

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Education Policy Comment

Public School Students Are Robbed of Funding By Increasing Bureaucracy

Public school students in Victoria are being robbed of funding by a bloated bureaucracy. There has been a huge expansion in the education bureaucracy over the past decade or more. It has far exceeded the growth in teachers and students in public schools. It has soaked up much of a very small funding increase for public schools.

Since 2009, the increase in non-teaching staff in the public education system was double that of teachers and three times the increase in students. Non-teaching staff increased by 60.4% between 2009 and 2021 compared to a 29.3% increase in teachers and an increase of 20.1% in students.

The growth in non-teaching staff has occurred at all levels of the school system – central and regional offices and in schools. The increases occurred under both Liberal and Labor Governments.

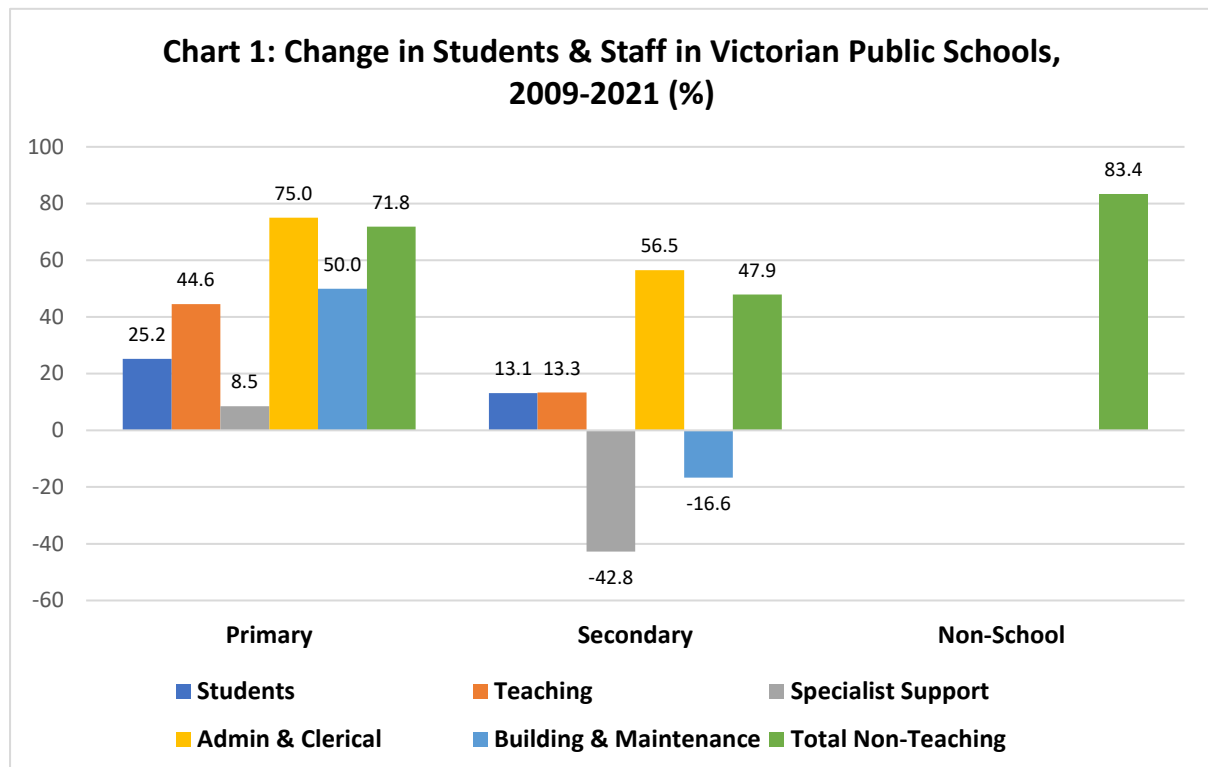
Central and regional offices staff increased by 1,220 between 2009 and 2021, an increase of 83.4% [Chart 1]. Nearly all this increase occurred under the Andrews Government. Non-school staff increased by 2,007 (81.8%) since 2015. Administrative and clerical office staff increased by 1,004 or 79.1%. Executive staff increased by 84 or 57.1% and specialist support staff increased by 118 or 200.8%.

Much of the work of central and regional offices is devoted to regulatory and compliance tasks. Only a few of the many branches of the Victorian Department of Education are directly involved in supporting teaching and learning. The vast majority are devoted to administration of finance, policing compliance with regulations, performance monitoring, human resource management and other corporate functions.

The bureaucratisation of public education in Victoria has extended to the school level under the guise of school autonomy implemented by Liberal and Labor Governments beginning back in the 1990s. Since 2009, administrative and clerical staff have increased by 75% in primary schools and 56.5% in secondary schools. The increase in primary schools far exceeded the increase in teachers (44.6%) while the increase in secondary schools was over four times the 13.3% increase in teachers. The increases in administrative staff also far exceeded the increase in enrolments – three times the increase in primary school students (25%) and over four times the increase in secondary students (13.1%).

Increased government accountability requirements and regulations have driven the huge increase in administrative staff in central and regional offices and in schools as well as placing increased administrative workloads on principals and teachers. The promise of more

school autonomy and less bureaucratic control has turned into a monster of more bureaucracy at both the central and school levels.



