



Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Australia in the Asian Century

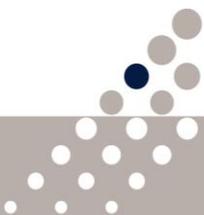
**Submission by
The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA)
to
Australia in the Asian Century Task Force**

About ISCA

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is the peak national body covering the independent schools sector. It comprises the eight State and Territory Associations of Independent Schools. Through these Associations, ISCA represents a sector with 1,090 schools and around 550,000 students, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of Australian school enrolments. ISCA's major role is to bring the unique needs of independent schools to the attention of the Commonwealth Government and to represent the sector on national issues.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with larger and smaller Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Seventh Day Adventist and Presbyterian schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/ emotional/ behavioural and other risk factors.



Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered with the relevant state or territory education authority. Most independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example the Lutheran system. Systemic schools account for 17 per cent of schools in the independent sector.

Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for 10 per cent of the independent sector's enrolments. These schools have been included in the figures above.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Independent schools work together with governments and the Australian community in order to prepare students for the Asian Century
- Recent national policy initiatives have established a broad framework for Australian schools to build the Asian Literacy of their students and communities.
- It is important that schools are appropriately resourced to implement national policy initiatives in order for programs to be co-ordinated, sustainable and ongoing.
- The Asia Education Foundation has a strong record of alerting schools, governments and the broader community to the importance of Asia Literacy for Australian students.
- National and international relationships are key to building the capacity of school communities to prepare students for the Asian Century.
- National policy settings and processes must recognise the diverse and autonomous nature of the independent schools sector.

Introduction

1. The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is pleased to have this opportunity to make a submission in response to the Issues Paper published by the Australia in the Asian Century Task Force in December 2011.
2. As the White Paper's Terms of Reference acknowledge, we are now a decade into the Asian Century. The situation in 2012 in terms of the importance of Asia, and expectations of how schools can help prepare Australia and young Australians for the Asian Century, is very different from even ten years ago.
3. By delivering high-quality educational experiences, independent schools work together with governments and the Australian community in order to prepare students with the skills and knowledge required that will allow all Australians to fully participate in and benefit from the many opportunities that are offered by the Asian Century.

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008

4. In 2008, Australian Education Ministers in all States and Territories and the Australian Government developed and endorsed the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008* in collaboration with the government, independent and Catholic school sectors.
5. The *Melbourne Declaration*, which builds on the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (1999) and the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (1989), provides a broad strategic framework and specific goals for individual schools, all school sectors, families, parents and the broader community to "position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives".
6. It is a condition of their public funding that independent schools meet these community standards in education through a commitment to achieving the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration*.
7. The *Melbourne Declaration* was the first such national education declaration to explicitly address the growing influence of China, India and other Asian nations, and the new demands that these major changes would place on Australian education.
8. Australian Government and State and Territory Ministers of Education agreed that the capability to understand and engage with the diverse countries of Asia is a vital twenty-first century skill set and central to Australia truly being part of our increasingly interconnected region.
9. Not only does the *Melbourne Declaration* reinforce the importance of Australians becoming 'Asia literate' so as to engage and build strong relationships with Asia, but it also emphasises that the capability "to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia" is vital so that all young Australians become 'active and informed citizens'.

10. The independent sector sees the *Melbourne Declaration* as setting a foundation for working in partnership together with governments in order to appropriately prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of engaging with the cultures and communities in our region.

