

School Funding Brief

The State of School Funding in Australia

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Save Our Schools

<https://saveourschools.com.au>

Key Points

1. Income per student in Independent and Catholic schools exceeds that of public schools.
 - The national average income per student in all Independent schools was \$25,649 in 2022 and \$19,747 in Catholic schools compared to \$18,076 in public schools.
 - Independent schools have a large resource advantage over public schools in all states, especially in NSW and Victoria.
 - Income per student in Catholic schools is greater than in public schools in all states except NSW and the ACT where resource levels are similar.
 - Victoria was the worst performing state for resource gaps between public and private schools.
2. Government funding increases are the major factor behind the resource advantage of private schools. Government funding has favoured Catholic and Independent schools over public schools since 2009.
 - Government funding adjusted for inflation increased by \$2,901 per student for Catholic schools between 2009 and 2022 and by \$2,478 per student in Independent schools compared to \$1,621 in public schools in Australia.
 - Government funding increases have favoured Catholic and Independent schools in all states except for Independent schools in NSW and the ACT.
 - Government funding increases massively favoured Catholic and Independent schools in Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.
3. Commonwealth Government funding increases heavily favoured Catholic and Independent schools over public schools in all states.
 - Commonwealth funding increases for Catholic and Independent schools was more than double that for public schools - \$2,687 per student for Catholic schools and \$2,345 for Independent schools compared to \$1,021 for public schools.
4. Despite their primary funding role, the states have provided only small funding increase for public schools.
 - State funding per student for public schools increased by only \$600 from 2009 to 2022. State funding per student for Catholic schools increased by \$214 and by \$133 for Independent schools.
 - The Western Australian and Northern Territory governments cut their funding for public schools by large amounts.
5. The resource advantage of private schools was supported by significant increases in income from fees, charges, donations, etc. while it fell in public schools.
6. The bias towards the funding of private schools and the under-funding of public schools is a major factor behind the large achievement gaps between rich and poor in Australia.
 - Despite enrolling the vast majority of students with the most learning challenges, public schools are massively under-funded. Public schools are only funded at 87.6% of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in 2024 while private schools are funded at 104.9% of their SRS.
7. The new funding agreements being negotiated between the Commonwealth and state governments must ensure that public schools are genuinely fully funded by 2028. This includes ending the accounting tricks that defraud public schools.

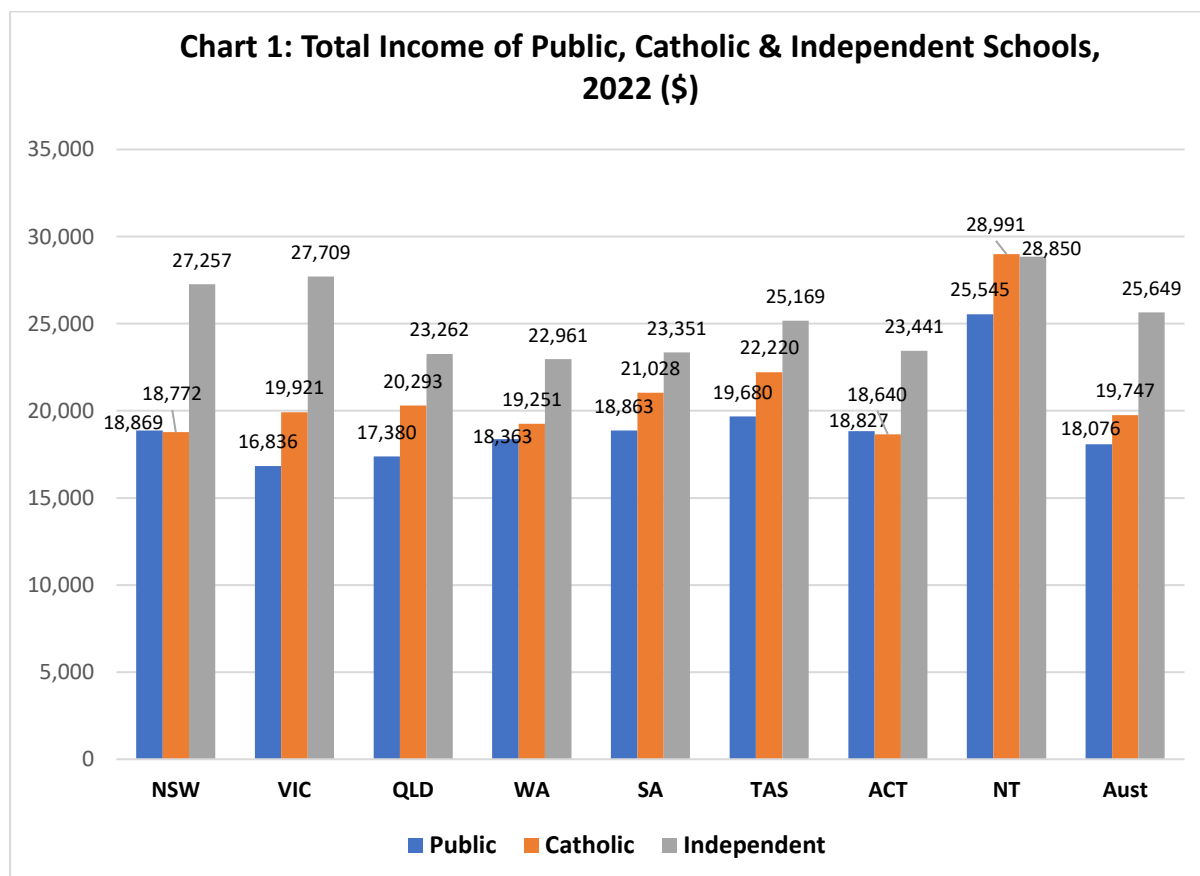
1. Introduction

This paper supplements a paper published earlier this year by [Save Our Schools](#) on school funding trends in Australia based on the latest figures published by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This paper provides a more detailed analysis of resource levels and funding changes in each state and territory (“states”). Further details for each state are provided in the Attachment.

Catholic and Independent schools are better resourced than public schools in almost all states. The only exceptions are in NSW and the ACT where Catholic schools are resourced at levels similar to public schools. Independent schools are much better resourced than public schools in all jurisdictions.

2. School income

The national average income per student in all Independent schools was \$25,649 in 2022 and \$19,747 in Catholic schools compared to \$18,076 in public schools [chart 1]. Income per student was 42% more in Independent schools than in public schools and it was 9% higher in Catholic schools.



Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#)

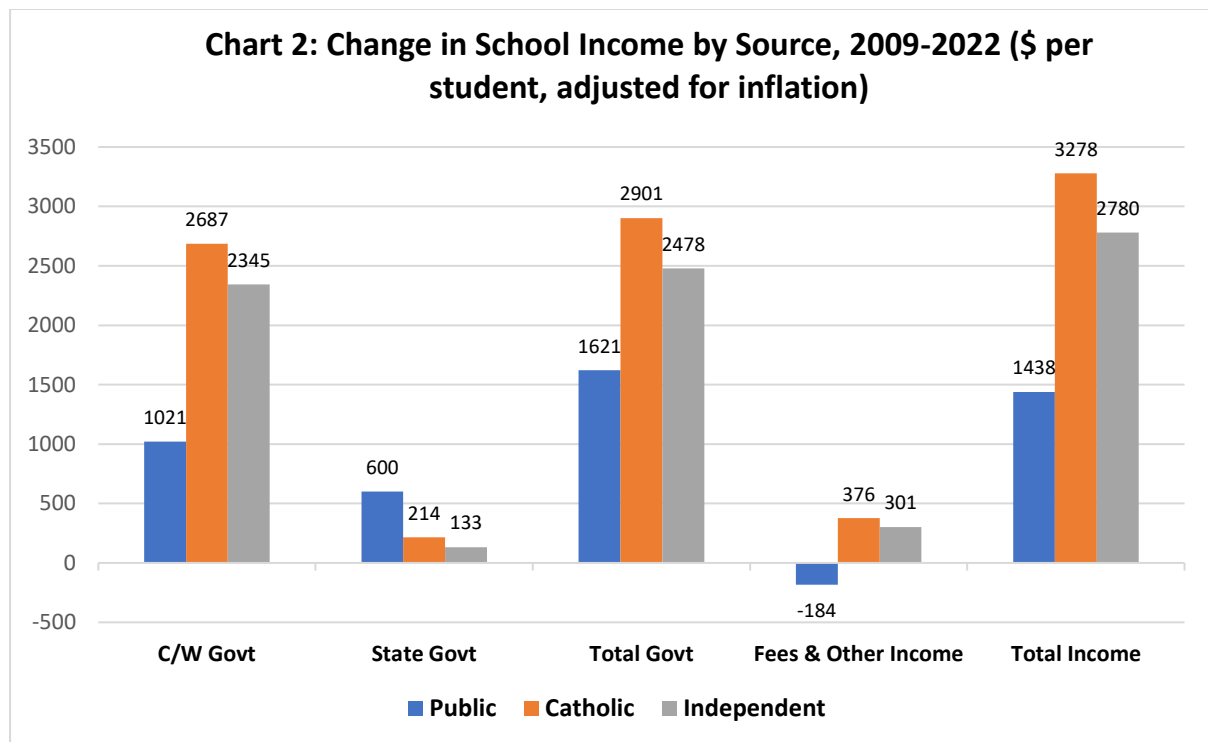
Independent schools had a very large resource advantage over public schools in NSW and Victoria. Victoria had the biggest resource disparity between Independent public schools. Income per Independent school student was 10,873 (65%) higher than in public schools - \$27,709 compared to \$16,836. Total income per student in NSW Independent schools was \$8,388 more than in public schools - \$27,257 compared to \$18,869.

