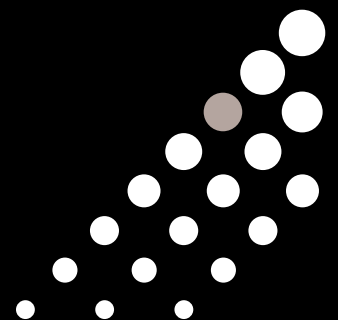




The Year in Review 2008–09



Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Engaging with the national reform agenda

The Australian education agenda has undergone radical changes in recent years, marked by the increased nationalisation of schooling policy. This trend, progressively driven by successive federal governments, is now irreversible.

The Rudd Government has extended the reach of federal influence over Australian schools by embarking on an ambitious education policy agenda that aims to improve overall student attainment and close the equity gap in student achievement.

Over the course of the past year details of the Australian Government's Education Revolution and its implications for schools have become clearer. New programs and resources for capital and equipment are combined with reforms that will change the way in which schools operate. Significantly, the government has begun implementing a program of enhanced school transparency, assessment and reporting requirements. For the first time, there will be nation-wide public reporting of school performance and operational data to provide public comparison of like schools across sectors.

We are also witnessing a major structural realignment in the delivery of school education under the National Education Agreement (NEA). The NEA requires the state and territory governments to achieve educational outcomes determined at a centralised federal level. This is consistent with an increased push for greater uniformity in schooling through the standardisation of national benchmark testing and the development of a national curriculum.

The trend towards uniformity and the influence of regulations attached to federal funding for schools threaten to make major inroads on the freedom of independent schools to build distinctive education communities. Contracting economic conditions, which threaten enrolment growth and the financial sustainability of the sector, are further challenging independent schools.

In this environment of reform and uncertainty, we welcome the stability provided by the government's delivery on its election promise to maintain existing general recurrent funding for non-government schools to 2012. Inclusion of the independent sector in the government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) program has also brought much needed capital support to independent schools.

The government's increase in general recurrent funding for non-government schools enrolling high proportions of Indigenous students is also acknowledged. However, achieving quality outcomes for Indigenous students is not just a matter of dollars. Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) have an important role in providing professional services for these schools and much of this support appears to be in jeopardy under the new funding arrangements.

The sector still awaits an equitable approach to the funding of students with disability. Unless the federal government can find a national solution to address discrepancies in support for these students across state jurisdictions and school sectors, its equity and inclusion goals will remain seriously compromised. Improving funding arrangements for students with disability remains an advocacy priority for the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA).

As the national education reform agenda broadens and centralises through inter-governmental agreements, ISCA has retained a place for the independent sector in a field dominated by government owners of large school systems.

ISCA plays a crucial role at the national level in ensuring that key players understand the impact of new policies on independent schools. ISCA's ongoing representation on government consultative groups and its sound advocacy, supported by quality data and analysis, continue to ensure the credibility of the independent sector's voice at the national level. Teamwork across the sector remains vital in keeping that voice strong.

Mark Porter
ISCA Chairman



Schools funding legislation

The Rudd Government honoured its election commitment to maintain existing levels of federal funding for non-government schools. The passage of crucial legislation in December 2008 ensures that the Australian Government will continue to fund non-government schools according to the Socio-Economic Status (SES) model over the 2009–12 quadrennium. The legislation also preserves capital funding and targeted program funding levels for the non-government sector over the quadrennium.

ISCA was heavily involved in representing the sector during the passage of the *Schools Assistance Bill 2008*. ISCA made a submission and appeared before the Senate Committee that examined the details of the legislation. The secretariat regularly engaged with the minister and other key parliamentarians with a view to ensuring that the Bill successfully passed through Parliament in time for the first instalment of general recurrent grants to be made to schools in January 2009.

ISCA continues to monitor the Schools Assistance Regulations 2009 as they are released by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). These regulations can significantly affect the conditions applying to funding arrangements between the government and independent schools and ISCA is active in representing any sector concerns to DEEWR and the minister's office.



Schools Assistance Act 2008

General recurrent, capital and targeted program funding

The SES funding model of general recurrent assistance for non-government schools has been retained. Funding for capital grants and existing targeted programs, including literacy, numeracy and special learning needs, languages education, new arrivals, country areas and short-term emergency assistance, has been incorporated into the Act.

Indigenous education

The legislation replaces a range of programs targeting Indigenous students attending non-government schools with one streamlined per capita payment. It also provides additional funding for non-government schools that have significant numbers of Indigenous students. The maximum per student rate of general recurrent funding under the SES model will now automatically apply to non-government schools in remote and very remote areas that have 50 per cent or more Indigenous enrolments and to non-government schools in other areas that have 80 per cent or more Indigenous enrolments.

