



Independent Review of Education in Tasmania

AEU Tasmanian Branch submission

Revised 21/11/2024

"Currently I see teachers burning out with every increasing workload and no plan in place to change this. Help is not coming, not soon, not later, I am watching teachers give up hope that it will get better. New staff break. Old staff break. The only reason there still is an education system is because we care about the kids. Any government can take advantage of empathy."

(Education Support Specialist, Tasmanian public high school)

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) Tasmanian Branch represents members employed in public schools, colleges and early childhood. AEU Tasmanian members include teachers, principals, educational leaders and support staff.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide a submission to the "Independent Review of Education in Tasmania", and to emphasise long overdue actions required from the state government to deliver on Premier Rockliff's promise to "lead the nation in education".

It must be noted that since the announcement of the Review, the Tasmanian Government has delivered a state budget that failed to include funding for implementing recommendations that may arise from this Review, and imposed \$81 million of budget cuts on public education.

Further, the Rockliff government has agreed to a school funding deal with the Federal Government that includes a loophole which will deny public schools and colleges \$280 million in desperately needed funding, over the next five years.

Government indifference to underfunding and under-resourcing of public education is a major barrier to improving the state's educational outcomes.

Material presented in this report is from surveys (AEU and independent), AEU member working groups, member focus groups, member interviews, and previous independent reviews and reports.

Executive summary

We strongly agree with the statement in the Review consultation paper: “The greatest risk is when learners fall behind and/or develop behavioural and wellbeing concerns”.

Tasmania has many of these types of learners who need extra one-on-one-time, small group work, tailored programs and intervention from specialists. Instead, we have a system so underfunded and short of teachers that classes are routinely collapsed. There is not adequate support for children starting, or slipping behind, nor enough resources to cater for students who need extending.

The data shows that educators cannot work any harder or longer, they cannot give any more and bold action and investment from government is urgently needed. Anything less than a significant injection of resourcing in the areas outlined in this submission will simply relegate another generation of students to disadvantage and unmet potential. Governments know resourcing works – their own reviews and reports tell them so, consistently.

Four years ago, 1 in 8 teachers planned to leave the profession before retirement. Today, it's 1 in 3. Tasmania's educators can't afford another decade of inaction. The number of new educators quitting in their first five years of teaching has doubled, and stress claims have jumped across the board.

As a wise educator said: “Any government can take advantage of empathy” and that is exactly what successive Tasmanian governments have done, and this must end now.

Additional resourcing is the precondition for a step-change in what Tasmanian students can achieve – and that is what we all want.

Recommendations

1. **Minimum funding for public schools** – every Tasmanian public school and college must be funded to benchmark Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), with the removal of funding loopholes.
2. **Cancel state budget cuts** – public education cannot afford \$81 million in budgets cuts.
3. **Professional Support Staff recruitment** – urgently increase numbers of social workers, speech and language pathologists and psychologists to the recommended ratios of one to every 500 students, in each category.
4. **Fund Safeguarding initiatives** – the “Safeguarding Children and Young People” initiative needs new money, additional to existing DECYP allocations.
5. **Better support for students with disability** – increase funding to all levels of educational adjustments; increase Support Teacher numbers and disability training for new educators.
6. **First Nations students** – urgently increase funding and staffing to support First Nations students and “closing the gap” objectives.

7. **LGBTIQA+** – expand access to Inclusion Officers and increase programs that tackle barriers to learning and inclusion, and tackle bullying and discrimination.
8. **Bolster “Tiered” alternative learning programs** – increase funding to Tier 3 and 4 programs. Expand Tier 4 to Years 11 and 12 - Colleges and Extension schools. Also, extend T4 for primary schools, and for all year levels to regional areas.
9. **Principal health and wellbeing** – increase school staffing to help alleviate principal workloads.
10. **Reduce class sizes/caps on class sizes** – reduce and cap class sizes, in negotiation with educators and their representatives.
11. **Improve data collection and transparency** – DECYP to regularly publish data on violent incidences to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of strategies.
12. **Retention and attainment data** – the state government needs to be proactive in correcting misreporting of data. Measure of student success needs to include different learning pathways e.g. those students who leave Year 11/12 for apprenticeships.
13. **End Support Staff stand down** – Support Staff (Education Support Personnel - ESPs) are vital to supporting teachers and lifting learning and must be paid for 52 weeks of the year.
14. **Education Support Specialist (ESS)** – expand training and provision of ESS roles.
15. **More in-class support** – greater provision of ESS and TA time in classrooms.
16. **Workforce planning** – government must deliver effective short, medium and long-term workforce strategies to deal with the staffing crisis.
17. **Teachers in Extension Schools** – recognise high workloads and increase support for teachers working across curriculum areas.
18. **Reporting to families** – DECYP action to alleviate increased workload caused by recent changes, particularly in relation to the introduction of Evidence of Learning reporting requirements.
19. **Individual Learning Plans** – urgent audit and review of the implementation and prevalence of these plans.
20. **Violence in schools** – urgent staffing increases (especially specialists such as psychologists) to manage and/or prevent violent incidences; more access to alternative programs; better reporting mechanisms and transparency with data.
21. **Act on educator advice** – for the government and DECYP to develop beneficial policies and deploy them effectively, they must not only consult but act on advice from educators and their union representatives.

