

**Reopen Our Schools  
Submission to the  
Senate Select Committee  
on School Funding Investment  
March 2016**



Reopen Our Schools  
Banyule  
March 2016

## Contents

Background .....	3
Terms of reference.....	3
State funding issues .....	4
Strong accountability reforms are needed .....	5
The impact of proposed funding reduction - \$30 billion proposed reduction over 10 years. ....	5
About equity and the connection to funding .....	6
International Research .....	8
Local Stories .....	11
Research, disadvantage generally and the situation in Banyule.....	13
In conclusion .....	16

## Background

- The Kennett Government's harsh attacks on schools resulted in the closing and sale of 300 public schools and the sacking of 8,000 teachers in Victoria in the 1990s. In 2006, the then Victorian Opposition Minister for Education, Martin Dixon MP said that some of the schools shut should not have closed and many should have remained open. Put simply, they got it wrong<sup>1</sup>.
- The building of more public schools in Victoria has not been properly addressed by successive governments since. This is in the face of Victoria's strong population growth and research that shows that 550 more public schools will be needed by 2031<sup>2</sup>.
- Figures provided by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) show that as at 2013, Victoria has passed the peak of the last baby boom in 1971, when the government acted quickly to build large numbers of public schools to accommodate the demand in enrolment growth numbers.<sup>3</sup> Many schools are now old and crumbling; hastily built in the 1970s to accommodate that baby boom. As at August 2015, the current State Government has, after conducting an audit, prioritised rebuilding and repairing many public schools.<sup>4</sup>
- No new public schools are opening in Victoria in 2016 however.
- Enrolments in public schools are increasing. Many inner and middle ring public schools are under extreme enrolment pressures. In 2014, that year saw the biggest movement of portables across Victoria to accommodate growing student numbers.<sup>5</sup> It has also been reported that the trend of parents choosing to send their children to private schools over public schools has reversed for the first time since 1977.<sup>6</sup>
- This, in turn, places pressure on public infrastructure such as local roads, congestion and parking and other associate traffic problems.
- The last significant Federal Government investment in school infrastructure was through the BER program.

## Terms of reference

This submission aims to address the terms of reference in a holistic way, rather than one point at a time.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/news/business/kennett-wrong-to-shut-schools-libs/2006/09/04/1157222071114.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/victoria-state-election-2014/victoria-needs-up-to-550-new-schools-by-2031-grattan-institute-20141017-117lv6.html>

<sup>3</sup> Attachment 1, Number of births in Victoria. Source: MPA

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/news/archive/Pages/schoolmain.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/temporary-classrooms-being-used-for-a-decade-at-some-victorian-schools-through-constraints-on-building-budgets-20150113-12nd06.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/public-schools-break-40year-trend-towards-private-schools-20160203-gmkseg>

## State funding issues

- Under the current State Government's plan, almost 330 buildings at 153 schools will be renovated and refurbished under a \$27 million maintenance funding program.
- \$27 million is in addition to school capital funding announced in the 2015-16 State Budget, as well as annual funding all schools receive for maintenance and upkeep.
- Money is being directed to buildings that were identified during an independent audit of every government school building as being in the most need of renovation in 2012.
- This decision to rebuild many Victorian public schools came after systemic cuts to education over the previous 4 years of previous Liberal State Government policy which saw \$1billion cut from the education system, which included a \$50million shortfall for Gonski, and a halving of the capital budget from an average of \$467 million to just \$278million<sup>7</sup>.
- The current State Government recently conducted a review in 2015 into school funding, called the Government School Funding Review, Emerging Issues and Ideas or the Bracks Review. Findings and the report can be found [here](#). But by and large, the Bracks review has called for a review of the funding of schools on the basis of common themes that emerged:
  - "Schools and the community want trust and confidence in Victoria's funding system.
  - They want a system that provides resources to schools based on the educational needs of students to obtain a high-quality education.
  - The intent of the Student Resource Package has broad support, but elements of the model need updating.
  - More can be done to meet the needs of some students, including the most disadvantaged.
  - Schools and communities want to understand the funding system better. They want more transparency from government about funding decisions and school budget allocations.
  - Stakeholders want to know that school leaders are supported to use resources in the best possible way to improve outcomes for children.
  - They want actors in the system to be accountable for resourcing decisions<sup>8</sup>."

---

<sup>7</sup> Victorian Budget Briefing papers 2014/15 PAEC

[http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/2014-15\\_budget\\_estimates/Presentations/Budget\\_Briefing\\_Seminar\\_2014-15\\_-\\_Presentation.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/paec/2014-15_budget_estimates/Presentations/Budget_Briefing_Seminar_2014-15_-_Presentation.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Emerging Issues and Ideas, Government School Funding Review, Steve Bracks, 2015, p4. [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ehq-production-australia/640aa4394d67b14d455b1a74ae4854da8f7b877b/documents/attachments/000/026/221/original/Bracks\\_Review\\_\\_Emerging\\_Issues\\_\\_Ideas\\_\\_2015.pdf?1441596430](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ehq-production-australia/640aa4394d67b14d455b1a74ae4854da8f7b877b/documents/attachments/000/026/221/original/Bracks_Review__Emerging_Issues__Ideas__2015.pdf?1441596430)

- Please watch our short 2 minute video that gives a concise overview of school funding in Victoria. You can view it by clicking [here](#).
- Further funding cuts would have an obvious detrimental impact on the State School system in Victoria for the foregoing reasons. Further explanations are provided below.

