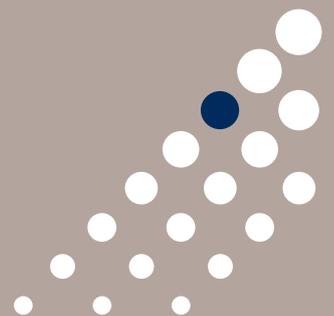




The Year in Review 2007–08



Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Meeting the challenges of a new agenda

In the past year the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) and the Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) have been confronted by significant challenges that have fundamentally influenced the direction of education policy. These challenges have arisen from a federal election, a change in government, the advent of an ambitious education policy agenda and new administrative arrangements that have contributed to a changed operating environment.

ISCA has also addressed the challenges brought about by long-term trends that are shifting the provision of education in Australia. The nationalisation of education has been progressively driven by the enhanced role of the federal government in schools policy. There is no doubt that federal–state relations are now of greater significance than ever, with a stronger focus on achieving improvements in student performance.

ISCA is also aware of demands that lie ahead. The incorporation of education into a broader productivity agenda means that the relevance of the sector is judged on the quality of its education outcomes as well as the economic value of its training and skilling of the future workforce.

I feel very privileged to lead the ISCA Board as Chairman. I would like to acknowledge the stewardship of the immediate past Chairman, Dr Ken Evans. Dr Evans' contribution has been significant and under his leadership ISCA has strengthened its role as the national peak body for the independent schools sector.

ISCA has built a solid platform in its work to influence policy affecting school education. This has been achieved by its strategic use of data with integrity as the basis of its policy analysis and its consultative approach with politicians and policy decision makers. A core strength of the organisation rests in its capacity to adapt to the operating environment while maintaining a consistent policy framework in its engagement with key stakeholders.

It is evident that the challenges facing the sector, both immediate and long-term, have the capacity to alter policy, which will ultimately affect the delivery of independent school education. It is ISCA's priority to analyse, respond to and meet these challenges to ensure that the independent schools sector is well represented as it continues to deliver quality education outcomes at an affordable cost.

This publication, *Year in Review 2007–08*, demonstrates ISCA's determination to meet the challenges of a new agenda and remain focused on its central mission of advocating choice and diversity in the provision of school education in Australia.

Mark Porter
ISCA Chairman



The independent schools sector makes a significant contribution to the education of young Australians, with over half a million students and 1,100 schools. As a sector, independent schools provide for students of all abilities, from all sections of society, across all states and territories. They provide quality schooling for some of Australia's most remote and disadvantaged Indigenous communities, for students in regional towns and cities, and in the nation's capital cities.

The sector's contribution will continue to grow as a greater proportion of parents choose an independent school education for their children. This growth occurs even though the families of these students invest many more after-tax dollars for the education of their children.

Given its size and diversity, it is imperative that the sector is well represented in the development of national policy. The sector is not systemically organised and it is ISCA's role to reiterate that it is individual schools and their communities that bear the full administrative burden and cost of any reform.

Through representation on national taskforces, committees and working groups the independent sector is able to participate in and contribute to national policy development. ISCA also seeks through this participation to ensure that policies do not have an unduly adverse impact on independent schools. With the help of AIS and independent school staff, ISCA now provides representatives for over 130 national committees.

Following the change of federal government in November 2007, significant development and implementation of national education policy is now occurring through forums where the independent sector has no traditional representation. ISCA has sought to broaden its representation and increased its liaison and advocacy initiatives to ensure the sector's viewpoint is taken into account as policy is formulated. ISCA also responds on behalf of the sector to parliamentary, national and government inquiries.



Federal election

The federal election campaign during the period leading to 24 November dominated the political agenda during the second half of 2007. A positive feature of the election campaign was the priority given to school education by the major parties. This campaign contrasted with previous federal election campaigns, with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) replacing its private schools funding 'hit list' with a commitment to maintain the current funding arrangements until the end of 2012. Consequently, the two major federal parties recognise that all schools—irrespective of whether they are owned by governments or community groups—make a significant contribution to the education of young Australians.

ISCA engaged in constructive dialogue and consultation with key members of the Federal Coalition and the ALP. Up-to-date policy analysis was provided on the parties' election platforms. A number of documents and statements concerning core issues affecting the sector were produced and made available on the website.

ISCA continued its media strategy of providing quality, factual information and responding in a timely fashion to media requests, including photo opportunities in independent schools. ISCA's strategy in relation to providing comment on Coalition and ALP policies was to respond positively where possible while outlining areas of possible concern to the sector.

The first Rudd Government

The change in government has resulted in the appointment of Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, to a new 'super portfolio' that amalgamates education, employment and workplace relations as well as social inclusion. ISCA has successfully cultivated constructive working relationships with Deputy Prime Minister Gillard, other ministers, shadow ministers and parliamentarians. We will continue to build on these relationships to ensure the sector's interests are clearly represented in the Australian Parliament as the Rudd Government delivers its education agenda. The establishment of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has also brought significant staffing changes, including those responsible for implementing the education policy agenda.

