their salaries, 90% were unable to afford the median cost of renting or buying a home within the local government area of their schools (Eacott, 2024).

## 2.1 - EVIDENCE FROM THE PROFESSION

The respondents to the survey were asked a range of questions which sought their insights into the funding and resourcing of programs for the aim of providing high quality education and well-being programs for students. Figures 1 and 2 show across all schools, 55% of participants felt their education programs were under resourced and 56% felt their wellbeing programs were under resourced.
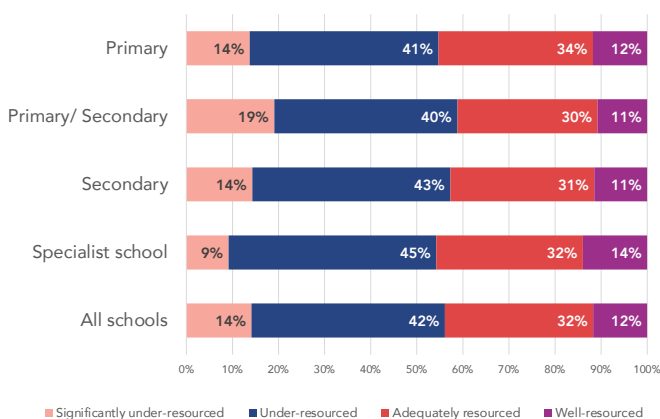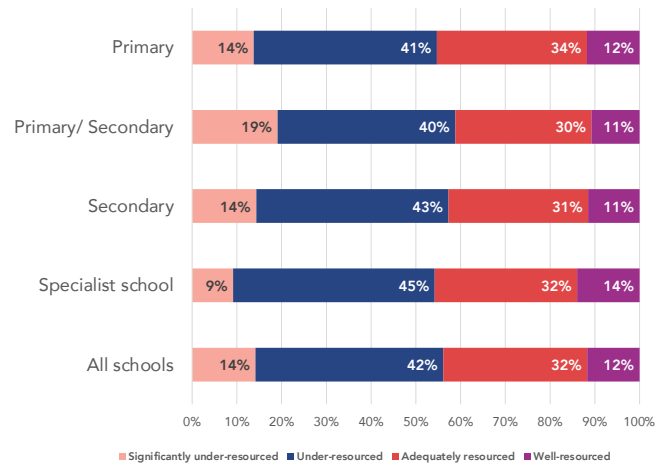


Figure 1: Resourcing of education programs



Figure 2: Resourcing of wellbeing programs

Further analysis of these data showed that 64% and 60% of school staff in inner and outer regional schools respectively felt that education programs were not adequately resourced (compared to 53% in major cities, including Melbourne and Geelong). Also, 62% and 59% of participants in inner and outer regional schools respectively felt that health and wellbeing programs were not adequately resourced (compared to 55% in major cities).

Over 2,000 participants provided an open response which invited them to share ideas for the ways that high quality education could be provided for in Victoria's public schools. When analysing these comments for the purpose of understanding funding issues, four key points were revealed: 1) calls for more funding, including rectifying the inequities in funding for public schools compared to the non-government sector, 2) higher salaries for school staff, 3) funding for 'more time' to manage the work demands and access appropriate leave, and 4) funding to enable smaller class sizes. Aspects of these themes will recur throughout the paper as they relate to provision issues in multifaceted ways. For example, class size is a key funding issue, but also a key staffing concern, and class sizes have implications for the provision of high-quality education for diverse learners. The conclusion will integrate and summarise the key themes that are developed through each section.

### General Funding Inequities

Respondents overwhelmingly called for public schools to be fully funded. The increasing divide in funding, which is entrenching major inequities in Australian society, was a source of frustration for participants. Respondents noted that more funding was needed to end school stratification, to sufficiently resource the range of students in public schools, and to achieve the crucial goal of improving students' academic outcomes. The following comments typified these sentiments: '*Putting money into government schools, [I am] tired of penny pinching at a government school but watch the private schools get a 1 million entrance or another*

*footy oval. While I am buying pens so students can write. Just seems unfair'* and *'The entire area of debate is contingent on fully funding public education… We could make a significant difference if we had that little bit extra to cover time in lieu, camps, funding for disadvantaged students, time release to collaborate etc - it would allow immediate improvements in practice'.*

### Salary concerns

When asked about what changes could be made to better provide for quality education in Victoria's public schools many respondents noted the inadequacies of their salaries. As *Discussion Paper 1* outlines in more detail, they pointed out that their salaries are low compared to other states and other professions. They felt that these lower salaries signalled that their work was not being valued as it should be. There was also frustration that their goodwill was being exploited. *'More funding, more appreciation and recognition of what teachers do. Less relying on the good will of teachers and exploiting them and forcing them to do unpaid work by creating unmanageable workload conditions and more job satisfaction through a decent living wage'.*

### Funding more 'time'

Many respondents noted that funding for extra time for their work in the form of student free time for planning and reporting that was teacher directed was needed. *'More curriculum/planning days across the year (e.g. one full day per term for staff to plan ahead, additional reporting days)'.* Many also called for increased leave entitlements that would support them to manage the demands of their work. The issue of time is discussed further below.

### Smaller class sizes

Calls for smaller class sizes were also regularly mentioned. Participants noted that high numbers of students in classes increases workloads and reduces the quality of education that it is possible to provide. Smaller class sizes would be a significant funding investment, but it would bring momentous improvements for Victorian public schooling. *'Smaller class sizes would make a huge difference to this profession and make it much more desirable to remain in teaching'.* This issue is also further discussed in other sections of this report.

### 2.2 - POSSIBLE FUTURES

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which a range of possibilities would support the provision of high-quality education while promoting wellbeing. Figure 3 shows that 92% of participants in principal class positions reported that an increased budget was needed for the realisation of this goal.
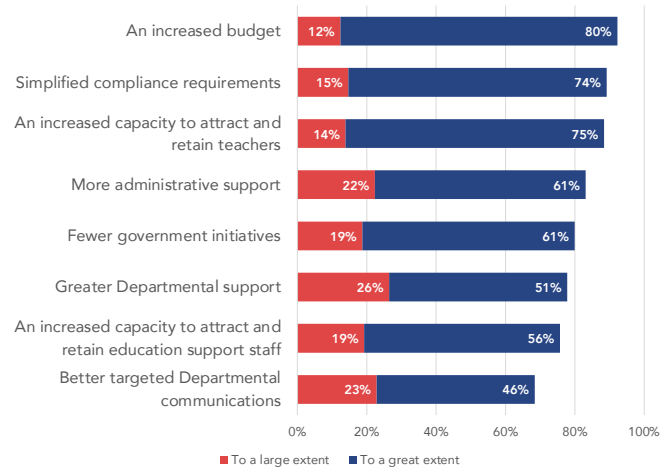


Figure 3: Changes that would support provision – Principal class respondents

In summary, the funding of Victoria's public schools is inadequate for the provision of a high-quality education and this inadequate funding is exacerbated by inequity in the arrangements for distributing available funds. The increased entrenchment of funding inequality between Victorian government and non-government schools that has led to high levels of segregation of the most disadvantaged students in public schools and increased the challenges for school staff must be ended. Funding of Victoria's public schools was the most urgent issue raised by participants for they are witnessing the severe educational and social consequences of the inadequate resources and support and the maldistribution of funds.