### Strong accountability reforms are needed

- The need for strong accountability measures in education spending at the local level is vitally important. Currently in Victoria, principals at the coal face are required to have audited cash accounts. However, where the DET places credit transfers into school accounts, there is currently no auditing requirement for how those funds are spent. With Gonski promising that funding will remain attached to the child, it is imperative, that more stringent and transparent accountability mechanisms be introduced to ensure that the education investment is spent on the kids, is fully accounted to school communities and the DET, and not be subject to the particular whim of leadership at a local school. This has become particularly pertinent in Victoria with recent revelations arising from public enquiries conducted by Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), most notably IBAC Ord<sup>9</sup> and IBAC Dunham<sup>10</sup>.
- In 2015, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) released its report titled *Additional School Costs for Families*.<sup>11</sup> The report noted that schools locally raised an extra \$626 million in funding from locally raised funds. Much of this has come out of the pockets of parents as schools turn to parents asking them to pay the shortfall of education funding. What this means is that social stratification increases, particularly where more advantaged communities are better able to contribute financially to local schools. Schools in disadvantaged communities will not have the same capacity to raise local funding, and consequently the gap will widen for those children as does the disparity in equity.

### The impact of proposed funding reduction - \$30 billion proposed reduction over 10 years.

The question really is, whether there is a connection between reducing funding in education and what if any that impact will have? And will that impact on kids in rural and regional communities disproportionately, and will it impact on people gaining access to job skills that will be required into the future.

The answer to that question is obvious: yes, of course it will! And often these decisions will have a lifelong impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in society. There is an urgent need to reduce disparities in Australian schools.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/ibac-questions-still-to-be-answered-for-operation-ord-20150630-gi1pbu.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/corruptionfighting-body-to-investigate-botched-180-million-ultranet-project-for-schools-20151217-glpsbg.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150211-School-costs/20150211-School-costs.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/geoff-masters/article/reducing-disparities-between-australian-schools>

There is already an abundance of research that shows the impact that disinvesting in education has. Some of the most notable examples, amongst others, that show the harm caused by disinvesting in public education are:

- Increasing social stratification of society and amongst schools;
- Rising levels of inequality;
- Lack of equity in Australian schools
- Student learning outcomes are falling;
- Concentrating disadvantage in some schools;
- Residualising of the public education system and some public schools;
- Early school leavers may also experience under-developed literacy and numeracy skills; and limited and or low expectations as well as significant barriers to re-entering post compulsory education.

### About equity and the connection to funding

At the Need to Succeed Symposium in 2015, a report authored by B. Shepherd found the following when examining equity.

In the executive summary of that report it states:

"This report found that Victorian schools became more unequal between 2010 and 2013. The findings of this report indicate that tackling educational disadvantage has grown more difficult over the last five years, and that funding reform is required to stop the academic gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students widening further.

Section 1 of the report, produced by former principal Bernie Shepherd, answers one key question: Has equity in schooling improved in recent years?' It finds that on both a state and national basis the socioeconomic status of the school community became a stronger determinant of student academic achievement from 2010 to 2013. Further analysis was performed by comparing a group of high and low *Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage* (ICSEA) schools between 2008 and 2013 using data from the *My School* website. This analysis examined school enrolment, academic performance and funding trends. It found:

- » Lower ICSEA schools on average lost 30 students, while higher ICSEA schools gained over 40 students
- » Enrolments of students in the top half of the ICSEA distribution increased by 3 percentage points for high ICSEA schools and declined by 6 percentage points for low ICSEA schools
- » The academic performance (as determined by a composite NAPLAN index) gap between high and low ICSEA schools increased
- » Overall funding to both high and low ICSEA schools grew over the last 4 years by similar increments (when accounting for all sources of income)

These changes were likely driven by a migration of students (predominantly those from more advantaged families) from the low to high ICSEA schools, increasing the gap in NAPLAN performance. The end result of this shift was a concentration of disadvantage in already disadvantaged schools, creating a widening academic gap along socioeconomic lines.

It would be reasonable to expect commensurately higher levels of funding in the low ICSEA schools to meet the increased educational costs that the Gonski review found came with concentrated disadvantage<sup>5</sup>. Our analysis of Victorian school funding from private and public sources shows this has not been the case. Regardless of whether a student attends a high or low ICSEA school, the increase in net recurrent funding on a per student basis has been quite similar. Even if funding from government sources did favour the more disadvantaged schools, it would seem that any overall gain was mitigated by the ability of the better off schools to raise student fees."<sup>13</sup>

Policies that promote choice and competition amongst schools are damaging equity and outcomes.

These policies concentrate disadvantage and are economically inefficient. The linkages about lack of equity and the ongoing effects are clear based on the report findings as highlighted above. The ability of advantaged students to migrate to more advantaged schools only further entrenches disadvantaged in residualises schools, because the concentration of disadvantage grows. Then, it looks like the school is a poor performing school, and the DET comes and suggests that performance must be lifted, or perhaps low performing schools should be closed down. Policies that promote an even spread of students will see an increase in equity and quite possibly also lift student performance.

