

## **Education Minister: Australian education urgently needs practical reform**

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Education Policy Outlook provides a concise analysis of the current Australian education system, compared to international education systems, including ongoing policy and reform efforts. The revised 2023 report confirmed ongoing issues with teacher shortages, equity issues, and a significant problem with bullying in Australian schools – reportedly three times the global average.

Following a formal review of document, Australia's Federal Minister of Education, Mr Jason Clare, released a statement expressing the need for urgent action from the federal government to achieve more practical reform efforts across Australia's entire education system. "While the report shows we have a good education system by international standards, we know that it should be a lot better and a lot fairer," Mr Clare said.

When asked about the cause of such a high rate of bullying in Australian classrooms, Mr Clare said it is difficult to pinpoint. "It's not just in the playground, it's online. Students can escape physical bullying in the playground when the school bell rings, but that online bullying continues after they leave," he said. "I think this is part of the fallout in the aftermath of the pandemic. Teachers will tell you that they're still seeing children struggle with their mental health following two years of on and off lockdowns. I think you can draw a line between bullying and why a lot of teachers are leaving the profession, feeling worn out and burnt out. A lot of teachers will tell you that when they leave university and jump into the classroom for the first time, they don't feel prepared to deal with some of these challenges."

Despite the country's National Teacher Workforce Action Plan recently coming into effect, the Department of Education has projected a shortage of 4,100 secondary school teachers within the next two years.

"We've seen a big drop over the last ten years in the number of people going to university to study teaching, about a 16 percent drop," said Mr Clare. "To help turn that around, we're investing in the budget, and in scholarships, to encourage more students to become teachers. We've got to improve the way we teach teachers at university. We have to make sure that people are better prepared for the classroom. Believe it or not, about 50 percent of teachers quit the profession in the first five years, and there are things that we can do to tackle that problem."

Mr Clare further commented on the disparity in academic performance between students from affluent inner-city communities and Indigenous students or those with socio-economic disadvantages such as living in a remote community. "If you're a young person from a poor family or from the bush or an Indigenous Australian, you're three times more likely to fall behind at school," said Mr Clare. "The fact is, you're less likely to go to preschool, you're more likely to fall behind in primary school and you're less likely to finish high school, let alone go on to university. We've got a great education system in Australia, amongst the best in the world, but not for everyone.."

*The OECD is an international organisation that works together with governments and policy makers to coalesce education data into an ongoing comparative analysis that examines country-specific work and seeks to establish international standards for education policy and reform.*