



EVERYONE
DESERVES
EDUCATION

Learning Without Essentials

Education inequality in
Australia and the cost of
going without.

Imagine watching your child fall behind in school because you can't afford the extras.

Every child deserves access to education that helps them reach their full potential. Yet, for many Australian families facing financial hardship, the hidden costs of schooling create barriers that go far beyond what most people realise.



Overview



1 in 2

Half of parents (48%) say that the “hidden costs” of education are adding to their overall cost of living stress.¹



1 in 3

More than 1 in 3 parents (37%) are concerned about affording essential education items for their children this year.¹



1 in 4

1 in 4 (24%) parents say the cost of extra-curricular activities makes it hard for their child to participate.¹



1 in 3

More than 1 in 3 (34%) parents feel education-related costs are ‘out of control’, with the inability to afford certain education essentials causing stress and worry, and impacting both student participation and wellbeing.¹

Everyone deserves education

Every child deserves access to education that helps them reach their full potential. Yet, for many Australian families facing financial hardship, the hidden costs of schooling create barriers that go far beyond what most people realise.

School costs go way beyond fees, textbooks, and uniforms. There are laptops and tablets, sports and music activities, getting to and from school, and lots of “little” expenses that add up over the year. For families already stretched thin by rising living costs, these education expenses can seem overwhelming. These consequences ripple through every aspect of a child’s life.

The hidden costs of education are the often overlooked expenses that create barriers to full participation in learning.

When kids can’t afford what they need for school, it’s not just their grades that suffer. It affects how confident they feel, whether they fit in with their friends, and what opportunities they’ll have down the track. The effects can be isolating and stick with them for years, making young people feel left out and unable to join in properly at school.

What does this actually look like? A child might be the only one left behind when everyone goes to camp or a school excursion. A student might stay home on mufti day because they can’t spare the gold coin donation, or they’re worried they won’t fit in because of their clothing. A teenager might miss out on sport or music because the gear costs too much.

The hidden costs of education include:

- › School uniforms (seasonal and sport variations)
- › Digital devices and internet access
- › Transport to and from school
- › School camps and excursions
- › Extracurricular activities and sports
- › School photos
- › Stationery, lunch boxes, drink bottles, and other essentials

Good360 Australia is bringing together national research and real stories from charities we work with to show the long-term effects of when families can’t afford education basics. By addressing these hidden costs, we can eliminate the barriers that prevent children from joining in, feeling included, and fully participating in their education. When we support kids who lack essential resources for school, we help create a future where every child, regardless of their family circumstances, has what they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

“Some of our students come to school with their lunch box and drink bottle in a plastic shopping bag. We were able to give these students a backpack to put their belongings in. One of the students couldn’t believe she could actually keep the backpack and take it home! We would like to say a huge thank you to Good360 and all the businesses that donate their goods. It is very much appreciated by our school and students.”

Good360 School Member



1 in 5 parents
say their family has
had to sacrifice other
essentials to afford
education-related
items and expenses.¹



1 in 10 have recently
been unable to
afford essential
educational items¹



The hidden cost of education

The true cost of sending a child to school can be significantly higher than people realise. **According to Finder, parents will spend \$2,847 per primary school child and \$5,310 per secondary school child to attend public school in 2026. Across the country, school supplies alone are expected to cost families a staggering \$3.8 billion.**⁴

School uniforms are one of the priciest back-to-school items, costing on average \$250 for primary students and \$479 for secondary students each year⁴, with our research showing nearly 2 in 5 parents (38%) feeling the cost of uniforms is excessive.¹ **Unfortunately, uniforms can be more than just a financial burden; they remain the main indicator of income in a school environment, with children reporting that not being able to afford uniform items can be a reason for being bullied and socially excluded.**³

Beyond major expenses, families face ongoing costs for everyday school supplies, with nearly 1 in 5 parents (18%) feeling stressed having to purchase everyday supplies for their child's class, like pencils, notebooks, and art supplies.¹ Even the "small" costs add up: dress-up days, mufti days, cake sales, fundraising events, Book Week celebrations, and school musicals all have associated costs that can unintentionally isolate students unable to participate.³


While schools might call these experiences "non-essential," they can be essential for kids to participate, feel like they belong, and learn. Costs associated with sport or music lessons, including membership fees, registration, uniforms, shoes, musical instruments, and other equipment, create significant barriers, and these activities build confidence, skills, and friendships that many children miss out on entirely due to cost.³ All these costs combined put extra financial pressure on families and can unintentionally isolate students who can't participate because they can't afford it.

