

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Education Policy Comment

More Fudges by Mr. Tudge

The Shadow Minister for Education, Alan Tudge, has again fudged figures on school funding and school results. He is a serial offender here. He regularly resorted to fudging data while Minister for Education to denigrate Australia's school performance. His fudges obscure the facts that school funding increases have heavily favoured private schools for the last two decades.

Writing in *The Australian* (17 September), Tudge claimed that school funding per student, adjusted for inflation, increased by 60 per cent since 2000. This is far from the truth. The real figure is less than half this and the increase for private schools was 2.5 times that for public schools.

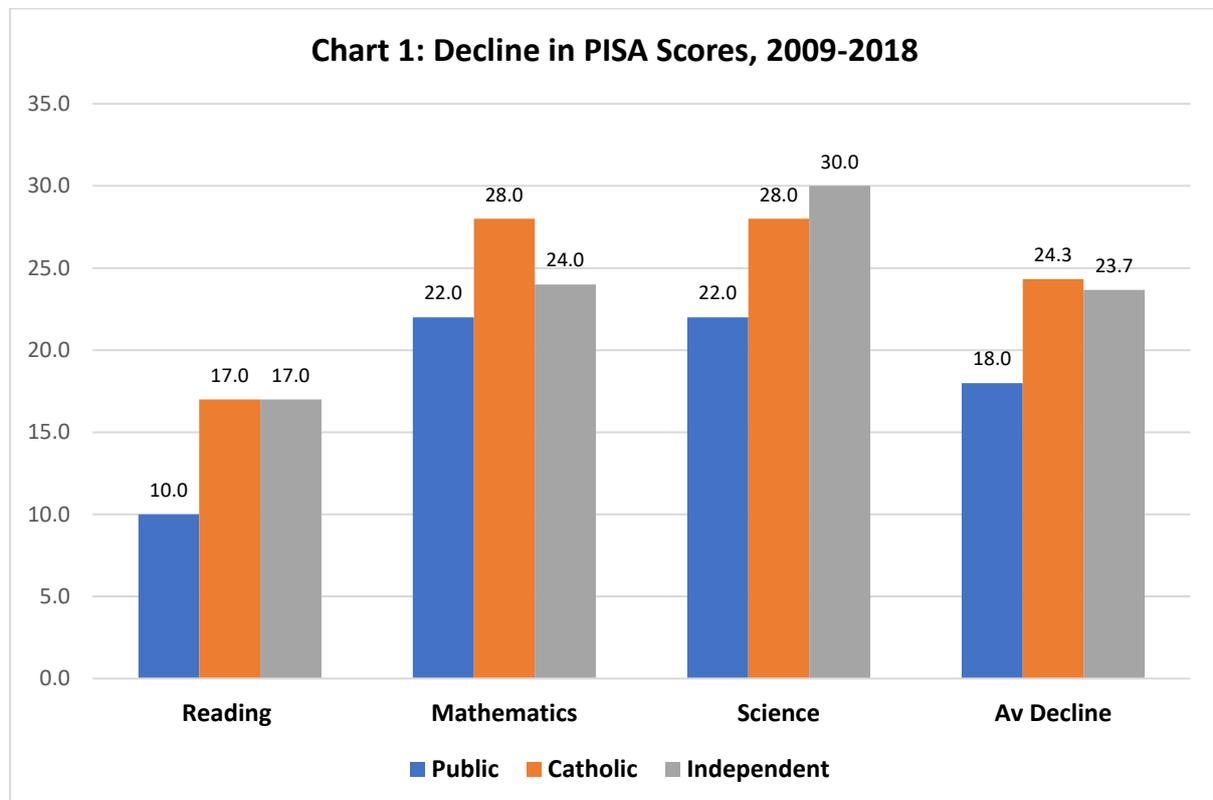
Funding per student in public and private schools, adjusted for inflation, increased by 24 per cent between 2001-02 and 2019-20. Funding per private school student increased by 48 per cent compared to only 18 per cent in public schools. Funding for private schools increased by \$4,153 per student compared to \$2,317 per student in public schools. These figures are drawn from the Report on Government Services but are adjusted for incompatibilities between the data for public and private schools whereby book entry items (user cost of capital and depreciation), payroll tax and school transport are included in the funding figures for public schools but not for private schools.

