



2 August 2023

## Submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System. This submission draws on my conversations with P&Cs, teachers, school principals, parents and carers in South Brisbane and surrounds. In addition, I've included data from a survey my office conducted, with responses from over 700 Queensland families.

### Underfunding of Queensland state schools

Queensland state schools are systemically underfunded, with the state government contributing just 69.26% of the schooling resources standard. This is felt acutely by state schools, in a lack of resources, lack of teaching and support staff, and lack of funds for infrastructure and maintenance.

This lack of funding is also felt in the growing out-of-pocket expenses that are expected of Queensland families. The claim that Queensland state schools are 'free' is an utter fiction. From a recent survey we conducted with over 700 Queensland families, families are paying out of pocket around \$1,200 for each child at a state primary school, and \$2,050 for each child at a state high school.

State Primary School Items	Cost Estimates
<b>Annual cost estimate (n=237)</b>	<b>1248.45</b>
School levy (n=196)	170.62
Subject levies (n=96)	107.61
Extracurricular sports (n=186)	348.65
School resources (n=288)	204.64
Uniforms (n=308)	218.82
Fundraising (n=213)	112.85

iPads or laptops (n=134)	612.44
Excursions (n=275)	188.68
Other (n=75)	219.25

State High School Items	Cost Estimates
<b>Annual cost estimate (n=184)</b>	<b>2057.85</b>
School levy (n=171)	411.07
Subject levies (n=143)	285.64
Extracurricular sports (n=122)	284.75
School resources (n=216)	229.80
Uniforms (n=229)	342.36
Fundraising (n=89)	121.96
iPads or laptops (n=219)	801.48
Excursions (n=179)	256.80
Other (n=55)	352.85

42% of respondents (298) had sought assistance to cover school expenses. Of these families, these were the sources of support they sought:

- 45% had gone on a payment plan
- 22% had received help from family, with either loans or cash
- 9% had asked for help from a charity
- 8% had gotten assistance via Centrelink - advance, loan or Centrepay
- 3.6% had used a payment platform like Afterpay or ZIP
- 3.3% had taken out a personal loan

Comments from parents and carers regarding the difficulties in cover out-of-pocket expenses included:

*"I've given my children their school supplies as part of their Christmas presents"*

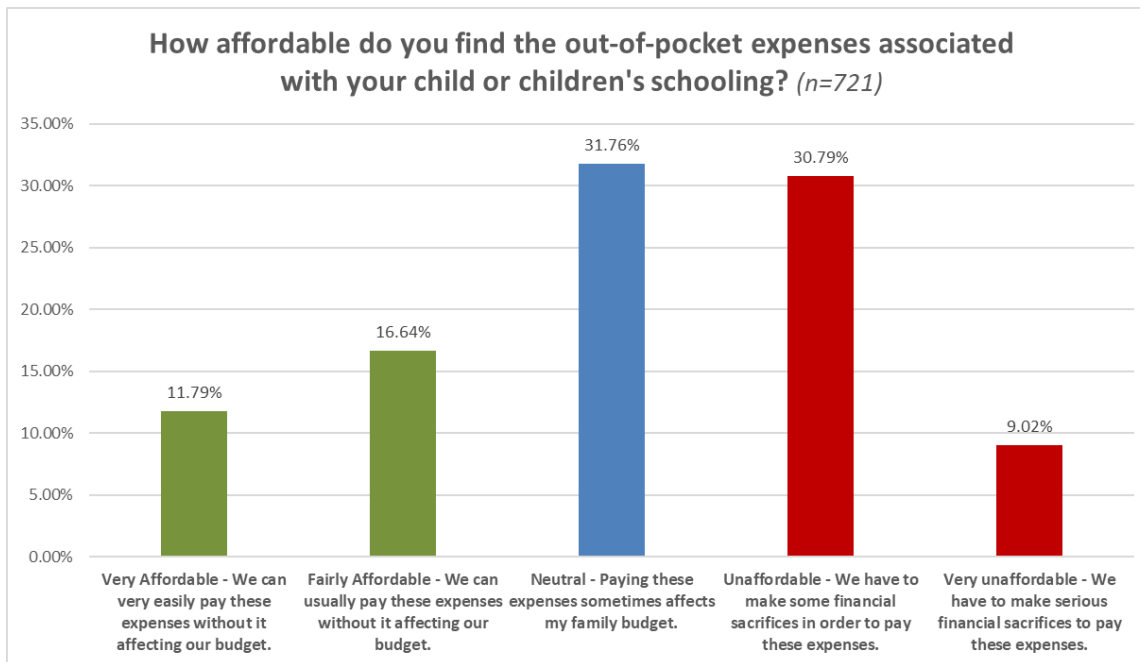
*“I pay my primary school fees via Centrepay and pay the high school fees off over time.”*