Tied to these concerns is the flatlining of Victorian teachers' salaries. Increased hours of work, which is intensifying in complexity and responsibility, is forcing staff in all roles to reassess their commitment to work in public schools (see *Discussion Paper 1*). There is also a strong perception by Victorian public school staff that their goodwill and care for students is being exploited, and that their commitment to the profession is not recognised or valued. This core view is exacerbated when combined with the post-pandemic cost of living pressures and housing affordability issues. These issues are driving disillusionment and desire of too many to exit the profession. Their comments show they wish to be recognised and valued for what they do – rather than expected to continue to do more for less. Salary increases that raise wages in line with comparable professions and other jurisdictions would assist in lifting recognition for those who may be considering leaving the public sector. It could also attract others to consider a career in public education. All of these concerns speak to the most fundamental risk to education provision in public schools in Victoria, the availability of an education workforce, as we discuss further in the next section.

# 3. Staffing

Teaching shortages are a global issue. While conditions differ, a crisis in staffing is occurring in most higher income countries, such as Australia. Across these contexts, governments are not attracting sufficient numbers of new teachers at the same time as increasing numbers of teachers are leaving the profession (UNESCO, 2024, p.30). 'Severe teaching shortages' indicated by advertised teaching vacancies (AEU Victorian Branch, 2023) are often framed as an issue of supply and demand, with less attention paid to the crucial workforce issues of teacher retention (Longmuir, et al., 2022; Lampert et. al., 2023; McPherson et. al, 2024).

In Victoria, and elsewhere in Australia, difficulties in staffing the education workforce have been described as 'the perfect storm,' impacted not just by a retirement age workforce, but by the comparatively poor pay, excessive workloads, changing student behaviours, increases in the complexity of student needs, inflexibility, and low status of the teaching profession (AEU, 2024a; Longmuir et. al., 2022). All of these were exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools in Victoria especially impacted due to long periods of remote learning. In recognition of the challenges, Australia's Education Ministers agreed on the five priority areas of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022). The Plan outlines initiatives in the priority areas: i) improving teacher supply, ii) strengthening initial teacher education; iii) keeping the teachers we have; iv) elevating the profession; and v) better understanding future teacher workforce needs. Although this plan includes welcome ideas, two-years have passed with limited action, limited investment by governments, and little impact on workload issues.

The most significant and longstanding teaching shortages have been in specific learning areas (such as in the persistently hard to staff areas of STEM or languages other than English), special education settings, and regional and rural schools. These settings and subjects regularly have teachers working-out-of field and see school leaders managing extreme difficulties in filling vacancies and finding casual relief teachers (Australian Government, 2022b; Victorian Department of Education, 2024). However, recent data has shown high rates of vacancies in the usually easier to staff subject areas, such as English and Health and PE, and that vacancy rates across all areas of the state and all school types have more than doubled from 2020 to 2022 (Victorian Department of Education, 2024). A further factor in understanding current staffing provision is the use of Permission to Teach (PTT) authorisations, and that many Principal Class employees report they are spending more time teaching in classrooms as they manage teacher shortages (Longmuir et al., 2024). Both of these measures somewhat obscure the full picture of staff shortages. With the issues more widespread, the traditionally hard to staff settings and subjects are even more acutely impacted. Further, as is the case across

Australia, teachers in Victoria's public schools earn less than their private school counterparts and those in other comparable professions (Preston, 2023). This means that the public education sector is at a competitive disadvantage in attracting staff. Therefore, traditional staffing challenges and inequitable school funding are being compounded by the current workforce circumstances and mean that teaching shortages are most severely impacting historically disadvantaged schools and vulnerable children, further entrenching the inequity.

In Victorian public schools' responsibility and accountability for key staffing decisions remains with the principal of each school. The administration of public schools is based upon the principle of self-management. The staffing policy aims to enable principals to select the best available staff to meet the educational needs of students (Victorian Department of Education, 2023b). However, because of worsening staffing shortages, and the competition between schools and sectors, this 'market' approach to recruitment is insufficient. In response, school and system leaders in Victoria are trying to find localised and boutique recruitment approaches. As well, the Victorian Government has invested to support and grow the school workforce since 2019 through initiatives such as an advertising campaign to attract people into teaching course, secondary school teaching degree scholarships, and incentives to attract staff to rural and regional schools (Victorian Department of Education, 2024). Despite these investments, staffing challenges persist and the burden remains largely with schools due to the self-management arrangements.

Along with funding, staffing is the most crucial issue currently for the Victorian Education system (see *Discussion Paper 1*). Every student has the right to access high-quality, properly and fairly funded public education, including being taught by a fully qualified permanent teacher, assisted by properly trained support staff, and led by school leaders with access to the resources they need (AEU Victorian Branch, 2022). In the context of extreme teaching and school leadership shortages, staffing solutions are urgently needed if provision of high quality education in Victoria's public schools is to be achieved. These solutions should be informed by reviewing the balance of local and centralised school staff recruitment and allocation arrangements, to ensure equitable and manageable access to staffing resources.

