

# Status of the Teaching Profession

## Submission by

### The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA)

#### Introduction: About ISCA

ISCA is the national peak body representing the Independent schooling sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISCA represents a sector with 1,123 schools and 604,436 students, accounting for approximately 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 Australian 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 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.

Many Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs. Examples include the Independent community schools for Indigenous students in remote areas, special schools for students with disabilities, and boarding schools to educate children from rural and remote areas. There are also schools that seek to reflect the religious values of a particular community or that seek to practise an internationally recognised educational philosophy such as Rudolf Steiner or Montessori schools. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

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 Lutheran systems. Systemic schools account for 18 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. However, four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

## Overview

ISCA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission in response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the *Status of the Teaching Profession*.

ISCA has previously made submissions to the Australian Government's Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools which, in March 2018, resulted in the report *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, and to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group whose report was published as *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* in December 2014.

ISCA supports and is contributing to the work being undertaken by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to provide national leadership for the Australian State and Territories in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. Much of the work undertaken by AITSL over recent years, including in the areas of Teacher Standards and certification, and Initial Teacher Education Standards and accreditation, is likely to support improved systems, practice, and outcomes for teachers and most importantly, for student outcomes.

This submission outlines the role of ISCA and the state and territory AIs, provides an overview of the Independent school sector and the professional context of teachers who are employed in Independent schools, and addresses a range of other issues related to the inquiry's Terms of Reference.

## About the Independent school sector

Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions that are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. Each Independent school is required to be registered with the relevant state or territory education authority.

Individual Independent schools operate in an environment of choice and diversity. The environment in which schools work require school communities to be aware, innovative, and responsive to change in order to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of students and the expectations of parents to provide a high quality educational experience for their students.

Independent schools are highly accountable to their school communities. Independent schools have a greater range of accountabilities than any other type of school in Australia due to the complex range of their responsibilities to stakeholders, governments, registration and other authorities, and their legal obligations as incorporated bodies.

The steady growth of the Independent sector is evidence of the public confidence in the accountability of Independent schools through their contribution to education policies, legislative compliance, and self-regulation.

Independent school enrolments continue to increase, and new Independent schools continue to be established, in part because many parents and community groups find that self-governing schools are more accountable to their immediate communities than is possible for schools that are part of large centralised systems.

### The role of state and territory Associations of Independent Schools

Independent schools in each state and territory are directly represented and supported by the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) in their jurisdiction. While almost all Independent schools choose to become members of their state or territory Association of Independent Schools, the AIS does not act as a 'system authority' for member schools.

AISs provide a range of professional services directly to schools. Many AISs also offer industrial relations services, policy and compliance support, professional learning services, and implement government programs, for example the Australian Government Capital Grants Program. In addition, AISs represent the views of the Independent school sector at the state or territory level.

### Overview of the Independent sector

In 2017, the Independent school sector enrolled 604,436 students, representing 16 per cent of total school enrolments in Australia.

The Independent sector's enrolment share is more significant in the later years of schooling, as the table below shows. While 11.5 per cent of primary students attend Independent schools, this proportion rises to 18.2 per cent at the junior secondary level and to 19.4 per cent at senior secondary.

Since 1970 the Independent school sector's share of Australian full-time school enrolments has grown from 4.1 per cent to 14.5 per cent in 2017.

Growth in both the number and diversity of Independent schools over time has resulted in greatly increased access to Independent schooling for a wider section of the population. In the last decade, the average annual increase in full-time enrolments in the Independent sector, at 2.0 per cent, has consistently exceeded the average growth at Catholic systemic (1.0 per cent) and government (1.0 per cent) schools. Much of the growth has been in low fee schools serving disadvantaged communities.

As a result of Australia's declining birth rate, the Independent school sector is expected to continue to grow, but at a slower rate, over the coming years. Projections by the Australian Bureau of