As a result, private schools have considerably more resources than public schools. Data published by the [Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority \(ACARA\)](#) show that the total income per student in Independent schools was 52 per cent higher than in public schools in 2020 while in Catholic schools it was 11 per cent higher. The total income per student in public schools was \$16,030 compared to \$24,338 in Independent schools and \$17,820 in Catholic schools.

Tudge claimed that school results have declined despite the increase in funding. If his claim has any validity, they point to the failure of private schools to uphold standards despite their favourable funding. Research published by the [Australian Council for Educational Research](#) shows that the biggest declines in Australia's results in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were in Catholic and Independent schools. Reading, Mathematics and Science scores in PISA fell by more than in public schools between 2009 and 2018 [Chart 1]. The average fall in public school results across the three domains was 17 points compared to 24 in both Catholic and Independent schools. To the extent we can rely on the PISA results (and there are [question marks about their reliability](#)), this suggests that billions in taxpayer funding is being wasted on privileged private schools.

Tudge also fudged Australia's school results by highlighting the decline in PISA results for 15-year-old students and ignoring improving results in Year 12. The percentage of the estimated Year 12 population that completed Year 12 increased from 68 per cent in 2001 to

79 per cent in 2018, although there is an unexplained drop-off in 2019 which partially recovered to 76 per cent in 2020 [[Report on Government Services 2007 & 2022](#)]. The proportion of 20 to 24-year-olds who attained a Year 12 Certificate or equivalent increased from 71 per cent in 2001 to 85 per cent in 2020 [[ABS, Education and Work, 2011 & 2020](#)].



Source: Australian Council for Educational Research.

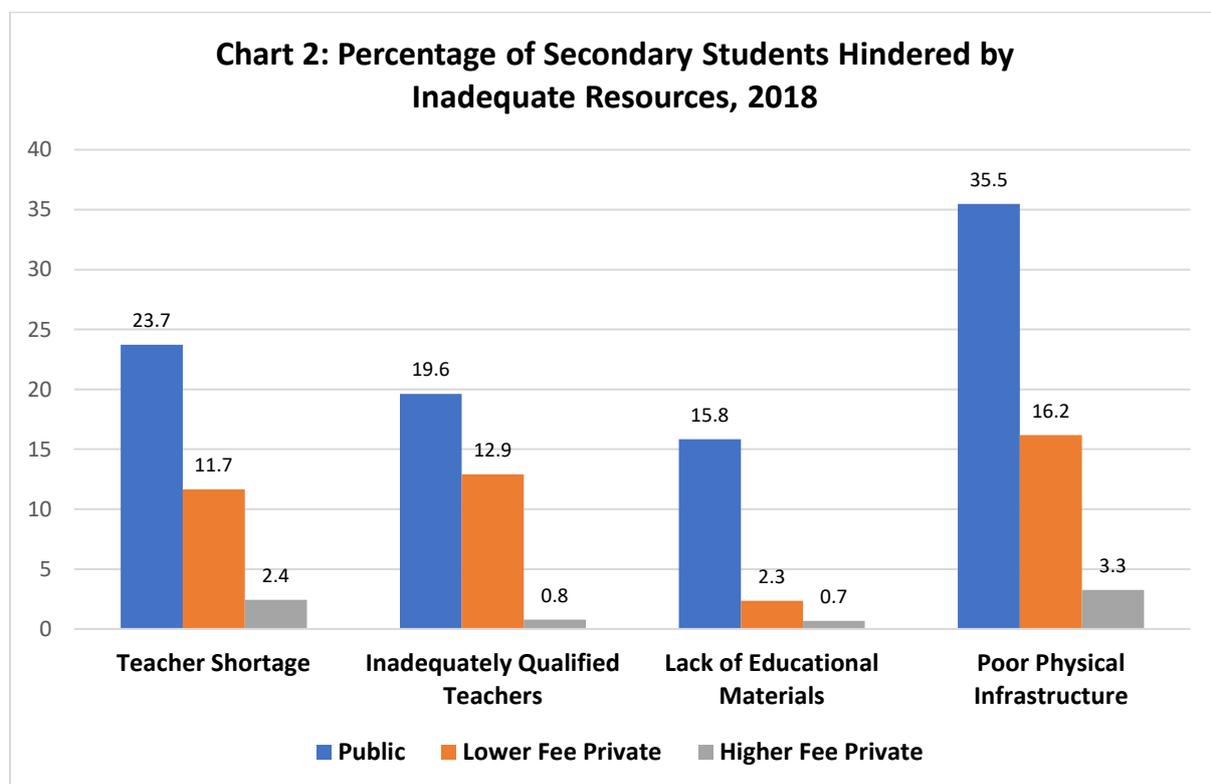
OECD data also shows that Australia had one of the larger increases in the OECD in the proportion of 25-34 year-olds who attained at least an upper secondary education. It increased by 19 percentage points from 71 per cent in 2001 to 90 per cent in 2019 [[Education at a Glance 2002 & 2020](#)].