## 3.1 - EVIDENCE FROM THE PROFESSION

Respondents to the survey who are teachers were asked how a range of factors impact on their capacity to provide high quality education. Figure 4 shows that 79% of teachers felt that there was not enough support for teaching students with additional needs, and 71% felt that there was a shortage of education support staff working in classrooms. As figure 4 shows, many other impacts were rated as concerning by a majority of survey respondents, including: inadequate time for collaboration, inadequate education support staff more

generally, a shortage of student support services and allied health, and school staff being called upon to take on extra duties.
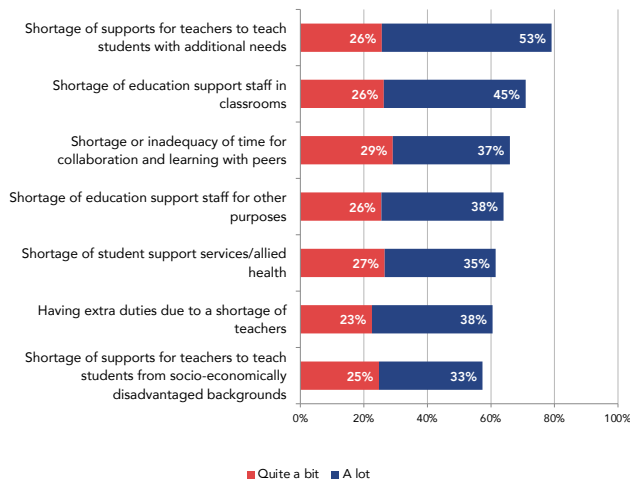


Figure 4: Impact of shortages of staff and resources on provision of high quality education

Principal class participants and teacher participants were also asked about the impact of reporting and accountability requirements and school and system initiatives. These factors were among the highest rating concerns for teachers and principals, as is shown in figure 5 below.
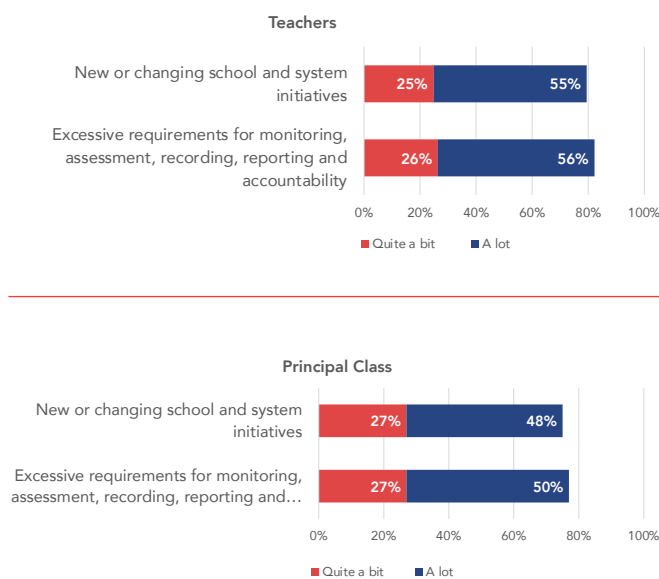


Figure 5: Impact of system demands on provision of high quality education

These requirements are important considerations for staffing provision and arrangements within schools as they offer ways to reflect on how staff time is used. As discussed in more detail in *Discussion Paper 1,* school staff are concerned about the excessive time that they have to spend on administration and compliance activities.

A further consideration for staffing provision is the interaction with time for teaching. As was noted in the funding section, there is potential in changes to the ways that instruction time is offered. Such changes may lead to school staff having more time available to manage factors that they report as contributing to their workloads (see *Discussion Paper 1*). Figure 6 shows responses to the potential of a four-day working week and changes to the length of instructional time each day or year to supporting the provision of high quality education.
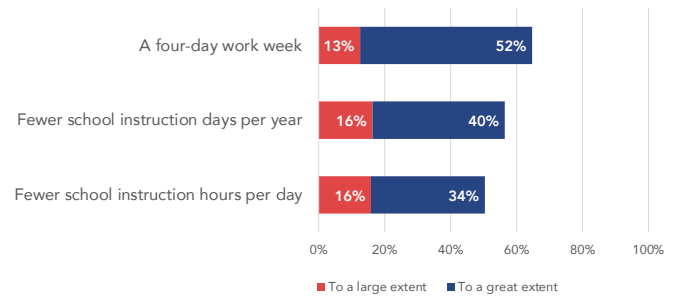


Figure 6: Impact of shorter instruction time on provision of high-quality education

The greatest support was evident for a four-day week with 65% of respondents believing that such a change would have an impact. This option was most supported by secondary teachers (70%, specialist – 62%, primary – 60%).

## 3.2 - POSSIBLE FUTURES

The open comments about provision concerns for Victoria's public schools were analysed for detailed insights regarding issues of staffing. Themes identified included: 1) provision of more school staff, including more classroom-based education support staff and allied health staff; 2) smaller classes, and 3) changes to instructional time to give more flexibility in working hours and work arrangements. The comments from participants around these themes illustrate possible ways to reduce the workloads of school staff and offer higher quality education to all students and have been incorporated into this discussion of solutions.

### An adequate and diverse education workforce

The need for an adequate number of staff in each and every school is a fundamental principle that is currently not able to be taken for granted. The fundamental guarantee that our society ostensibly provides to children and young people is that they can access a high quality education at their local public school. The most important priority for the Victorian Government should be to ensure that more teachers and support staff are attracted to work, and be retained, in Victoria's public schools. An important factor here is the place of local school staffing processes under the self-managing schools' principle. With current conditions and future needs for a diverse, healthy and sustainable workforce for every Victorian public school, the capacity of local staffing processes should be reviewed. The place of centralised staffing processes may need to be revisited

in order to achieve an adequate and balanced school workforce in Victoria, and to relieve principals and other staff of significant workload.

In Victorian education policy there is general agreement about the need for diverse school staff - including teachers, education support staff, Koorie education roles, and allied health staff such as psychologists and speech therapists. Various initiatives are underway to recruit, train, initiate, and, possibly most significantly, fund these types of roles. One example in Victoria is a $13.9 million initiative trialling an undergraduate-level employment-based teaching degree to support education support staff working in Victorian government secondary and specialist schools to become teachers (Victorian Government, 2024). Such investments are welcome but are limited in their impact on the broader issue of sufficient numbers and appropriate balance of staff in Victoria's public schools, especially as they amount to upskilling existing school staff.

Evidence from the survey showed strong support for more staff in schools. Notably, many suggested that more education support staff (ES) could help to ease workload issues and better support students. This was qualified by the need to properly remunerate underpaid and undervalued ES staff. Further ES staff need to be provided with required training to ensure that they can work in partnership with teachers to support both student support and administrative tasks. These tasks could include working in targeted ways with students with additional needs or challenging behaviours, and supporting administrative requirements (such as documenting incidents, paperwork and reporting). As one ES respondent stated, *'Reduce the amount of admin for teachers. In an ideal world every classroom would have a full-time education support person to assist with admin and/or behaviour management'.*

There is clear evidence that the expansion and diversification of the teaching, education support and allied health workforce is needed. Investment in better understanding and resourcing a diversified public school workforce should be a priority given the potential of such initiatives and the calls for such action from the profession.

