

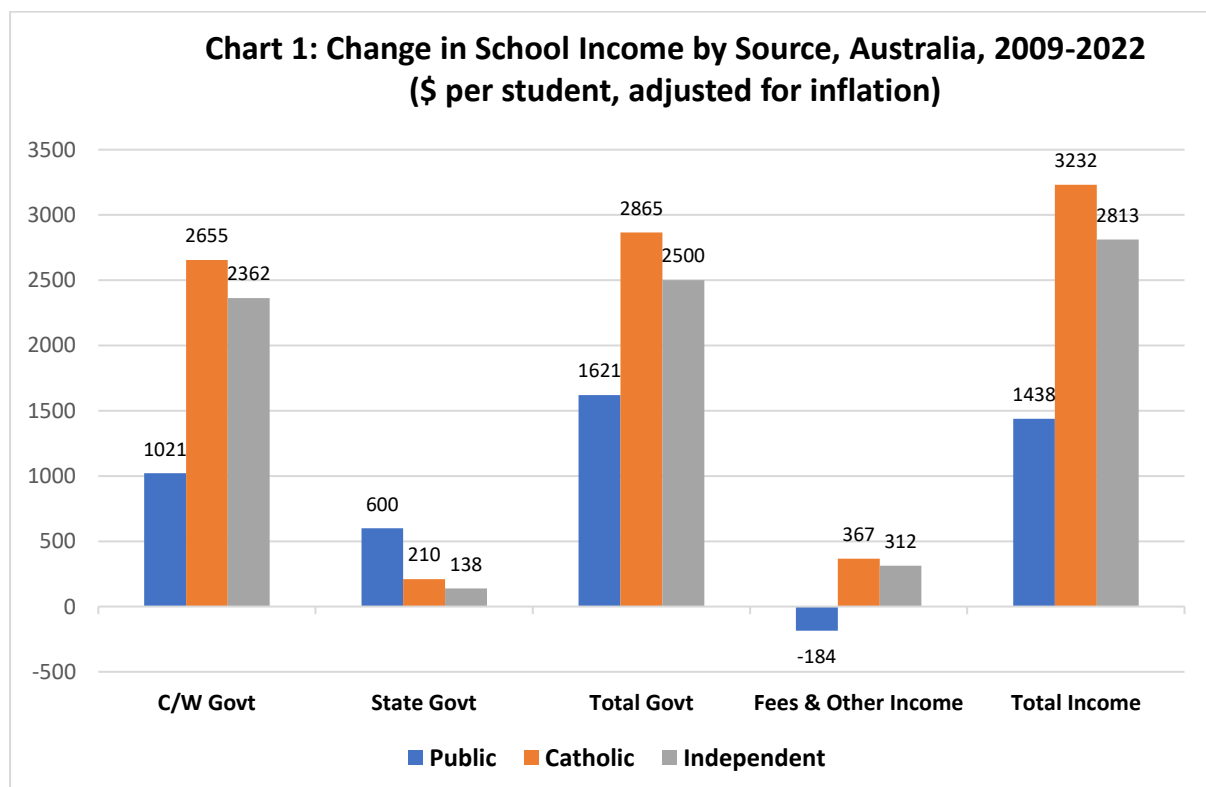
# SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

## School Funding Brief

### Government Funding Increases Continue to Favour Private Schools

New figures again demonstrate the bias against public schools in Australia's school funding system. Government funding for Catholic and Independent schools has increased much more than for public schools since 2009. Government funding has enabled private schools to have a much higher income per student than public schools and to provide more teaching and material resources per student than in public schools. It is extraordinary, but shameful, that Australia's school funding system so favours the privilege over the under-privileged. The new figures show that the Commonwealth and state governments must fully fund public schools in the new funding agreements being negotiated at present.

The new figures published by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ADARA) and adjusted for inflation by Save Our Schools show that between 2009 and 2022 government funding (Commonwealth and state) for Catholic schools increased by \$2,865 per student and by \$2,500 in Independent schools compared to \$1,621 for public schools [Chart 1]. In percentage terms, the increase for Catholic and Independent schools was well over double that for public schools – 37.1%, 39.6% and 15.3% respectively.