Funding agreements

As with previous legislation, the Schools Assistance Act contains conditions of funding and accountability arrangements for schools including:

- participation of students in national benchmark testing
- contribution to national reports on the outcomes of schooling
- public reporting of individual school information including student achievement in national testing, student attendance, student characteristics, student, parent and teacher satisfaction and income streams
- provision of plain English reports to parents
- implementation of the national curriculum
- access by departmental officers to school accounts, records and documents for monitoring purposes
- participation in evaluation of programs
- failure to comply provisions, including repayment, reduction and delaying of payments.

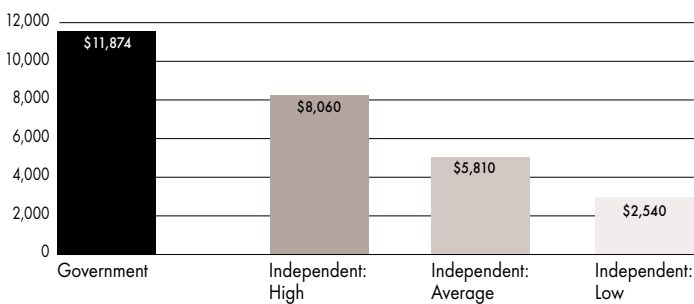
Student support

All school students, whether they attend government, Catholic or independent schools, receive public support for their education from their state or territory government and the Australian Government.

Comparisons of public funding for students in different school sectors that refer only to Australian Government funding are misleading. Students in government schools receive the most public funding, and the main source of this funding is the state or territory government that owns the school they attend. Students in independent schools are eligible for a much lower level of public funding, and the main source of this support is the Australian Government.

Combining both state and federal funding, public support for a student in a government school is on average \$11,874—but for a student in an independent school it can be as low as \$2,540. On average, total government funding for an independent school student is \$5,810.

Funding support per student by school type



Building the Education Revolution

In early 2009, the government announced an economic stimulus package entitled Nation Building and Jobs Plan. A significant part of the government’s plan included the BER package, which provides \$14.7 billion over three years for school capital projects. The independent schools sector is expected to receive \$1.5 billion under BER.

Implementation of BER has already commenced and consists of three main programs:

- Primary Schools for the 21st Century: \$12.4 billion to build or upgrade large scale infrastructure, such as libraries and multipurpose halls, in every primary school, special school and K-12 school in Australia
- Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools: \$1 billion to build around 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres in high schools with a demonstrated need for upgraded facilities
- Renewing Australia’s Schools: \$1.3 billion to provide up to \$200,000 to every Australian school for maintenance and renewal of school buildings and minor building works.

To achieve the government’s economic stimulus intent, ambitious timeframes have been set for the delivery of BER initiatives. The cooperation between ISCA, AISs, Block Grant Authorities (BGAs), schools and the government in streamlining approval processes, undertaking assessment and contract management for each project, has been critical in meeting the deadlines necessary for participation in the program.



Digital Education Revolution

The Digital Education Revolution forms part of the Education Revolution and aims to improve the teaching and learning of information and communications technology (ICT) in Australian schools. The \$2.2 billion program provides for:

- the National Secondary School Computer Fund (NSSCF)
- the Fibre Connections to Schools initiative, to support the development of fibre-to-the-premises broadband connections to Australian schools
- collaboration with state and territory governments and Deans of Education to ensure new and continuing teachers have access to training in the use of ICT that enables student learning
- a two-year program to supply students and teachers with online curriculum tools and resources to support the national curriculum and conferencing facilities for specialist subjects such as languages

Trade Training Centres in Schools

Twenty-nine independent schools have been successful under round one of the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. This program is budgeted to provide \$2.5 billion over 10 years to enable all secondary schools to apply for funding of between \$500,000 and \$1.5 million for Trade Training Centres.

Schools will have an opportunity to apply for funding to build new or upgrade existing trade or vocational education and training facilities in subsequent rounds of the program.

ISCA, AISs and BGAs have been working closely with the government to ensure the independent sector benefits from this program. Following strong representation relating to the assessment process for school applications to access program funding, there is now independent sector involvement and greater transparency in the funding allocation process.



- the development of online learning and access that will enable parents to participate in their child's education
- a three-year program to develop support mechanisms to assist schools in the operation of ICT provided through the NSSCF.

Implementation of NSSCF is already well advanced. This program provides \$1.9 billion for new or upgraded ICT for secondary schools with students in Years 9 to 12. Many independent schools have already received computers. ISCA is currently consulting with the government on future funding arrangements so that the government can achieve its objective of a 1:1 computer to student ratio for all Year 9 to 12 students by 2011.

COAG and federal-state reform

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to a new framework for the Commonwealth's financial relations with the states and territories. These new arrangements aim to provide states and territories with greater flexibility to allocate resources for policies that fall within their jurisdiction. These arrangements provide a set of defined and measurable targets for accountability to governments and the community. The reforms have culminated in a series of Intergovernmental Agreements which establishes a commitment to cooperative working arrangements between governments.