### Smaller class sizes

Another strong theme from the data is the call for smaller class sizes. Comments from participants present strong arguments for the potential of smaller class sizes. Smaller classrooms offer better environments for teaching and learning, especially in the crucial areas of literacy and numeracy. They also enable teachers to better attend to classroom management and individual needs of their students. In addition, smaller classes would reduce teacher workload, for example, by reducing the magnitude of assessment and reporting requirements. As one teacher reported, *'It's simple, really. Fewer students per teacher (both class sizes and number of classes) means better outcomes for students and teachers who don't constantly feel*

*stretched to breaking point'.* Responsibility for fewer students could also support better management of diverse learning needs (see more discussion below) with more time available to support individual students, as this participant noted, *'Greatest impact would be smaller class sizes so less behaviour, additional needs students, and more support for those students'.* Smaller class sizes offer significant potential for improving the provision of high quality education in Victoria.

### Changes to time arrangements

Though shorter school days or years or more flexible workplaces will not compensate for all the stressors school staff experience, the survey data suggest participants are generally supportive of more flexible work arrangements, including shorter days (changes in start or finishing times), a four-day working week, and/or days in lieu or reductions in the period of time and/or number of days a teacher is physically required to be at school (see figure 6 above). More flexible arrangements, such as one day a week allocated for administrative tasks, may provide teachers with more productive non-face-to-face time to do things like preparing for classes and assessment without interruptions and so that *'teachers can get their work done during working hours'.* Given that this research found that on average, school staff in Victoria's public schools are working an extra 12.5 hours each week (see *Discussion Paper 1* for more information), such responses deserve consideration. 65% of participants reported that they believed a four-day working week would support them to better deliver high quality education (see Figure 6 above). However, it is important to note that in survey comments many respondents expressed caution around how solutions such as a four-day week are implemented. They indicated that a reduction to staff working week should not be equated with a four-day instructional week, as this would lead to a range of logistical concerns (e.g. timetabling), and further overload for staff and students if current curriculum, assessment, and accountability pressures were to be compressed into less teaching time.

The Victorian Department of Education (2024) recognises the importance of flexible work arrangements and family friendly work practices in maintaining a diverse, adaptive and high performing workforce. This is congruent with international data around the desirability of flexibility in the workforce. In England for instance, 26% of teachers and school leaders said they would prefer to work part-time (Sharp et al, 2019). English school leaders reported benefits of part time work, including improved teacher recruitment and retention, better teacher well-being, the retention of specialist expertise and reduced costs. Other benefits included the likelihood of recruiting and retaining teachers such as young or single parents, particularly women, who would be attracted to the profession if it were more family friendly (New Britain Project, 2024). However, it is important to note that new arrangements around part-time and flexible work pose not just affordances, but challenges such as resourcing and timetabling.

## FOUR-DAY WEEK EVIDENCE

In the United States trials of four-day weeks for schools - staff and students - have steadily increased in the past twenty-five years. In 1999, 257 schools in 108 districts were running four-day week schedules, and by 2019 that number had increased to 1607 schools in 662 districts across 24 states. In terms of the effect of the four-day week on academic achievement, attendance and behaviour, Morton (2023) found that the changed scheduling had no effect on reading and mathematics scores, and no effect on attendance. However the four-day week resulted in a significant decrease in rates of high school students' disciplinary incidents related to bullying and fighting. Thompson's (2021) study expresses concerns about the impact of a four-day week on student outcomes. While Maiden et al. (2020) found no evidence that a four-day week would improve retention over time, they suggested that further robust studies are needed.

# 4. Facilities

Providing schools with high quality facilities and resources is a key concern of governments and communities. In Australia, schools are funded through a combination of federal and, state and territory government funding, as well as funding from fees, charges and other parental or private contributions. These arrangements have resulted in substantial inequality in access to funding, with Australia having a well-developed private sector and relying on high proportions of private expenditure (Rowe and Perry, 2022), as well as having the highest level of government expenditure on private educational institutions in the OECD, at more than double the OECD average (OECD, 2024) The current Victorian state government has made significant investments in school capital infrastructure over the past decade, spending an average of $1.7 billion per year since it came to office in 2014 (Victorian Department of Education, 2023a). However, this has failed to keep pace with infrastructure demands, which include new and accessible buildings in growth areas and urgent upgrades and maintenance on existing schools.

Many studies have found that Australia's public sector schools have limited funding for buildings, facilities and maintenance (e.g. AEU, 2024a; Lawrence, et al., 2023) and that funding arrangements segregate Australia's schools "according to SES, race and ethnicity, and in turn contribute to large and sizable gaps between schools" (Rowe and Perry, 2022, p.117). Based on an analysis of OECD data, Hunter (2022) found that "Australia's disadvantaged schools have worse access to educational staff and materials than in any comparator country" (p.8). In a stark illustration of the inequity, an analysis of school funding found that "Two private schools in Victoria (Caulfield Grammar and Haileybury College) spent more on capital works ($391.8 million combined) over the decade 2012-2021 than was invested in public schools in the entire state of Tasmania over that time ($291.1 million)" (AEU, 2024b, p.7).

There are clear links between access to facilities and resources and the quality of education possible for students (AEU, 2023; Hulme, et al., 2024). As well, the literature shows that reduced access to educational facilities and resources makes it more difficult for teachers and school leaders to fulfil their roles adequately (Hulme, et al., 2024) and contributes to challenges of attracting educators to disadvantaged or rural and remote schools (UNESCO, 2024).

### 4.1 - EVIDENCE FROM THE PROFESSION

Participants were asked to respond to three items that related to facilities in Victoria's public schools. The question asked to what extent: 1) better classroom facilities, 2) better school facilities, and 3) better access to – and use of – ICT and school ICT networks, would support the provision of high quality education to students, while promoting student and staff wellbeing. Figure 7 shows that most respondents indicated that improvements in facilities across all three areas would be beneficial.
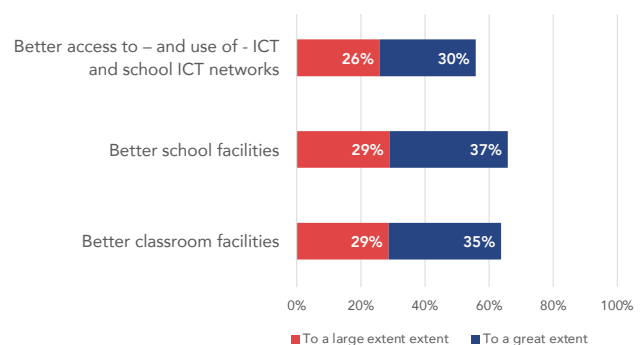
Figure 7: Impact of better facilities on high quality education