Catholic schools had a large resource advantage over public schools in Victoria and Queensland. In Victoria, income per student in Catholic schools was \$3,085 (18%) more than in public schools - \$19,921 compared to \$16,836. In Queensland, income per Catholic school student was \$2,913 (17%) more than in public schools - \$20,093 compared to \$17,380.

Victoria was the worst performing state for resource gaps between public and private schools. Public schools had the lowest income per student in the country while Independent schools had the highest income per student. The income gap between public and Catholic schools was the second largest in Australia after the Northern Territory.

3. Government funding

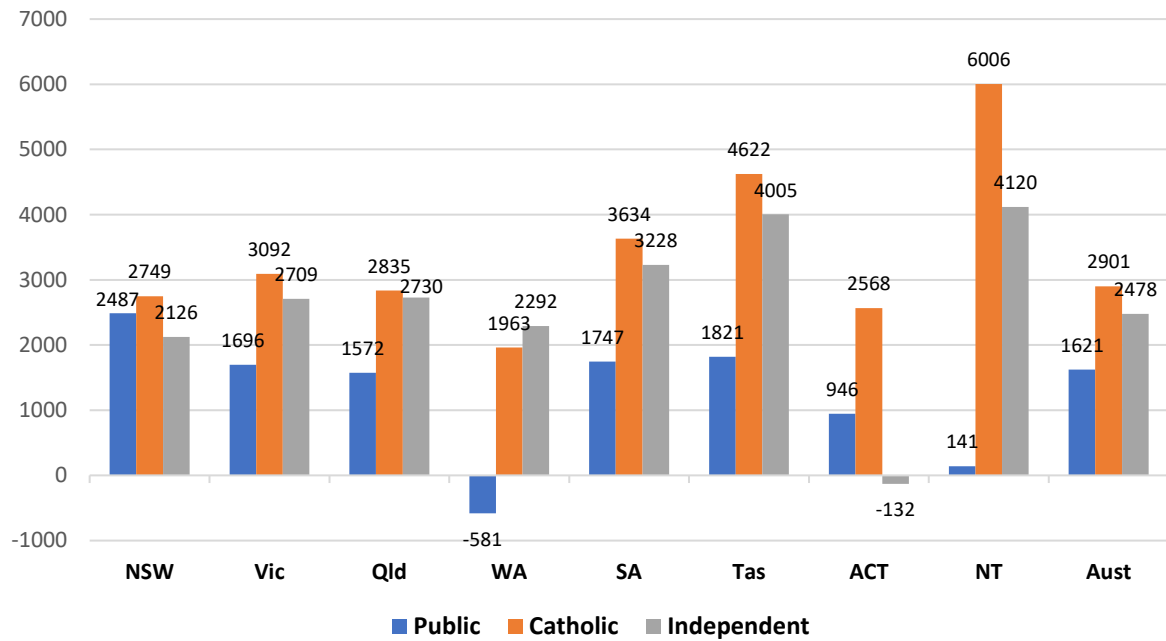
A major factor contributing to the resource advantage of Catholic and Independent schools was their bigger increases in government (Commonwealth and state) funding. Government funding adjusted for inflation increased by \$2,901 per student for Catholic schools between 2009 and 2022 and by \$2,478 per student in Independent schools compared to \$1,621 in public schools in Australia [Chart 2]. The percentage increases were 37.6, 39.3 and 15.3 respectively. Increased income from fees and donations for private schools supplemented the increased government funding.



Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

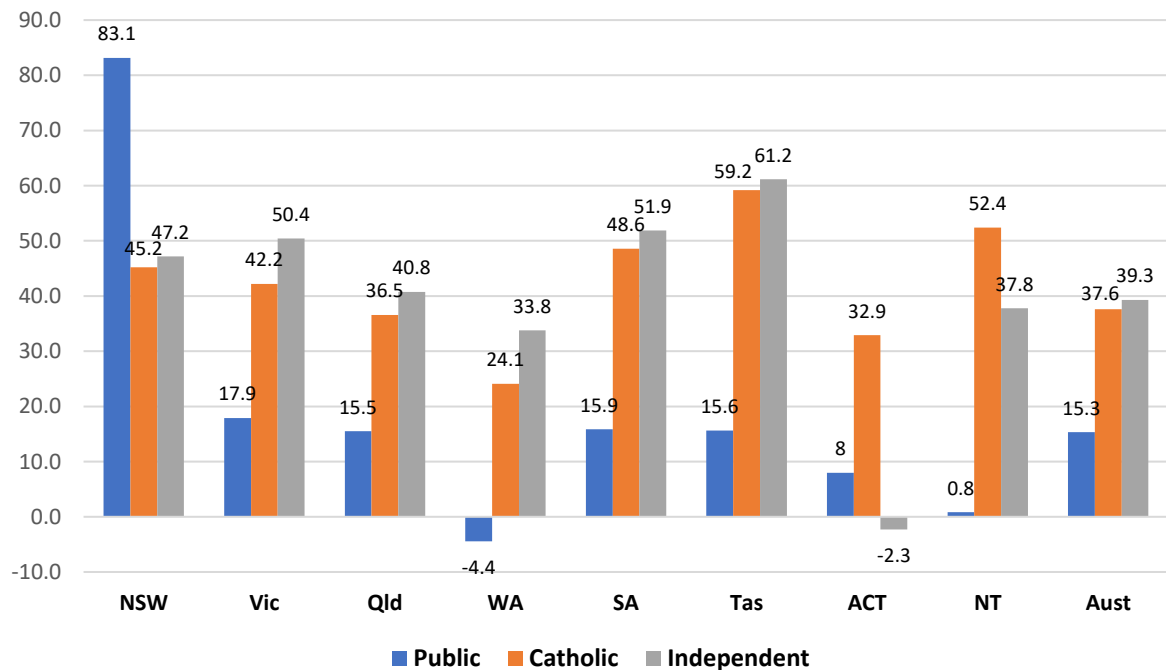
Government funding increases have favoured Catholic and Independent schools in all states except for Independent schools in NSW and the ACT [Charts 3 & 4]. Government funding increases massively favoured Catholic and Independent schools in Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. In Western Australia, funding for public schools was cut by \$581 (-4.4%) per student while it increased by \$1,963 (24.1%) in Catholic schools and \$2,292 (33.8%) in Independent schools. In South Australia, funding for public schools increased by \$1,747 (15.9%) compared to \$3,634 (48.6%) in Catholic schools and

Chart 3: Change in Total Government Funding, 2009-2022 (\$ per student, adjusted for inflation)



Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

Chart 4: Change in Total Government Funding, 2009-2022 (% per student, adjusted for inflation)

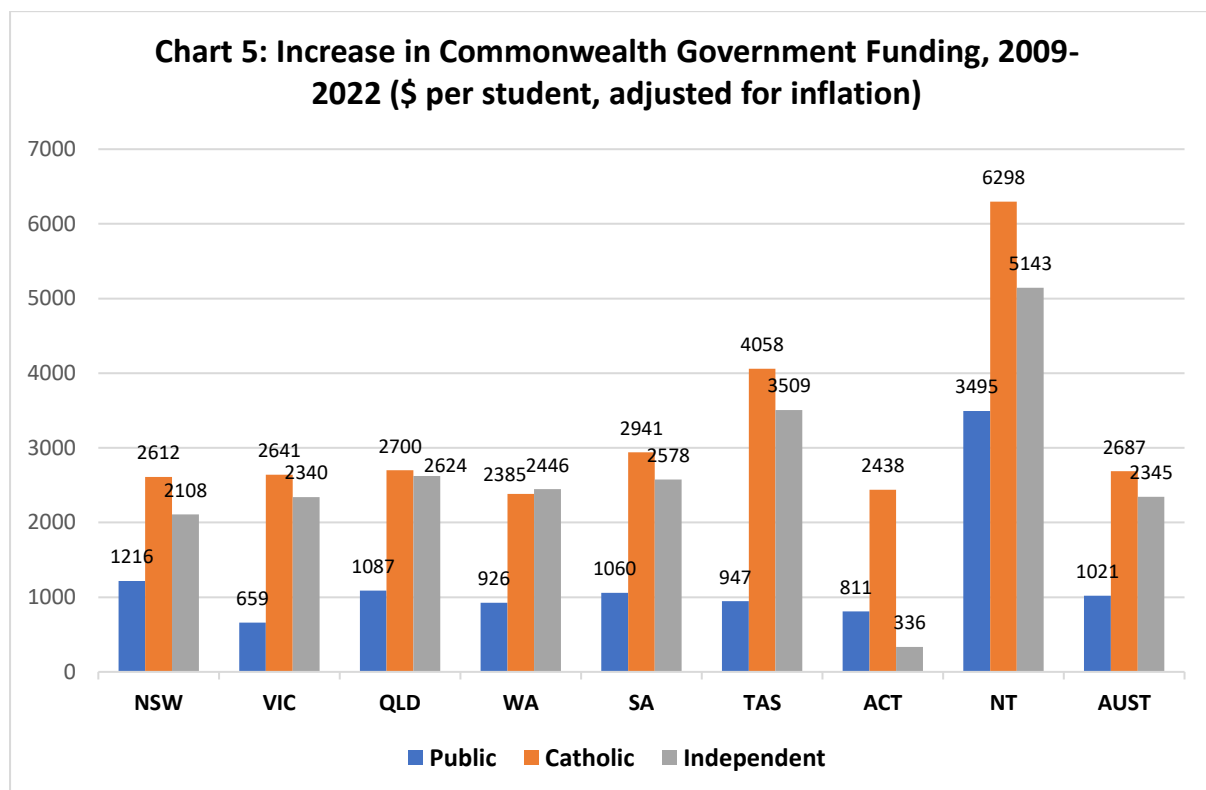


Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

\$3,228 (51.9%) in Independent schools. Government funding for public schools in Tasmania increased by \$1,821 (15.6%) compared to \$4,622 (59.2%) in Catholic schools and \$4,005 (61.2%) in Independent schools. Funding for Northern Territory public schools increased by a miniscule \$141 (0.8%) compared to a massive \$6,006 (52.4%) and \$4,120 (37.8%) in Independent schools. Only in NSW were funding increases broadly similar. Funding for public schools increased by \$2,487 (83.1%) compared to \$2,749 (45.2%) in Catholic schools and by \$2,126 (47.2%) in Independent schools.