Tudge’s fudges ignore and distract from the major challenges facing Australian education, namely, the extent of disadvantage and the large achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students at all levels of schooling. For example, the Report on Government Services revealed that nearly 28 per cent of students from low socio-economic status families did not complete Year 12 in 2020 while 41 per cent of Year 7/8 Indigenous students do not make it to Year 12. The [2020 NAPLAN Report](#) shows that 24 per cent of Year 9 students from low educated parents and 31 per cent of Indigenous students did not achieve the minimum reading standard. In addition, students of low educated parents are about four years behind those of highly educated parents in reading at Year 9 while Indigenous students are over five years behind.

The effect of Tudge’s fudges is divert attention from the funding needs of public schools. Over 80 per cent of low SES, Indigenous and other disadvantaged students attend public schools. Estimates derived from the Report on Government Services 2022 show that 82 per cent of low SES students and 83 per cent of Indigenous students were enrolled in public

schools in 2021. Moreover, 98 per cent of all disadvantaged schools are public schools based on figures published by the Australian Council of Educational Research. Other research based on different data shows that over 90 per cent of disadvantaged schools are public schools.

The learning of these disadvantaged students is severely hindered by inadequate resources. Data compiled in PISA 2018 reveals that 25 per cent of public school students have their learning hindered by a shortage of teachers compared to only 2 per cent in higher fee private schools [Chart 2]. Twenty per cent of public school students have their learning hindered by inadequately qualified teachers compared to less than one per cent in higher fee private schools. The presence of inadequately qualified teachers generally reflects the high proportion of teachers teaching out-of-field in public schools. Sixteen per cent of public school students suffer from lack of educational materials compared to less than one per cent in higher fee schools. There are vast differences in the quality of school infrastructure. Thirty-six per cent of public school students are hindered by poor quality physical infrastructure compared to only three per cent of high fee private schools.



Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2019, Online Tables.

Tudge’s fudges are a reminder that the Liberal Party is not at all concerned about the state of public school funding. They serve to divert attention from the funding crisis in public schools. They are designed to deny public schools the funding increases needed to ensure all students received an adequate education and to improve equity in education. At present, public schools in Australia are only funded at 87 per cent to their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) while private schools are funded at 104 per cent of their SRS. Under the current funding arrangements public schools will only ever be funded at less than 91 per cent

of their SRS while private schools will be funded at over 100 per cent of their SRS to at least 2029.

We urgently need a better deal for public schools. Unfortunately, the new Minister for Education, Jason Clare, was silent on the future funding of public schools in the election campaign and has remained silent since. The Albanese Government has failed to provide any detailed plan to ensure that public schools are fully funded. All we have is hollow and platitudinous statements that the Government will put public schools “on the path of full and fair funding”. This is not enough; the silence must end. Save Our Schools calls on the Minister to issue a detailed policy statement on future funding of public schools.

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