In an open-response question that invited expanded comments on what changes would support provision of high quality education in Victoria's public schools, many participants noted issues related to facilities. The impact of inadequate spaces and poorly maintained

environments on teachers and students was evident in many comments: '*Why is it that teachers have to work in crowded offices with stingy desks? Why do we have to work in classrooms with awful acoustics and/or windows that can't open? ... It's amazing that students learn at all in crowded, uncomfortable classrooms*" and "*I teach in a horrible portable classroom with mould, freezing in winter, boiling in summer, rats under the boards, leaking and dripping each time it rains and generally a shitty place to teach.*' Other comments focused on issues of funding for facilities and some noted the variance in the quality of facilities between the private sector and the public sector. '*I have worked in both private and public schools and it is disgusting how public schools are not funded to be cleaned properly and that so many of the buildings are scrappy and in bad condition compared to private school counterparts. Our kids deserve better. It is demoralising to work in such an environment day after day and embarrassing when parents and other visitors come to visit.*'

Indeed, cleaning and maintenance were raised by many of the survey respondents. In Victoria, a series of cleaning and maintenance reforms have shifted responsibility for cleaning contracts from schools and principals to the Department. Important interventions have occurred which addressed the underpayment of some school cleaners by some contractors. Despite this, future changes planned for 2025 need to bring about much-needed improvements to cleanliness in Victoria's schools (Victorian Government, 2024). Attention to maintenance arrangements remains an issue that requires ongoing attention and further investment.

In further analysis of the responses to the facilities questions it became clear that teachers who reported working in low socioeconomic status (SES) schools were more likely to report that better facilities were needed:

- 58% of teachers in low SES schools felt better classroom facilities were needed compared to 40% of teachers in High SES schools

- 60% of teachers in low SES schools felt that better school facilities were needed compared to 55% those in High SES schools

- 52% of teachers in low SES schools felt that better ICT facilities were needed compared to 42% in High SES schools

There were minimal differences in teachers feeling that improved facilities in classrooms and schools were needed across the different regional categories (major city, inner regional, outer regional) but 43% of teachers working in outer regional schools felt that better ICT facilities were needed compared to 38% in inner regional schools and 40% in major city schools.

Survey comments called for improvements in the management of funding for the provision of appropriate facilities for Victoria's public schools. These included noting that fully funding government schools would make a difference to the quality of facilities: '*Fund School facilities - buildings and grounds, fences, playgrounds- basic things need planning for upgrades*'. Further, some school leaders described concern about the work associated with local management of upgrades and using the department systems as shown in this comment, '*Revamped VSBA [Victorian School Building Authority] to upgrade school facilities by NOT pushing it ALL onto the principal. AIMS [Asset Information Management System] is not workable without appropriate funding and expertise*'.

## 4.2 - POSSIBLE FUTURES

Issues of funding for adequate facilities for public schools are a long-fought and ongoing struggle in the Australian education landscape. Through this examination of the provision of facilities that are needed for high quality public education in Victoria, it is evident that inadequate funding arrangements continue to negatively impact teaching and learning experiences across Victoria's public schools. This is particularly highlighted in the federal government's 2024-25 budget decision to give private schools $1 billion in infrastructure funding while not continuing with Capital Works funding for public schools beyond 2024 (AEU, 2024c). In many cases, inadequate funding contributes to teachers and students working in unpleasant and at times unhealthy environments. Further, the evidence suggests that local responsibility for maintenance, upgrading, cleaning and ICT provision can be laborious and a source of tension for school leaders and local communities. Further, disadvantaged communities, who have less capacity to raise local funds, are more likely to be deprived of access to adequate facilities (Rowe and Perry, 2022). As was starkly illustrated by AEU (2024a), inequitable funding for school facilities in Victoria's public schools is egregious and must be addressed for the provision of a fair and sustainable public school sector. Access to healthy, safe, stimulating, and adequately resourced learning environments should be a base level provision responsibility of governments.

# 5. Curriculum

Most Victorian government school students in the first 11 years of schooling undertake learning that is structured around the Victorian Curriculum F-10 2.0, which includes content or learning areas, such as mathematics, literacy, the arts and the humanities, and capabilities, such as ethical capabilities and critical and creative thinking. The curriculum is sequential and is informed by the Australian Curriculum and the subject of input from teachers and education academics. The Victorian Curriculum 2.0, implemented in stages from 2023, is the latest attempt by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to document required learning, which has been reviewed, revised and renamed more than once per decade since 1995, when the Curriculum Standards Framework was introduced. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which now incorporates academic and vocational pathways, structures learning for most students in the final two years of schooling.

The Victorian Curriculum also includes curriculum for students who are learning from the 'Towards Foundation' level, including students attending specialist schools in Victoria, and others with learning delays or disabilities. A small number of public schools in Victoria also structure learning around the International Baccalaureate or the Montessori or Steiner education approaches. In addition to formalised curriculum, a range of provision mandates are communicated to schools through policy and VRQA minimum standards. For example, all Victorian government schools must implement curriculum programs such as the Respectful Relationships program, and, while not mandatory for all students, school staff are required to administer NAPLAN assessments.

Across Australia, curriculum reform is increasingly influenced by global discourses relating to competitiveness and economic development, which have emphasised skills (Gleeson et al., 2020). For example, since the mid 2000s Australian state and commonwealth governments have worked through the Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to develop a wide range of skills and capabilities curricula and assessments (including NAPLAN). Governments have also looked to OECD testing regimes such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to assess system progress and inform curriculum policy, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy (Daliri-Ngametua et al. 2023). A related emphasis on providing quality STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and STEAM (which brings Arts into the acronym) curricula has also been influenced by international competitive aspirations. However, in Victoria and elsewhere, uneven resourcing and the lack of qualified teachers has undermined curriculum provision, particularly in rural and regional areas (Murphy, 2023).

A final significant context for curriculum provision in Victoria relates to accounting for continuing Indigenous sovereignty of the lands and the role of schools and education in reconciliation and truth telling. The Victorian curriculum carries forward Anglo-European ways of knowing, centring the knowledge of the English language, science and the humanities as foundational. While teaching within these frameworks supports deep learning and critical thought, they have also been used in Australia's colonial history to erase Indigenous ways of knowing and justify colonial violences (Sriprakash et al., 2022). In a recent analysis of the Victorian history curriculum, Keynes (2023) argues that attempts to incorporate learning about colonial injustices and violences into curricula have thus far failed to interrogate the ongoing coloniser structures and the longer history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty and self-determination.

The place of curriculum and the arrangements that surround the provision of curriculum to Victoria's students is crucial to the success of Victoria's public schools and access to high quality education. Curriculum challenges and opportunities shape teachers' work and students' experiences.