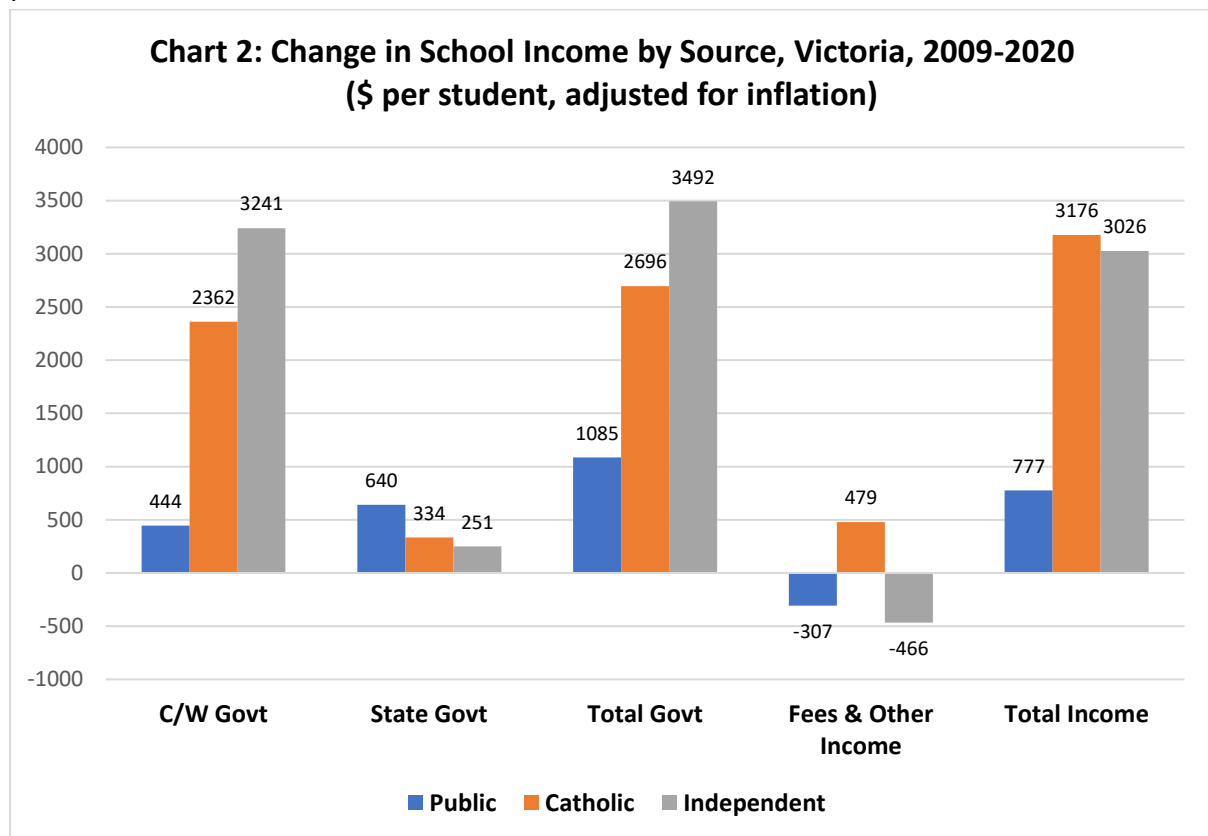
Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia; Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services.

Public schools are subject to widespread accountability measures covering financial management, student well-being, behaviour management and safety, teacher appraisal, compliance training, school review processes, curriculum standards, student progress based on standardised test results, workplace health and safety, and auditing. This requires increased monitoring and administration by managers and staff in central and regional offices. The system has resulted in a strengthening of central control over schools and a focus on management and administration rather than direct support for teaching and learning.

Despite the huge increase in administrative staff, the workload of teachers has not diminished. Instead, the administrative load for principals and teachers has increased. School leaders and teachers are working longer hours on accountability measures. Filling out endless forms and writing reports for central office is part and parcel of the life of principals and teachers.

Much of a small increase in funding for public schools has been spent on the increased bureaucracy. Combined Commonwealth and State funding, adjusted for inflation, for public schools increased by only \$1,083 per student between 2009 and 2020, less than \$100 per student per year [Chart 2]. Victorian Government funding increased by \$640 per student.

The previous Victorian Liberal Government denuded public schools by cutting funding by \$957 per student, adjusted for inflation, between 2011 and 2015, while increasing administrative and clerical staff in schools to extend school autonomy. The Andrews Government reversed these cuts by increased funding for public schools since 2015 by \$1,342 per student. However, much of this increase has gone to increasing central and regional office staff and more increases in non-teaching staff in schools.



Source: ACARA, National Report on Schooling data portal. The figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined index of the Wage Price Index for Public and Private Education and the Consumer Price Index.

The result of the diversion of resources into more bureaucracy is that classroom learning has suffered, especially for disadvantaged students. [High inequity in school results](#) continues virtually unabated. For example, low socio-economic status (SES) Year 9 students are over four years in learning behind the high SES peers. The reading, writing and number scores of low SES Year 9 students are less than those of high SES Year 5 students. Reading, writing and numeracy results of Year 9 low SES students all fell between 2010 and 2022. One-quarter of them are below the national reading standard and nearly one-third are below the writing standard.

Victorian public schools are massively under-resourced. Along with Queensland, Victoria is the equal second most under-resourced public school system in Australia after the Northern Territory. At present, they are only funded at 84.6% of their Schooling Resource Standard and there is no prospect of even getting to 91% by the end of the decade under the current funding arrangements.

The next Victorian Government must address the funding failures of the past. Public schools and disadvantaged students desperately need a funding boost, but it should go to support learning not more bureaucracy. Candidates and parties in the election campaign must commit to fully funding within the next four years and stopping the diversion of resources into more bureaucracy and increased funding where it is most needed – in the classroom.

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