



This week's stories from the media

- Parents fight big fines for truancy
- STEM push has failed
- Schools splurge but cash stashed
- Childcare costs: Government says reform will fix broken system
- Indigenous struggling in maths
- Australian children's word of the year
- Teaching academy to boost SA

### STEM Push Has Failed

**Is there a crisis in Australian science and mathematics education?**

Despite the government's efforts to produce budding coders and 'STEMinists', disengagement in these pursuits persists.

Coupled with slipping maths and science PISA and TIMSS scores, Dr Rachel Wilson thinks it is an indictment on our education system.

"The drift towards a personalised education system" has led to lowered science and maths uptakes in students' senior years.

Wilson says Australia is unique in its apparent disregard for STEM subjects. "Internationally, we look very unusual," she advised.

Our numerical nonchalance is perpetuated in teaching, where many students who didn't take maths and science become the ones responsible for delivering them.

[Read the story](#)

### Parents Fight Big Fines For Truancy

**Parents are making a last-ditch effort to convince the State Government to abandon proposed expiation notices for truancy, saying it will trivialise and even worsen the problem.**

The fines, which could be set as high as \$750, are embedded in legislation that has passed the House of Assembly.

A key parent group is meeting with Legislative Council crossbenchers in a bid to quash the move, which the Liberal Party also opposes.

Director of the SA Association of State School Organisations (SAASSO), David Knuckey, said it was more likely children missed school because of "the bullying epidemic and lack of resources for special needs students" than because "parents cannot be bothered taking them".

"Fines will not solve any of these other issues," he said.

"These fines could actually encourage the wrong behaviour and trivialise school absenteeism. We shouldn't be treating children missing out on an education the same way we treat parking in a loading zone."



But he was not opposed to the continued use of the courts as a last resort when families have become "completely disengaged" from the education system.

"(That) could compel some families to re-engage in the mediation process to get their children back into school," he said.

A SAASSO survey earlier this year found overwhelming majorities of parents and school staff opposed both expiation notices and raising of court-imposed penalties.

Opposition education spokesman John Gardner hoped cross-benchers would reject the "speeding fine (style) expiation fee approach".

[More](#)

***“...We shouldn’t be treating children missing out on an education the same way we treat parking in a loading zone....”***

### Schools Splurge But Cash Stashed

**More than 90 public schools would be gifted \$690 million for upgrades in a State Government pledge, but a report has questioned whether some schools are overfunded or not using resources for their intended purposes.**

Parents welcomed Labor’s new spending commitment but said a historical lack of money for upgrades was why schools had been forced to scrimp and save for years towards projects - and they don’t even get to keep most of the interest earned.

The director of parent group, the SA Association of State School Organisations, David Knuckey, said schools “don’t receive anywhere near enough money” for infrastructure. He said schools were independently audited every year, and dismissed any suggestion they were “robbing children today” to hoard for the future.

He said the accounts, collectively known as the SA Schools Investment Fund, were originally meant to help schools save for projects, until the Government decided to keep the interest earned from state funding for itself.

[More](#)

### Childcare Costs: Government Reforms Will Fix Broken System

**Australian families are paying almost \$3300 more per year for childcare than five years ago, with new figures showing prices continue to rise.**

The latest figures show mums and dads were paying on average about \$11,329 for childcare in 2016.

That’s a dramatic jump since 2011 when families were paying about \$8030 per year for child care on average.

Families have gone from paying about \$154 per week on average to about \$217 per week in five years.

Education Minister Simon Birmingham told News Corp the government was working to fix the “broken” system.

The December quarter figures showed that, while costs were still increasing, there was some slowing in the rate of fee increases with prices spiking by 5% over 2016, compared to 6% the year before.

The Minister said the introduction of an hourly rate cap would put further downward pressure on costs.

[More](#)

### Indigenous Struggling In Maths

**Indigenous students are eight times more likely to fall behind in maths before Year 9 than non-Indigenous students.**

Figures showed that at least 17 % of Indigenous Year 9 students were below minimum maths standards, compared with their non-Indigenous peers who sat at 2.1%.

Report results also showed a low representation of Indigenous and female students among Australia’s mathematics high achievers, and experts say this remains a challenge for skill supply.

Female participation in maths was low, with only 7% taking up advanced maths compared to 13% of males.

[Full Story](#)

### Australian Children’s Word Of The Year

**Oxford University Press Australia and New Zealand (OUP ANZ) announced the 2017 Australian Children’s Word of the Year: ‘equality’.**

They predicated their decision on the word’s frequency, popularity and use in context, based on entries from 700 primary school children around the country.

OUP ANZ director of School Publishing, Lee Walker, said the winning word reflects that children are cognisant of topical social issues.

They had used the word in school writing tasks on gender, pay, culture, marriage, disability, religion, race, sport, and – kids being kids – ice cream.

[More](#)

### Teaching Academy To Boost SA

**South Australian teachers will be encouraged to up-skill and specialise under a new state government program.**

The \$16 million teaching excellence and leadership academy aims to lift the performance of teachers and students across the state, Premier Jay Weatherill says.

“Our teachers and educational leaders are world class,” the premier said.

“By providing them with the right support, our education system can attract and retain the best professionals, delivering the best quality of education for our children.”

[Read more](#)