## 5.1 - EVIDENCE FROM THE PROFESSION

Respondents to the survey indicated that issues of curriculum are a concern in Victoria's public schools. Figure 8 shows that more than half of all participants felt that revisions to curriculum would support them in providing high quality education to students, while promoting student and staff wellbeing. Staff from specialist schools and primary schools were most likely to agree that revisions are needed.



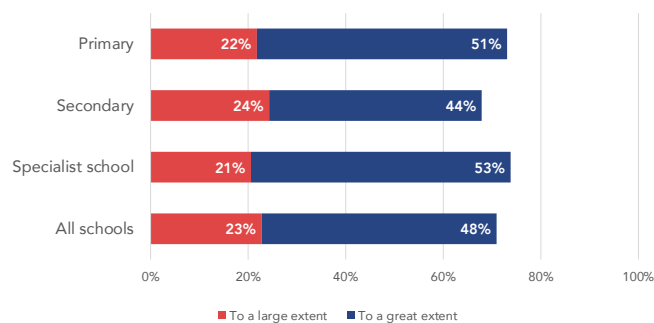| | To a large extent | To a great extent |
|---|---|---|
| Primary | 22% | 51% |
| Secondary | 24% | 44% |
| Specialist school | 21% | 53% |
| All schools | 23% | 48% |

Figure 8: Revising the curriculum would support high quality education

Comments provided in the open response items suggested that teachers generally feel that there is too much content and that there is simply not enough time to cover all that is expected. This comment described the damage of current curriculum arrangements, 'Demands from curriculum are too high. Too many students are left behind as we are required to move to a different topic'. Relatedly, some felt that teachers were expected to cover content that could be taught at home and that the testing and assessment mechanisms are also time-consuming and not always workable. Curriculum demands are an important factor in considering other aspects of provision. As discussed

in earlier sections, any adjustments to instructional time (e.g. shorter days or shorter terms) need to be considered alongside curriculum demands. With school staff reporting that current curriculum demands are not manageable with the current levels of instructional time, less time with the same curriculum requirements will be untenable.

## Rethinking Senior School Provision

VCE teachers commented that the timeline for teaching curriculum and assessing student work is unreasonable. A number also commented that VCE is not appropriate for all students and that there should be more resources made available to schools for additional VET and alternative curriculum pathways to ensure schools can support all senior learners effectively. A related concern reported by several respondents was the perception that the VCE structure has significant influence on how curriculum is structured in earlier phases of Victorian schooling. '*VCE scores only impact around 30% of students, but the whole system is governed to VCE scores which seems backwards*' and '*We can't keep pushing changes in the younger levels of high school and not change the end game of VCE. Where they still have to stick to the exam style and instruction-based learning. If you want there to be [a] wellbeing focus in junior years and inquiry based learning, then the end game needs to change*'.

Figure 9 shows that 55% of all survey respondents and 75% of those who work in secondary schools, and therefore have the most relevant experience of the VCE curriculum, believe that reform to Senior Secondary curriculum and assessment is needed for the provision of high quality education.
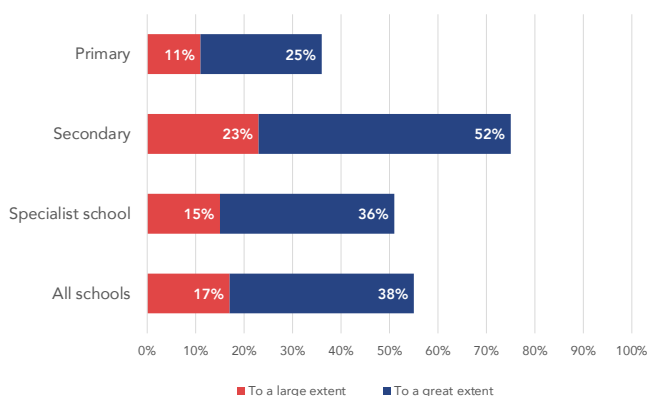


Figure 9: Reform to senior secondary assessment and certification

Concern about VCE and the ATAR system has been raised by AEU members in other surveys over recent years. This prompted the AEU Victorian Branch to petition that the Victorian Department of Education "conduct a review of the VCE and the ATAR system to recommend ways in which the negative impacts of the senior years certificate and tertiary entrance rankings on the wellbeing and mental health of students

can be alleviated" (AEU Victorian Branch, 2023). Of particular concern to many AEU members is the psychological impact of VCE examinations and other assessments, which are undertaken at an age when many teenagers struggle with mental health challenges. These psychological impacts were compounded by interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and represent one of the drivers of the increasing number of VCE students selecting to complete an unscored VCE certificate, at 10.9% in 2022 compared to 4.1% in 2018 (Halliday, 2023).

## Broader concerns about assessment and reporting demands

Through the open comments, many survey respondents expressed concern about challenges and inconsistencies regarding assessment and reporting, raising three key concerns. Firstly, respondents expressed strong concern about how time consuming the administration of assessment tasks and system driven reporting has become: '*Assessment and reporting, not enough time in the working day to complete this in primary school. Having to complete a lot of assessment during class time which is impossible to also do and teach at the same time*'. There was debate among respondents about how this might be addressed, with some suggesting that they did not want to be given more time release to administer assessment tasks, as this would take them away from their core work of teaching students. However, a more common suggestion from respondents was if schools and the Victorian system require teachers to undertake so much assessment, then sufficient time must be allocated to undertake this work.

Teachers also argued that many assessment activities in schools were far more about data collection than student learning, '*There is too much reliance on data driven directives, rather than assessing schools from the more human element that aren't always reflected in data collection methods*'. Thirdly, many respondents questioned the need to collect so much data and commented that assessment regimes undermine teacher judgement and erode teacher time, as explained by this teacher, '*Literacy and Numeracy in Australia are declining across all states which suggests the issue is structural and not what an individual school does. As data has been more emphasised and had more meetings about data, the data for schools have gotten worse. The irony is that schools that perform the worst get hit over the head with more data*'.