Below is a graph extracted from a document presented at the Need to Succeed Symposium which was held in Victoria in 2015. What the graph below shows, is that since the advent of the My Schools website, parents have school shopped and moved their children, and it is usually children from advantaged backgrounds to schools that appear to be high performing schools. A whole paper could be written on how leadership are gaming the system by 'managing their cohort', but that topic is outside the scope of this senate select committee review.

But what is occurring is that the schools that parents and children migrate from are left behind, become residualised and often stigmatised as schools that are not seen as desirable because there has been a flight in student numbers. Not always an accurate reflection of the reputation or achievements of that school.

Often parents are not aware that there is selective recruitment of high performing students, either through select entry programs or SEAL programs which artificially bolsters a schools results. A true, deeper comparison is required with much further analysis. A stigma often becomes attached to a school for no good reason. It is all too much a smoke and mirrors approach to what makes a good or high performing school. Often schools can and will game the system, to make it look like the best results are being attained. Standardised testing does not assist student learning outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Equity, funding & the Education State, Need to Succeed 2015. <http://needtosucceed.org/equity-funding-the-education-state/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/highstakes-risks-of-naplan-20130517-2jqwj.html>

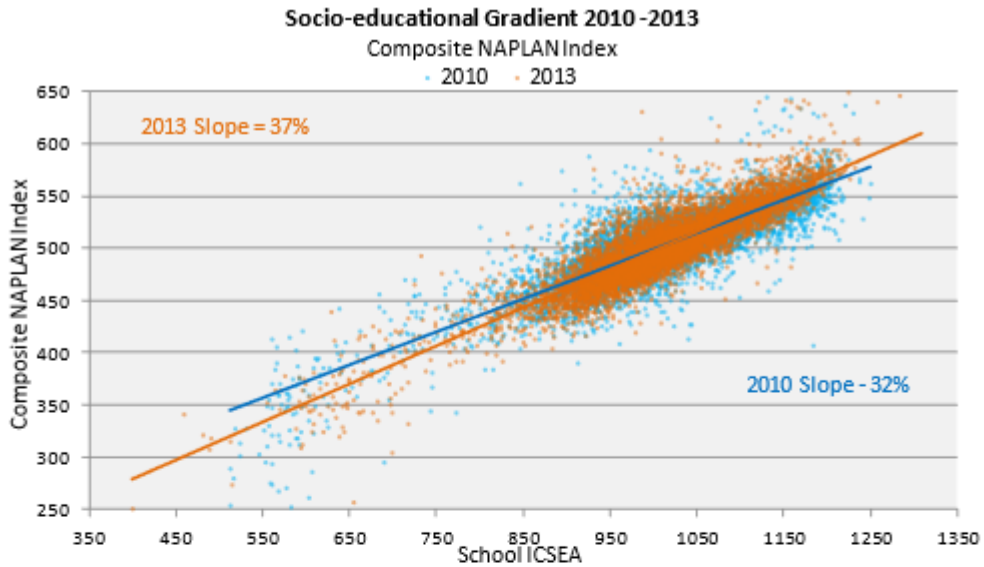
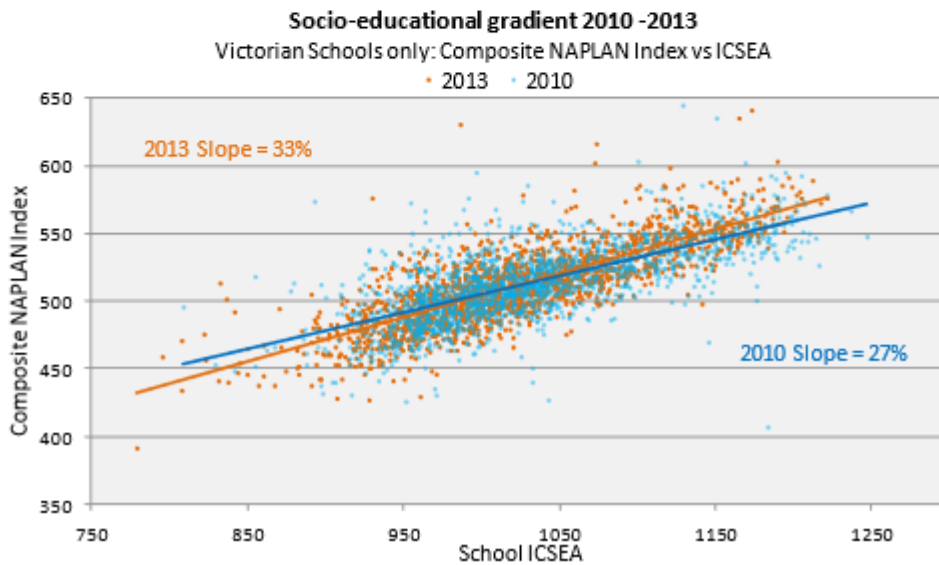


Figure 2: A comparison of socio-educational gradients for NAPLAN data in 2010 and 2013 (note: each dot represents one school)

When we plot the data for Victorian schools only, the picture is only a little different (Figure 3). The 2010 slope is considerably less, but the rise in 2013 is comparable with the national case. Both of these graphs use a composite NAPLAN Index which reflects the effect of all NAPLAN test results for each school. Literacy measures and the Numeracy measure are equally weighted in compiling the index.



Source: Need to Succeed, Equity, funding and the education State, B. Shepherd, February 2015.