"When I got school gear from Good360, it really made a difference. I didn't have to worry about looking different from everyone else, and it helped me feel more confident. It showed me that people actually care and want to see me do well."

Recipient after receiving school equipment from a Good360 member

"We were able to get some backpacks from Good360. These backpacks will become part of our back-to-school delivery, making sure students in rural and remote areas have backpacks and school supplies for their 2026 school year. A backpack filled with school supplies at the start of the school year is more than just tools for a child, it helps with convenience to go to school with what they need and also knowing it has been donated shows a child that people care."

The Backpack Venture, Good360 Member



1 in 5 parents feel stressed having to purchase everyday supplies for their child's class.¹

Who is going without?

Students at schools in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be excluded because they can't access or afford what they need². Research consistently shows that socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of educational outcomes, and achievement gaps start in the earliest years of children's lives⁵.

Children and young people living in low-income households have access to fewer books and learning materials in the home and more limited access to the support and resources that help form a foundation for learning. Parents in low-income families are less likely than other parents to possess the digital skills required to support their children's education, and students from low-income families report significantly lower scores in digital literacy⁵.

The COVID-19 pandemic deepened this divide. While moving to online education was a big change for most families, it created specific challenges for digitally excluded groups like low-income families with school-aged children trying to access their lessons online⁸. For some households with internet connection at home and laptops to work from, it was business as usual, but unequal internet access was just the beginning of the challenges some students faced. The disruption led to widening gaps in learning that are still affecting many students today⁵.

Beyond digital access, family income affects whether a child or young person can afford regular laundry costs and other hygiene and personal care products. This becomes especially important during puberty for young people who menstruate and need reliable access to period products, and for all young people who are expected to use deodorant and to manage personal grooming³. Not having proper laundry facilities can also mean students stay home from school because they're embarrassed to wear their uniform multiple days in a row.

Parents most concerned about affording essential education items this year:



42% parents of early primary students aged 5-8 compared to 37% average



40% parents of boys compared to 34% of girls



45% Western Australian parents compared to 37% average



"A group of volunteers was called to put together more than 150 back-to-school packs in response to a need from an organisation that provides supplies to foster home children. These packs aim to transform the embarrassment of not having basic schooling items that is experienced by the children in out-of-home care into dignity and hope. Children with access to their own supplies are more likely to engage actively, feel ownership of their learning, and dream bigger."

Good360 Network Member

"Thanks to Good360 and its product donors, Liverpool Hospital School was able to gift new books to the sick children inside the hospital so they could continue their learning after class. The books kept their minds occupied while they waited to get better. Parents and carers were also grateful to have something to do with their child that kept them busy and made them smile."

**Liverpool Hospital School,
Good360 Network Member**

"We are thrilled to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Good360 Australia for their generous donation of brand-new books! Thanks to their support, we celebrated Education Week by gifting each student a new book to take home, and the excitement was visible! This donation not only enriches our school library but also reinforces our commitment to promoting literacy and a love for reading. We are immensely grateful to Good360 for their support and for making a positive impact in our community."

**Lavington East Public School,
Good360 Network Member**

Impact: The ripple effects of missing out

For many families, the impact goes well beyond household budgets. More than 1 in 8 parents (13%) say difficulty affording education items has caused stress or worry in their household. These concerns include the impact on their children's ability to fully participate in education, including missing out on activities or struggling with homework, and their wellbeing, such as their confidence, social connections and self-esteem. Meanwhile, 1 in 4 parents (24%) say the cost of extra-curricular activities makes it difficult for their child to participate.

The consequences of missing out on education essentials extend far beyond the classroom, they ripple through every part of a child's life and future. When kids and young people can't afford education basics, it creates embarrassment and shame that affects how they participate and feel connected to their school and community³. The stress and worry parents experience about affording education costs also affects family dynamics and children's sense of security.

The impact extends beyond the classroom, creating challenges that can follow young people into adulthood. Education is one of the main pathways to opportunity and success, with individuals with higher levels of education more likely to have higher-paying jobs, better general health, and a lower likelihood of engaging in crime⁶. Children growing up in poverty often face barriers such as leaving school early, difficulty transitioning to work, and challenges accessing formal post-school education, which can affect their income level as adults and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage².