## 5.2 - POSSIBLE FUTURES

As described above, respondents were asked how changes to Victoria's public education system might impact on their capacity to provide high quality education and promote student and staff wellbeing. Among the suggestions were changes in the number of instruction hours/days, different school structures and revisions to curriculum. There is strong support for revising the curriculum and reforming senior school curriculum and assessment pathways. However, as discussed elsewhere, workload impacts should

be considered in concert with any future changes. Victoria's teachers are weary from constant change and incremental reforms that are a regular impost on their capacity to work effectively with students and families. Tinkering at the edges of the current curriculum and assessment arrangements is not likely to yield the desired results, which should aim to better support the work of school staff and improve the learning experiences of students. In fact, as this comment suggests, it would likely have the opposite impact and cause greater damage to Victoria's public schools: *'Constantly changing things is also a workload issue. Report templates, recording of teaching templates, reporting of behavioural issues, organisation of excursions, camps etc, keep changing are becoming more complex and therefore more time-consuming'.*

It is important that significant reform options, such as exploring different school structures, are authentically considered and the possibilities examined. Large-scale changes are supported by many participants in this study. Bold reforms such as these have been trialled in a range of jurisdictions and are needed. For example, elsewhere in this paper we discuss four-day week programs in the US, and below we remind readers again of Finland's enduring and successful commitment to trusting teacher judgement in assessment and curriculum provision. However, any proposals for fundamental changes need to account for the broader educational context in which public schools are significantly underfunded, staffing shortages are chronic, and where education departments have regularly altered curriculum and assessment requirements for schools over the past three decades.

## A REMINDER ABOUT FINLAND

In Finland, the first and only standardised test is taken by students after they have successfully completed their final year of high school. In all preceding years teachers use school and class level assessment to inform their teaching and provide students with feedback on their learning. While Finnish students perform very well in international testing such as *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS), the *Progress in International Reading Literacy* (PIRLS), and the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA), these tests are not regarded as significant by teachers and school leaders. Finnish teachers undertake regular formative and summative assessments of students and report progress to parents. They are respected as having the expertise to undertake relevant and appropriate assessments that align with national curriculum priorities.

# 6. Supporting Diverse Learners

Important discourses of equity, inclusion and social justice, such as represented in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Quality Education* which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable education for all" (United Nations, 2015), have resulted in greater attention to diverse student learning needs. Further, in Australia, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 requires that students with disabilities (representing 24.2 per cent of school students: ACARA, 2024) "have opportunities and choices which are comparable with those offered to students without a disability" (Australian Government, 2005). Beyond formally identified students with disabilities, it is important that schools also recognise diverse cultures, wide-ranging learning needs, and the variety in students' life opportunities and learning experiences. This recognition mandates the provision of diverse teaching and learning experiences which aim to maximise learning success in tailored ways for individual learners. When considering these aspirations and being cognisant of all the complexities of inclusion, diversity and equity, a range of provision issues arise.

Whilst the recognition of the range of diverse needs of students has increased, the provision of appropriate varied support has not kept pace, leaving school staff trying to bridge the gaps and provide the best support that they can. In the Victorian public school context, the range of support options and tailored learning contexts beyond 'mainstream' schools is inadequate. Alternative settings, also called flexible learning option (FLO) schools, are oversubscribed. These options then are often not available at a time when more students are disengaging from mainstream schools (Clark, 2023; Mills, et al., 2017) and teachers are reporting that more students in their classrooms need the increasingly difficult-to-access allied health support.

In terms of support for the wide range of diverse learners, figures suggest that public schools do the heavy lifting, "they enrol 80 per cent or more of disadvantaged students – 80 per cent of low SES, 84 per cent of Indigenous, 86 per cent of extensive disability and 82 per cent of remote area students" (Cobbold, 2021, p. 10). Once again inequitable funding arrangements are a significant issue in terms of support for diverse learners. While the Victorian Government's Disability Inclusion (DI) reform which commenced rollout to schools in 2021 included significant funding increases for school students with disability, inadequate resourcing to appropriately support diverse learners remains a pervasive issue. These concerns have been compounded by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic where extensive lockdowns followed by particular post-pandemic induced economic and social stressors, exacerbated learning, social, mental health and behavioural concerns for great numbers of students. Teachers report a range of amplifications in the intensity and variety of students' needs (Longmuir et al., 2022). As well, in many schools, shortages of

teachers and allied health professionals (such as school psychologists and speech therapists) mean that many teachers are taking on responsibility for more students and are trying to provide them without the resources and supports that they need (Longmuir, et al., 2024).

## 6.1 - EVIDENCE FROM THE PROFESSION

Findings from the survey show that supporting the diverse needs of students is a challenge and that the provision of support and resources for this work is inadequate. Figure 10 shows that in primary and secondary schools, over 75% of staff do not have enough time to respond to the learning needs of all students, and over 80% feel that their workloads are increased as a result of inadequate support available. Special school staff were somewhat less troubled by supporting students with additional needs, but given that their settings are specifically designed to support these students, it is concerning that 55-65% report not having enough time or support.
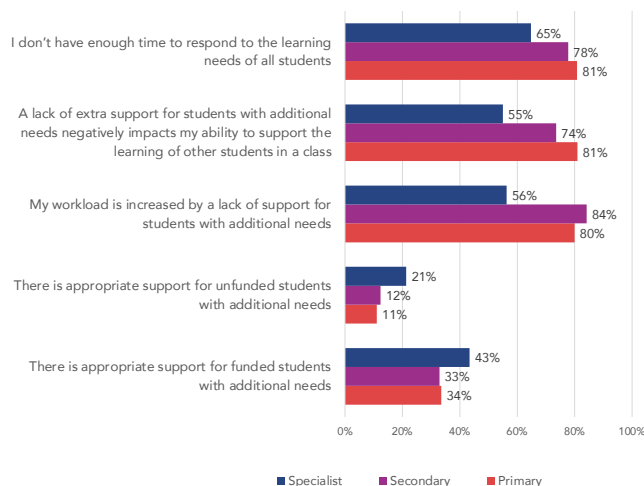
Figure 10: Support for teachers working with diverse learning needs

Over 4,500 participants provided an open response to elaborate on the ways that supporting students with additional needs impacted on their work. These comments regularly mentioned concerns about students' behaviour, the need for documentation associated with working with students with diverse needs, and concerns about time available to work with all students.

In talking about behaviour, participants described the intensities of navigating students varied behavioural and ability challenges, as well as the difficulty of not having enough time to give appropriate attention to other students in their classes. These comments illustrate some challenges associated with diverse behaviours for teachers work: *"I've been a teacher for a long time - I've never worked so hard in my life - I simply cannot cater to all the students and their individual needs"*, *"We can and should be expected to make reasonable adjustments. However, some*

*behaviour is outside the scope of our professional skills, and children do need to know that some behaviours are not tolerated as they wouldn't be tolerated in any other profession. The department also needs to have clear policies around this and support teachers to be safe in schools".*

As well as the implications for teachers' work and students' experiences in classrooms, participants also described the work required in their non-teaching and personal time in order to manage the planning, documentation and compliance requirements that come with the diverse student learning needs, as is illustrated in this comment: "*increased time planning differentiated lessons / activities / resources - more time dealing with challenging behaviours (e.g. writing incident reports, running SSGs, supporting students after class hours, holding detentions) - overwhelming / high stress feeling in the classroom when there are 25 students with very diverse learning needs and only 1 teacher who is unable to get around to support every individual*".