22. **Remuneration** - Tasmanian educator pay and working conditions are poor (support staff are stood down without pay during school holidays) when compared to other states while they educate the most difficult cohort of students. Competitive pay that matches other jurisdictions is required for recruitment and retention, along with increases to incentive payments to recruit to regional and hard-to-staff schools.

Theme 1 – Defining educational success.

As already noted by the Review in the Public Consultation Paper, Tasmania’s reporting to the Productivity Commission of educational success is very narrow measure, when compared with other jurisdictions.

Whereas other states recognise a number of certificates, Tasmania only reports to the Productivity Commission students who attain the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE). Alternate certificates such as the Tasmanian Certificate of Educational Achievement (TCEA) and the Qualifications Certificate (QA) are ignored.

The Productivity Commission could not be clearer in its statement: “Data is not comparable across jurisdictions...” And the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)* explains why “...assessment, reporting and criteria for obtaining a year 12 or equivalent certificate varies across jurisdictions.” Yet continually Tasmania’s Year 12 attainment rates are directly compared with the national average, and with other states, without the caveat that it is not comparing ‘like with like’.

In South Australia students who fail the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) but manage to complete a full Year-12 level subject receive a Record of Achievement and are reported as Year 12 attainers. Victoria has counted its “hands on” Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) which students could achieve in just one year of senior secondary study. The VCAL has recently changed but it’s not yet reflected in the Productivity Commission reports.

The TCE requires achievement of 120 points and falling short by a single point, or failing any other criteria such as attendance hours, means absolute failure. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) remarked that Tasmania was unique in that students could “*reach the end of Year 12 and not receive a senior secondary certificate that is considered equivalent to the TCE in regard to completion...*”.

The dysfunction of the Tasmanian education debate has been noted by the Grattan Institute and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). ACER’s [“Review of Years 9 to 12 Tasmania”, 23 December 2016, Final Report](#) (which is available on the ACER Research Repository), page 34 states:

One of the concerns expressed to the Review Team was the ‘inconsistency’ of statistics that had been reported about education in Tasmania. These reports come from a variety of sources, such as lobby groups and external commentators who use publicly available information to support their views. The major statistic for this Review is the measure of Year 12 completion. In some cases, it is a problem of using the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) as the sole measure of Year 12 completion, ignoring alternative certificates, such as the Qualifications Certificate (QC) and the Tasmanian

Certificate of Educational Achievement (TCEA). According to information available from TASC, both of these alternative certificates are awarded to students ‘finishing their senior secondary education and training’ (for QC, from <http://www.tqa.tas.gov.au/2429>). TASC reports the number of TCEs awarded, but not the number of QCs or TCEAs awarded as distinct from the TCE.

“One paper provided to the Review states that just over 50 per cent of Year 12 students in 2015 were awarded the TCE in that year (Professors Michael Rowan and Eleanor Ramsay, ‘Will harvesting the low hanging fruit end the TCE famine?’ unpublished paper, August 2016.) The same authors have noted that fewer than one-half of Year 9 students in 2010 had been awarded the TCE in 2013, even though they had achieved close to the same NAPLAN results as did students in most other Australian states when in Year 9. (Professors Michael Rowan and Eleanor Ramsay, ‘States’ rate of conversion of above NAPLAN minimum standard results to Year 12 certificates’, unpublished paper, n.d.) This mismatching of statistics, which has been repeated in other reports, contributes to the confusion in the public mind. The DoE and TASC release a wide variety of statistics which are not always consistent with statistics available from other official sources, such as the ABS and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), which are subject to their own strict protocols for enumeration. The Review Team appreciates that the DoE recognises this issue and is working with the TASC to ensure greater consistency in available statistics.

Given the concerns expressed to the Review Team about the lack of consistency in the use of statistics in Tasmania, this section examines the data and statistics from a variety of official sources in order to understand what is occurring in Tasmania in relation to student participation and completion.”

The problem with misreporting data is that it fuels expensive policy failures – such as the universal extension of high schools, which resulted in Years 11 and 12 being added to schools within walking distance of a college.

The Grattan Institute noted in its 2018 state-by-state report card that: *“Tasmania and the Northern Territory are often thought of as Australia’s education underperformers. But when school advantage is taken into account, this is not the case.”* The Grattan Institute restated its backing of Tasmanian teachers in its submission to the state government’s “Lifting Literacy, Lifting Tasmania” consultation process in 2022 and said that the state’s schools, on average, are *“...doing a tough job about as well as other jurisdictions”*.

Tasmania’s lower than “national average” Year 12 attainment rate is primarily because of different certification systems. A measure of student success needs to include different learning pathways to include, for example, those who leave Year 11/12 for apprenticeships. Further, if there is to be worthwhile interstate comparisons with Year 12 certification rates, there needs to be alignment and consistency on what is being measured. Currently there is no consistency, and why the Productivity Commission says *not* to compare data, which is to the detriment of Tasmania because it has a very narrow and comparatively difficult measure of “Year 12 success”.

Theme 2 – Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education.

Basic benchmark levels of funding for schools and colleges are required as a precondition to supporting learners and lifting their achievement – especially for a public system which educates the

highest proportion of disadvantaged students. Tasmania has more children entering school categorised as “vulnerable” than any other jurisdiction (including the Northern Territory) and therefore funding is especially important for supporting the state’s learners at all stages of their education.