Source: ACARA [National Report on Schooling data portal](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

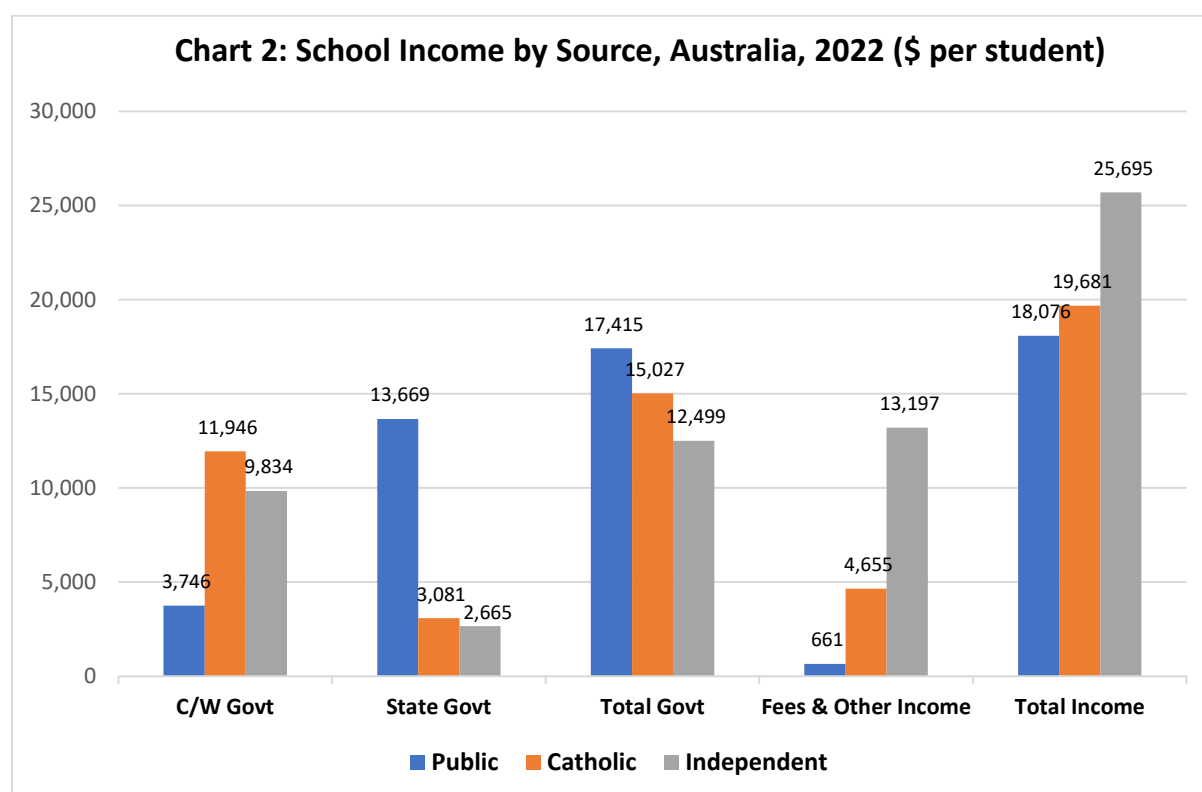
Commonwealth Government funding for Catholic schools increased by \$2,655 per student and by \$2,362 for Independent schools compared to \$1,021 for public schools. State government funding

increases only slightly favoured public schools - \$600 compared to \$210 for Catholic schools and \$138 for Independent schools. The states' funding increase for public schools has only occurred in recent years after the states had cut funding over several years.

The increase in total income per student in Catholic and Independent schools was double that in public schools - \$3,232 in Catholic schools and \$2,813 in Independent schools compared to \$1,438 in public schools. Fee and other income increased slightly in private schools but fell slightly for public schools.

As a result of these changes, Independent schools now have a massive resource advantage over public schools. Their income per student in 2022 was over 40 per cent higher than for public schools - \$25,695 compared to \$18,076. Catholic school income at \$19,681 per student is significantly higher than for public schools [Chart 2].

Private schools are more dependent of government funding in 2022 than they were in 2009. Government funding accounts for 76% of the income of Catholic schools in 2022 compared to 72% in 2009. The dependence of Independent schools on government funding increased from 41% to 49%.



Source: ACARA [National Report on Schooling data portal](#).

The bias towards catholic and Independent schools in funding increase and total income per student is incompatible with the challenges facing Australian education. Many disadvantaged students are failing to meet minimum standards and the large majority of these students attend public schools.