Central to the schools education agenda is the National Education Agreement (NEA). It consists of nationally agreed objectives, outcomes and performance benchmarks and a performance reporting framework designed to measure achievement of objectives and outcomes.

The NEA includes new National Partnership (NP) payments, which are structured to fund specific projects and to facilitate and/or reward states and territories that deliver on agreed outcomes. NP programs that relate to the schools sector and which apply to independent schools are:

- Quality Teaching: \$550 million over five years aimed at improving teacher quality
- Literacy and Numeracy: \$540 million over five years aimed at improving literacy and numeracy standards as determined by the 2008 NAPLAN tests
- Low Socio-economic Status School Communities: \$1.1 billion over five years to target and assist the educational needs of students from low socio-economic school communities
- Improving Retention Rates: \$100 million over six years directed at youth attainment and transitions to improve Year 12 retention rates.

While ISCA welcomes the funding initiatives under the NPs, in conjunction with the AISs it is working closely with governments at both federal and state levels to ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place to give independent schools equitable access to NP funds.



Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

The Australian Government established an interim National Curriculum Board in February 2008 with responsibilities for the development of a national curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 by 2010. During 2009, the interim Board became part of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), whose charter aims:

- to develop and administer a national school curriculum, including content of the curriculum and achievement standards
- to develop and administer national student assessments
- to collect, manage and analyse student assessment data and other data relating to schools and comparative school performance
- to facilitate information sharing arrangements between Australian Government bodies in relation to the collection, management and analysis of school data
- to publish information relating to school education, including information relating to comparative school performance
- to provide school curriculum resource services, educational research services and other related services
- to provide information, resources, support and guidance to the teaching profession.

The independent schools sector was represented on the interim National Curriculum Board and is represented on the ACARA Board by Garry Le Duff, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia.

ISCA supports in principle the establishment of a national curriculum that provides the necessary flexibility to ensure the protection of a diversity of curriculum offerings. ISCA considers it essential that schools have the opportunity to offer alternatives that complement the proposed national curriculum.

National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy

The National Assessment Plan—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests were held nationally for the second time in May 2009. All school students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were assessed using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy.

ISCA has been closely associated with the development and monitoring of tests. It is a member of the NAPLAN Project Reference Group that plans, implements, reviews and reports on the tests. Through this process, ISCA endeavours to ensure that the unique needs of the independent sector are addressed.

National Schools Reporting Framework

In April 2009 the federal, state and territory ministers for education agreed on a framework for publication of comparable information concerning school performance and context. Under this arrangement schools will be required to report information on their workforce, financial resources, student population and student academic achievement. ACARA will be responsible for publishing this data.

Independent schools comply with extensive federal and state accountability arrangements and already report much of this information to government and in the public domain.

ISCA is a member of the School Reporting Working Group of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) that guides school evaluation, accountability and resource allocation of the reporting framework. Through this representation, ISCA continues to advocate for the reporting of accurate and comparable data that accounts for the different cost structures associated with the operation of independent schools compared to systemic schools. ISCA also advocates that this reporting should occur in a consistent timeframe.



Key presentations and consultations

Regularly attending a wide range of educational forums across the country gives ISCA a number of opportunities to both communicate the sector's position on important issues as well as have a voice during government policy deliberations. In the last twelve months, the organisation has delivered a total of 25 presentations and speeches and provided representatives for 139 national consultative committees.

ISCA Parliamentary Forum

The inaugural ISCA Parliamentary Forum, held in Canberra in September 2008, was successful in facilitating direct engagement of the independent sector with people of influence in developing national education policy. The forum attracted over 200 delegates to discuss key issues on the national education agenda with parliamentarians, journalists, public servants and educational researchers.

The highlight of the forum was the speech by the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, who foreshadowed a number of schools policies that have since been implemented. The Deputy Prime Minister noted:

- the government's commitment to retain the SES Model as the basis of funding non-government schools
- the establishment of a national curriculum
- the initiation of the Digital Education Revolution
- the creation of the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program and NSSCF
- initiatives that target improved Year 12 retention rates
- changes to funding arrangements relating to Indigenous students
- the establishment of programs that focus on improving teaching quality
- the emphasis on literacy and numeracy assessment to measure school performance
- the establishment of a schools reporting framework with nationally consistent reporting of school measures that are linked to understanding the factors associated with education outcomes.

The Deputy Prime Minister also addressed the government's intention to undertake a longer-term open and transparent review of the funding arrangements for non-government schools beyond 2012. ISCA welcomes the intended review as an opportunity to reinforce the significant contribution independent schools make to the education of young Australians.



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 511,000 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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