

STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOLS FOR FUTURE

Submission to the Schools for Future Inquiry

June 2026

Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is the peak body and leading advocate representing school-aged students in Victoria. We were created by students to be a voice for all primary and secondary school students at the highest levels of decision making in Victorian education. Our vision is an education system that is student-led, student driven and student-focused.



VicSRC respectfully acknowledges and recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the custodians of this land. We pay our respects to the ancestors and Elders past and present of all Aboriginal nations in Victoria and across the wider continent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Schools for Our Future Inquiry.

As the peak body for primary and secondary school-aged students in Victoria, VicSRC believes all students deserve to experience safe and inclusive school environments.

This submission amplifies the lived experience of Victorian students through VicSRC's existing research, while also drawing on relevant external research. By centring student voice in this submission, VicSRC hopes to highlight the unique perspective students bring to education reform and emphasise the value of embedding student-led practices in policy-making processes.

As key stakeholders served by the education system, students must be involved in creating and evaluating national standards for school infrastructure. Across all areas of VicSRC's engagement, students consistently raise concerns about school infrastructure and its impact on their learning, wellbeing. Students see firsthand how poor infrastructure shapes their educational experiences, including safety and the capacity of schools to meet diverse student needs. Understanding these impacts from a student perspective is essential to forming effective and equitable policy responses.

"It seems unfair that some schools have the best equipment and top-quality infrastructure while other schools don't" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student

Key Recommendations

The Commonwealth and Victorian Government must implement the following:

- **Student voice in a national agreement for school infrastructure:** Formalise a national agreement for school infrastructure. Students and representative bodies (such as VicSRC) must be consulted as key stakeholders on this agreement, to ensure funding directly addresses student-identified needs.
- **National reporting standard:** Formalise a national reporting standard for school infrastructure, including nationally consistent data on the condition of classrooms and buildings, and current and projected future enrolments at each school. In addition, the reporting standard should reflect school infrastructure accessibility.
- **All gender bathrooms:** Strengthen safety and inclusivity by ensuring every school has All Gender bathrooms.
- **Vocational education infrastructure:** Support schools to offer more vocational education on-site or, where that is not possible, establish partnerships with other schools in their community to create local vocational education networks.

Wellbeing and Participation

Student Engagement

Students have shared that core facilities across Victorian schools are well overdue for renewal. They have specifically highlighted classrooms, libraries, air-conditioning systems, and toilets as areas requiring urgent upgrades to ensure schools remain inviting and conducive to learning.¹ This is affirmed by The Building Divide in Australian Schools Report, which highlights that 43% of Victorian

¹ VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

public school Principals say the external maintenance of their school buildings is inadequate and 41% say internal maintenance is inadequate² These concerns reflect a broader understanding that the standard of physical learning environments are related to positive educational outcomes.³

"We have a bad bathroom situation, resulting in students feeling unsafe" – Melbourne Congress 2025 Student

While the Victorian Government has made significant investments in school infrastructure to support a growing student population, students at the 2023 and 2024 VicSRC Congress events were clear that these decisions are often made without sufficient student input.⁴ They expressed a strong desire to have a say in the look, feel, and functionality of their learning environments, emphasising that infrastructure spending should reflect student needs and experiences.⁵

"We should know where the school's money goes" – Swan Hill Congress 2026 Student

Regional and Remote Schools

Students in regional and remote areas have consistently raised persistent issues regarding the maintenance and condition of school facilities. Many reported that basic infrastructure concerns frequently go unaddressed, creating environments that undermine learning and wellbeing.⁶

"We have outdated buildings with no elevators" – Wangaratta Congress 2026 Student

Rural students at Congress 2024 described long-term reliance on portable classrooms which have become semi-permanent fixtures. They argued that these spaces do not provide an adequate or engaging environment and signal a lack of government prioritisation for rural communities.⁷ This is made more alarming as 66% of Victorian public school Principals report that their school has temporary or demountable classrooms, with an average of 9.6 per school.⁸

Homeschools

Victorian homeschool students do not have explicit standards around their learning environments. VicSRC notes that, while homeschool students do not receive government funding, they deserve clean, safe and engaging learning environments. Like all students, students who are homeschooled should have a voice in shaping these standards.

Vocational Learning

Vocational education remains poorly integrated into mainstream schooling in Victoria, despite increasing demand for skilled workers across vocational industries. Fewer than 30% of Victorian

² Australian Education Union 2026, 'The building divide in Australian schools: how capital funding fuels educational inequity', p.54.