## International Research

Additionally, the key findings of the OECD's *Education at a Glance*<sup>15</sup> report found in 2015 that reducing inequalities and financing education remain key challenges, but they are challenges that must remain a key focus noting the serious consequences for labour markets and the economy. The report notes:

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/reducing-inequalities-and-financing-education-remain-key-challenges.htm>



["Education at a Glance 2015"](#) reveals the rapid progress made in expanding education over the past 25 years, with around 41% of 25-34 year-olds now having a tertiary qualification. But inequalities still persist in education, with serious consequences for labour markets and economies. In 2014, less than 60% of adults without an upper secondary education were in work, compared to over 80% of tertiary-educated adults.

Educational inequalities also affect earnings, with adults who have attained tertiary education 23 percentage points more likely to be among the 25% highest paid adults than adults with an upper secondary education.

"The dream of 'quality education for all' is not yet a reality," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría at the launch of the report in Paris. "Lack of a quality education is the most powerful form of social exclusion and prevents people from benefitting from economic growth and social progress." (Emphasis added).

Inequalities in initial education continue to unfold throughout people's lives, notably in access to lifelong learning: about 60% of workers in the most skilled occupations participate in employer-sponsored education, while only 26% of workers in elementary occupations do."

Federal funding of education has been unfair for a considerable period of time. This commenced with the then Howard Government's introduction of the SES model. This model over time has seen an extremely disproportionate allocation of Federal funds to the non-government school sector.

Trevor Cobbold, Convenor from Save Our Schools, articulately gives the facts straight up in his most recently article published in February 2016 about Australia's unfair school funding model:

"Over the past 15 years, total Commonwealth and state government funding for private schools has grown at more than twice the rate of funding for public schools, and in more recent years, funding for public schools has been cut while private school funding still increased.

Between 1998-99 and 2013-14, government funding per private school student, adjusted for inflation, increased by 39% compared with only 17% for public schools. More recently, between 2009-10 and 2013-14, real funding for public schools funding per student fell by 3% while private school funding increased by 10%.

Since 2009, total government funding per student for many high fee, exclusive private schools in Victoria and NSW increased by several times more than for many highly disadvantaged schools.

In Victoria, the average funding increase per student for 16 selected elite private schools was 25% compared with 3% for 17 disadvantaged public schools. Six of the disadvantaged schools had their funding cut.

On average, 76% of students in the elite schools were from the highest socio-educational advantage (SEA) quartile and 1% were from the lowest SEA quartile while 61% of students in the disadvantaged schools were from the lowest SEA quartile and 3% from the top quartile. The average total income of the elite schools in 2013 was \$27,085 per student compared with \$13,897 per student in the disadvantaged schools.

In NSW, the average funding increase per student for 14 selected elite private schools was 23% compared with 11% for 15 disadvantaged schools. One disadvantaged school had its funding cut.

On average, 80% of students in the elite schools were from the highest SEA quartile and 1% were from the lowest quartile while 62% of students in the disadvantaged schools were from the lowest SEA quartile and 3% from the top quartile. The average total income of the elite schools in 2013 was \$29,639 per student compared with \$15,263 per student in the disadvantaged schools."<sup>16</sup>

Most recently, Trevor Cobbold from Save our Schools, analysed the OECD's most recent report into school funding and equity. The report titled: *'Why they fall behind and how to help them succeed'*, draws together the causative factors that limit performance.

Cobbold notes:

"The report extensively analyses the policy implications of its findings. It says that the first step for policy makers is to make tackling low performance a priority in their education policy agenda and translate that priority into additional resources. Beyond this, tackling low performance requires a multi-pronged approach, tailored to national and local circumstances. It suggests that an agenda to reduce the incidence of low performance can include several actions:

- Dismantle the multiple barriers to learning.
- Create demanding and supportive learning environments at school.
- Provide remedial support as early as possible.
- Encourage the involvement of parents and local communities.
- Inspire students to make the most of available education opportunities.
- Identify low performers and design a tailored policy strategy.
- Provide targeted support to disadvantaged schools and/or families.
- Offer special programmes for immigrant, minority-language and rural students.
- Tackle gender stereotypes and assist single-parent families.
- Reduce inequalities in access to early education and limit the use of student sorting.

In his introduction to the report, Andreas Schleicher, the OECD's Director of Education and Skills, says that it is urgent to reduce poor performance at school. He says that students who perform poorly at age 15 face a high risk of dropping out of school altogether. By the time they become young adults, poor proficiency in numeracy and literacy can translate into limited access to better-paying and more rewarding jobs, poorer health and less social and political participation. When a large share of the population lacks basic skills, a country's long-term economic growth and equity are severely compromised.

In a nutshell, this is the case for fully implementing the Gonski funding plan. "<sup>17</sup>

These facts as presented above, require no further explanation, as they speak for themselves and demonstrate the imbedded inequity arising from the current approach.

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/funding/australias-unfair-school-funding-system-must-be-overhauled>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/equity-in-education/oecd-report-highlights-education-inequity-in-australia>

To propose a further cut of \$30million over 10 years would simply be the undoing of Australia's public education system as we know it. The system is already on its knees through years of partisan politicking that attempts to crush the public system and have it replaced with for-profit education businesses and quite possibly charter schools - put simply, to follow the American path of residualising the public school system in Australia.

