Gender Lens on the 2026 Budget

Policy area: Schooling

Portfolio / agency: Education

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Key Portfolio Issues

The 2026 Budget largely maintains the existing needs-based school funding settings, while adding a limited set of targeted measures which focus on governance support, STEM initiatives and First Nations Support. Overall the package is incremental rather than transformational, and its impact will be dependent on implementation and on how reforms interact with the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement funding pathway.

A gender lens is essential because schooling is delivered through a heavily feminised workforce, and funding settings affect workforce sustainability, workload, pay equity, and retention. Education settings also shape life-course outcomes for gender equality, including attainment and completion, pathways to further study and work, long-term economic security, health and wellbeing, and safety. Applying a gender lens helps ensure that new investments reduce, rather than reproduce, inequality for girls, women, and gender-diverse students across different cohorts and communities.

Key issues

- Workforce sustainability in a feminised sector: workload, workforce shortages and retention pressures remain central; funding decisions affect women's pay equity and conditions.
- Equity cohorts and intersectional barriers: First Nations students, students with disability, regional/remote communities and disadvantaged schools require targeted, culturally safe supports.
- Attendance, engagement and wellbeing**:** participation is a prerequisite for learning and for reducing long-run inequality.

- System accountability**:** the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025–2034) embeds measurable national targets and a funding pathway that should be assessed for gendered impacts.

Key gaps

- Limited explicit gender framing in national school funding and reform settings; gender impacts must be made visible through reporting and evaluation.
- Risk that new initiatives (assessment, STEM, commissions) improve systems but do not translate into reduced workload, improved retention, or better wellbeing and participation outcomes for girls and gender-diverse students without deliberate design.

Budget Measures

The Budget allocations below demonstrate the Australian Government's support for schools and areas where further support is needed, some of the key line items include $35.2 billion total in 2026-27 to support state education services, including $34.4 billion in Better and Fairer Schools funding and $777.3 million in National Partnership payments.

- National Partnership payments:
    - $61.4 million for the National Student Wellbeing Program (pastoral care services in participating schools)
    - $20.8 million for Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment – Early Learning and Access to Education (remote early learning, access, and First Nations education workforce development)
    - $8.3 million for consent and respectful relationships education (government and non-government sectors)
    - $15.7 million for Disadvantaged independent school students (transition support under new funding arrangements)
    - $5.8 million for Expansion of the Joint Compliance and Monitoring Program (regulatory oversight and streamlined compliance)
    - $4.0 million to establish a Hindu School in Australia
    - $8.7 million for Mid-Year Reception in South Australian Non-Government Schools (temporary funding over 2025–26)
    - $1.4 million for the Schools Pathways Program (defence-industry pathways; STEM participation)
    - $0 in 2026–27 for the Workload Reduction Fund (funding concludes after 2025–26).

Better and Fairer Schools funding[a]

$million	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2025-26									
Government schools(b)	3,536.0	3,048.4	2,770.9	1,491.6	804.7	289.5	198.4	302.9	12,442.3
Non-government schools(c)(d)	6,121.1	5,270.5	4,443.5	2,085.6	1,601.8	457.1	302.1	255.4	20,537.1
Total	**9,657.0**	**8,318.9**	**7,214.3**	**3,577.2**	**2,406.5**	**746.6**	**500.5**	**558.3**	**32,979.3**
2026-27									
Government schools(b)	3,663.2	3,155.4	2,877.1	1,579.6	831.0	304.3	209.4	352.1	12,972.0
Non-government schools(c)(d)	6,388.0	5,489.6	4,635.6	2,163.8	1,684.4	478.3	318.2	263.9	21,421.8
Total	**10,051.2**	**8,645.0**	**7,512.6**	**3,743.4**	**2,515.4**	**782.5**	**527.6**	**616.0**	**34,393.8**
2027-28									
Government schools(b)	3,798.5	3,278.3	2,974.0	1,633.2	849.0	309.3	215.3	404.5	13,462.2
Non-government schools(c)(d)	6,666.5	5,747.1	4,853.0	2,265.7	1,774.4	498.3	332.8	273.4	22,411.3
Total	**10,465.0**	**9,025.4**	**7,827.1**	**3,898.9**	**2,623.5**	**807.6**	**548.1**	**677.9**	**35,873.5**
2028-29									
Government schools(b)	3,980.9	3,398.1	3,071.4	1,687.2	887.4	316.1	221.1	460.5	14,022.6
Non-government schools(c)(d)	6,958.9	6,016.8	5,083.5	2,374.9	1,864.4	520.2	346.7	282.9	23,448.5
Total	**10,939.8**	**9,414.9**	**8,155.0**	**4,062.1**	**2,751.8**	**836.3**	**567.8**	**743.5**	**37,471.2**
2029-30									
Government schools(b)	4,260.9	3,520.9	3,195.6	1,749.5	954.4	327.8	228.0	496.3	14,733.3
Non-government schools(c)(d)	7,269.3	6,297.5	5,332.4	2,489.9	1,957.1	542.9	362.7	291.9	24,543.6
Total	**11,530.2**	**9,818.4**	**8,528.0**	**4,239.4**	**2,911.5**	**870.7**	**590.7**	**788.2**	**39,276.9**

