



# Education in Australia

## An APS insights paper

### Summary

Education puts individuals in a position to succeed in personal relationships and in society. People with a good education have better standards of health, wealth, wellbeing and social mobility, and have fewer interactions with the justice system. Although the quality of education is generally high in Australia, there are still many young people who do not get the opportunities they deserve and a number of challenges exist within the Education sector.

This paper examines the key issues in the Education sector in Australia and how charities seek to address these.

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## Introduction

Education puts individuals in a position to succeed in personal relationships and in society: people with a good education have better standards of health, wealth, wellbeing, social mobility and have fewer interactions with the justice system. A well-educated workforce fuels a nation's economic performance. Although the quality of education is generally high in Australia, there are still many young people who do not get the opportunities they deserve and a number of challenges exist within the sector.



Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to start school behind, struggle to catch up, and leave school before Year 12:

## Key issues in the education sector

Disadvantage is one of the key challenges within the Australian education system. The term 'disadvantage' encompasses a range of situations, particularly children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, First Nations children, children in rural and regional areas and those with a non-English speaking background. There are significant inequalities between pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds. Living in poverty is one of the most significant determinants of educational achievement.

- By the age of 15, children facing disadvantage can be almost three years behind their peers
- Only 61% of children facing disadvantage finish high school, compared with 89% of the most advantaged
- Even among high achieving students, only 74% of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are expected to complete a university degree, compared with 92% from higher socio-economic backgrounds
- Out of 37 OECD countries, only Chile and Turkey rank lower than Australia in the difference in resources for schools in low socio-economic areas versus schools in high socio-economic areas.<sup>2</sup>

Charities work to reduce the education gap in a variety of ways, from providing basic necessities to attend school, such as uniforms, to more academic-focused programmes such as literacy, numeracy, science and technology initiatives. Many also offer after-school activities, school-home mediation services, counselling and therapy, wellbeing, anxiety and behaviour management support, extra tuition, alternative education and outdoor activities.

### **Early childhood education: low levels of preschool attendance**

Participation in preschool programs in Australia is very low compared with other OECD nations, as is total public expenditure for preschool education and care.<sup>3</sup>



22% of 4-5-year-olds start school developmentally behind, with children facing disadvantage twice as likely to be unprepared for school. It is very hard for these children to catch up.

Early years initiatives delivered by the non-profit sector focus on delivering play-based programs to give young children the stimulation they need for healthy development, along with parenting programs which empower and support parents as their child's first teacher.

### **Low performance of vulnerable groups**

There are a number of groups of young people that show consistent underachievement at school, for example children in out-of-home care. Vulnerability can be caused by many different issues such as mental health, family violence, special educational needs and disability.<sup>4</sup>

Some charities provide specific programs to support vulnerable children and young people depending on their needs, for example delivering support services such as after school care, mentoring and outdoor pursuits.



### **Poorly qualified teachers and low levels of teacher retention**

Good schools depend on good teachers and high-quality management. While many factors may contribute to teacher quality, one factor is the overall academic attainment of those entering teaching degrees. An international benchmarking study showed teacher degree courses in Australia had the highest percentage of tertiary students entering with low ATAR scores.<sup>5</sup> There are also challenges around teacher retention, especially in disadvantaged schools which experience higher than average levels of staff turnover.

Charities play a variety of roles from recruiting and training teachers through to fellowships, professional development and coaching support for people entering the teaching profession to enable them to stay in the sector.

### **The relevance of the curriculum: is the system fit for purpose?**

To get the best out of young people, schools need to offer interesting and engaging lessons and provide the skills needed to enter the workforce. Some observers question how well schools are preparing students for life and work in the 21st century, with criticisms pointed at whether the curriculum:

- is too focused on factual and procedural knowledge rather than application of knowledge
- emphasizes passive, routinised learning rather than creative problem solving
- is designed for delivery in traditional classroom settings, at a time when new technologies are transforming how courses are delivered and learning takes place.<sup>6</sup>

Charities have a role in researching and highlighting best practice and advocating for policy change where required.

### **Funding considerations**

If you are interested in funding in the education space and aren't sure how to narrow down the options, it may be worth considering some of the options on the following page.

## Funding considerations (cont.)

Who	How	Where	Educational level	Focus
<b>Disadvantaged</b> Low SES (socio-economic status) Girls Indigenous Rural & regional ESL (English Second Language) Migrant Asylum Seekers and Refugees Additional needs  <b>Gifted/talented</b>	<b>Specific programs</b> Wellbeing Behavioural Literacy Numeracy STEMM  <b>Equipment &amp; supplies</b>  <b>Scholarships/ Bursaries</b>  <b>Playgroups</b>  <b>Teacher training</b>  <b>Parenting support</b>	<b>At school</b>  <b>Public v Private</b>  <b>Community programs</b>  <b>In home support</b>  <b>Extra curricular</b>  <b>Remote/ online</b>	<b>Early childhood</b>  <b>Primary</b>  <b>Secondary</b>  <b>Tertiary/ vocational</b>  <b>Postgraduate</b>  <b>Lifelong learning</b>  <b>Pathways to employment</b>	<b>General academics</b>  <b>Physical health</b>  <b>Mental health</b>  <b>Arts &amp; culture</b>  <b>Digital literacy</b>  <b>Policy research</b>

## Find out more

APS has included below a list of some of the charities working in the education space. For specialised resources on supporting Indigenous Education, childhood wellbeing and resilience programs, or to discuss other focus areas, please get in touch with our Giving Services team.

### [Give list – Education](#)

## Footnotes

- <https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/the-education-gap/>
- <https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/the-education-gap/>
- <https://www.ias.uwa.edu.au/new-critic/five/educationinequalities>
- [https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/SVA-Perspective\\_Paper\\_Education\\_disengaged\\_cohort\\_lowres.pdf](https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/SVA-Perspective_Paper_Education_disengaged_cohort_lowres.pdf)
- <https://theconversation.com/six-ways-australias-education-system-is-failing-our-kids>
- <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2016-05/apo-nid65829.pdf>

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