When children have access to the resources they need, education provides a stable foundation for them to grow into active and informed citizens⁷. Ensuring every child has access to education essentials is not just about helping individual students; it's about building stronger, more inclusive communities and creating opportunities for all Australians to thrive. By providing the essentials children need, we can help break down barriers to education, employment, and social connection.

Digital access, an education essential

The digital divide refers to the lack of access to essential digital resources due to financial hardship with around one in five Australians missing out on access to essential technology⁹. In an increasingly online society, missing out on digital access limits people's ability to participate in everyday activities, including education, communication and services. For students, this gap has direct implications for learning and long-term opportunity.

Good360's 2025 research found that digital exclusion remains widespread. The impact on children's education is particularly concerning: fewer than half of parents surveyed reported having reliable internet at home for their children's schoolwork, and only 40% said their children had regular access to a laptop or computer. In the same year, Good360 received more than 19,000 requests for digital devices from charities and disadvantaged schools across Australia, highlighting the scale and persistence of unmet need.

Together, these findings reinforce that digital access is now a core part of the true cost of education. When students lack essential technology, the cost is not only financial, but social and educational, affecting participation, confidence and future learning pathways.

Each year, large numbers of usable computers and tablets are discarded or sent overseas, despite millions of devices being refurbished across Australia every five years. Redirecting this technology to people in need locally presents a clear opportunity to reduce waste while addressing digital exclusion.

Businesses are encouraged to pledge laptops, tablets and computers 3-5 years old to help close the digital divide.

Further detail on these findings is available in the Good360 Digital Access Report 2025.

Good360's member network

Good360's charity and disadvantaged school members play an important role in making education essentials and digital devices accessible. They provide access to help meet immediate needs and often act as a gateway to wider support.

**In 2025 alone,
our members helped
us connect over
\$27.4 million worth of
education essentials to
communities in need.**

Good360 members say:

"Many of the donated products that we receive through Good360 are items that our clients would never dream of being able to obtain on their own. Without the generosity of the donors and the tremendous work of the team at Good360, sadly our clients would simply go without and miss out on these positive experiences."

"Good360 is a lifeline for us. Without their donations, we would be unable to provide the essential support that our community relies upon. The lack of resources would lead to increased hardship and suffering. Every Good360 delivery brings a ray of hope and a reminder of the generosity that sustains our community."

Our product donors

Special thank you to our generous product donors, whose kindness has meant vulnerable communities can access much needed education essentials.

Major supporting partner

Harvey Norman®

OPTUS



amazon.com.au

acco
BRANDS



hachette
AUSTRALIA

Mont Marte

MACMILLAN
Pan Macmillan Australia

SIMON & SCHUSTER
AUSTRALIA

What can be done?

We're calling on businesses, charities, and public bodies to help close this gap. Clear national guidelines and incentives for donating surplus goods would make a real difference. Food redistribution is well established; we need the same approach for essential non-food goods. Reducing barriers around logistics costs, tax treatment, and liability would help more businesses give with confidence. Above all, it's about normalising giving as the first option, so fewer children miss out on the essentials they need to learn.

Good360 Members say:

"There are students at our school who do not have the necessary digital advantages necessary to complete homework, assignments, practice maths and spelling."

"We have started to make "back to school" packs to assist low income families at the start of the school year. Stationery suitable for both primary and high school children along with items such as lunch boxes, water bottles etc are appreciated."

We can all play a role in providing equal access to education essentials.



Donate education essentials

Access to education essentials helps children keep learning and thrive. We're calling on businesses to donate products to meet the growing demand. Visit <https://good360.org.au/give-the-goods/>



Join our network to access goods

Charities and disadvantaged schools can join our network for free to access stationery, school supplies, digital devices, books, and more. Register at: <https://good360.org.au/get-the-goods>







Donate money

Alleviate the burden of being unable to afford everyday goods, because everyone deserves access to life's essentials. <https://give.good360.org.au/impact-area-education>



Follow Good360 Australia

 Good360 Australia
 @good360au
 Good360 Australia
 @good360au

Help us address the lack of access to educational resources.

What items are needed?

Over \$4.5 billion of new goods are wasted every year in Australia (*Deloitte Access Economics report commissioned by Good360 Australia*). While surplus stock remains an important resource, businesses also have the unique opportunity to make purposeful donations of brand-new product to support Australians experiencing hardship. These are some of the most requested items from our members, along with other essentials that can make a difference in communities.