4. Commonwealth Government funding

Commonwealth Government funding increases heavily favoured Catholic and Independent schools over public schools. Across Australia, funding increases for Catholic and Independent schools was more than double that for public schools - \$2,687 per student for Catholic schools and \$2,345 for Independent schools compared to \$1,021 for public schools [Chart 5].



Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

Commonwealth funding increases for Catholic and Independent schools far exceeded that for public schools in all states. Funding increases for Catholic schools were over double that for public schools in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia, about three times that for public schools in South Australia and the ACT and about four times more in Victoria and Tasmania.

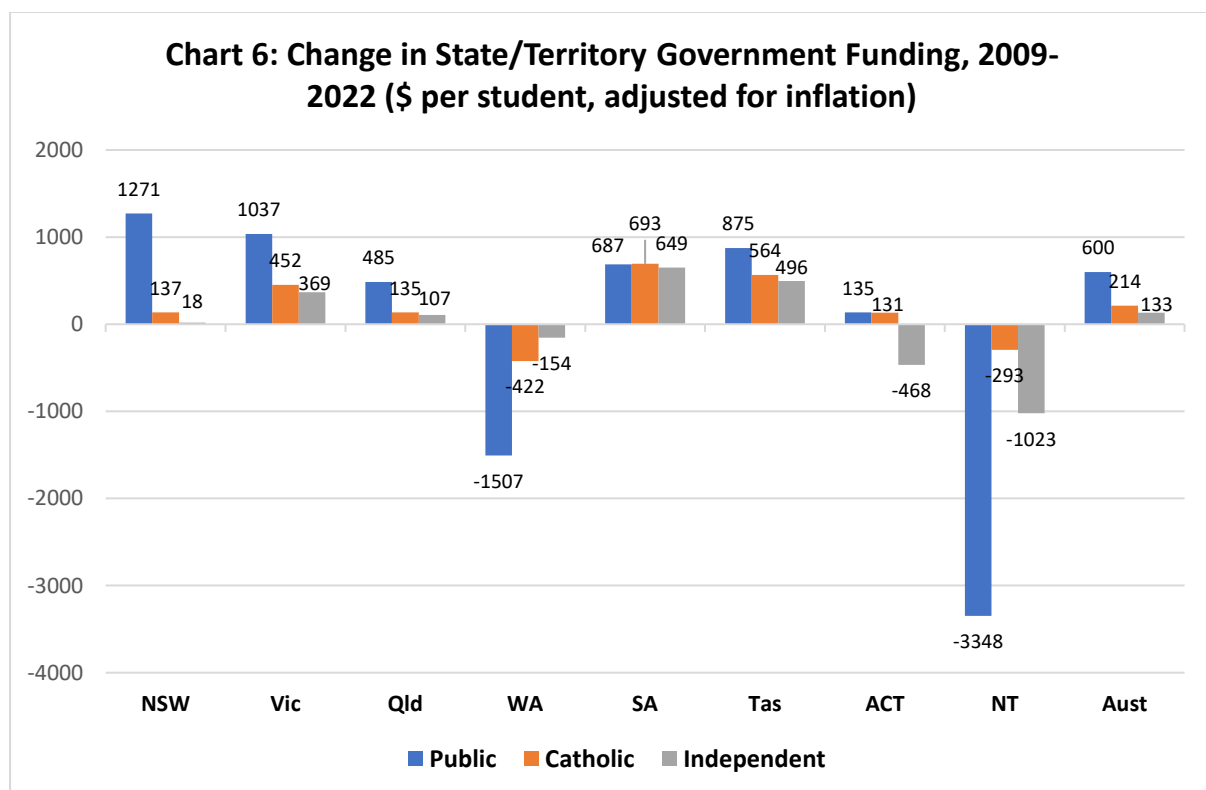
Funding for Independent schools was about double or more than for public schools in NSW, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. It was nearly four times that for public schools in Victoria and Tasmania. However, the funding increase for ACT public schools was over double that for Independent schools.

The Commonwealth Government provided the largest share of increased funding in all sectors. It accounted for 93% of the increase for Catholic schools and 95% of the increase for Independent schools.

5. State government funding

Despite the states having primary responsibility for funding public schools, the Commonwealth accounted for 63% of the increase for public schools. State funding of public schools increased by only \$600 per student over the 13 years from 2009 to 2022 [Chart 6]. State funding per student for Catholic schools increased by \$214 and by \$133 for Independent schools.

The NSW and Victorian governments provided the biggest funding increases for public schools - \$1,271 and \$1,037 respectively. The Western Australian government cut funding for public schools by \$1,507 per student and the Northern Territory government cut its funding for public schools by a massive \$3,348 per student. Both governments also cut funding for Catholic and Independent schools, but by much smaller amounts. The South Australian and Tasmanian governments provided the biggest funding increases to private schools.



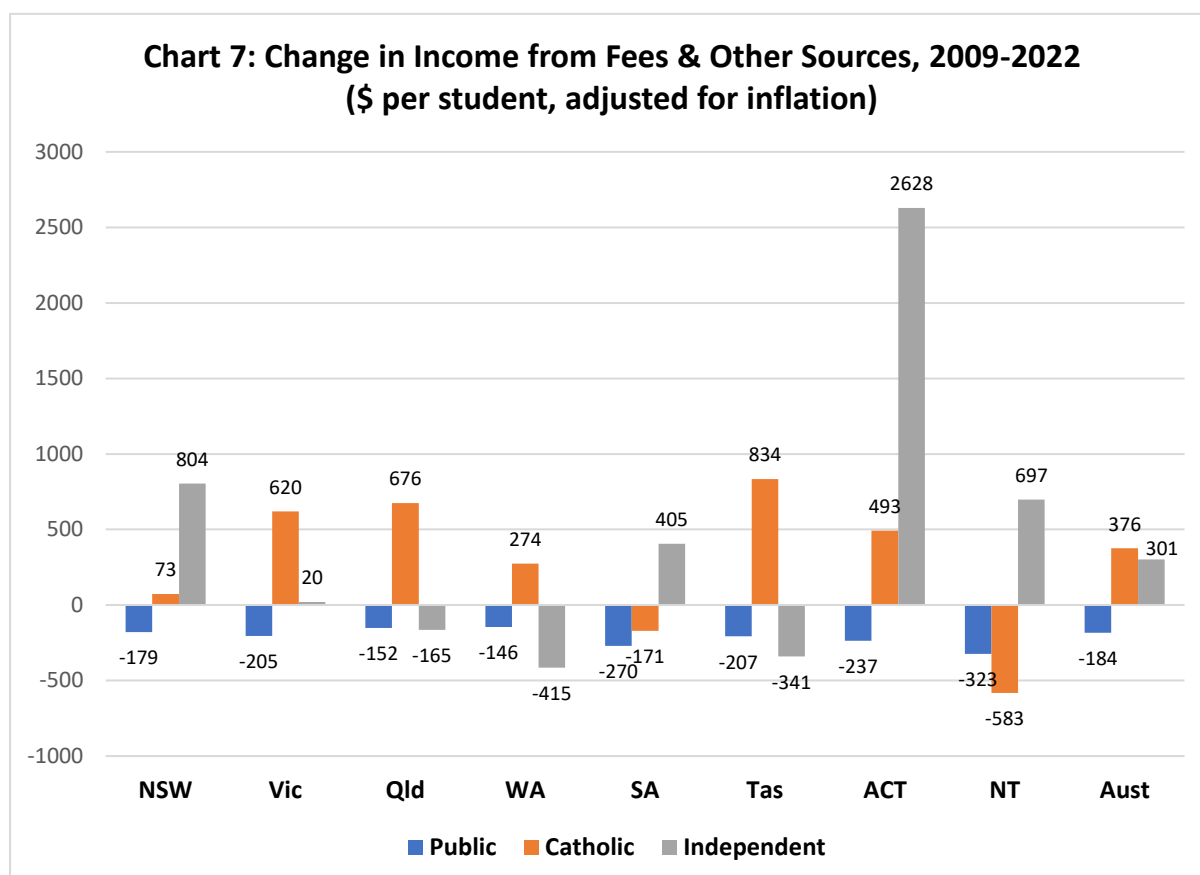
Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

6. Other income

Income from fees, charges and other sources such as donations in Catholic and Independents schools increased by more than the rate of inflation. However, after adjusting for inflation, the increase from these sources was small compared to the increases in government funding. Across Australia, income per student from these sources increased in Catholic schools by \$376 and by \$301 in Independent schools [Chart 7]. Income fell in

Catholic and Independent schools during COVID but recovered only slightly in 2022. Income per student from these sources fell in public schools by \$184.

The biggest increases in other income for Catholic schools were in Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria - \$834, \$676 and \$620 respectively. Income from this source fell in South Australia and the Northern Territory. Other income increased in ACT Independent schools by \$2,628 per student, mainly due to increases in fees and charges. The other significant increases in Independent schools were in NSW and the Northern Territory - \$804 and \$697 respectively. Income from these sources fell in public schools in all states.



Source: ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia](#). The ACARA figures are adjusted for inflation by a combined Wage and Consumer Price Index.

7. Resource gaps are a major factor behind achievement gaps

The bias towards Catholic and Independent schools in increase funding and total income per student is incompatible with the challenges facing Australian education. Many disadvantaged students are failing to meet minimum standards and the large majority of these students attend public schools.