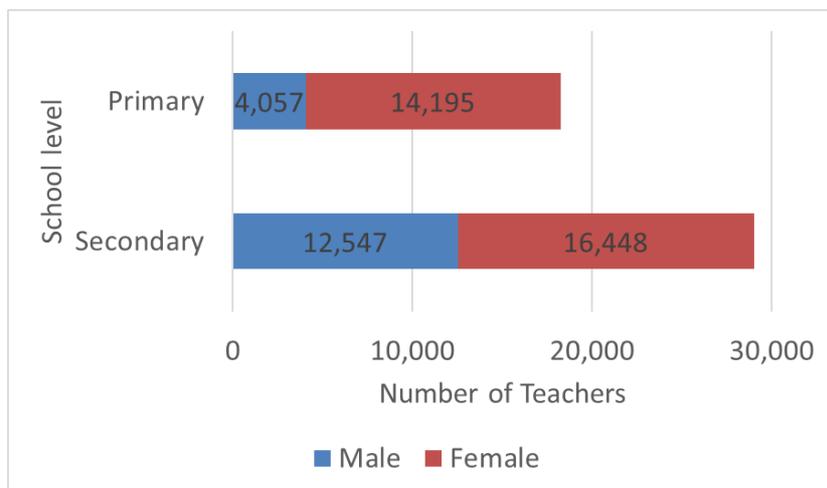
Statistics indicate that the Australian school population as a whole will continue to grow but will represent a smaller proportion of the total population over this century.<sup>1</sup>

### Teachers in Independent schools

Independent schools in Australia employ over 91,600 staff, of whom 54,200 are part-time or full-time teachers. This equates to approximately 47,300 full-time equivalent teachers.

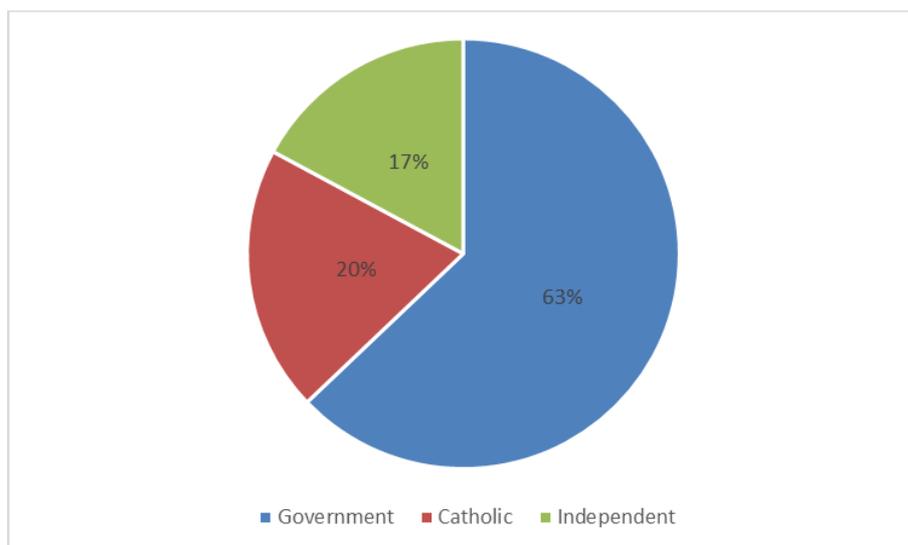
Independent schools employ the full-time equivalent of over 18,200 teachers at the primary school level and almost 29,000 teachers at the secondary school level. Teachers working at the primary school level represent 39 per cent of teachers employed in the Independent sector. Sixty-one per cent of teachers in the Independent sector work at the secondary school level.

*Chart 1: FTE teachers in the Independent sector by gender and level (2017)*



In all, 17 per cent of teachers working in Australian schools are employed in Independent schools.

*Chart 2: Teachers by school sector (2017)*



<sup>1</sup> Department of Education & Training Projections and ABS *Schools Australia* 2017

The majority of teachers employed in the Independent school sector are female, especially at the primary school level. The proportion of male teachers is higher at the secondary school level with 43.3 per cent of Independent school teachers being male.

Unlike other school sectors, the majority of Independent schools are governed and operated autonomously. These schools do not rely on large central bureaucracies or bodies and are separately accountable to their parent and school communities. The autonomy of Independent schools enables them to directly select and employ the teachers who work in the school.

It is important to note that employment policies, including workplace conditions and career and leadership structures for schools in the Independent sector, rests with individual Independent schools or with their system authority. Teachers are employed directly by individual schools, or in some cases by the system that owns and operates the school. Neither ISCA nor the state and territory AISs are employing bodies for teachers who work in Independent schools.

Research undertaken by ISCA has shown that 'good teachers' are resoundingly the most important factor influencing parents' decision-making in choosing an Independent school education for their child. The research confirmed that parents see teachers as pivotal to the development of their children's academic and broader life skills.

Therefore, ensuring that Australia has, and retains, a work force of high-calibre teachers who are well prepared, highly skilled and trusted to keep learners safe is of fundamental importance to Independent schools.