³ Edgerton, E. et al. (2011), 'Students' perceptions of their school environments and the relationship with educational outcomes'. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 28(1), p.33–45; Tanner, C. K. (2008), 'Explaining Relationships among Student Outcomes and the School's Physical Environment', *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 19(3), p.444–471.

⁴ VicSRC 2023, '2023 Congress Report', p.13. VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report, p.21.

⁵ VicSRC 2023, '2023 Congress Report', p.13. VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report, p.21.

⁶ VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report, p.20. VicSRC 2025, '2025 Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.13.

⁷ VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report, p.20.

⁸ Australian Education Union 2026, 'The building divide in Australian schools: how capital funding fuels educational inequity', p.54.

schools offer VET subjects on site⁹ and 51% of Victorian Principals in public schools report that their technology and design facilities are inadequate.¹⁰ Alarming, only 24% of these Principals report that they are able to offer the full curriculum with the current infrastructure available.¹¹

*“Only learning theory because there’s not enough equipment for practical classes” –
Swan Hill Congress 2026 Student*

In an environment where vocational pathways are often perceived as a less desirable option, additional obstacles such as travelling to external training facilities and missing other classes further reduce accessibility. This makes vocational education an impractical choice for many students.¹²

*“When I first started looking into doing VET, it was difficult to tell if I could do the subject at my school or if I had to travel somewhere else” – Regional Senior Secondary
Panel Student*

Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessible Schools

Students with disabilities are among those most affected by shortcomings in school infrastructure, with some reporting that their schools are unable to adequately meet their accessibility needs. In some cases, essential features such as ramps and lifts are either unavailable or outdated, creating barriers to full participation in school life.¹³ This is affirmed by the views of Victorian public school Principals, as 63% report their school lacks purpose-built structures to support the needs of students with disabilities.¹⁴

“Students who use wheelchairs aren’t always able to access the whole school” – Gippsland Congress 2026 Student

Inclusive Schools

The need for All Gender bathrooms in schools is consistently raised by Victorian students. Students have reported that gendered bathrooms create additional barriers for trans and gender-diverse students, who are often required to use facilities that do not align with their gender identity.¹⁵

*“We know that public schools are underfunded” – Geelong Congress
2026 Student*

Students engaged with VicSRC described situations where trans students experienced discrimination or faced risks to their physical safety when using bathrooms that aligned with their gender identity.¹⁶ Critically, Australian research has also found that trans people are twice as likely not to complete their

⁹ VicSRC (2023), 'Appendix to Inquiry Submission - Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of Vocational Education and Training'

¹⁰ Australian Education Union 2026, 'The building divide in Australian schools: how capital funding fuels educational inequity', p.55.

¹¹ Australian Education Union 2026, 'The building divide in Australian schools: how capital funding fuels educational inequity', p.55.

¹² VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.20; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.12.

¹³ VicSRC 2024, '2024 Congress Report', p.21; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.9.

¹⁴ Australian Education Union 2026, 'The building divide in Australian schools: how capital funding fuels educational inequity', p.55.

¹⁵ VicSRC 2024, 'Inclusion and Safety in Victorian Schools: A Vision from LGBTIQA+ Students', p.19; VicSRC 2025, 'Melbourne Congress Snapshot', p.11.

¹⁶ VicSRC 2024, 'Inclusion and Safety in Victorian Schools: A Vision from LGBTIQA+ Students', p.19.

schooling due to unsupportive school environments, highlighting the significant impact of these barriers.¹⁷ Research further demonstrates that the absence of inclusive infrastructure, such as All Gender bathrooms, reflects cis-normative practices and can contribute to the erasure of trans identities in secondary schools.¹⁸

Where inclusive bathroom facilities were available, LGBTIQA+ students engaged with VicSRC generally valued and appreciated them. However, access was not always straightforward, with some facilities requiring a teacher's key to enter. In these cases, this process reinforced the 'othering' of trans students.¹⁹

Conclusion and Recommendations

Students learn best in environments that meet their needs. Without the necessary capital investment and infrastructure standards, students cannot engage fully in their education. Quality school infrastructure that draws from student voice is an investment in accessibility, engagement and inclusivity.

The Commonwealth and Victorian Government must implement the following:

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¹⁷ Smith, E et al. (2014), 'From Blues to Rainbows', La Trobe University and University of New England, p. 49.

¹⁸ McBride, R (2021), 'A literature review of the secondary school experiences of trans youth', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 2/18, p.103–134

¹⁹ VicSRC 2024, 'Inclusion and Safety in Victorian Schools: A Vision from LGBTIQA+ Students', p.19.