The Federal Government’s own Independent Expert Panel’s stated in its report in 2023 that: *“The panel was clear in the report that full funding to 100 per cent of the SRS is a critical prerequisite for successful education reform and student learning and wellbeing improvement across the country.”* The report states that “all jurisdictions should fully fund schools within a comparable timeframe” and the issue is all the more urgent *“because of the full funding arrangements that already exist in the non-government sector”*. In Tasmania every public school receives less than SRS benchmark, while every private school in the state receives a combination of state and federal government funding that is at, or above, their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).

Schooling Resource Standard (SRS)

Not one Tasmanian public school or college is funded to the *minimum* standard set by the independent Review of Funding for School led by David Gonski AC in 2011. The SRS is the funding level that equips schools to educate just four out of five, or 80 per cent, of students to *minimum* standards in reading and numeracy. It does fund schools to deliver quality education in other curriculum such as ICT, science, VET. This means in Tasmania, around 10,000 students are attending schools and colleges that do not receive enough funding to meet their basic educational needs. The SRS is a low bar level of funding, even without an inbuilt funding loophole.

The reason why so many Tasmanian students do comparatively well (as noted by Grattan Institute reports) is because of the superhuman efforts of teachers, principals and support staff but the situation is not sustainable. Teachers are burning out in record numbers and early career teachers, in their first five years of service, are quitting the profession at double the rate compared to 2020.

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA)

Tasmania recently signed an agreement with the Federal government which, despite the headlines, will not deliver 100% SRS to public schools. The agreement still contains an accounting loophole which is counter to the intent of the SRS and allows government to spend 4% of the SRS on non-school activities such as capital depreciation and administrative costs. The loophole is effectively a tax on learning in public schools and must be excised.

Over the five-years of the funding agreement, the loophole will deny Tasmanian schools \$280 million. This is desperately needed funding that could be used on interventions to catch-up students who have slipped behind, to extend those students doing well, to provide more in class support for teachers and hire urgently need additional professional support staff like school psychologists.

Without the minimum benchmark funding schools and colleges are not resourced to manage the complex learning and psychosocial needs of all students and there will be no desired step change in student performance.

We agree with the Review’s statement in the consultation paper: *“The greatest risk is when learners fall behind and/or develop behavioural and wellbeing concerns.”* That is why the AEU has been raising concerns about the lack of funding and resources in schools and the detrimental impacts on the safety, wellbeing and learning of students and staff.

State Budget cuts

Chronic underfunding of Tasmanian public schools has been exacerbated by the announcement of \$81 million in cuts to the education department in the 2024-2025 state budget.

Understaffing in the department appears already to be at the point of farce – where it doesn't have enough people to finish work on something as fundamental as the Year 9 – 12 curriculum. Ironically, it was the state government who commissioned ACER, in 2019, to investigate on how Tasmanian could lift its rates of educational achievement. A key recommendation from the ACER review was that the curriculum should be updated yet five years later that recommendation has not been fully implemented and the work has ground to a halt.

It takes a team of people to run great schools, support educators, and deliver quality education so any cuts, whatever they are labelled, are unacceptable and will worsen the recruitment and retention crisis and ultimately ripple through to classrooms.

Funding for public schools, colleges and DECYP has failed to even keep pace with inflation. Non-wage costs for Agency allocations were indexed at only 2 per cent per annum in the 2023-24 State Budget, at a time of close to 7% cost increases represented by the CPI. And the indexation rate remained unchanged in the 2024-25 Budget. Funding that doesn't keep pace with inflation is an effective cut.

Professional Support Staff shortages – barriers to better supporting and engaging learners.

Wait times for students to access professional supports such as speech and language pathologists are unacceptable, but the delays in accessing school psychologists are catastrophic.

The education minister revealed in Budget Estimates that there are 2,217 students waiting to see a school psychologist with an average wait time for assessment and treatment of more than a year – 448 days. And these figures are conservative – we know the true picture is far worse.

The figure of 2,217 only includes students deemed of high enough need to make it onto the official waiting list, there would be many more students who request support but don't make the list. Parents who become frustrated at delays, and can afford to, seek private treatment and drop off the list, lowering numbers. The waiting times are statewide *averages* so maximum waiting times would be far higher, and especially in regional areas.

As an early career teacher commented:

“As this is my first-year teaching, it has been eye-opening to witness the number of students that require additional support but due to limited spaces at the school, the students are placed on a waitlist or are recommended to see a specialist outside of the school. I understand that there are a variety of employment demands for the specialist support staff, however my heart really does break for some of the students in my class that would benefit from having these opportunities to work alongside a professional but are unable to due to unavailability at the school or their families being unable to afford to see a specialist privately.”

Students unable to access timely support fall behind in their learning at a critical time in their development and without intensive support may never catch-up. Surveys have found that 83 percent of principals need more specialist staff for student wellbeing and nearly 70 percent require more teachers.

Tasmanian children, at a time of increasing prevalence and complexity in mental health issues, have a desperate need for more school psychologists with many communities at breaking point caused by extensive delays in assessment and treatment. The National Association of School Psychologists recommend a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students. The Australian Association of Social Workers recommend a minimum ratio of one school social worker per 500 students. An immediate increase in speech and language pathologists is also required and to ensure timely access, DECYP should employ occupational therapists dedicated to supporting students and staff at schools and colleges.

To attract and retain the professional support staff required, significant improvements in conditions and salaries are required. The government must use all tools at its disposal and that includes use of market allowances, in order to boost recruitment.