## Local Stories

I am a mum of two children. Both my children attend government schools in Melbourne. I have one child in High School, and another in Primary school and they attend local government schools in our area that are within walking and/or riding distance. Both my husband and I were educated in the government school system in NSW. We both left high school on completing year 10.

My campaign group is called Reopen Our Schools. Reopen Our Schools was formed in response to the situation around public education provision in the Banyule municipality in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs. Banyule is about 15-20 kilometres out from Melbourne's CBD and it is considered a middle ring area of Melbourne. Reopen Our Schools is also part of a Victorian State wide campaigning alliance called Our Children Our Schools (OCOS). OCOS has about 24 parent led, grassroots campaigns which are campaigning around proper provisioning of public education. I am also currently the secretary of that group.

Reopen Our Schools is campaigning to reopen schools in Heidelberg West and Bellfield. For full details of our campaigning activities please visit our website.<sup>18</sup> We are also campaigning to fix education provision issues right across the southern end of Banyule where schools are now full to overflowing with student numbers. This increase in enrolment numbers is partly due to the baby boom, poor planning and also partly due to choice and competition policies and the autonomy agenda that allows principals to aggressively compete against other local schools and cherry pick bright students to bolster a schools overall results through SEAL programs and the like.

Banyule has concentrations of extreme disadvantage and extreme advantage. Heidelberg West and Bellfield have high levels of social disadvantage and remain one of Melbourne's most disadvantage communities. Ivanhoe and Eaglemont to the south of Banyule remain amongst some of the most advantaged communities in Melbourne.

Our local community has lost about 13 public schools in through closures over a 30 year period. About 10-11 of those are in the southern end of Banyule. These closures began during the Kennett Government years. The number of closures/mergers and/or consolidations could actually number more up into the high teens. However, those public schools that have remained, have had so little funding to assist with upgrading of infrastructure, some kids, at Greensborough College for example, were sitting in classrooms using blankets to keep warm.<sup>19</sup>

In 2011, the DET decided to consolidate 3 schools in Heidelberg West, Heights and Bellfield. This meant there was a closure of 3 local schools in 2011 that were educating some of the State's most disadvantaged children. Amidst promises of transport to assist with children getting to those schools, which subsequently were shelved, the disinvestment of education resources in those

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.reopenourschools.com.au/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/school-warms-to-blanket-policy-as-funding-gives-cold-comfort-20110621-1gd12.html>

communities has only exacerbated disadvantage and done nothing to life outcomes and opportunities for those children.

Almost 450 local people have signed a petition calling for the reopening of the closed public schools. There are approximately about 2,000 people engaged in our local campaign to reopen closed public schools along with a call to properly provision for public education in Banyule.

There is a persistent void of public education provision within this community due to the lack of provisioning. Given all of the foregoing, the lack of planning decisions and foresight is slipshod at best, and neglectful and negligent at worst. Of course school sites that were declared 'excess' have mostly been sold off to property developers who have built private housing and sold to the market for market rates after property was rezoned from educational use, and rezoned by Banyule Council as residential. These homes have been built to attract families. Over 200 additional townhouses have been built on two of the former schools sites.<sup>20</sup>

Just a 10-15 minute drive away from this area, are schools like Our Lady of Mercy at Heidelberg and also Ivanhoe Grammar School. Neither of those private schools offers scholarships or free places to disadvantaged children. Neither of those schools has opened its doors to take in children from the local area whom otherwise have to travel long distances to access education. These schools boast large and modern facilities, whilst children in Heidelberg West have none, other than the new consolidated Charles La Trobe Secondary school which opened as a result of the closure of the 3 schools in Heidelberg West. To date, there are 10 less children who are attending the new consolidated school (Junior and Senior campus) as there were spread across the 3 closed schools. The PISA results for that school are some of the worst in the state. The concentration of disadvantage is also amongst some of the highest in the state.

Many children and their parents are forced to travel—if their parents are fortunate enough to have the means to. If there is no means of transport, there are reports of some children in and around Heidelberg West who do not attend school. There are parents struggling with alcohol and drug dependency issues, poverty and crime. Getting their kids to school just doesn't happen sometimes.

Against all common sense, schools in this area were shut down. This was despite evidence that at those schools were beginning to increase their enrolments. Bellfield Primary school, was beginning to have an impact on turning outcomes around by utilising a phonics program. Student outcomes were beginning to lift. At another school, Haig Street Primary, enrolment numbers were increasing.

I recall seeing a local mother from Heidelberg West. She diligently took her son to school, taking the bus to and from Heidelberg West every day taking him to the next closest primary school at Banyule. She was always on time dropping him off, and was always there waiting for him at pick up time. She never missed a beat. Her child was young, and too young to travel on a bus each day. I have not seen them at our local primary school for some time however, and I do have concerns about how/why and how they have become disconnected from the primary school.

I recall a discussion about another student who resided in Heidelberg West at our School Council meeting at my child's school, BPS (about 5 kilometres from Heidelberg West). No names were mentioned during this exchange. A teacher reported having concerns because reportedly mum had depression and was struggling to get the child to school. The child was missing a lot of school due to this. Discussions took place around getting appropriate levels of support to assist the child and parent in getting to school. But there appeared to be no centralised level of assistance and support

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/north/banyule-schools-group-slams-16-million-sale-of-former-haig-street-primary-school-in-heidelberg-heights/news-story/a9a826aa0cd4bea544a1e9493bf897b7>

for this family. There appeared to be no level of intervention that could ease this now added burden of having to travel to get this child to school. Local solutions were offered, but there was no follow up and I do not know whether local solutions fixed this problem. I do not know whether the child still attends our school or whether mum and daughter continue to have ongoing access issues to public schools.

