

About Independent Schools

The Independent school sector has 1,091 schools and 586,500 students, accounting for approximately 16 per cent of Australian school enrolments. The sector is represented by the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) and the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA). The Independent school sector is the largest provider of secondary education in Australia. Independent Catholic schools are also a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

Diversity

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 also include Indigenous community schools, special schools for students with disability and special assistance schools which cater for marginalised and at-risk youth.

School Funding

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

In the government school sector, the state or territory government that owns and operates the school contributes most of the funding. In the Independent sector, most of the funding is contributed by parents and families.

The SRS Funding Model

In 2010, the then Labor government commissioned a major review of school funding in Australia. A review panel produced a report in February 2012 (the 'Gonski Report') which recommended that a new national funding model for all schools be based on a schooling resource standard (SRS) with additional loadings to address educational disadvantage.

Under the SRS funding model, the amount each school receives depends on the sector to which the school belongs, the state or territory in which it is located, and the characteristics of the school and its students.

The Australian Education Act was passed in June 2013 and transition to the new funding model commenced in January 2014. The model was to be phased-in over 6 years under complex transition arrangements and is significantly different to the model outlined in the Gonski report.

Beyond 2017

The Coalition Government has committed to funding the first four years of the SRS funding model. In the 2016 - 17 Budget, the Australian Government flagged its intention to move to a new funding model after 2017 and to a single indexation rate for school funding based on a school education specific index, estimated at 3.56% for 2018 - 2020. It is not clear how this change to indexation will be implemented or the impact on the 87% of Independent schools yet to transition to their SRS entitlement.

The current legislative commitments exceed Australian Government Budget forward estimates by several billion dollars. However the Australian Education Act has no sunset date and any changes to the current funding model will require legislative change.

Predictable and stable public funding is essential for Independent schools' long term financial planning and successful educational outcomes and the current uncertainty regarding future funding is causing significant concern to Independent schools.

It is essential that any changes to school funding must include transition arrangements which take into account the diversity of the Independent sector and recognise the particular circumstances of each Independent school. Further, any changes to funding should not undermine the financial viability of individual Independent schools including through any differential treatment of schools across the non-government sector.