*“Had to beg/borrow money from family to pay for my three children”*

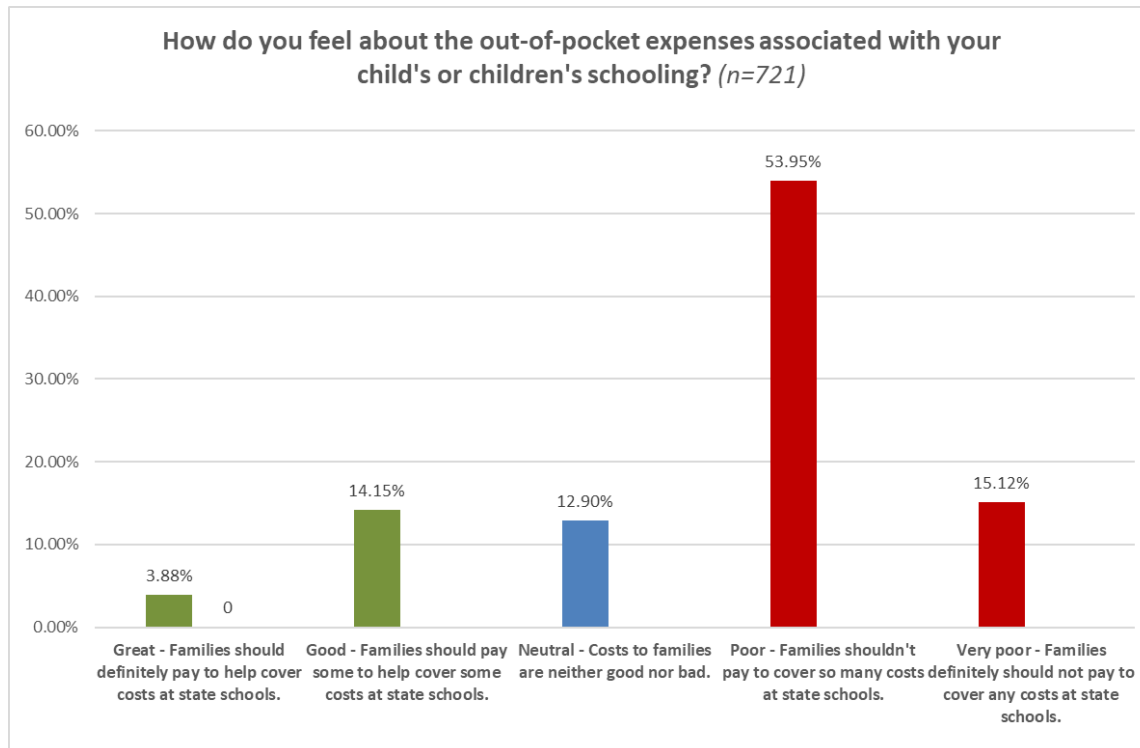
*“We have to pay for most things on our credit card”*

*“Because most of the fees are due at the start of the year, I had to borrow money from my mother”*

From our survey, nearly 40% of Queensland families find the out-of-pocket expenses associated with their children’s schooling to be unaffordable.



In addition, 70% of respondents felt that families shouldn’t be paying so much for school costs.



Feedback from parents and carers included:

***“I am appalled that we have to pay so much money for our children to receive an education at a state run school. There are countries like Canada where state run education is totally free- right through from early childhood to university!”***

***“While we are able to cover the cost of school expenses without it affecting our budget, others are not as fortunate. I don't think there should be any cost associated with primary or high school education - it is the best way to give all children the best opportunities in life”***

***“When I attended school in the 60's and 70's everything was free at a state school. How is it that in 2023 when we are so much more rich as a nation that ‘free’ education at a state school is so expensive?”***

***“I sometimes go without food myself to pay for these things. Obviously the older the child is the higher the cost , once you hit year 11 and 12 it's ridiculously high”***

***“Not wanting my child to miss out on experiences, I have had to make sacrifices...zero assistance regarding payment options other than payment plans across the year. As a single parent, both my children have both missed opportunities particularly regarding sports due to lack of time on my part because of work commitments and finance resources ...over their schooling years”***

## **Inclusive Education**

This lack of funding is felt acutely with regards to inclusive education. Without their base funding met, schools struggle to provide for the additional needs of students with disability or other particular needs. I regularly hear from parents and teachers who lament the lack of support available for Queensland children. Unless base funding requirements are met, schools will be unable to meet these additional supports for students, and children will continue to suffer.

Many community advocates have raised the issue of school disciplinary absences, particularly school expulsions. First Nations and disabled students are particularly affected by school expulsions. Being excluded from the school system makes young people far more likely to fall right into the justice system.

From what I understand, there is no legislation governing how school expulsions occur, including timeframes, processes, how many students and how often they can be expelled. There is nothing governing how students who are expelled might be connected with alternative education such as flexi schools before being expelled.

A report<sup>1</sup> by Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, released in February 2022, found that students with a disability received up to 48% of all suspensions between 2016 and 2020, despite making up only about 17% of the Queensland school population. Further, despite constituting only 10% of the school population, First Nations students received approximately one quarter of all suspensions and exclusions. Both of these cohorts are also over-represented in the youth justice system.

## **Support for Teachers**

These funding pressures also manifest as pressure on teachers. Teachers face large class sizes, long hours, heavy workload, lack of work-life balance. Many teachers have also reported to me spending hundreds if not thousands of dollars out of pocket for classroom resources, furniture, or food for their students.

My office recently heard from a first-year teacher who took up a position at a public school in Brisbane's northern suburbs. He told my office how he had spent 7 thousand dollars of his own money on classroom furniture and resources because he didn't want to see kids in his classroom having to sit on the floor or having to share exercise books.

Another first-year teacher told my office how excited she was to finally be able to begin teaching after three years of study. However, within six months, she left the profession and returned to child care because the workload and limited resources available to her made teaching unmanageable.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://qai.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/QAI-and-ATSILS-submission-to-QHRC-re-SDAs.pdf>

## Recommendations

- Guarantee 100% needs based funding for all state schools
- Fund additional teacher aides and support staff to support students with disability, or other needs, to build a truly inclusive state schooling system
- Ban out-of-pocket expenses, and cover all costs, including costs for laptops, uniforms, and an allocation for extracurricular activities for state school students
- Fund free breakfasts and lunches in all state schools
- Reform approaches to school disciplinary absences to ensure the human rights of students is being upheld, ensure support is offered to students and their families, rights of appeal and safeguards to avoid inappropriate school absences.

Kind regards,



Amy MacMahon  
Member for South Brisbane