Contrast this with the approach in Finland, where if students need to travel long distances to school, the Government provides free travel, and in some cases accommodation. The Finnish system ensures that each child has access to local schools in each and every community.

Many schools will move children on who are a drag on results or present challenging behaviours. Parents of children with disabilities will be encouraged to attend a more 'suitable school'. This level of selective enrolment practices utilised by some principals as a local decision making process is abhorrent and needs to cease. I am concerned that this practice has increased since the introduction of standardised testing. More research needs to be conducted to ascertain the depth of this problem. Local schools must take all students, however, selective enrolment for children with disabilities and moving children on must end.<sup>21</sup>

In Banyule, disinvestment has also seemingly coincided with non-government schools opening up their doors or expanding. However, public school selection by parents in the local area is higher than the average. Yet often these non-government schools do nothing to assist when it comes to heavy lifting as the recent Bracks review found that the amount of non-government schools who take children with a disability or children from a poor socio-economic background or status is extremely small, if negligible. (Please see Reopen Our Schools funding video to demonstrate the statistics on this point).

This is a fight about market share for the non-government schools in the area. Businesses aggressively competing. However, they have no intention of educating the kids who need it the most. What those schools offer is social segregation, social engineering and exclusivity at the expense of children in the local community who don't even have a local school to go to at all. A disgrace!

Rather than cutting \$30million from education, Government would be well served to redirect Government funding toward public schools on the basis of need for all the reasons set out in this submission. That will indeed save the Government millions and would be a far more astute investment of the education dollar.

### **Research, disadvantage generally and the situation in Banyule**

Jesuit Social Services launched a report in 2015 and an accompanying website called *Dropping of the Edge*.<sup>22</sup> This report and the website give an overview of the challenges faced by people from disadvantaged backgrounds. *Dropping off the Edge* studies population areas in every State and Territory of Australia to identify pockets of location-based disadvantage and the unique web of challenges faced by these communities.

The study looked at disadvantage and how it is spread across communities amongst other things. In Victoria, the study encompassed a review of 667 postcodes. In the report, disadvantage is

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://mydisabilitymatters.com.au/opinion-stories/how-schools-actively-avoid-enrolling-children-with-disabilities/12265/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.dote.org.au/about/>

measured across a range of factors out of 1000 per head of population. A midpoint indicator is a rank of around 363 representing roughly a 50th percentile for disadvantage. The lower the number the higher the concentration of disadvantage. Consequently, where communities score a rank of between 1 - 67, this rank puts that community in the top 10% for disadvantage for that particular indicator in the State.

I have summarised some of the findings relevant to Banyule below in regard to disadvantaged communities in Heidelberg West, Bellfield and Heidelberg Heights. Readers of this report are also invited and encouraged to view the disadvantage map at attachment 2. This attachment shows, highlighted in red, concentrations of disadvantage in rural and regional areas as well as in the city. Readers are also encouraged to read the full *Dropping off the Edge* report.

For the purposes of this submission, I have extracted a few indicators that show lack of access to education and the long term consequences of being deprived of access to education. Comparisons have been done with an advantaged communities, some 10-15 minutes drive away from Heidelberg West at the southern end of Banyule. The comparisons are stark but obvious:

<b>Factor</b> Per 1000 head of population - the lower the number the greater the disadvantage (18-65) Rank between 1-67 Top 10% of state for disadvantage	<b>Heidelberg West</b>	<b>Heidelberg Heights</b>	<b>Bellfield</b>
Left School before age 15	85	85	85
Post school qualifications	440	440	440
Developmentally vulnerable/school readiness	88	88	88
Unskilled	371	371	371
Year 3 Numeracy	363	363	363
Year 3 Reading	388	388	388
Low family income (Less than \$600 per week)	156	156	156
Rent assistance	150	150	150
Young adults not engaged (17-24 yo) not in study or work	171	171	171
Long term unemployment	37	37	37
Juvenile Convictions	20	20	20

Factor Per 1000 head of population - the lower the number the greater the disadvantage (18-65) Rank between 1-67 Top 10% of state for disadvantage	Ivanhoe	Eaglemont	Lower plenty
Left school before age 15	568	578	599
Post school qualifications	613	604	551
Developmentally vulnerable/school readiness	290	306	327
Unskilled	583	548	551
Year 3 numeracy	333	277	445
Year 3 reading	404	367	459
Low family income (Less than \$600 per week)	602	560	593
Rent assistance	339	340	283
Young adults not engaged (17-24 yo) not in study or work	440	365	443
Long term unemployment	285	246	130
Juvenile convictions	109	140	Not recorded

Source: Extracts taken from *Dropping of the Edge*, Jesuit Social Services, 2015.