The Department of Education has claimed that the barrier to recruitment of more psychologists is a shortage in the marketplace but that is not backed by evidence. In contrast, we are aware of school psychology positions being 'overprescribed', in that more than one suitable candidate had applied for a DECYP position but they were not hired because of funding restraints. Furthermore, there are part-time school psychologists who would happily work more hours but the schools don't have enough money to employ them for "top-up hours".

One barrier to the provision of more desperately psychology services in schools appears to be a lack of political will.

Students who are not safe, and feel safe, cannot learn to their potential.

As a result of inquiries into institutional child sexual abuse, the state government launched a "Safeguarding Children and Young People" initiative, which has been under-resourced and poorly implemented. The government had not allocated any money for the initiative in 2022-23 State Budget and the entire 'Safeguarding Children and Young People' initiative was to be funded "from within the Department's existing resources". Allocating no new money for these initiatives forced the Department, and therefore schools, to divert much-needed funding from other areas to implement the Safeguarding initiatives.

The effect of chronic underfunding on staff and students, particularly the resulting shortage of specialist support staff, was again highlighted during the 2021 "Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Responses to Child Abuse", which found:

"One consistent refrain across all the schools we visited was that the demand for school support staff greatly outweighed the allocated resources for these positions by DoE. Most of the schools purchased additional time for school support staff from their general school budgets, but still do not have anywhere near the availability of professional support staff to keep up with student demand. At least three of the principals we met with told us they would like their school support staff to move into the development and delivery of proactive preventative programs - or even to undertake some therapy programs with the most needy groups of students - but the work of those professionals is almost

entirely reactive, preoccupied with assessments and responding to the most pressing and serious problems.”

The report confirms that public school principals are consistently reporting that they do not have adequate resources to safeguard students at risk of harm, disengaging from education or experiencing complex issues.

The Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education’s Responses to Child Abuse noted (Pg. 62-63):

“The social challenges and relational complexities that exist in the broader community invariably manifest in the school community, in technical terms as a complex system of interactions between the individual child and their family, peer, school, and neighbourhood systems.

We heard about some communities riven with systemic social problems, including inter-generational poverty, illiteracy, alcohol and drug abuse, malnutrition, domestic violence, and familial sexual and other abuse. It is hardly surprising that the student cohort of a school located within a community with those sorts of societal deprivations would reflect them in their relationships and behaviour at school.

In one of the schools we visited, just 2% of students were in the top quartile of ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage), and 67% are performing in the lowest 25% of academic performance in the State. That school has a very large number of family violence notifications in their students' families, and the highest number of students in the State under care and protection orders. Violence experienced by students at home at times spills over into the school community. In 2019 the school had 303 student suspensions and, with concerted effort by school leadership and staff, that number was reduced to 250 suspensions in 2020. Many students are disengaged from learning, and staff are stretched to capacity in their efforts to promote engagement. The school's allocations of student support staff (psychologist, social worker, nurse, home-school liaison officer, indigenous learning support staff) are overwhelmed by the demands of such large numbers of students under care and protection orders. Despite the school buying additional support staff time (over and above DoE allocations, based on the size of the student cohort), those support staff are constantly in response mode, with no capacity for the development and delivery of proactive preventative programs.”

Inadequate professional support staff, teachers, education support personnel and senior staff allocations affect the health and wellbeing of principals, teachers and staff and the ability to proactively address student safety and wellbeing.

If schools and colleges do not have adequate resources to develop and deliver proactive programs that safeguard children and meet student needs when it comes to child abuse, it is clear they are inadequately resourced to meet staff and student needs when it comes to a whole range of other issues, including wellbeing, behaviour, and barriers to learning.

Reduced class sizes – to better support student engagement and learning

Excessive class sizes, combined with a high level of social and economic disadvantage in Tasmanian classrooms, prevents effective observation and intervention. There are currently no caps on class

sizes in Tasmanian public schools and colleges. Reducing class sizes is known to be effective in improving engagement in learning, lifting educational outcomes and preventing disruptive behaviour. Class size limits should take into account the complexity of the student cohort and must be developed in negotiation with educators and their representatives.

The number of small schools in Tasmania brings down the average figure, but we know many schools have battled with classes of 30 or more students.

Students with disability – not supported to reach potential

Schools and colleges do not receive the level of funding required to enable every student with a disability to meet their potential, not do they have enough specialist Support Teachers.

Public schools in Tasmania have high rates of significant and substantial disability and it is the responsibility of government to ensure the needs of students and public-school classes are met. Funding of educational adjustments for students with a disability is a proportion of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) but no public school receives funding to the SRS so automatically every school is underfunded for disability education.

“We need more support for teachers of children with high needs. This is a huge workload issue, and results in a huge disparity in workload among teachers, e.g. one class may have eight or more children with learning plans while another class may have one or two. Learning plans take up too much time, and planning for the TA's to work with the children also takes up too much time. We need more teachers supporting and not just TAs. There is far too much emphasis on paperwork involved with working with kids with disabilities, support teachers work full time on learning plans and compliance documents and there is no time for them to actually work with children who they are supposed to have expertise with.”

Students meeting the criteria for ‘support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice’ should receive additional funding to meet their needs, while funding levels for all other levels of Educational Adjustment must be increased. Schools and colleges should receive additional funding allocations to support students with disability who currently do not receive funding or meet Educational Adjustment criteria.

Other barriers to students with disability reaching their potential are:

- Understaffing in schools, especially inadequate numbers of Support Teachers (who have specialist knowledge and can manage applications for funded support).
- Lack of training for teachers in dealing with students with disability.
- Limited student places at Support Schools for students with complex learning needs and behavioural issues.