The Australian Curriculum

11. The Australian Curriculum, developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has integrated an emphasis on Australia's geographic region and the growing international influence of that region through including 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' as one of three Cross Curriculum Priorities, and 'Intercultural Understanding' as one of seven General Capabilities.
12. The prominent place of 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' as a Cross Curriculum Priority in the Australian Curriculum highlights the need for all Australian school students to develop a better understanding of the countries and cultures of the Asian region. As a Cross Curriculum Priority, the curriculum documents envisions that Asia literacy will be embedded in all learning areas, Foundation to Year 12, rather than establishing discrete learning areas or subjects. The organising ideas for this Priority are
 - Asia and its diversity
 - The achievements and contributions of the people of Asia
 - Asia - Australia engagement;
13. 'Intercultural understanding' is one of seven General Capabilities. The capability involves students in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures, including their own, in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.
14. Late in 2011 ACARA released *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* document. The shape paper provides broad directions for the development of languages curriculum as one of the key learning areas in the Australian Curriculum and hence is a core facet for the learning of all students. Chinese is one of the two languages currently being developed with other languages being rolled out over the next few years.
15. All Australian schools (government, Catholic and independent) will be implementing the Australian Curriculum over the next few years. This means all Australian school students will need to be provided with opportunities to become Asia literate and understand Asia and Australia's relationship to Asia and how we can interact with Asia and its people on all levels: through language, cultural understandings and an appreciation of our inter-connectedness and co-dependency.
16. Current national education policy aims for 100 per cent of young Australians to be Asia literate in this decade and by 2020 for 12 per cent to be completing Year 12 fluent in one of the four target Asian languages.
17. A strong national Asia Literacy Strategy for all young Australians that captures the many facets of contemporary and traditional Asia, Australia's place in Asia, and Asia's place in Australia is required to develop the cultural competencies necessary for all Australians to operate in the

Asian Century. This would take place over a 10 to 15 year period as educational change takes time with the need to train teachers, create the curriculum and generate resources.

18. While the Asian priorities are now clear, teachers, curriculum leaders and principals often do not have the time or capacity to build these new emphases into their curriculum without support and resources to do this work.
19. A strong, well resourced and realistic implementation plan is required for the Australian Curriculum with significant increases in investment in Asia Literacy, and the study of Asia and Asian languages. This investment would be used to train new teachers and up-skill existing teachers, develop resources and provide access to high quality ongoing professional learning communities.

Asia Education Foundation

20. The independent schools sector has a high degree of involvement with, and support for, the work of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) in advocating and providing resources to develop and sustain Asian literacy in Australian schools. ISCA is represented on the Board of the AEF.
21. The AEF provides extensive high-quality support programs such as curriculum resources, study tours, professional learning opportunities, and other resources aimed at school leaders and teachers, parents, and students.
22. Many leaders and teachers from independent schools are involved in AEF programs at peer level with the aim of further strengthening their personal and professional networks and developing their skills in order to support the Asian language and studies program for the students in their school.
23. ISCA is a signatory of the AEF's *2010 Call for a National Action Plan for Asia Literacy in Schools* which was formulated with the aim of 'Achieving the Goals of the Melbourne Declaration'. This document focuses on the importance of Asian literacy in the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration* and states that "without increased investment in Asian literacy through a national plan, the intentions of the *Melbourne Declaration* and the Australian Curriculum are unlikely to be met".
24. The AEF's *National Statement on Asia Literacy in Australian Schools* is a strong statement of the importance of Asia Literacy for Australian education and includes many excellent recommendations indicating suggested broad policy settings for educational leaders to support schools to achieve Asia Literacy for all Australians.
25. The AEF would be a significant partner for investment in the use of new technologies for delivery of studies of Asia and Asian languages that facilitate on-line delivery and partnerships between schools both within Australia and in the Asian region.
26. ISCA supports many of the emphases and recommendations contained in the AEF submission to the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper.