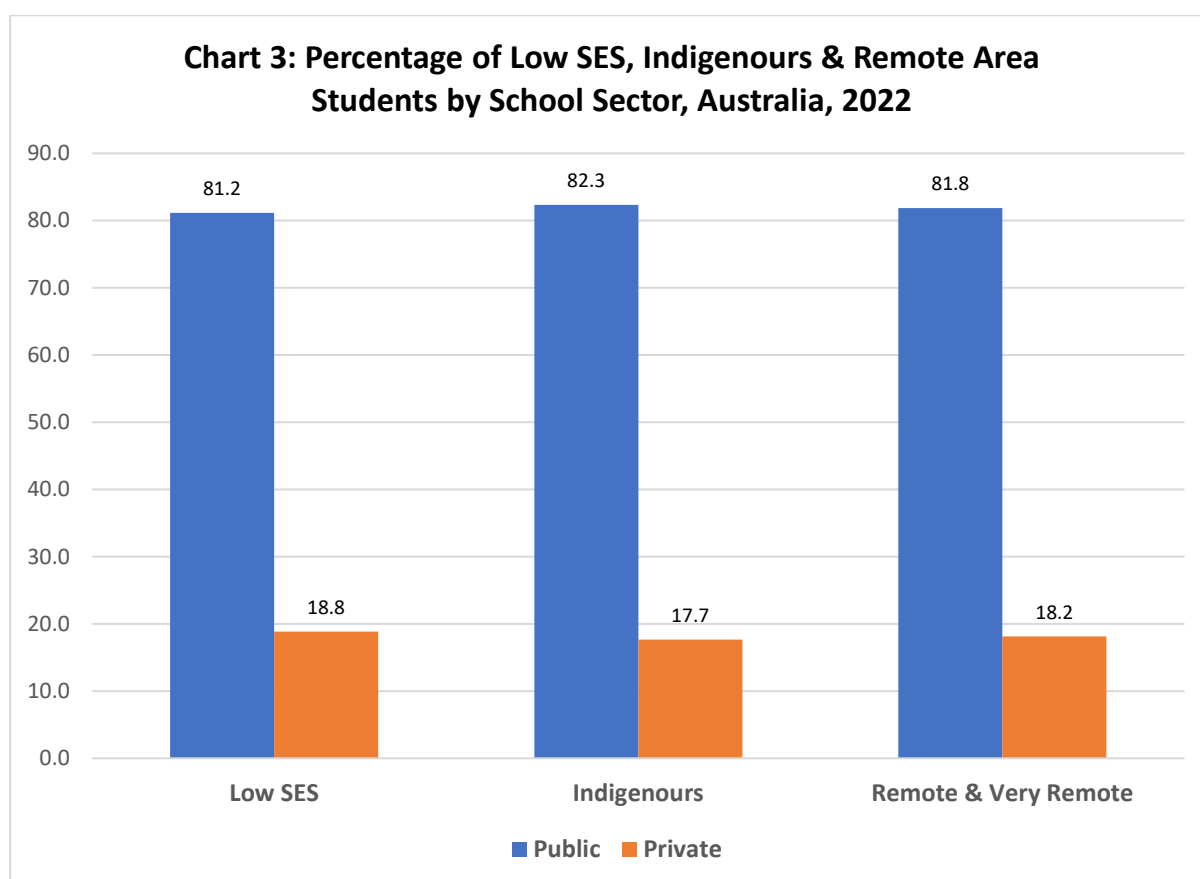
[The latest results](#) from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that large proportions of 15 year-old low SES, Indigenous and remote area students did not achieve the basic PISA proficiency level in 2022. One-third or more of low SES and remote area students did not achieve basic proficiency in reading and science while 43% of low SES and 48% of remote area students did not achieve basic mathematics proficiency. Over half of all Indigenous students (55%)

did not achieve basic mathematics proficiency, 45% did not achieve reading proficiency and 46% did not achieve science proficiency.

The percentage of disadvantaged students not achieving basic proficiency standards was generally 3-4 times that of high SES students. Only about 10% of high SES students did not achieve these standards.

The achievement gaps between high socio-economic status (SES) and disadvantaged students have widened in reading, mathematics and science since 2006. The OECD states that 20 points on the PISA scale represents about one year of learning. The gaps between high and low SES students increased from just over four years of learning to nearly five years in reading and over five years in mathematics and science. The gaps between high SES and Indigenous students in reading remains at just over six years of learning and nearly seven years of learning in science. The mathematics gap increased significantly from about six years to six and a half years. The gaps between high SES and remote area students increased by about one year of learning, with a reading gap of over five years and nearly six years in mathematics and science.

The large majority of low SES, Indigenous and remote area students attend public schools. In 2022, 81% of low SES students and 82% of Indigenous and remote area students were enrolled in public schools [chart 3].



Source: Report on Government Services 2024

Despite enrolling the vast majority of students with the most learning challenges, public schools are massively under-funded. Public schools are only funded at 87.6% of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in 2024. This estimate includes an adjustment to official figures for [accounting tricks](#)

in the existing funding agreements that swindle public schools of over four percentage points of their SRSs. The funding shortfall in 2024 is about \$6.8 billion.

[The Commonwealth Education Minister, Jason Clare](#), has set ambitious tertiary education targets. Meeting them depends on improving school results for disadvantaged students. This will not happen unless public schools are fully funded at 100% of their SRS without any accounting tricks. Of course, the money has to be spent wisely and be well-targeted at those most in need and governments have to be transparent on how funding is allocated. However, there will be no improvement without increasing funding. [Money does matter in school education](#).

It is a critical time for public education and the future prospects of disadvantaged students. Negotiations are under way now on the next funding agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The next few months will tell whether the actions of governments will match their rhetoric. The Albanese Government must lead the way to genuine fully funding for public schools and not allow the states to get away with short-changing public schools as the Morrison Government did in the previous round of funding agreements.

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