First Nations

The Tasmanian Government signed the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 201922 which commits it to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to reach their potential and includes the following statement: *“Educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people remain behind those of other learners in a number of key areas. Meeting their needs and fostering access, engagement, progress, and achievement for their educational performance requires strategic effort and investment.”*

Tasmania has the highest proportion of First Nations students in public schools than any other state at 11.5% of total enrolments² while according to the Department of Education, less than one per cent of teachers in our public schools are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. While there have been some targeted improvements toward closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in Tasmanian schools, on average the gap between the two groups of students is widening.

Supporting cultural awareness and activities both inside and outside of school for First Nations teachers and students is important and under-resourced schools need funding to support engagement in important cultural activities relevant to their school communities.

Judy Hunter, Aboriginal Educator and AEU First Nations Advisory Group member, said:

There is an urgent need to invest in Aboriginal education in Tasmania and to review and improve policies and initiatives to better support students and teachers. We know that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported to achieve at higher levels of education the flow-on positive outcomes are many – it’s not just Aboriginal kids that succeed but whole communities benefit.

A central tenet of quality teaching is to “know your students and how they learn”. This means cultural awareness must be mandated for students studying to become teachers and for those already in the system – including support staff. Another fundamental step is to build the level of cultural capacity in our education system. It is vitally important for support staff because they bring their lived experience to the education setting and it helps build more respectful relationships. We need a review to identify the policies that have worked at a national level but that are no longer supported at a state level and develop initiatives to actually deliver on the goals of equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to ‘close the education gap’.

Expand LGBTIQ+ Schools Inclusion Officer program to support students and staff

Working It Out provide an invaluable support role to teachers and students through their Inclusion Officer program, but the yearly grant provided by DECYP is insufficient to cover the cost of the program and the staff FTE is insufficient to cover the need for support.

Funding should be increased to allow Working It Out to employ permanent Inclusion Officers to a total of 3.0 FTE plus additional funding to cover additional support and materials costs. Funding should be ongoing rather than annual grants that don’t allow appropriate forward planning.

Furthermore, we submit that the State Government acknowledge the need for a significant increase in funding for a more comprehensive program that tackles barriers to learning and inclusion including racism, toxic masculinity and discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality. Funding should be provided to begin work in researching the needs of students and staff and increasing the supports available.

Theme 3 – outcomes.

We agree with the Review statement in the Public Consultation Paper that *“It is not a surprise that students who become disengaged through schooling don’t complete Year 11 and 12”* and it is why the AEU has long campaigned for urgent fixes to underfunding.

We do not want another generation of students to enter a public system that is not resourced to meet their needs. Schools and colleges can only support, educate and nurture students with adequate resources to do so.

Currently, not one Tasmanian public school or college is funded to the minimum standard set by the independent Review of Funding for School led by David Gonski in 2011. This minimum Schooling Resource Standard is written into the Federal Education Act, and Tasmanian public schools and colleges are receiving just 91 percent of a minimum standard deemed necessary to ensure just 80 percent of students could achieve minimum levels in reading and numeracy.

Years 11 and 12 – lacking alternative education programs

When the Tasmanian government legislated to increase the leaving age to 18 (or finishing Year 12, or attaining a Certificate III qualification), it did not also invest in programs and staffing for colleges, and extension schools, to support and manage students who had become disengaged.

And it is no wonder that there are students in years 11 and 12 who have become disengaged because they would have entered a schooling system not equipped to meet their needs. We know an important factor in engaging students early on and helping them to develop a love of learning is for them to experience success, and a sense of accomplishment. But students who started their education journey in an underfunded system and had any one of a number of possible barriers to their learning may not have received the interventions and supports that they need to keep pace with peers. As each year passes these students slip further and further behind, despite the very best efforts of teachers.

Schools and colleges depend on alternative learning options called Tiered programs but funding for Tier 3 and 4 programs is inadequate to address student need. This funding should be increased significantly, as well as capital funding to ensure fit-for-purpose facilities are available for programs that require off-campus engagement with students.

Tiered programs, or alternative educational engagement options, need to be provided for Primary School level students. There are currently no funded options to support students below Year 7 who have high level behavioural issues, including bullying, but do not meet criteria for funding related to disability or trauma for instance.

Additionally, Tier 4 programs for Year 7-10 students need to be extended statewide, and through to Year 12. Schools in areas such as the West Coast do not have access to these alternative settings for students who may require them to remain engaged with learning, and at the same time ensure that their behaviours do not significantly impact on other students or school staff.

Similarly, there is no access to Tier 4 provision in the College and Year 11-12 system and this needs to be urgently addressed. Amazingly, a student engaged in an off-campus Tier 4 program at the end of Year 10 will return to campus-based learning in Year 11, potentially even in the same school, despite potential risks to the safety and wellbeing of other students and staff.

Currently, applications for part-time attendance need to be initiated by a parent or independent youth. In some circumstances this means that, rather than being able to reduce a student's time at school so that they can engage successfully, and their behavioural needs can be properly supported, the school needs to resort to repeated suspensions.

Theme 4 – Support for our teaching workforce.

Workload

While resources in public schools have degraded over time, the learning and psychosocial needs of students have increased. Unmanageable workload is a key reason given for teachers burning out and quitting the profession. Workload is made up of many elements and impacts different roles support staff, professional support staff, teachers and principals in different ways and which cannot all be captured in this submission.