School

- Backpacks and school bags
- Books (fiction and non-fiction)
- Calculators
- Coloured pencils
- Erasers and sharpeners
- Exercise books and art diaries
- Folders and binders
- Geometry sets
- Glue sticks
- Highlighters
- Lunch boxes
- Notebooks
- Pencil cases
- Pens and pencils
- Rulers
- School shoes
- Scissors
- Stationery packs
- Sticky notes
- Whiteboards and classroom supplies
- Whiteboard markers

Creative

- Art and craft supplies
- Art paper and coloured paper
- Craft kits
- Educational games and puzzles
- Learning resources
- Markers and textas
- Musical instruments
- Sketchbooks
- STEM kits
- Visual learning aids

Technology

- Computer accessories (keyboards, mice, headphones)
- Phone services and data
- Educational software and licenses
- Headphones and earphones
- Internet data
- Laptop sleeves
- Laptops and tablets 3-5 years old
- Power banks
- Wi-Fi devices and modems

Sport

- Balls (soccer, basketball, football, netball etc)
- Cones and training markers
- Hats
- Protective gear
- School sports equipment
- School sports bibs
- Sports bags
- Sportswear
- Sneakers
- Sunscreen
- Water bottles

A note from Good360

“When parents are worried about affording education essentials like clothing, stationery and drink bottles, the impact is felt deeply, causing concern, stress and difficult trade-offs. These pressures are ongoing and often invisible, but they have lasting consequences for children’s confidence and wellbeing. No family should have to choose between education essentials and other basic needs. When so many families and young people are doing it tough, surplus education essentials should not be sitting in warehouses or heading to landfill. By donating these items, businesses can help relieve pressure on families, support children to participate fully at school, while also reducing waste and costs. It’s a win-win and a no-brainer.”

Susan Wallis,

Head of Government and Philanthropy,
Good360 Australia



Sources:

1. Nationally representative online survey of 500 Australian parents of school-aged children conducted by PureProfile in January 2026 on behalf of Good360 Australia and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
2. Anti-Poverty Week. (2021). Fast Facts: Child & Family Poverty in Australia. <https://antipovertyweek.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/5.-Child-Poverty-2021-d1.pdf>
3. Commissioner for Children & Young People. (2021, October). Spotlight on the True Cost of Going to School (Project Report No. 26). <https://www.cyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Spotlight-on-the-True-Cost-of-Going-to-School.pdf>
4. Godfrey, J. & Sudarshan, S. (2026, January 13). Back to school costs and statistics for 2026. Finder.com.au. <https://www.finder.com.au/insights/back-to-school-costs>
5. Lamb, S. (2020, April 27). Impact of learning from home on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. Centre for International Research on Education Systems (CIRES). <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/submission-government-impact-learning-from-home.pdf>
6. Lamb, S. and Huo, S. Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education. Mitchell Institute report No. 02/2017. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/counting-the-costs-of-lost-opportunity-in-Aus-education-mitchell-institute.pdf>
7. The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update. (2022). The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, FSDO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. <https://www.unicef.org/media/122921/file/StateofLearningPoverty2022.pdf>
8. Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, CK, Holcombe-James, I, Kennedy, J, Rennie, E, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, 2020, Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020, RMIT and Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, for Telstra. https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/TLS_ADII_Report-2020_WebU.pdf
9. Thomas, J., McCosker, A., Parkinson, S., Hegarty, K., Featherstone, D., Kennedy, J., Ormond-Parker, L., Morrison, K., Rea, H., & Ganley, L. Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index. Melbourne: ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Telstra. https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ADII-Report-2025_V6-Remediated.pdf

About Good360 Australia

Good360 Australia is Australia's leading not-for-profit online marketplace for charities and disadvantaged schools. We redirect donated new products to the people who need them most, working with over 600 partners and a network of 4,800 charities and schools. Our purpose is to ensure no one in Australia goes without life's everyday essentials, including for hygiene, play, home and education. The result is a Circle of Good that reduces both need and waste in our communities.



Good360 Australia

Unit 6/364-384 Woodpark Rd,
Smithfield NSW 2164
02 8594 3600
contact@good360.org.au



www.good360.org.au

#good360australia #circleofgood #bringinggoodtogether