What can be seen from the foregoing is the stark contrasts that advantage and access to education can have on local communities. The biggest contrast can be seen where children disengage from school before age 15. Significant barriers are then encountered by children who then attempt to overcome disengagement from school and then to lift out of longer term disadvantage. Many might attain further educational qualifications, but then languish in either long term unemployment, or short term, insecure work patterns. For more evidence about the social and economic returns that flow to Government from investing in education, please watch this short, 2 minuted video from the OECD. Click [here](#) to view it.<sup>23</sup>

The story about lack of access to public education that is being played out in areas of disadvantage in Banyule. This situation aligns with the findings presented in international research set out above.

Strategies taken at a local regional level via local department of education authorities have not factored in any of these issues. Often the reasons for school closures and rationalisations have purely been driven on a need to cash-in school assets to balance the budget bottom line, or to asset recycle to fund other Governmental infrastructure needs. A lack of long term planning and foresight costs communities, and costs them dearly, often setting up long term patterns of entrenched disadvantage. A more cohesive, co-operative, long term approach to education funding and provision is required, particularly in disadvantaged communities to alleviate long term trends in disadvantage.

<sup>23</sup> OECD Education at a Glance 2015 - Video overview - [https://youtu.be/TTVLgHufQ\\_E](https://youtu.be/TTVLgHufQ_E)

## In conclusion

In summary and in conclusion, Reopen Our Schools calls on the Federal Government to ensure proper and fair funding of public schools. Australia's public schools continue to do the heavy lifting when it comes to educating kids who have disabilities or whom come from a poor socio-economic background and status. Government must ensure that:

- Funding does not continue to be directed to non-government schools that accommodate children from high socio-economic backgrounds in private education businesses, against all the evidence that shows that funding needs to be needs based which in turn is directed to those kids who need it the most.
- Governments must stop the continued social stratification of our education system which is producing a drag on our economic prosperity, based on all the foregoing reasons. Surely, as Australians we want to leave the country in better shape than which we found it, especially as our children are the next generation that will be funding the Australia's needs and wants into the future.
- As a society, we don't condemn our children to a situation where reliance on social security benefits is high. Do we really want to be faced with the situation that our children will not know what it is like to have full time, secure employment because they will be trapped into a cycle of low paid, insecure, low skilled jobs? All of this will mean that the next generation will not be able to participate in society on an equal footing when compared to their older counterparts or peers, who may have either come from a higher socio-economic background and status.
- Investing money in education is not an expense. Investment in early years education then followed by investments in public schooling, where the bulk of students are educated and where most if not all the heavy lifting is done, will save millions to the economy for the reasons outlined above. The OECD have noted as much in their most recent reports as referenced above. So why does education continue to be politicised as it does in Australia against all of the international research?
- A more cohesive, co-operative, long term bi-partisan approach to education funding and provision is required, to alleviate long term trends in disadvantage across all 3 levels of government.
- There must be enhanced and improved accountability mechanisms that sees all schools property account for every dollar they spend. The priority must be to ensure that education spending is spent on children's needs. Funding must remain attached to the child. Schools must demonstrate that government funding is not wasted or spent on things other than supporting a child's education needs.
- The need for strong accountability measures in education spending at the local level is vitally important. Currently in Victoria, principals are required to have audited cash accounts. However, where the DET places credit transfers into school accounts (i.e. transfers funds internally), there is currently no auditing requirement for how those funds are spent.
- With Gonski promising that funding will remain attached to the child, it is imperative, that more stringent and transparent accountability mechanisms be introduced to ensure that the education investment is spent on children, is fully accounted to school communities and the DET, and not be subject to the particular whim of leadership at a local school. This has become particularly



pertinent in Victoria with recent revelations arising from public enquiries conducted by IBAC, most notably IBAC Ord and IBAC Dunham.

- A consistent standard of public school infrastructure must also be determined to assist with student learning - now and into the future.
- A long term, bipartisan approach to education funding in Australia is an imperative if we are to begin to undo much of the underinvestment and damage done to our public education system.
- Realign funding priorities. Government cannot continue to fund non-government schools at the same rate. The priority must be government schools as public taxpayer funds should be the priority investment of government. A significant investment and injection of federal taxpayer funds is required to assist with building new Government primary and secondary schools.
- Government cannot continue to provide a taxpayer subsidy to education businesses in Australia. There is no return for investment on this approach. All the research says that students in public schools outperform students in private schools. If this is the case, government is not getting value for money with overspending in this area.
- Funding cuts will only exacerbate detrimental impacts on the ability of children in rural and remote areas in Victoria. Attachment 2 highlights disadvantaged communities in rural and remote Victoria. Funding priorities must realign to ensure that children from rural and remote communities have the same access to educational opportunities as do their city counterparts. Slashing funding will only have a more deleterious effect.
- Overfunding private for profit education businesses is contrary to current Federal Government claims that we have a spending problem in Australia, and unless we reign in spending we will continue to drive up debt. The current rate of funding to non-government schools must end. It is unfair, unsustainable and inequitable.
- The impact on social exclusion is demonstrable, particularly since the introduction of the Howard Govt SES policy on school funding. The deleterious impact on equity is now obvious, and contributes in a limiting way to kids participating fully in society and is impacting on student performance when comparisons are made internationally.
- In addition to Gonski, a community standard should apply and would include:
  - Non-government schools co-operating fully with child sex abuse reporting requirements<sup>24</sup>;
  - A requirement to spend government funding according to student need, which must be demonstrated and able to be fully audited, whether held in cash or credit accounts;
  - All Government funds must be allocated on student need and remain attached to the student;
  - Allow local students from a poor socio economic background to access non-government schools free of charge where there is a government enrolment shortfall and to alleviate

