

SA Commissioner for Children and Young People Helen Connolly delivers report on real cost of public education

Lauren Novak

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The hidden costs of putting a child through school mean the right to a free education is now a “pipedream” for South Australian families, a children’s advocate argues.

Gavin Giles would rather cut back on his medication than let his grandchildren miss out on a school excursion.

He and wife Samantha, both 54, are caring for five kids aged 6 to 11 who are heading back to the classroom for another year.



Samantha and Gavin Giles with grandchildren Alex Giles 10, Serenity Giles 10, Lilly Giles 6, Annabelle Giles 6 and Tyler Giles 8. Picture: Kelly Barnes

“We try not to let them miss out, but there are a lot of children that do,” Mr Giles said.

“There must be two to five in each classroom that are missing out because they can’t afford to go.

“Some parents will keep their children out of school rather than have them feeling like they’ve missed out.”

A new report by South Australia’s Children’s Commissioner Helen Connolly has warned that universal, free schooling has become “a pipedream” amid the growing and hidden costs of education.

Ms Connolly wants the Education Department to audit the “cumulative costs” of public education - including fees, uniforms, stationery, excursions, transport and extra-curricular activities - at each public school and publish the figures each year.

She says each school should also provide an itemised list of the “full range of optional charges that families can expect to incur, so these can be planned for in advance”.



Gavin would rather cut back on his medication than let his grandchildren miss out on a school excursion.
Picture: Kelly Barnes

Public schools will this year charge fees of at least \$300 per primary student and \$396 for secondary students.

The state government will provide a \$200 rebate on those fees, but schools can poll parents to gain approval to charge more.

Ms Connolly’s report urges schools to:

OFFER families short-term interest-free loans or staggered payment options.

KEEP spare uniforms, sports gear and essential books on site for students.

SET simple uniform standards which allow cheaper generic items.

OFFER second-hand uniforms, books and equipment in a “non-stigmatised way”, such as an annual sale.

The cost of going to public school

	2024	2025
National (metro)	\$92,710	\$123,294
National (regional & remote)	\$80,303	\$81,141
Adelaide	\$88,186	\$114,678
SA (regional & remote)	\$86,677	\$75,600
Canberra	\$81,564	\$106,280
Sydney	\$94,819	\$150,323

NSW (regional & remote)	\$87,762	\$89,448
Brisbane	\$85,177	\$101,064
QLD (regional & remote)	\$72,670	\$90,267
Melbourne	\$108,879	\$114,126
VIC (regional & remote)	\$79,678	\$77,641
Perth	\$90,785	\$122,106
WA (regional & remote)	\$74,979	\$78,788
NT (regional & remote)	\$79,737	\$75,798
TAS (regional & remote)	\$72,083	\$78,869

*Estimated cost of education from Reception to Year 12 at a government school including tuition, uniforms, transport, electronic devices, extra-curricular activities and other education expenses.

Source: Futurity Group 2025 Cost of Education Index

Mrs Giles, of Hackham West, said she had spent \$1500 on uniforms, shoes, school bags, hats and other back to school items.

The family survives on Centrelink carer and disability payments and support from The Smith Family.

“There’s no way we would be able to find the money without them,” Mrs Giles said.

About a third of families in the public system, including the Giles clan, are covered by the school card because they are on low incomes.

They are exempt from school fees and can receive a free laptop for students in year 7 or 10.

Others can buy laptops at a 15 per cent discount through a department bulk-buying program.

Education Minister Blair Boyer said the government would “continue to make sure families are supported so every child gets a great education, no matter their background”.