Another issue evident in the comments is that of the burden associated with access to additional funding to support students with diverse needs, as this comment describes: "*Ensuring supports are documented in planning, developing and managing IEPs [Individual Education Plan] with leadership, parents and students. Chronicling incidents that occur throughout the day / week to support actual and potential funding applications that may or may not be successful*".

The survey of Victoria's public school staff highlights that the impact of supporting the diverse needs of students in Victoria's schools, including those with diagnosed and funded needs, as well as those without this formal support, is a source of workload stress for school staff. The transition from the *Program for Students with Disabilities* to the *Disability Inclusion* approach to supporting inclusion, which has provided additional resources to schools, has seen new workload stress for some school staff. This stress is both in the amount of time needed to plan, document, report on diverse student needs in order to apply for additional individual support for them, and in the increased intensity that comes with working in classrooms where these needs are unmet and the consequences that need to be managed by these teachers (Longmuir & McKay, 2024). These challenges, particularly in relation to managing student behaviours, were identified

in *Discussion Paper 1* as contributing to teachers' intentions to leave the profession.

## 6.2 - POSSIBLE FUTURES

It is evident that the provision of resources and support for diverse student needs in Victoria's public schools is not adequate and is a source of substantial concern for school staff. They call for the provision of additional time, resources, and support to assist them to better respond to the needs of the students that they are working with every day. Figure 11 shows that over 80% of respondents would like more time to help individual students, additional support for students with behaviour and engagement concerns, and additional programs to support literacy and numeracy.
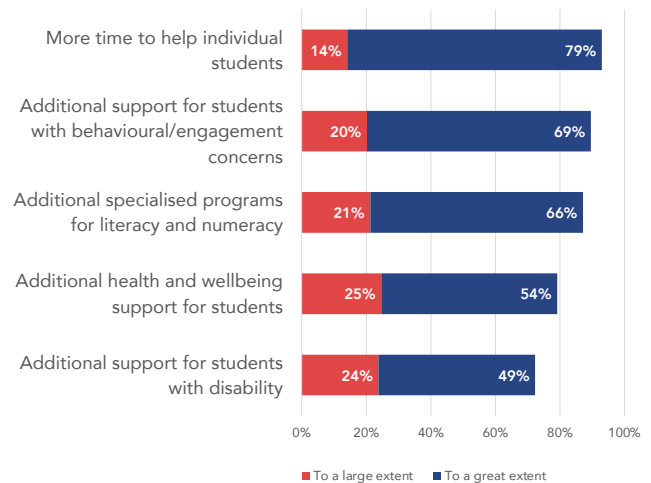


Figure 11: Possible changes to better support students with additional needs

Given the evidence here, and the indications of increasing challenges arising from the diversity of students learning, social, mental health and behavioural needs consistently reported in other studies (e.g. Longmuir, F., McKay, A., et al., 2024; Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 2023), it is clear that consideration of the provision arrangements that better support both school staff and students is required in Victoria's public schools.

# 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Victoria's public schools and the students and communities they serve, are at a key juncture. Critical social, economic and political conditions are highlighting deficiencies of longstanding school and education system arrangements and practices. These deficiencies leave schools unable to respond to increasing student disengagement and declining wellbeing. As well, many school staff are struggling to keep turning up for work feeling unable to support students appropriately. The evidence presented in this report shows that *funding* and *staffing* are the underlying and entwined issues that are key to improved provision for Victoria's public schools.

- FUNDING: Most solutions require *additional* funding. Key challenges will not be addressed without greater investment. More funding to pay school staff so they are attracted to, and retained in, their careers and so students have learning and wellbeing programs delivered by experienced and well supported teachers and support staff. More funding for resourcing and supports, as well as facilities, so that school staff and students can work and learn in safe, sustainable and effective ways. More funding for resources to ensure support for diverse students is needed to promote equity and excellence for all learners. Additional investment must come with more equitable distributions of funding. While the enduring inequities in school funding persist, there will be intractable provision issues that perpetuate disadvantage for the state's most vulnerable students and communities.

- STAFFING: Victoria is currently experiencing a significant shortage of available teachers. This makes the issue of appropriately staffing Victoria's schools both more crucial and more challenging. These shortages make it difficult to staff schools to the current levels and risk further attrition of education staff. Despite this, to achieve an improved future - through solutions such as smaller class sizes, more diversity in staff expertise (including support staff and allied health professionals), and more time so that workloads are manageable – even greater numbers of teachers, school leaders and support staff are needed.

The efforts and investments of the Victorian Government in the public school system have, in part sought to address some of the issues identified in this paper. However, it is clear, that these efforts have been insufficient, with too many long standing challenges neglected and additional challenges increasing. It is therefore time for a choice to be made that demonstrates Victoria's commitment to the education of our children and young people and to the future of our communities. It is time to fully commit to supporting the dedicated and highly-skilled, teachers, school leaders and support staff. It is time to consider bold solutions to unsolved problems. It is time to commit to educational equity and excellence for all.

These recommendations suggest possibilities for this strengthened commitment to the provision of an improved Victorian public school system:

1. Fully fund Victoria's public schools to at least 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard.

2. Increase pay (including salaries and allowances) for Victorian school staff to levels that are competitive with other states, sectors and comparable professions.

3. Increase and diversify the school staff workforce – more teachers, school leaders and education support staff. This should include more allied health and wellbeing staff, and an expansion of education support staff roles to undertake administration and compliance tasks currently being done by teachers and school leaders.

4. Commit to the ongoing upgrade all school facilities to provide modern, healthy and safe teaching and learning spaces.

5. Explore options for the modernisation of school provision (e.g. school hours/days/term/year lengths) to better meet the needs of staff and student working and learning arrangements. This should include further research in to, and a trial of, a four-day work week for school staff.

6. Work with school staff to review curriculum provision and assessment practices, including senior secondary certifications. Such a review should particularly consider the volume of curriculum required to be taught and learnt. It could include a review of assessment and reporting to establish maximum requirements to limit workloads.

7. Improve in capacity to support diverse learning needs which ensure the health and safety of students and staff in Victoria's schools and the individual rights of all students to education.

8. Review Disability Inclusion processes, especially in relation to associated workloads.

9. Reduce class sizes. This could include reducing class sizes where there are high numbers of students who require Individual Education Plans, or students with additional learning needs.

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