But the universal problem is one of educators feeling constantly overwhelmed, not able to complete tasks required of them in the hours for which they are paid, and emotionally burdened by the knowledge that they cannot provide the support that every child needs to meet their potential.

Adding to 'general' workload issues created by administration, and reporting is a growing problem with violence and disruptive behaviour. Schools do not have the required senior staff, social workers, psychologists and other specialists needed to deal with the number of students presenting with complex needs. DECYP data shows the impact this is having - Workers Compensations claims from teachers for psychological injury has increased 59% between 2021 and 2024.

In 2022 EBA negotiations, AEU educators had to stop work and close schools in order for the government to agree to more in-class support. One hour a week additional Teacher Assistant time for teachers was agreed to which, while welcome, is a drop in the ocean.

“I would like recognition for the number of unpaid hours that are undertaken by teachers doing administrative tasks in their own time. e.g Seesaw, evidence of learning, learning plans, emails, referrals, data collation, data entry, SSS, mandatory reports, police reports, etc. All of these tasks are done in our own time and are unpaid. Reduced administration workload or paid time/recognition for the amount of e.g., Student Support System (SSS) reports and evidence of learning that goes into each term, ARL. police reports, mandatory reporting increases due to royal commission findings, student supports such as speech, psych and social work referrals, learning plans, data collation and entering data, seesaw entries and answering seesaw messages from parents, emails.”

In 2017, the AEU commissioned ACER to do an in-depth study into educator workloads in Tasmania. [The report “A Study of Work Practices in Tasmanian Government Schools”](#) was presented to the state government and released publicly. Seven years later the issues, and solutions, remain the same because successive governments have failed to act.

More than Tasmanian 3000 educators participated in the research, and here is a summary of the final ACER report:

Principals

Workload is unmanageable:

- Principals are working 60-hour weeks (which includes weekend work) during school term.
- In school holidays, principals work 28 hours a week, assistant principals work on average 25 hours per week in the holidays.
- Only one in five (20%) principals and one in four (25%) assistant principals believe their work is manageable.
- Between one-quarter (25% primary) and one-third (33% secondary) of principals indicated that their workload adversely affects their health.

Red tape and administration:

- More than half of principals in primary and secondary spend most of their school day on administration (56% Primary, 54% Secondary respectively)
- The most common task for all principals is internal administration.
- Not enough time for improving teaching and learning.
- Only a third (33%) of secondary school principals say they spend a “reasonable amount of time on leading teaching and learning” at their school.

Principals in secondary schools identified the top five changes needed to help alleviate their workload as:

- More specialist staff (e.g. school psychologists) to deal with student welfare (87.5% of principals)
- Increased capacity to attract and retain good teachers. (83.3%)
- Less red tape or compliance requirements (83.3%)
- More administrative support (70.8%)
- More teachers 66.7%

To help manage *teacher workload* and provide quality education, principals believe more staff in schools are key:

- Around 80% of principals (78.2% Primary, 83.3% Secondary) need additional staffing for their schools.
- Nine out of 10 (89%) of Primary principals need more specialist staff.
- Almost eight out of ten (78%) Primary principals need more in-class support for teachers.
- A majority of principals (82% Primary, 71% Secondary) want more guaranteed time for planning and preparation for teachers.
- Six out ten of principals (62.8% Primary, 66.7% Secondary) want routine administrative tasks transferred to support staff.

- Seven in ten principals (70.5% Primary, 75% Secondary) want student wellbeing work transferred to specialist staff such social workers and psychologists.

Teachers

Workloads are unmanageable:

- Only about one quarter (22% Primary, 26% Secondary) of teachers think that their workload is often or nearly always manageable.
- One-quarter of teachers also think about leaving the teaching profession.

Lesson planning, preparation and marking done at night and weekends:

- Primary teachers do on average 10.8 hours of unpaid overtime a week and 95% of that time is spent doing core teaching work like planning, preparation and marking.
- 87% of primary teachers spend time at weekends planning
- 69% of primary teachers use part of the weekend for developing lessons
- 92% of primary teachers spend nights planning and preparing lessons
- 83% of Secondary teachers did planning and preparation at night and 70% do it at weekends.

Quality of teaching is negatively impacted by workload:

- Only one quarter of secondary teachers (23%) say they have enough time to ensure the majority of their lessons are well planned.
- Less than half of primary (48%) and secondary (38.8%) can meet students' individual learning needs.
- Only one in four secondary teachers (25%) can meet the needs of students struggling with their learning.
- One in three teachers (30% Primary, 38% Secondary) say their workload has a negative impact on their teaching.

Key requirements teachers say are needed for quality education:

- Non-teaching time (non-contact time) is quarantined for teaching *related* tasks.
- A reduction in unsupported government initiatives.
- More teacher assistants.
- More professional supports such as school psychologists and speech therapists
- More teachers

With more time to teach:

- Two thirds (65%) of primary teachers and 57% of Secondary teachers would prioritise planning effectively to meet individual learning needs of students.
- More than half (57%) of primary teachers would prioritise meeting the needs of students struggling with their learning.
- Two in five primary teachers (41.5%) would monitor and assess student progress more effectively.