---

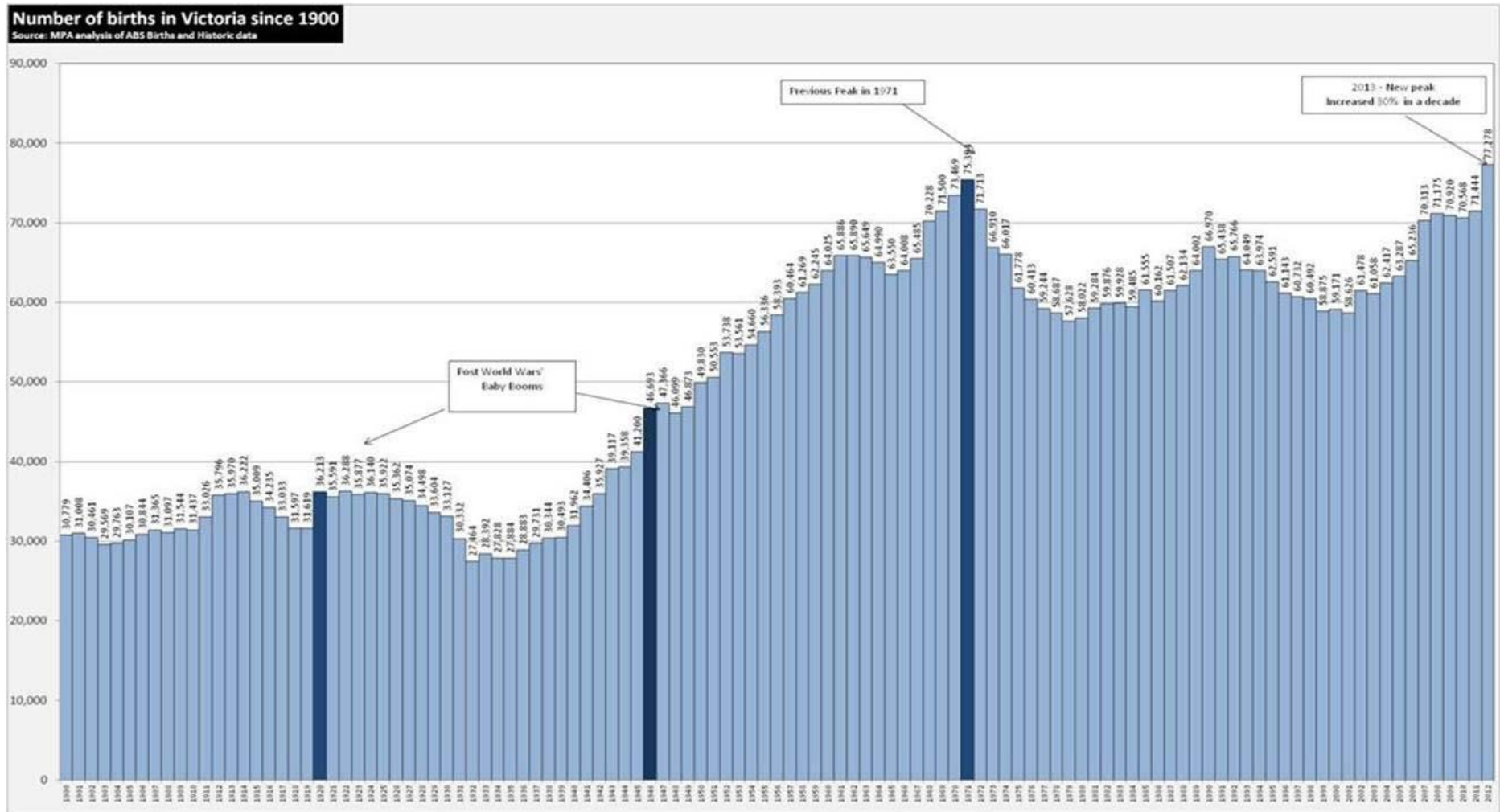
<sup>24</sup>Catholic and Independent schools were not expected to confirm to the same standard of reporting child sexual abuse as government schools were. This has now been rectified with amendments to the Crimes Amendment Protection of Children Bill passed in 2014 in Victoria. I am unsure of the situation in other states in Australia however.  
[http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child\\_Abuse\\_Inquiry/Report/Preliminaries.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/57th/Child_Abuse_Inquiry/Report/Preliminaries.pdf)

- enrolment pressures in government schools and to more evenly disperse concentrations of disadvantage;
- Ensure that all sporting facilities in non-government schools, such as gyms, pools, sporting grounds and the like are shared with local public schools free of charge.
  - There must be a long term, bipartisan approach to school funding in Australia. The push pull of 3 or 4 yearly election cycles have taken an extremely heavy toll on the education system, not to mention school leadership, teachers, students and parents as outlined in the foregoing submission.
  - Ensure that federal funding that flows to children in Victoria is brought in line with the national average spend. Victorian children are currently \$2000 behind in terms of federal funding when compared with their interstate counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2015/childcare-education-and-training/school-education/rogs-2015-volumeb-chapter4.pdf>

Attachment 1 - Number of births in Victoria since 1900



### Attachment 2 - Victorian State-wide map of disadvantage