[The latest results](#) from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that in 2022 large proportions of 15 year-old low SES, Indigenous and remote area students did not achieve the basic PISA proficiency level. One-third or more of low SES and remote area students did not achieve basic proficiency in reading and science while 43% of low SES and 48% of remote area students did not achieve basic mathematics proficiency.

Over half of all Indigenous students (55%) did not achieve basic mathematics proficiency, 45% did not achieve reading proficiency and 46% did not achieve science proficiency.

The percentage of disadvantaged students not achieving basic proficiency standards was generally 3-4 times that of high SES students. Only about 10% of high SES students did not achieve these standards.

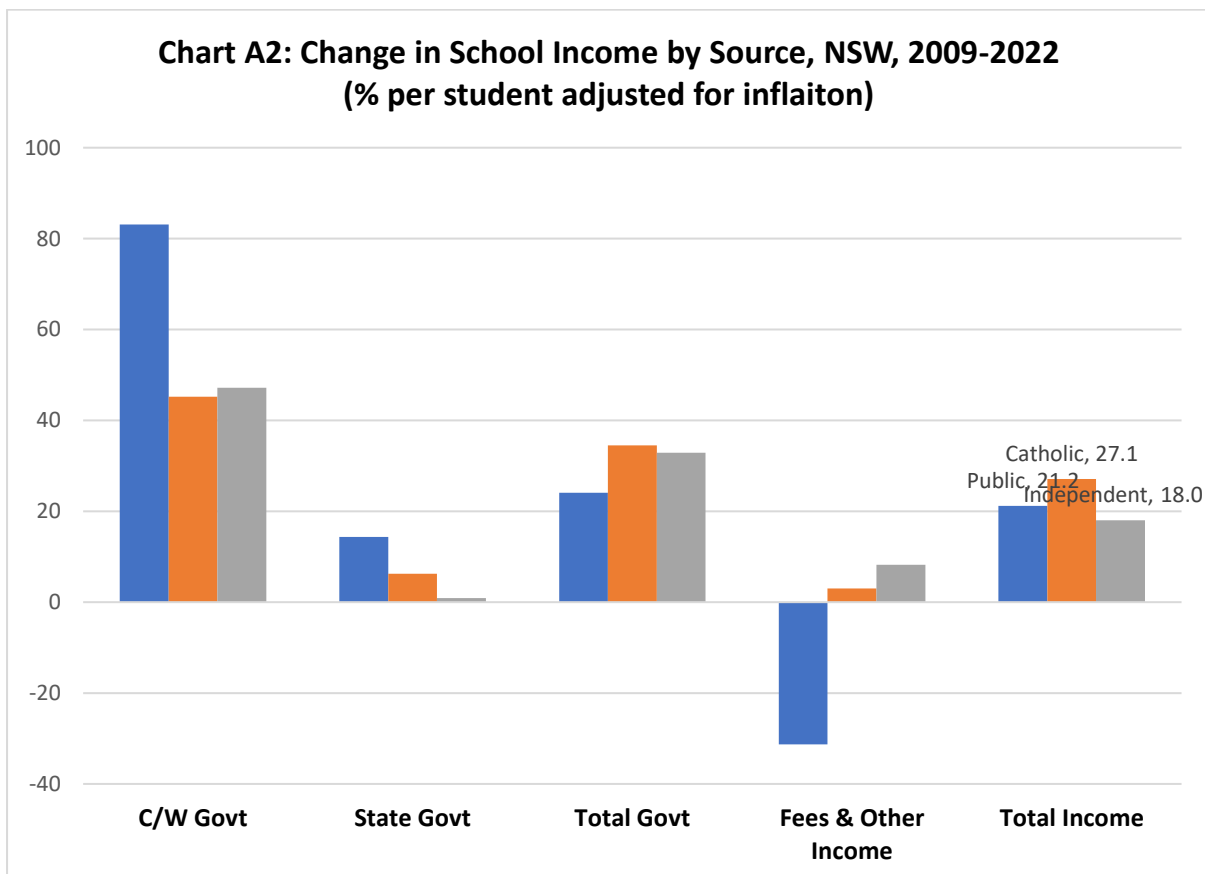
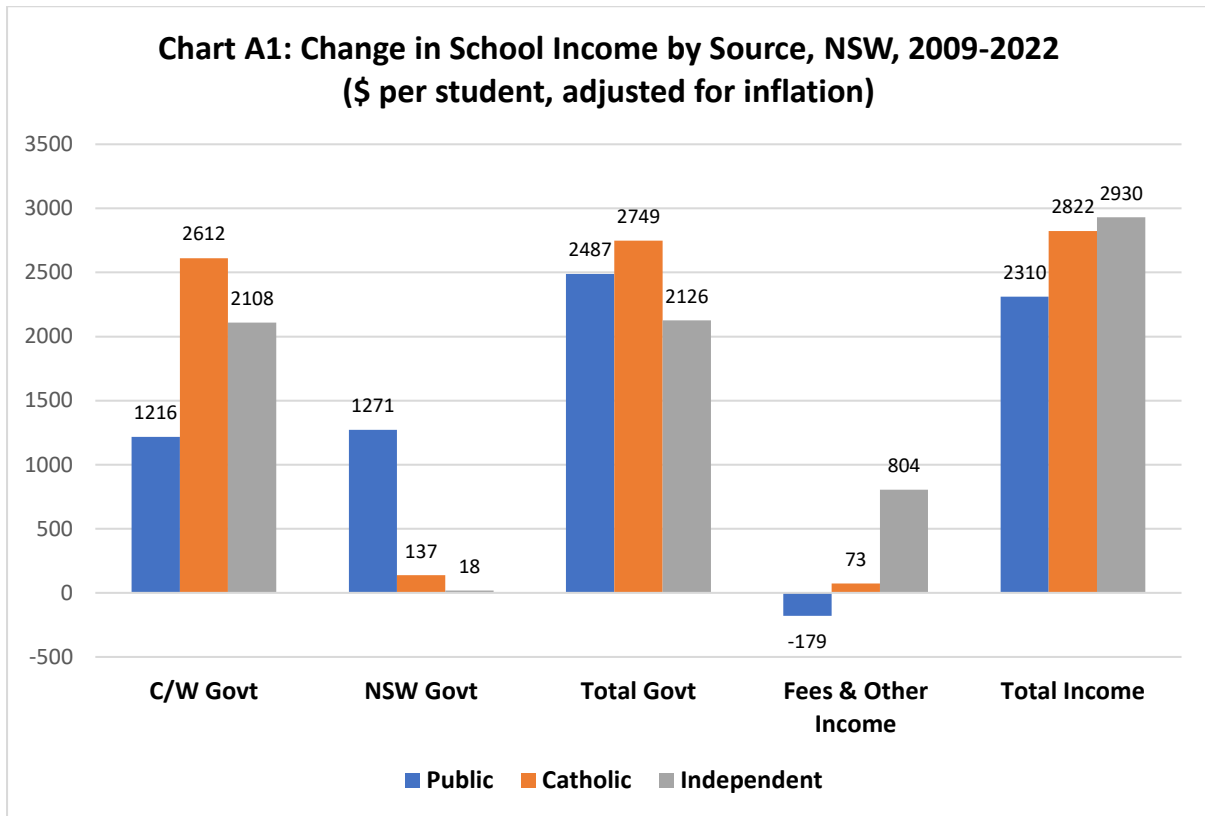
The achievement gaps between high socio-economic status (SES) and disadvantaged students have widened in reading, mathematics and science since 2006. The OECD states that 20 points on the PISA scale represents about one year of learning. The gaps between high and low SES students increased from just over four years of learning to nearly five years in reading and over five years in mathematics and science. The gaps between high SES and Indigenous students in reading remains at just over six years of learning and nearly seven years of learning in science. The mathematics gap increased significantly from about six years to six and a half years. The gaps between high SES and remote area students increased by about one year of learning, with a reading gap of over five years and nearly six years in mathematics and science.

The [Report on Government Services 2024](#) shows that the large majority of low SES, Indigenous and remote area students attend public schools. In 2022, 81% of low SES students and 82% of Indigenous and remote area students were enrolled in public schools.