New Educators (Early Career Teachers) in need of support

DECYP workforce data shows Teachers quitting in their first five years of service has almost doubled since 2020, jumping 97 per cent. The government needs to build more 'on the job' mentoring and development for new educators and strengthen training in areas including disability education, managing students with difficult behaviour and engaging with parents.

Beginning Teacher Time Release (BeTTR) should be extended from the first two years to the first five years of teaching along with relevant, individualized professional learning to be offered during paid term time. The reduction in instructional load for mentor teachers needs to also be extended to be available to early career teachers across their first five years, enabling more mentor time, additional learning and support.

Principal Health and Wellbeing

Tasmanian public-school Principals are working 60-hour weeks and excessive workloads are affecting Principals' health. Principals spend an average of 28 hours per week working during school holidays. They are often forced to work these long hours just to keep up with growing administrative tasks.

Principals in schools need to be able to focus on educational leadership, which means having the time to properly support their staff to improve teaching and learning. In a recent survey, only 20 per cent of Principals felt that their workload was manageable, and more than half of Principals spend the majority of their school day on administration, taking them away from their essential leadership duties.

High workloads and under-resourcing leads to higher stress levels for Principals, with nearly a third of Principals indicating that their workload adversely affects their health. More than 40 percent of Principals report considering leaving their jobs in the next few years.

Principals consistently report that they do not have adequate resources to support equitable learning for students with disability or complex needs. Lack of professional support staff, teacher and senior staff allocations affect the health and wellbeing of Principals and the ability to retain and recruit people in leadership roles. There needs to be increased allocations of teachers, professional support staff and senior staff to reduce excessive workloads and improve support available to Principals and their school or college.

Education Support Specialists (ESS)

Education Support Specialists are an essential part of many education teams in schools. They work closely with students, guiding them to realise their potential. They often work closely with teachers and other professional support staff (School Psychologists and Speech and Language Pathologists) to develop and implement student's Individual Learning Plans. They play a vital role in the classroom, taking focused small groups or individual students for learning activities, particularly around numeracy and literacy.

The importance of ESS to student outcomes needs to be recognised with an ongoing program of funded qualifications and centrally funded permanent ESS positions in more schools across the state. ESS are a professional pathway for Teacher Assistants to extend their skills and knowledge and even continue on to become a qualified teacher. Expanding the training and provision of ESS will also assist with addressing chronic teacher shortages. New ESS should also have access to the Beginning Teacher Time Release (BeTTR) program.

More in-class support

Teacher Assistants, Support Teachers and Education Support Specialists (ESS) are vital to delivering quality education in Tasmanian classrooms. Additional TAs are required to support teachers with large class sizes or a complex cohort, while Support Teachers assist classroom teachers with student assessments, educational adjustments, documentation and learning plans, as well as managing TA duties. ESS provide support with the delivery of instructional practices and contribute to the improved learning outcomes of students, including high level instructional or differentiated support, small group work and student supervision. Current allocations in all these areas are insufficient, resulting in excessive teacher workloads and students missing out on the learning support they require.

Complexity of Year 11-12 recognised in schools

Extra resources are required to alleviate the workload of Extension School teachers delivering across multiple curriculum areas, including subjects with additional TASC and VET Quality Assurance requirements. Participation in curriculum development, TASC and VET Quality Assurance across Colleges and Extension Schools is currently severely underfunded and relies on unpaid overtime and goodwill from overworked teachers. Additional funding allowing teachers time to participate in these processes is urgently required.

Reporting to families

Teacher Workload Reference Group (comprising AEU and DECYP) looked at how the DECYP changes to reporting made in 2021 were working – namely the removal of comments from reports; the addition of a 9-point scale (for teachers for Prep to Year 10 reports); and the requirement for teachers to give regular updates to parents about their child’s learning by providing “Evidence of Learning” throughout the year.

The working group found that the new system has created new workload issues because of the evidence of learning requirements, specifically:

- The workload involved in collating, digitising, and uploading evidence of learning via CANVAS or Seesaw is significant for teachers.
- Particularly significant workload for specialist teachers who have large numbers of students.
- Limited system guidance on the types of appropriate work samples (that are time-efficient)
- Disparity between schools in the expectations being set in relation to reporting requirements.

“Scrap or reform of Evidence of Learning reporting. The added workload that put on my school was monumental. Had many teachers staying well into the night for two weeks to get that task completed.”

A number of improvements were recommended by the Group but have not been fully implemented, they include:

- Provide a list of appropriate work samples for each specialist area and grade, to help streamline workload for teachers.
- Provide more assistance and guidance for senior staff to lead and optimise reporting processes that reduce teacher workload.
- Align the collection and sharing of evidence of learning so that it occurs twice per year at the same time the two required parent-teacher interviews take place.
- Teachers reported preference for sharing work samples during parent/teacher conversations. This provides a good opportunity to explain and be clear about progress and future focus.
- Reconsider asking specialist teachers to provide evidence of learning, instead write a summary about the class program for mid and end of year (in SARIS).
- Provide clear communication to parents about the process and timing.
- Support schools to utilise existing communication channels with parents and carers, instead of introducing a new system.
- Support consistent practices and expectations across schools.
- Teachers would appreciate the acknowledgment of the time, effort and value of the assessment and reporting processes as part of their professional duties.

The new reporting model for Prep to Year 10 reduced workload in one area but created it in another. The issues with the new reporting model were documented by DECYP at the end of 2023 but there has not been follow-up action, and this needs urgent attention.