COAG and federal–state relations

Inter-governmental relations between the Commonwealth and states are undergoing significant reform, which has the potential to impact on the independent schools sector. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is reviewing the architecture of Commonwealth–state financial relations with a new inter-governmental agreement (expected to be finalised by the end of 2008) which will incorporate outputs, reforms, performance indicators and funding arrangements.

The COAG reforms influence the policy environment in which ISCA and AISs operate, adding to the complexity that is already inherent in the joint responsibilities for schooling between the Commonwealth, state and territory jurisdictions.

ISCA continues to engage with key decision makers central to COAG to ensure that the sector is represented during these negotiations. ISCA also participates in forums that are fundamental to federal-state relations including Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) taskforces.

Schools funding 2009–12

Since its election, the federal government has re-stated its commitment to maintain the funding arrangements for non-government schools for the 2009–12 quadrennium. This means that the existing SES funding arrangements will continue. These include indexation, funding guarantee and funding maintenance arrangements. It is anticipated that the enabling legislation will be introduced into parliament in the spring 2008 sittings and debated later in the year. ISCA is committed to closely monitoring the detail of the legislation to ensure that the independent schools sector is treated appropriately in funding policy and administrative arrangements. The government has also indicated that it will review schools funding arrangements during 2010–11.

SES funding recalibration

The government has released the recalibration of socio-economic status (SES) scores for all non-government schools based on the 2006 Census data. These scores will be used to determine school funding levels for 2009–12. The recalibration had potentially adverse impacts on funding for some schools, particularly those with substantial Indigenous enrolments in remote areas that draw students from very small census collection districts.

Following representation from ISCA and AISs, the Deputy Prime Minister announced a change to the basis on which Indigenous schools are categorised for funding purposes. This change is consistent with ISCA's long advocated position that an independent school which is a part of a defined Indigenous community and enrolls a significant percentage of Indigenous students should be defined as a special assistance school. This means that such a school is entitled to receive maximum general recurrent funding without regard to the SES of its school community. This is a very welcome policy change.

National Secondary School Computer Fund

The government moved quickly to implement the National Secondary School Computer Fund. This \$1 billion program aims to install up-to-date information and communication technology in the classrooms of all students in years 9–12. The government conducted an audit of all secondary schools' ICT infrastructure to identify schools in greatest need for information technology upgrades. Over 200 independent schools received funding under the first stage of the program announced in June 2008.





Trade Training Centres in Schools

Secondary schools have been encouraged to apply for funding under another major government initiative, the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. This program is designed to give students training opportunities and help address skills shortages. Schools will be able to apply for between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million over the 10-year life of the program.

As with the National Secondary School Computer Fund, input from ISCA and AISs has been influential in the development of this program. The AISs and block grant authorities will continue to play a key role in the implementation of these two major government initiatives.

Indigenous school attendance

COAG has agreed that the states will work together to address the issue of the low rate of school attendance in Indigenous communities. This will involve all states and territories sharing truancy data on enrolments and attendance. The federal government has established a National Student Attendance Unit to analyse and monitor this data. ISCA is a member of the steering group overseeing this process.

National curriculum

A National Curriculum Board has been established to develop and implement, by 2010, a national K-12 curriculum in the priority areas of English, maths, science and history. The board has commenced operations on an interim basis with three members of the twelve member interim board coming from the non-government sector. The independent schools sector will be actively involved in developments in this important area.

National Assessment Plan— Literacy and Numeracy

The first national tests in literacy and numeracy were held in May 2008 for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in all states and territories. Year 9 students were included in the test for the first time. The National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy adopted a new approach to reporting on achievement which includes information on students who have not achieved the national minimal standards for their year. Through close collaboration between ISCA, AISs and independent schools, testing was effectively delivered. ISCA has sought, through its membership of MCEETYA and other national committees, to ensure that the sector's views were considered in the decision making processes.

National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program

The federal government has established a National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program which is due to commence in January 2009. ISCA and the AISs have undertaken a survey to provide the government with specific information about current Asian language education provision in independent schools.



As the national peak body representing the independent schools sector, ISCA takes seriously its responsibility to engage with the sector. Through speeches, presentations, regular consultation, research and publications, we strive to provide accurate information about the many facets of the independent schools sector.



Governance survey

In late 2007, ISCA conducted a survey to explore the range of governance models within the sector and identify typical governance challenges. An online survey tool was employed and separate responses were sought from the heads of school and the chairs of school governing bodies.

The project's main findings demonstrated that independent schools have healthy governance structures and that governing bodies operate fairly and openly. The project showed that governing bodies of independent schools are:

- established under recognised legal arrangements and guided by principles of governance such as a constitution, rules or guidelines
- supported by committees that focus on matters such as finance, strategic planning, and education
- guided by key documents such as a strategic plan, charter, and financial plan

- composed of a broad membership which includes representation from key stakeholders, with parents well represented.