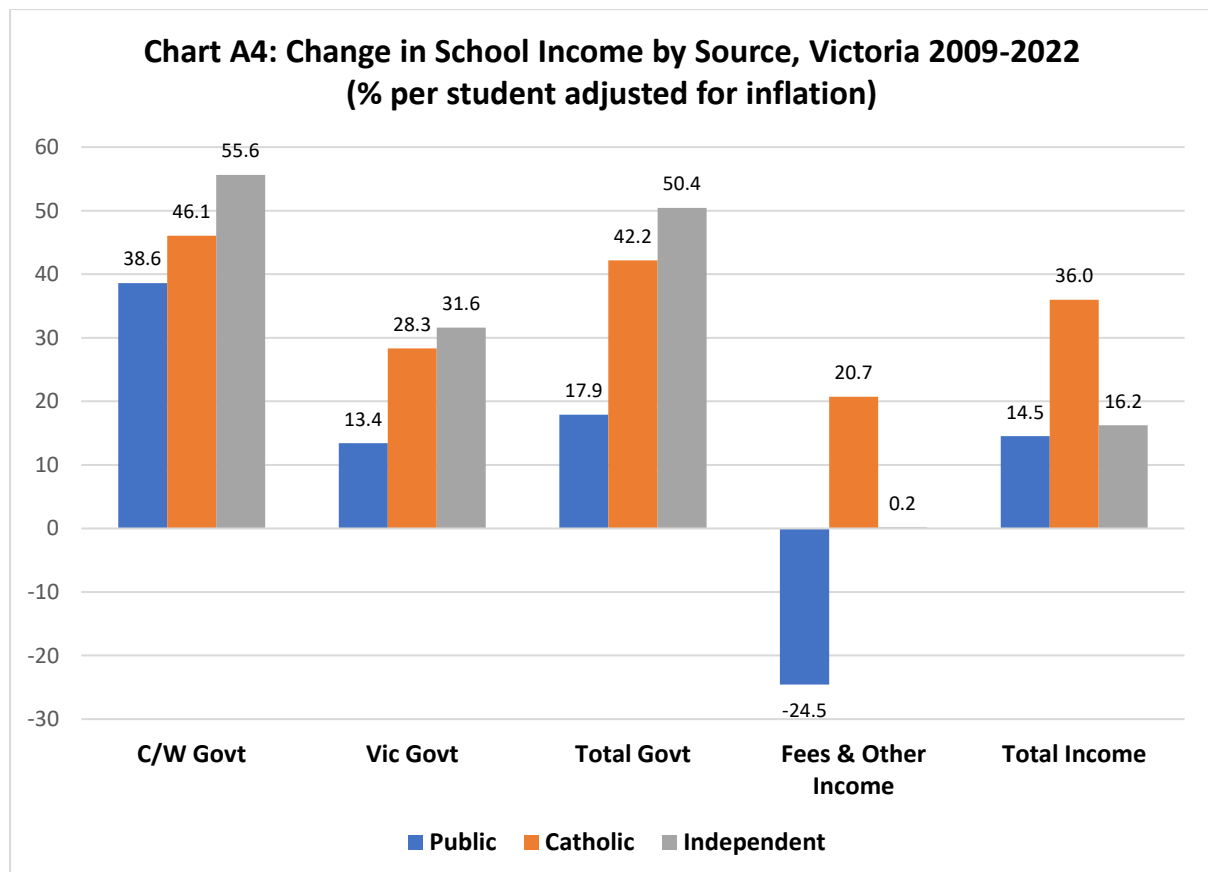
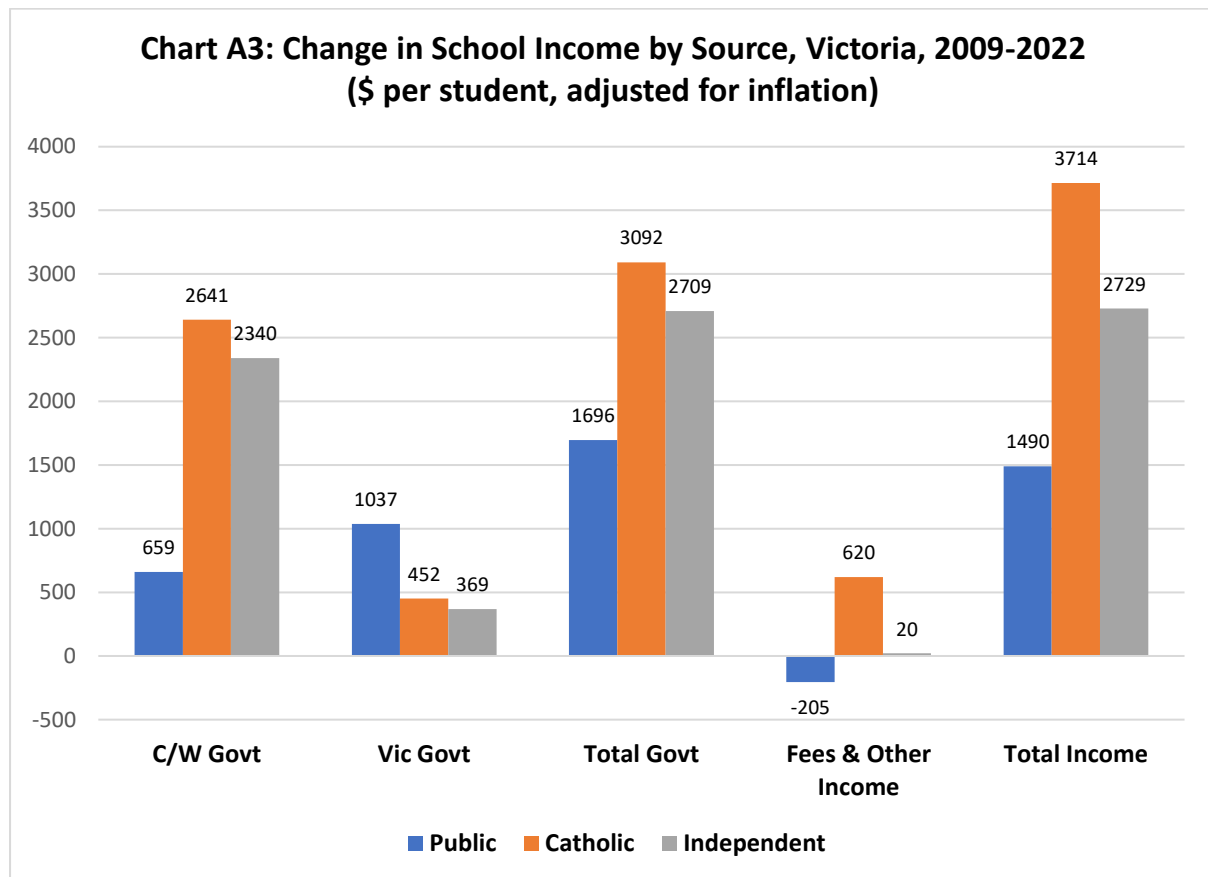
Despite enrolling the vast majority of students with the most learning challenges, public schools are massively under-funded. Public schools are only funded at 87.6% of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in 2024. This estimate includes an adjustment to official figures for [accounting tricks](#) in the existing funding agreements that swindle public schools of over four percentage points of their SRS. The funding shortfall in 2024 is about \$6.8 billion. In contrast, private schools are funded at 104.9% of their SRS.

It is a critical time for public education and the future prospects of disadvantaged students. Negotiations are under way now on the next funding agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. The next few months will tell whether the actions of governments will match their rhetoric. The Albanese Government must lead the way to genuine full funding for public schools and not allow the states to get away with short-changing public schools as the Morrison Government did in the previous round of funding agreements.

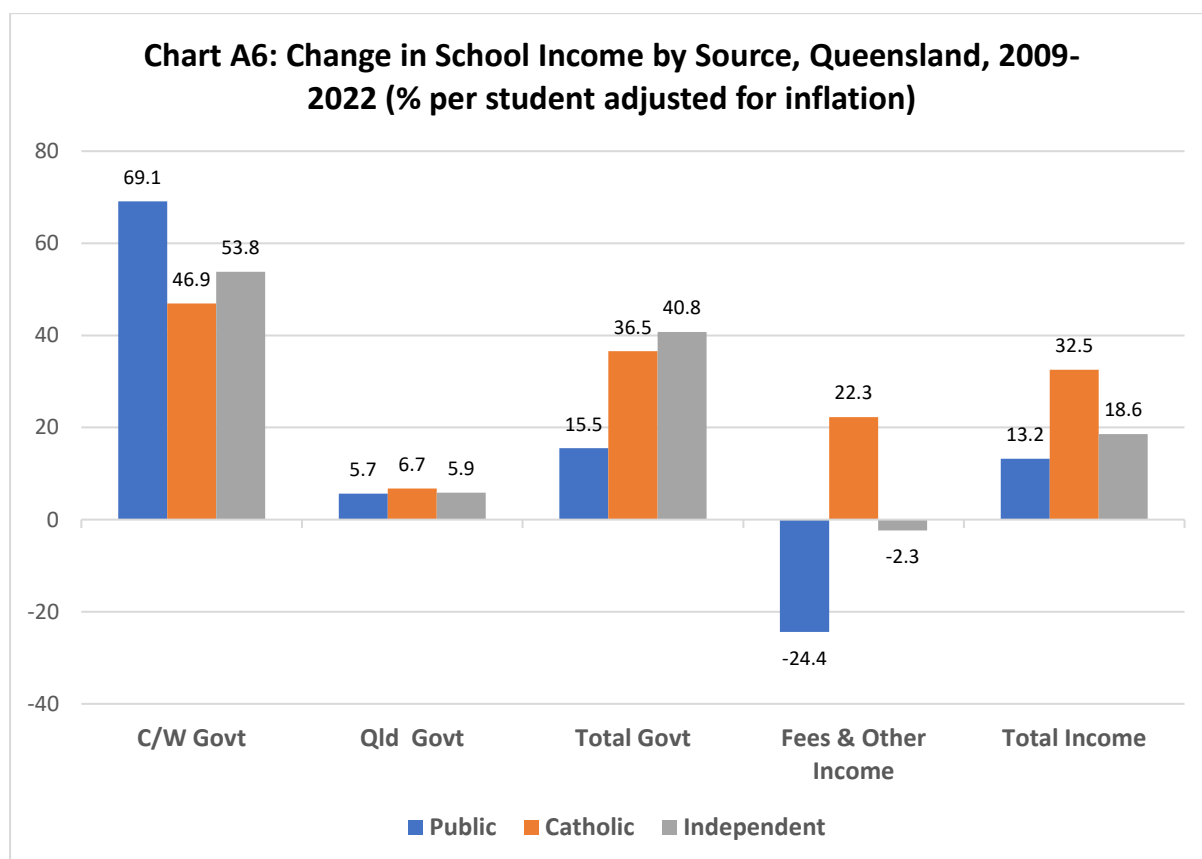
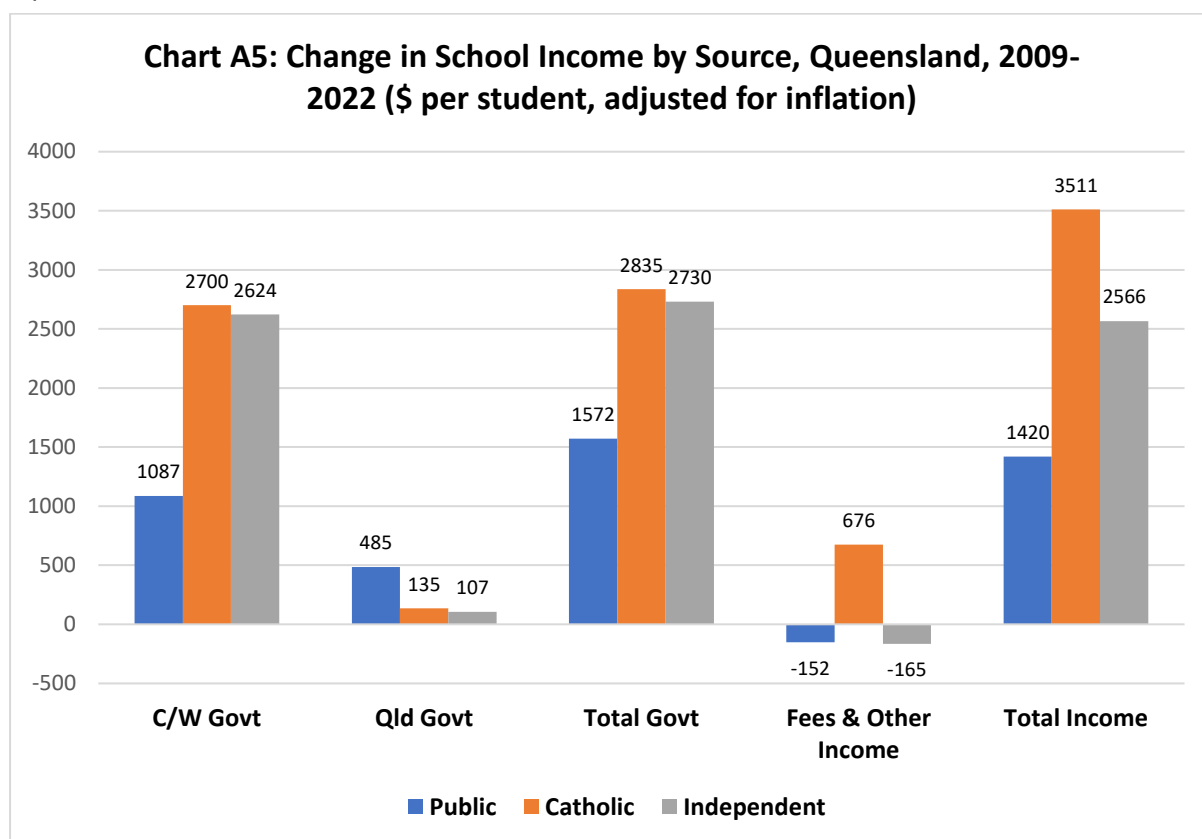
**Attachment
NSW**



