



Australian Education Union - Federal Office

Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, Victoria, 3006
Phone : +61 (0)3 9693 1800 Fax : +61 (0)3 9693 1805
Email : aeu@aeufederal.org.au Website : www.aeufederal.org.au

ACT schools facing infrastructure funding divide

Sunday 22 February 2026

Students in the most advantaged private schools in the ACT receive more than eight times the capital investment per student compared to students in the most disadvantaged public schools — a gap of \$3,840 per student in 2023.

At the same time, the number of demountable classrooms across ACT public schools has increased by 68 per cent since 2022, highlighting growing infrastructure pressure in the absence of ongoing Commonwealth capital funding.

[The building divide in Australian schools: How capital funding fuels educational inequity](#) reveals that capital investment by private schools in the ACT has outpaced public schools by \$293.7 million over the past decade, including \$93.6 million in 2023 alone.

This inequity is fuelled by the lack of federal funding for capital investment in public schools.

Nationally, private schools have outspent public schools on capital works by \$38 billion over the past decade, including \$5.4 billion in 2023 alone. Capital investment averaged \$2,746 per student per year in private schools, compared with \$1,237 per student in public schools.

Between 2017 and 2025, the Commonwealth's Non-Government School Capital Grants Program has delivered more than \$1.6 billion to private schools, with a further almost \$3 billion scheduled between 2025 and 2034. By contrast, public schools receive no permanent federal capital stream.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the divide is being driven by Commonwealth policy settings that fund capital works in private schools while leaving public schools without a long-term federal stream.

"Elite private schools are spending hundreds of millions of dollars capital infrastructure, while the Commonwealth has provided no ongoing capital funding stream for public schools since 2017," Ms Haythorpe said.

"That is not an accident, it is the result of policy choices that keep directing public funding towards already wealthy private schools."

Documents released by the ACT Education Directorate show there were 257 demountable classrooms across the Territory's 92 public schools in 2025, reflecting a sharp increase over recent years.

In the AEU's 2025 State of Our Schools Survey, ACT public school principals described significant infrastructure challenges, including buildings not fit for purpose, insufficient heating and cooling, inadequate science and technology facilities, limited accessibility for students with disability, and schools operating without enough specialist learning spaces.

Principals reported that funding provided does not meet the actual cost of maintaining and upgrading facilities to an acceptable standard.

AEU ACT Branch President Angela Burroughs said the findings show the practical consequences of the funding gap.

"Principals are telling us they have classrooms that aren't fit for purpose, that don't have sufficient heating or cooling, buildings that need full rebuilds, and facilities that simply don't meet accessibility standards for students and staff with disability. No modern education system should expect staff and students to operate in those conditions," Ms Burroughs said.

"ACT public schools are being asked to deliver inclusive education, expanded wellbeing supports and a full curriculum, yet many are operating in facilities that are clearly not fit for purpose."

"Without a guaranteed, long-term Commonwealth capital funding stream, the infrastructure divide in the ACT will only continue to widen."

Ms Haythorpe said public schools deserve facilities that match the expectations placed on them.

"We know that great facilities deliver great results for students and for teachers."

"If the federal government want schools to do more, including supporting students with complex needs, they must invest in the buildings and spaces that make that possible."

"A guaranteed long-term federally funded capital works package will provide much needed improvements to public schools and ensure schools are fit for the future."

The AEU is calling on the Commonwealth to provide an immediate injection of capital funding to public schools, establish a permanent capital works fund, and negotiate a joint partnership with state and territory governments to ensure all public schools have access to adequate and safe 21st century learning environments.

Key findings:

- Capital investment by private schools in the ACT has outpaced investment in public schools by \$293.7 million over the last decade and by \$93.6 million in 2023 alone
- Students in the most advantaged private schools get more than eight times the investment per student compared to students in the most disadvantaged public schools, a gap of \$3,840 per student in 2023

In the AEU's State of Our Schools Survey public school principals in the ACT said:

- 24% of public schools in the ACT do not have adequate classrooms to meet enrolment demand and need an average of 6 additional classrooms each
- 39% will run out of classroom space in the next 3-5 years
- 49% say the external maintenance of their school buildings is inadequate and 52% say internal maintenance is inadequate
- 52% say that the science facilities at their school are inadequate and 49% say their technology and design facilities are inadequate
- 42% say that their school has temporary/demountable classrooms in use with an average of 7.1 per school
- 61% say their school lacks purpose built structures to support the needs of students with disability
- 46% do not have enough space for small group tutoring programs
- 42% do not have enough space for dedicated counselling or therapy areas
- Only 36% of public schools principals in the ACT are able to offer the full curriculum with their current infrastructure

Documents released by the ACT Education Directorate show there were 257 demountable classrooms across the territory's 92 schools in 2025 – a 68% increase on the number in 2022.

ENDS

Media contact: Kylie Jensen 0402 298 728