a) This table does not include additional funding that may result from ongoing negotiations with Victoria on the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025–2034* supporting bilateral agreement.
b) Includes Literacy Support for Tasmanian Students and funding for the Northern Territory to accelerate evidence-based reforms to improve outcomes for vulnerable students.
c) Includes capital funding.
d) Includes funding for Choice and Affordability Fund.

Building Early Education Fund[a]

$million	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2025-26	3.9	42.3	25.0	-	7.7	9.2	5.0	-	138.5
2026-27	1.4	10.5	-	2.5	0.7	2.0	4.0	-	97.9
2027-28	-	8.8	15.0	6.5	4.2	9.7	1.0	-	52.8
2028-29	-	1.6	10.0	-	1.8	4.6	-	-	28.0
2029-30	-	-	-	-	0.4	-	-	-	0.4
Total	**5.3**	**63.2**	**50.0**	**9.0**	**14.8**	**25.5**	**10.0**	**-**	**317.7**

a) Totals include funding yet to be allocated.

Source: *Budget Paper No. 3*, page 47

Consent and respectful relationships education

$million	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2025-26	6.7	4.8	3.8	2.4	1.5	0.5	0.3	0.4	20.4
2026-27	2.7	2.0	1.5	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.2	8.3
2027-28	2.7	2.0	1.5	1.0	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.2	8.3
2028-29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2029-30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**12.1**	**8.7**	**6.8**	**4.3**	**2.7**	**1.0**	**0.5**	**0.7**	**36.9**

Source: *Budget Paper No. 3*, page 47.

Gender implications of this budget measure

Education funding functions as gender equality funding because schooling and early childhood education are delivered through a highly feminised workforce and resourcing decisions directly shape workload, burnout risk, retention, leadership pathways, and pay equity. The scale of education funding in 2026–27 ($35.2 billion, including $34.4 billion in Better and Fairer Schools funding) reinforces that “mainstream” education funding settings are among the most significant levers affecting women’s economic security.

Student safety and wellbeing measures also have gendered implications. Funding for consent and respectful relationships education ($8.3 million in 2026–27) can contribute

to preventing gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault affecting students and school communities, but program quality, educator support and consistent national implementation are critical. Ongoing funding for the National Student Wellbeing Program ($61.4 million) is relevant to girls', boys' and gender-diverse students' participation and learning.

A gendered understanding of the benefits of wellbeing programs and respectful relationships education is important when assessing the effectiveness of this expenditure, especially as the needs of and benefits for girls, boys and gender diverse people may be significantly different, particularly where wellbeing needs intersect with poverty, disability, racism, and experiences of violence.

Intersectional equity settings remain central. Funding for Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment – Early Learning and Access to Education ($20.8 million) highlights the need for culturally safe, community-led implementation that recognises gendered experiences within First Nations communities and supports First Nations education workforce development.

Finally, the absence of Workload Reduction Fund funding in 2026–27 is a gender equity watchpoint. Teacher workload is a major driver of burnout and attrition in a feminised workforce; discontinuation heightens the need for the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement implementation to be assessed against explicit outcomes on workload, retention and workforce sustainability (with gender-disaggregated reporting where feasible).

Recommendations

NFAW recommends:

- Full and fair funding: all government schools in all states and territories be funded to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard
- Disability inclusion across schooling: extend the Inclusion Support Program to all schools (not only childcare and early education settings), so that students with disability and additional needs receive adequate support throughout their education
- Gender-visible reporting: require gender-disaggregated workforce and student wellbeing/participation reporting where feasible (including intersectional disaggregation), to assess whether funding and reforms are improving gender equality

- Workload and retention as core outcomes: ensure new initiatives (assessment, commissions, STEM extensions) include explicit plans to reduce workload drivers and improve retention in schools and early childhood settings.

References

Australian Government, Department of Education. (2026, March 25). *The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025–2034).* https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/national-school-reform-agreement/better-and-fairer-schools-agreement-20252034

Australian Government. (2026, May 12). *Education* (Part 2: Payments for specific purposes). In *Budget Paper No. 3: Federal financial relations 2026–27*. https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3_05_part_2_education.pdf