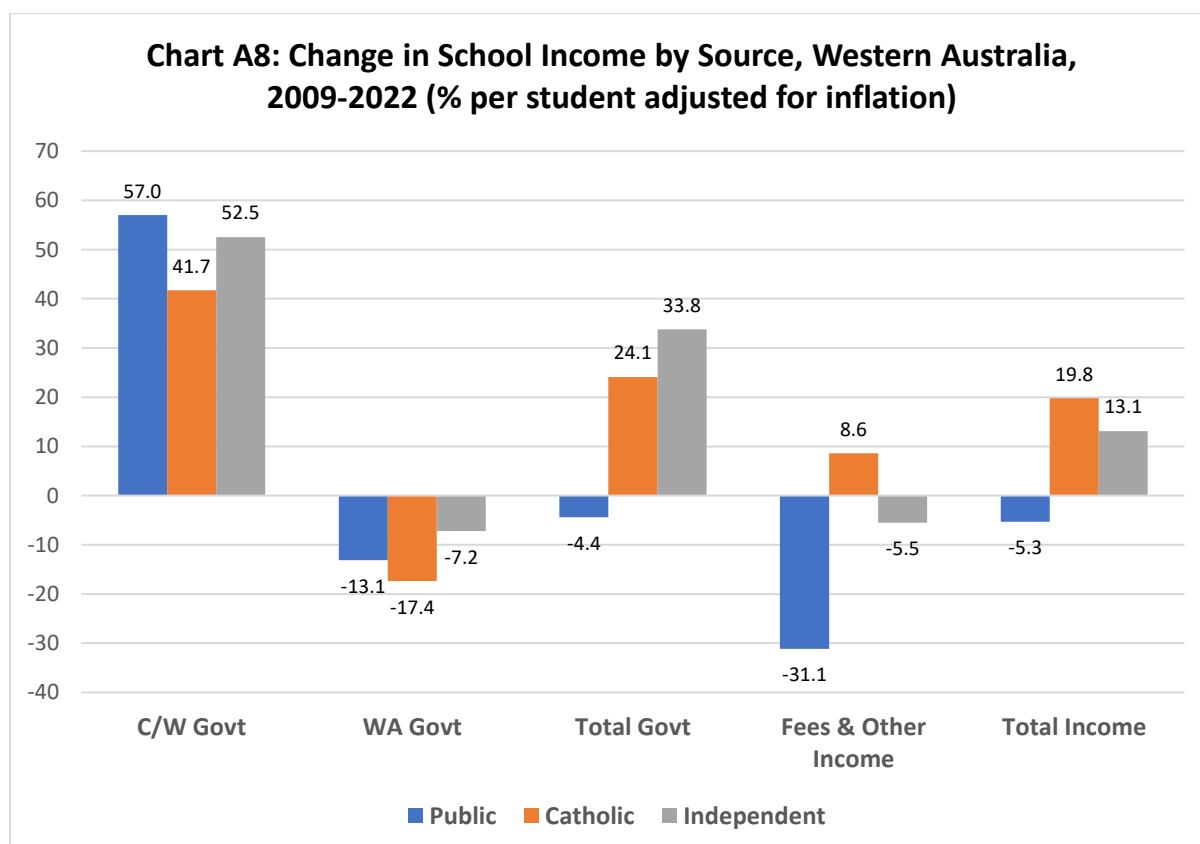
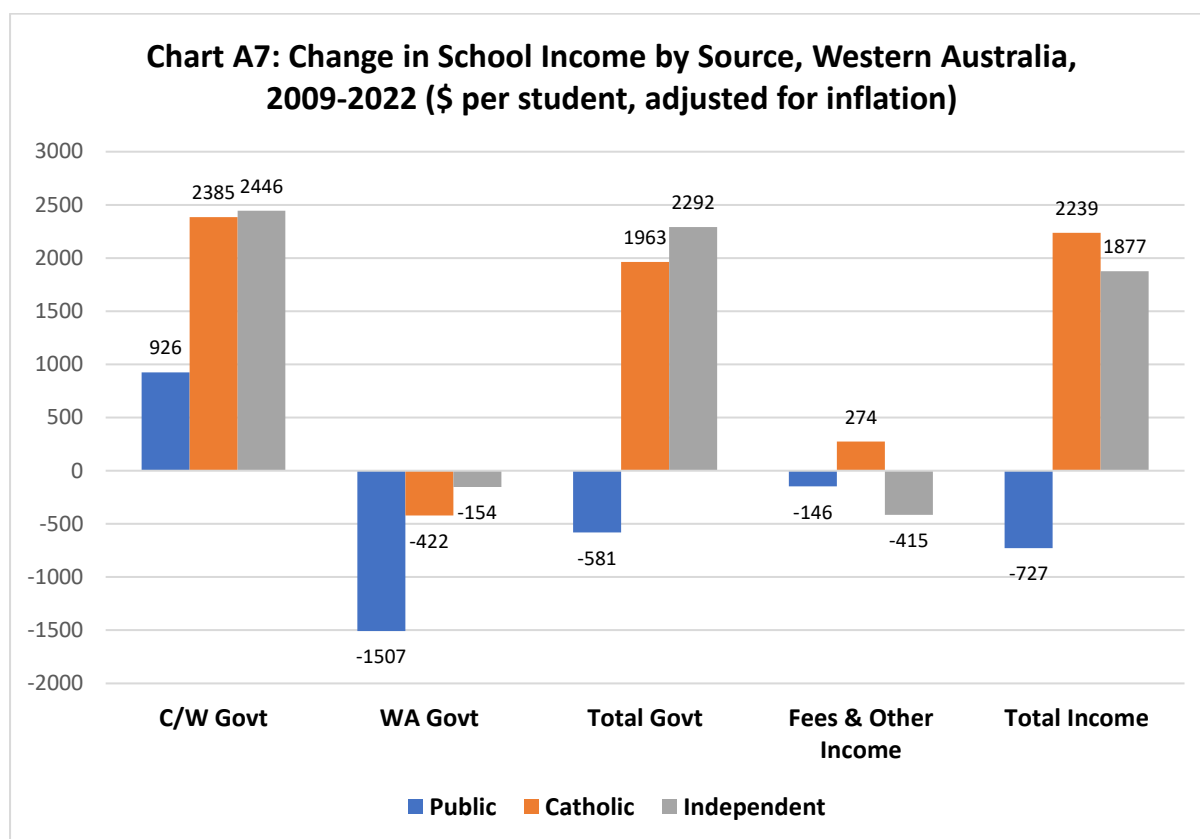
Victoria