Asian Languages and Asian Studies Programs

27. Independent schools have a range of programs to develop Asia literacy and Asian languages skills with their students. Some of these schools received financial assistance for their Asian literacy programs through the NALSSP (National Asian Languages and Studies Program, 2008 – 2012), and prior to that, the NALSAS (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools, 1999 - 2002) initiatives of the Australian Government.
28. While these two Australian Government initiatives had an impact on the capability of schools to offer and support Asian literacy programs, the short-term, stop-start nature of the initiatives have not always supported sustained change and sustainable programs in schools.
29. Development and implementation of a specific Asia Literacy imperative in the Australian Curriculum has created a new situation. While schools are very aware of Asia Literacy requirements in the Australian Curriculum many are not in a position to provide the most appropriate resources or staff capable of implementing the agenda.
30. An example of this can be seen in the difficulty that many schools have in finding curriculum time and suitably qualified teachers to teach languages in primary schools. This may result in schools being unable to offer the program they would otherwise like to so as to meet community expectations. Half an hour a week could not be called a languages program and would rarely lead to language learning.
31. There are also school continuity difficulties and community misunderstandings about the time and commitment required to learn a language. Students transitioning from primary to secondary schools may experience a lack of continuity of the languages offered from a range of primary schools into a smaller number of secondary schools.
32. In the independent sector, where there are large numbers of combined schools, this problem is often not as great as in other sectors where children are more likely to transition between primary and secondary schools. However, there are a greater proportion of students in independent secondary schools than independent primary schools so for those incoming students into secondary there will often be a change of languages offered.
33. The number of enrolments in language learning classes decreases as students progress through secondary school. This may be for a variety of reasons, such as the range of other offerings on the timetable or the known difficulty of getting high Year 12 results in languages that contribute to an ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank). Well resourced and effective programs to address this situation would be welcomed by schools in all sectors.
34. The current situation sees schools willing to take on more Studies of Asia in order to develop Asia literate students and to encourage greater uptake of Asian languages, however there cannot be sustained change without extensive support provided to schools. To generate greater interest in Studies of Asia and Asian languages among students, high quality programs that engage students must be offered by trained teachers with access to on-going resources.
35. The Asia Education Foundation has some excellent resources and programs to support this but teachers need help in how to use these to enhance programs and schools need assistance to access the various professional learning programs on offer.

36. While extensive resources have been put into Asian education in the past, the time is now here for all schools to embrace this agenda. Schools will need to receive support and resources to access professional learning for teachers and will need to be encouraged to involve their students in a meaningful and continuous way. Development is required for dedicated programs about Studies of Asia and the importance of learning Asian languages that target principals and key school decision makers, as without their support what happens in the classroom cannot change.

Reciprocal and Collaborative Efforts

37. In order to best develop the required skills, capabilities and knowledge for building Asian Literacy, relationships between schools, school leaders, school teachers, and school sectors both nationally and internationally is vital.
38. The Australian Government needs to support Australia's unique position as the largest English speaking country in the region. The on-going promotion of Australia as a study destination for international students relies in no small measure on this fact and is built on Australia's ability to provide quality English language services to the region.
39. It is important that Australian education leaders work with their counterparts in Asia to see how Asian education institutions can use Australia as a resource and tap into our expertise in the learning of languages and teaching methodology.
40. Dedicated programs to provide individual schools or clusters of schools with the resources, both financial and administrative, to engage with similar schools in Asian countries are important for the development of co-ordinated and sustainable relationships. Whether through student and/or staff exchanges, sister-school arrangements, or online collaborative learning, personal relationships will be a key in developing Asia Literacy in Australian schools.
41. The independent sector has worked to develop relationships with schools in the countries of Asia, and an example here is the PAPE (Pan-Pacific Association of Private School Education) Congress, which is a biennial congress of education and school leaders from across Asia, the Pacific and Australia in the independent schooling sectors. Events such as these provide excellent opportunities to develop relationships between educators in Asia and Australia.
42. The three educational sectors, government, Catholic and independent, in Western Australia collaborated to organise a student summit on Asia in 2011. There is demand for this kind of involvement in Asia studies and increasing Asia Literacy, and those who try to meet this demand must be supported to see a truly Asia literate student and Australian citizens.
43. All schools feel the pressures of competing initiatives on budgets and resources. In order for schools to meet the Australian community's expectations of adequately preparing young Australians for the opportunities and challenges of the Asian Century additional resources will need to be provided to support the above initiatives so this can be a reality.

Conclusion

44. Independent schools are committed at a national policy, state and territory, and local school level to providing educational programs that position Australia for the Asian century.
45. The autonomy of independent schools enables them to respond flexibly as professional educational organisations to meet the needs of their local communities and to develop, innovate and improve the school to enhance outcomes for students.
46. In order to build on recent progress in including Asia Literacy as a core aspect of Australian students education experiences, well resourced, ongoing and sustainable initiatives are required.
47. The diverse and autonomous nature of the independent schools sector means that national policy settings established to position Australia for the Asian Century must recognise the particular circumstances of the sector. Appropriate recognition of these circumstances would allow independent schools to continue provide a high level of service, and flexible and innovative approaches to education.

Bill Daniels
Executive Director
ISCA

Canberra
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