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**Investment in Existing School Canteen Infrastructure: The Missing Link in Free Meal Program Election Promise**

The Federation of Canteens in Schools (FOCIS) acknowledges and welcomes the Australian Greens' recent proposal to provide free meals to all public school students nationwide. Ensuring every child has access to food during the school day is essential to improving student health, wellbeing and academic performance.

We agree that now is the time for ambitious, nation-building investment in the school food system, but the success of any free meals initiative will depend on strengthening the systems already in place.

Leanne Elliston, the Federation’s Chair and CEO at Nutrition Australia ACT, said that nationwide, thousands of school canteens already operate within schools and are embedded in their local communities.

“These canteens are well-positioned to deliver healthy, affordable meals, but many are under increasing pressure due to outdated infrastructure, funding shortages and an overreliance on volunteers.”

As outlined in [the *National Consensus Statement on the Future of School Canteens and Tuckshops*](https://www.focis.com.au/national-consensus-statement-on-the-future-of-school-canteens-and-tuckshops/), FOCIS is urging policymakers to:

* Invest in critical infrastructure upgrades so existing school canteens can manage and prepare fresh meals safely and efficiently.
* Exploring the delivery of free meal programs, utilising the community-based models that school canteens already provide to build food security in schools.
* Provide dedicated, salaried staff to support long-term sustainability and reduce reliance on parent volunteers.
* Implement nationally consistent guidelines for school food provision to reduce confusion and improve quality.
* Support coordinated procurement systems to ensure affordability and access to healthy food.

Consideration of in-house school meal programs funded in-house through existing canteens fosters stronger ties between students, schools, families, and the local food economy.

“Now is the time to invest not only in food provision but in the existing infrastructure, people, places and partnerships that make it possible.

“FOCIS stands ready to work with governments and school communities to ensure that any new investment in free school meals strengthens, rather than replaces, the trusted school canteen model.”

***About the Federation of Canteens in Schools (FOCIS):***

FOCIS is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health and nutrition of Australian schoolchildren. Through advocacy, education, and direct action, we ensure that school canteens can offer healthy, nutritious meal options that contribute to better health outcomes for children across Australia. FOCIS members, representing all Australian States and Territories, recently held a national roundtable with industry stakeholders and announced a National Consensus Statement to assist our canteens and tuckshops. The statement can be read here: [NATIONAL CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL CANTEENS AND TUCKSHOPS - FOCIS](https://www.focis.com.au/national-consensus-statement-on-the-future-of-school-canteens-and-tuckshops/)

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