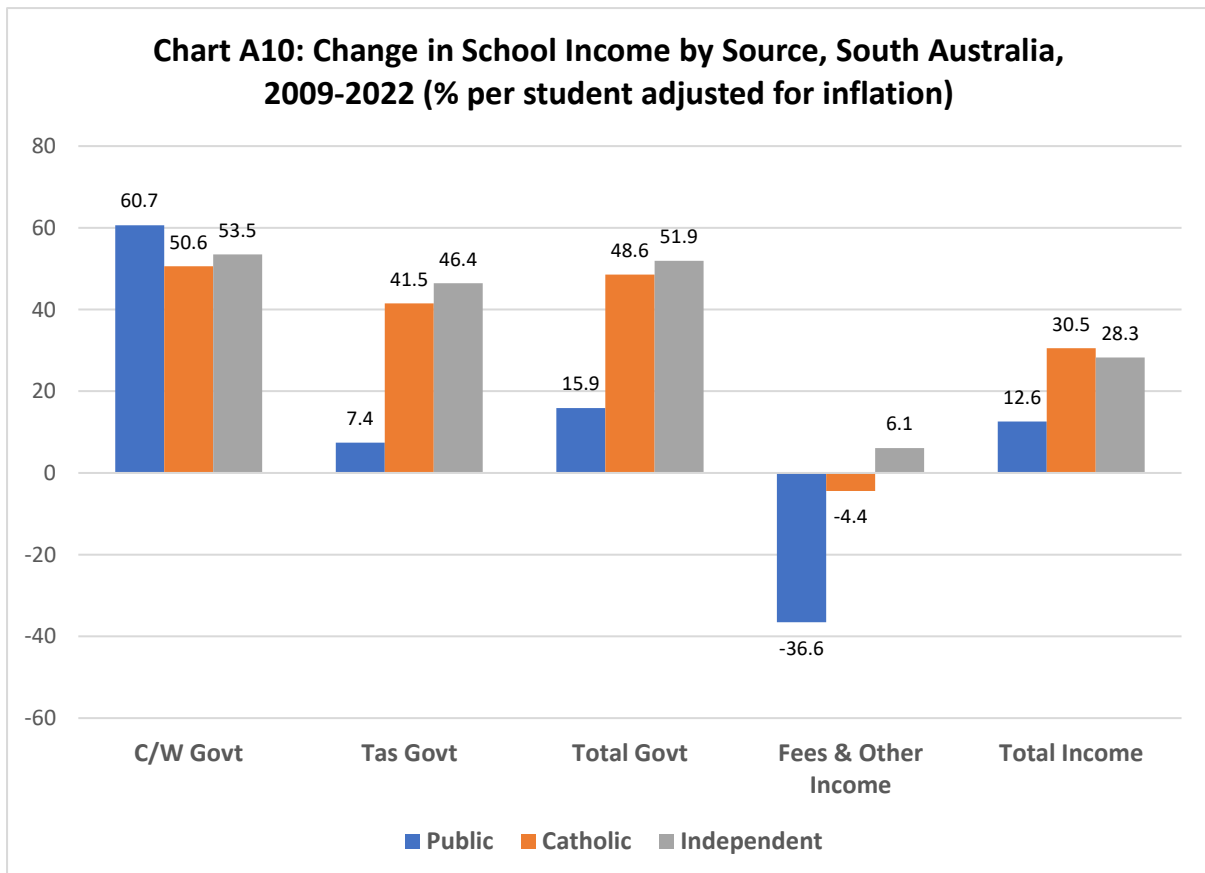
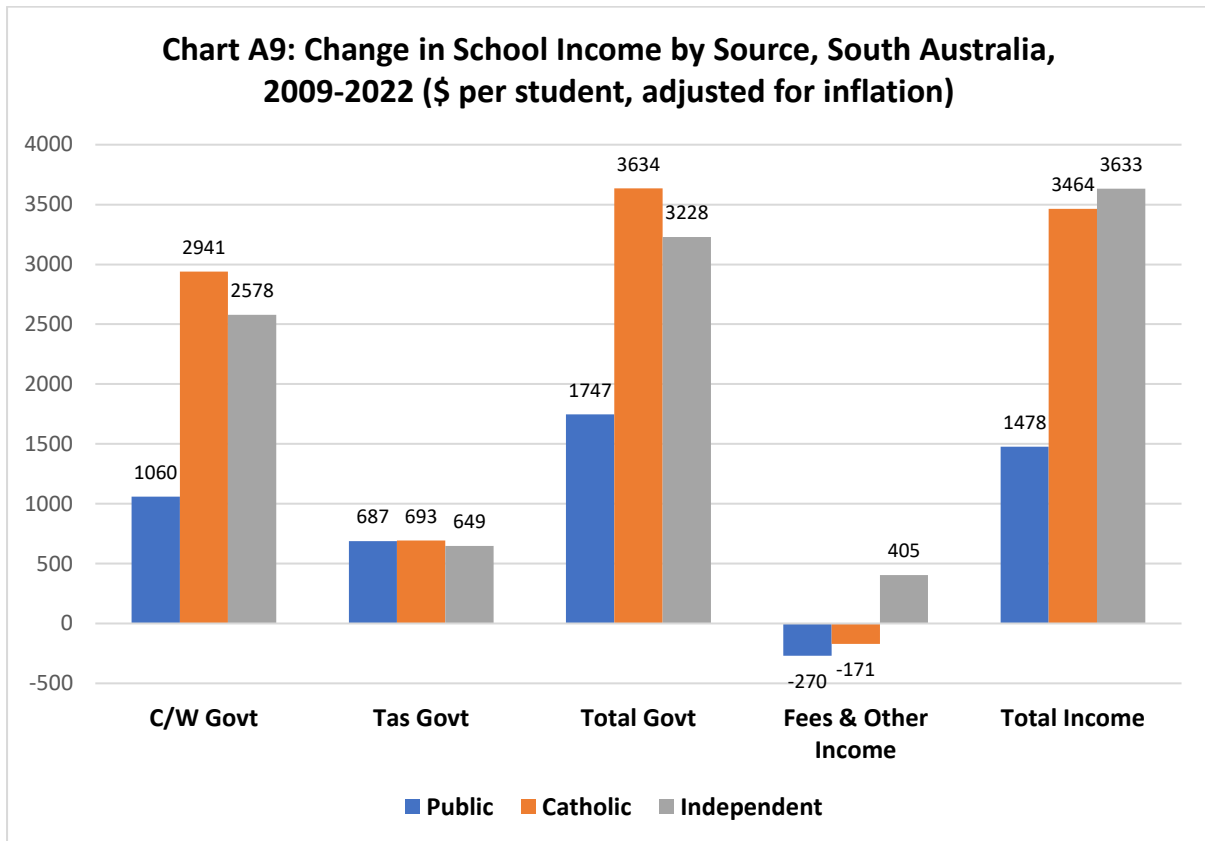
Queensland



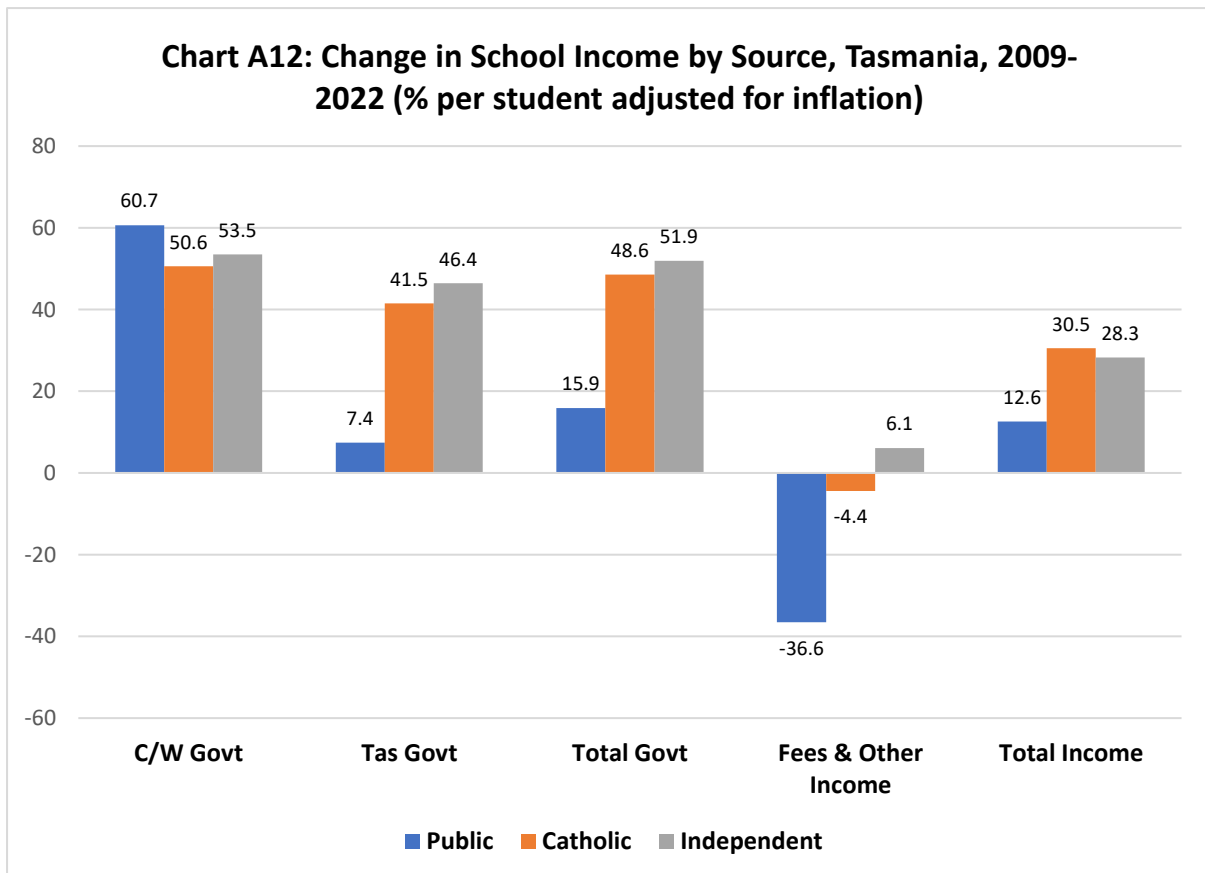
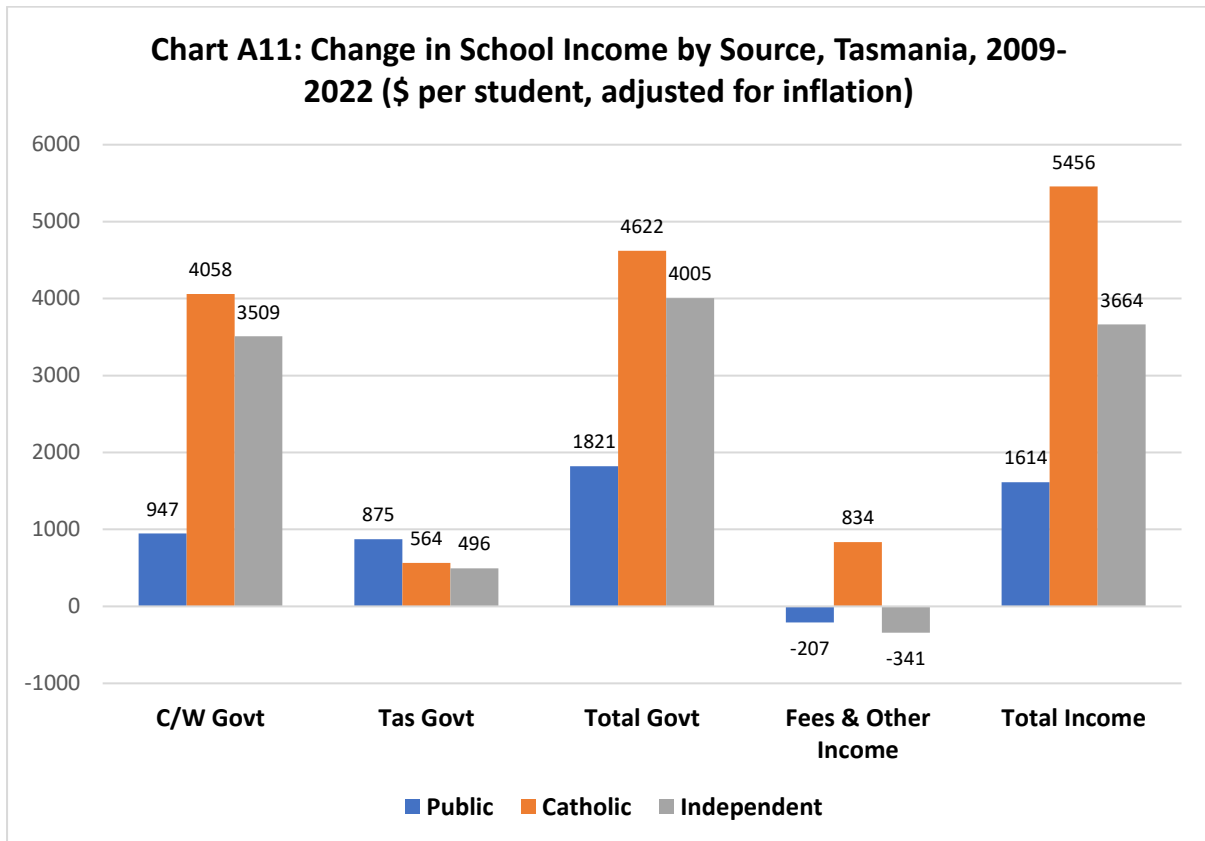
Western Australia