Strategic change within the school was the biggest challenge facing governing bodies. Other significant challenges included:

- risk management
- the impact of technology
- an increasingly litigious environment
- declining enrolments due to demographic changes
- financial sustainability of the school, including the affordability of schools and the impact of increasing remuneration levels of senior executive positions
- recruitment to the governing body, particularly achieving the right skills mix
- succession plans for the heads of school and chair.



Students with disability

ISCA continues to advocate for students with disability to receive adequate government support to meet their special education needs irrespective of the school they attend.

A commitment by the previous Australian Government in 2007 to investigate ways to improve the learning outcomes of students with disability through improving the portability of their funding was welcomed by the sector. ISCA participated in a reference group for the first stage of

the initiative, which involved a survey by Monash University of student and family needs.

The independent sector is very disappointed at the limited progress to date in this area, and urges the Australian Government to take action in the 2009–12 funding quadrennium to address the present unsatisfactory arrangements for the funding of students with disability.

School Choice research project

ISCA commissioned research in 2007 to explore the factors that affect school choice amongst parents of children attending independent schools. The project identified core strengths of the independent sector and found a very high recommendation rate amongst parents whose children attend independent schools. Parents identified good teachers, a supportive and caring environment, good facilities, a disciplined environment, educational excellence and a safe environment as key reasons for choosing an independent school. This is consistent with other research conducted by the sector.

Publications

ISCA regularly contributed articles to education sector publications and magazines, principally *Independence* and *Independent Schooling Business*.

ISCA also produced the *2008 Snapshot* as well as six *Independent Updates* covering:

- important facts about the funding of schools
- principles for government funding of non-government schools
- the contribution of independent schools to Australian education
- needs-based funding for schools — the SES system
- capital funding
- students with disability.

ISCA publications are available at www.isca.edu.au

2008 Parliamentary Forum

ISCA has decided to initiate a new approach to facilitate enhanced engagement on national issues within the independent schools sector. A parliamentary forum will be held in Canberra in September 2008. The forum seeks to draw together principals and school leaders; chairpersons and members of governing bodies; and school business managers to identify, discuss and analyse the key national issues on the education agenda.

Delegates at the forum will have a genuine opportunity for consultation and interaction with decision makers who influence the direction of national education policy.

Key speeches and presentations

- *Independent Schooling in Australia and Educational Reform*, 27th PAPE Congress: Taipei, October 2007
- *Current National Issues*, ASBA Conference: Adelaide, 8–12 October 2007
- *Independent School Governance in Australia: Lessons Learned*, NAIS Annual Conference: New York, 29 February 2008
- *Independent Schooling in Australia*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Schools Staff Policy Forum: Canberra, 23 April 2008
- *Independent Schooling in Australia*, AHISA New Members Conference: Canberra, 17 May 2008
- *The Funding Debate and Non-Government Schools*, 2008 National Policy Forum — The Education Revolution and Christian Schooling: Canberra, 27 May 2008
- *The Politics and Economics of Independent Education Worldwide: An Australian Perspective*, ISC Annual Conference: London, 4 June 2008

Providing a national voice

ISCA is the national peak body for independent schooling in Australia. Its eight member associations represent a growing sector of 1,100 schools and 510,989 students, or around 15 per cent of total Australian school enrolments.

ISCA's policy-making is the responsibility of its Board of Management, which is made up of a chairman and one delegate from each of the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs).

AIS Executive Directors constitute the Executive Directors' Council that provides advice to the ISCA Executive Director.

ISCA also consults regularly with other national independent school bodies individually and through the ISCA National Consultative Group, which comprises Adventist Schools Australia, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, Australian Anglican Schools Network, Australian Association of Christian Schools, Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools, Australian Parents Council, Christian Education National Ltd, Christian Schools Australia, Greek Orthodox Schools, Islamic Schools, Australian Council of Jewish Schools, Lutheran Education Australia, Montessori Association of Australia, Montessori Australia Foundation Ltd, National Independent Special Schools Association, Rudolf Steiner Schools, and Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly. ISCA also liaises regularly with the National Catholic Education Commission.

ISCA maintains links with international independent school organisations in New Zealand, the USA, UK, Europe, South Africa and the Pacific region, through sharing of research and materials and reciprocal attendance at conferences and meetings.

ISCA

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Headmaster
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AISACT

Ms Christine Harrison

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Canberra Montessori
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AISNSW

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AISWA

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Board Member
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Community School, Perth

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Executive Director

The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales Ltd

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Dr Geoff Newcombe,
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Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory Inc

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Ms Gail Barker,
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Independent Schools Queensland

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Dr John Roulston,
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Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

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Mr Garry Le Duff,
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The Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania

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Mr Tony Crehan,
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Association of Independent Schools of Victoria Inc

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