Individual Learning Plans

An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is written by a school to help children who are experiencing difficulties to improve their skills and knowledge at their own pace. It is a tool to help plan for meeting the special educational needs of a child and to aid effective teaching and learning.

DECYP mandates learning plans for students who:

- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Have a disability requiring educational adjustments
- Are supported through an approved Tier 3 or 4 flexible learning option or re-engagement provision (refer to the DoE Student Engagement Procedure for more information)
- Are highly gifted and/or have been accelerated
- Are Under Care and Protection Orders:
 - Guardianship to 18yrs s42(4)(d)(i)
 - Custody and Guardianship to 12mths s42(4)
 - Guardianship for 12mths s42(4)(c)
 - Custody for 12mths s42(4)(b)
 - Extension s44
- Have English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) and receiving a resource allocation from the EAL service.
- Require short term/transition arrangements which involves an adjustment to school attendance to attend school every day for the whole school day for a period of less than one term:

- Attendance adjustments must be in the best interests of the learner
- Apply for a period of less than a school term with anything longer than a term requiring an application for a part-time attendance certificate initiated by the parents/ guardian of the student. Refer to Section 10 Adjusted Hours through the Learning Plan for more information.

A key issue with Learning Plans is their widespread, rather than targeted, use. We know of classes where the principal has insisted that every child be on a Learning Plan. Aboriginal students are mandated to have a Learning Plan, regardless of their levels of progress or achievement.

An urgent review is needed into the 'use and abuse' and the administrative requirements of Learning Plans with the aim of reducing teacher workload.

Violence in schools

DECYP acknowledges violence in schools is a major issue and is a combination of student-on-student, student-on-staff, and parent-on-staff.

In February 2024, DECYP replaced two former reporting systems (the SRLS and the Incident Reporting App) with the new Safety Reporting System (SRS). Widespread confusion and lack of awareness persists around the newly centralised reporting system. Principals were given the job of advertising to staff the new reporting system and because of that unrealistic expectation, we believe awareness and use of the new reporting has been limited.

A question in Budget Estimates (September 2024) exposed the fact that DECYP does not routinely track 'global' data about violent incidences across school and colleges. When asked for data trends about violent incidences neither the Education Minister nor Department officials could answer and instead the question was "taken on notice".

There's a popular quote about "measuring what matters" and the government has announced to educators that addressing violence in school is not a real priority. If data is not routinely tracked and reviewed it is impossible for the Department to evaluate the effectiveness, or otherwise, of its initiatives.

Remuneration

Remuneration of Tasmanian educators may be outside the scope of this Review but it shouldn't be - financial incentives and salaries are part of the package of changes needed to solve the staffing crisis.

Tasmania's most experienced teachers will likely soon again be the lowest paid in the nation as states like Queensland, New South Wales and the ACT significantly boost teacher salaries beyond that offered by the Tasmanian Government. If we want to attract and retain the 'best and brightest', our teachers must be paid a competitive and fair wage. Tasmanian students deserve to be taught by the very best teachers. In a national teacher shortage crisis, Tasmania wages need to be competitive with other jurisdictions and recognise the complexity of the role and the added challenges of teaching students with the highest rates of disadvantage of any state. Valuing Tasmanian educators means wages that are nationally competitive.

Teacher Assistants, Library Technicians and other Education Support Personnel (ESP) play a critical role in our schools and colleges supporting the learning of our children. ESP are highly skilled, knowledgeable and experienced educators who undertake paraprofessional work. Unfortunately, this

work is not currently properly recognised and valued. Increasingly, Teacher Assistants and other ESP are completing formal tertiary qualifications without any extra remuneration. These workers are amongst the lowest paid employees in education and the public service. The average yearly salary for a Teacher Assistant has reached as low as \$25,000. All Education Support Personnel (ESP) must be paid a fair wage for 52 weeks of the year.

The current employment practice of standing down essential support staff without pay for several weeks every year is unacceptable and must come to an end. Student learning depends on dedicated and professional Teacher Assistants, Library Technicians and other ESPs who must be valued and respected with appropriate conditions.

Theme 5 – implementation

There has been a pattern of the government announcing education policies without then resourcing the department to properly implement changes. The most recent example is the government's response to the *'Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Responses to Child Abuse'* released in June 2021.

The response of the Rockliff Government and DECYP has been insufficient and unsatisfactory. The 'Safeguarding Children and Young People' initiative has been under-resourced and poorly implemented.

We raised the issue when the 2022-23 State Budget papers noted that the entire 'Safeguarding Children and Young People' initiative was to be funded "from within the Department's existing resources". Allocating no new money for these initiatives forced the Department, and therefore schools, to divert much-needed funding from other areas to implement the Safeguarding initiatives.

There has also been a widening gap between DECYP and the effective implementation of policies, industrial Agreements and Awards. There is a raft of changes from the last round of EBAs still needing to be implemented by DECYP. The onus for implementation and monitoring of policies, regulations, industrial agreements has been placed on Principals, who are unable to do so effectively while directly also given disproportionate responsibility for addressing recruitment amid a teacher shortage crisis.

For example, every Band 1 teacher is entitled to one hour per-week *pro rata* Teacher Assistant (TA) support. However, AEU survey data reveals that 30% of teachers are not even aware of this allocation. And of those aware of the new benefit, less than half thought it was being properly implemented in their schools.

As a general rule, implementation of policies requiring changes in schools are poorly resourced which leads to an inevitable cascading of issues, and without proper funding this cycle is set to continue.