

Public schools' hidden cost

By REBECCA BAKER

Sunday Mail

Sunday 17th October 2021

583 words

Page 5 | Section: NEWS

312cm on the page



Public schools' hidden cost

REBECCA BAKER

SENDING your child to public school may not be as cheap as you think.

A new report has found a range of hidden costs, from uniforms to sporting activities, has caught budget-conscious parents by surprise.

The state's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, has called for greater transparency around the "true cost" of public education in South Australia.

She said an analysis by her office of more than 100 SA government primary and secondary schools found a disparity in costs that parents are required to fund.

"Through this sample of 108 (metropolitan and regional)

government schools ... we have started the process to identify the significant and ongoing costs," she said.

"Emerging from this research is a fuller picture of the true cost of public education ... uniforms, excursions, technology, sport and participation in fun events are examples of costs often labelled as optional extras. Not only do these add up but more importantly they are key to a student's capacity to have a full and enriching educational experience ... many schools are increasingly relying on families to raise funds, or pay out of their own pockets for enhanced school facilities and initiatives."

The Spotlight on the True

Cost of Going to School report finds parents at some public

high schools are forking out as much as \$229 on school blazers for their children while the top-priced uniform item uncovered at a public primary school was \$77 for a winter skirt.

"Typically, public high

schools had the highest number of items on their uniform list (an average of 21 items), followed by combined schools (19 items), primary schools (17 items) and area schools (10 items)," the report finds. Other

"non-essential" items listed on the schools' websites include camps, excursions, performances, incursions, sports clothing, uniforms, formals, discos and laptop computer hire.

Ms Connolly said while one in three SA government school students received School Card help, the scheme only covered "essential items and services".

"For some families, the cost of uniforms, alongside equipment, membership, and transport costs, make participation in sports and other structured activities at school and outside simply impossible," she said.

She makes seven recommendations "relating to the true cost of going to public schools" be made available with a full range of optional charges itemised. "It is now quite challenging to quantify these 'extra' costs ... this information is not publicly available in a consistent way," she said.

Kickstart for Kids CEO Ian

Steel said his organisation provides 60,000 breakfasts and 10,000 lunches to SA school kids in need each week but the demand is far greater.

An Education Department spokesman urged parents struggling financially to contact their child's school.

"Schools support families with the costs for other education expenses such as uniforms, camps and excursion, by negotiating payment by instalment arrangements, but also through the waiving of these types of costs in exceptional circumstances," he said.

#FEARLESS CONVERSATIONS P26

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

MAKE information relating to the true cost of going to public schools available, itemising "optional charges".

PROVIDE free laptop and data packs to all SA School Card holders as required.

EXPAND access to free public Wi-Fi.

OFFER free period products at schools, community centres, youth facilities,

libraries and chemists.

PROVIDE free transport to and from school for children whose families are eligible for a School Card.

FREE school breakfast and lunch programs in priority high-need schools.

PROVIDE free school uniforms and sports kits to all School Card holders as required.