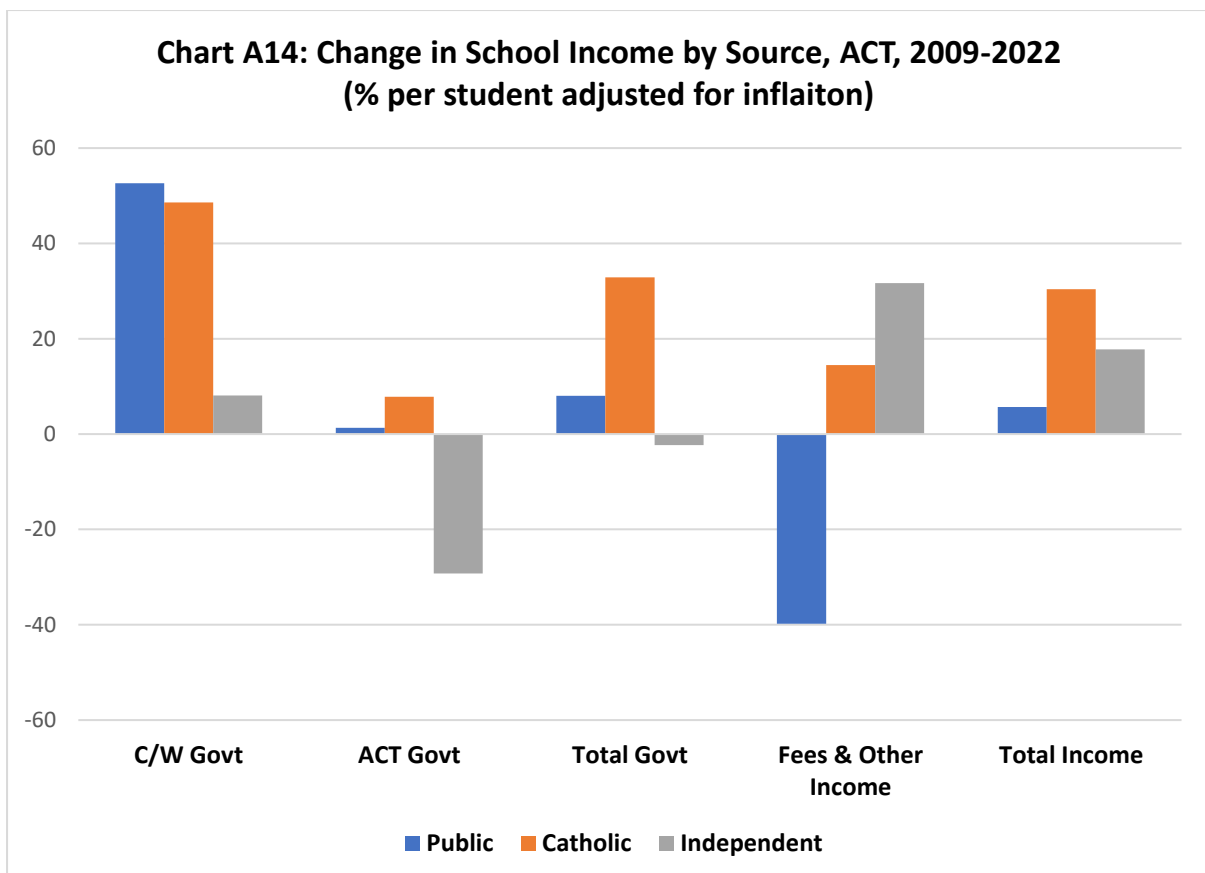
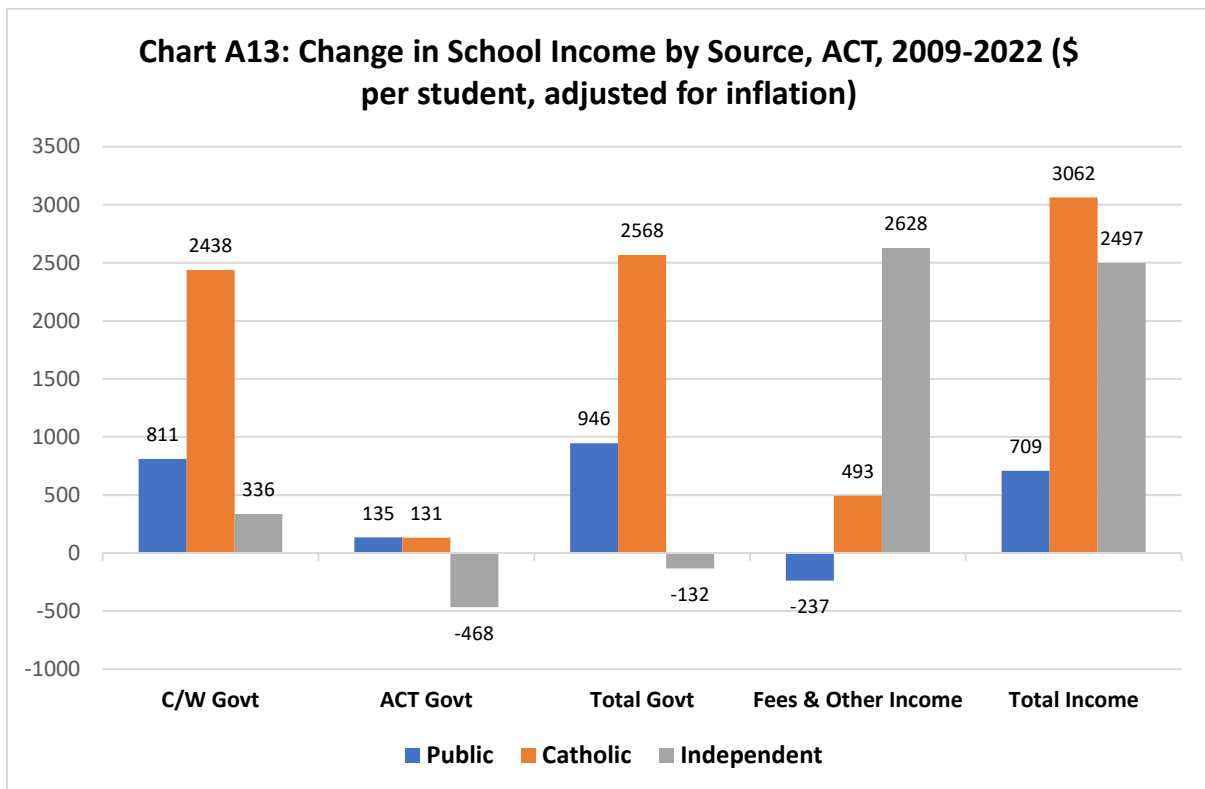
South Australia



Tasmania



ACT



Northern Territory