### The professional credentials of teachers practising in Independent schools

Teachers who are employed and work in Independent schools must meet the same requirements for teacher registration and registration renewal as teachers who work in the government or Catholic sectors.

The vast majority of schools in the Independent sector meet their teaching staff requirements by employing existing teachers from other schools and beginning teachers who have studied in and graduated from public universities alongside teachers who go on to work in the Catholic and government sectors.

These requirements have been shaped by the framework for national teacher registration as endorsed by Education Ministers in 2011 and are implemented by the teacher regulatory authority in each state or territory.

Given teacher registration processes as implemented by the regulatory authority vary to some degree between states and territories, the requirements for registration that are applied to teachers working in Independent schools will differ according to the state or territory in which that teacher is practising. The registration requirements for a teacher employed in an Independent school will have more in common with a teacher employed in the government or Catholic sector in the same state or territory than may be the case with a teacher employed in an Independent school in a different state or territory.

### The diverse contexts of the teaching profession in Independent schools

The 604,436 students attending Independent schools come from all socio-economic backgrounds. As a sector, Independent schools provide for students of all abilities, including students with special

needs, such as students from a language background other than English and students with social, emotional and behavioural issues, and serve a wide range of communities from remote and disadvantaged indigenous communities to socially, culturally and ethnically diverse communities in capital cities. Independent schools are also the major providers of boarding schools in Australia.

The majority of schools in the sector are co-educational although single-sex schools remain a feature of the sector, with 20 per cent of boys enrolled in boys-only schools and 22 per cent of girls attending girls-only schools. In 2017, 79 per cent of Independent school students attended co-educational schools.

The Independent sector differs from the Catholic and government schools in the proportion of enrolments in primary and secondary education. In the Independent sector, primary schooling accounts for just under half the total student population, 46 per cent, whereas in Catholic and government schools, primary students account for 53 per cent and 62 per cent respectively.

Conversely, secondary students make up 54 per cent of Independent school students, compared with 47 per cent of Catholic school students and 38 per cent of government school students. This appears to be largely due to a cohort of students that switch to an Independent school for secondary or senior secondary education, although this pattern differs across jurisdictions.

The Independent sector also differs from Catholic system and government schools in the prevalence of combined schools which offer both primary and secondary schooling in the one school. Sixty-six per cent of all Independent schools are combined K (Year 1 minus 1) to Year 12 schools. Consequently, many Independent schools have structures that differ from the traditional distinct primary and secondary school arrangement. Many Independent schools offer middle school programs, designed to meet the specific developmental needs of early adolescence.

The inherent diversity of the Independent sector is reflected in the attitudes schools have in relation to teacher employment issues. Schools need to recruit teachers appropriate to their communities from a range of backgrounds and experiences in order to meet the needs of their existing and growing enrolments.

It is significant that, unlike other sectors, the responsibility for the selection and employment conditions of teaching staff in Independent schools rests with the school itself.

Many Independent schools have governance and management arrangements which delegate the day to day responsibilities of the school's education program and staffing to the school's management team, and longer term planning and supervision to Boards of Governance. These arrangements mean that school governors and educational management teams are accountable directly to their parent and school communities.

As Independent schools report to and are responsible to their community, an emphasis on fostering a sense of belonging, listening and responding to the community in order to meet the needs of the community is at the very core of Independent schools. Independent schools build this social capital within their own communities through the development of networks among families and organizations within the local and international communities, and through the values that underpin the formal curriculum.

Teachers employed in Independent schools require a particular set of skills and knowledge in order to assist students to meet their educational goals in a wide range of contexts. Independent schools

include Independent community schools for Indigenous students in remote areas, special schools for students with disabilities, schools providing boarding facilities to rural and remote students, and schools committed to alternative learning environments.

In support of providing a rounded education, teachers in Independent schools often have responsibilities that extend beyond delivery of the school's classroom curriculum to also include participation and supervision of extra-curricular activities. The expectation is that teachers will not only concentrate on teaching their subject but also on the holistic development of individual students by contributing to the broader life of the school.

The supply of teachers in Independent schools is currently broadly in balance with the demand across Australia; however teacher shortages across the whole schools sector continue to be an issue in some subject areas and in some geographic locations.

### Research on teacher attrition and retention rates in Australia

ISCA notes recent research by Weldon which states,

(t)he attrition rate of early carer teachers in Australia is an issue, but not because it is worryingly high or an intractable problem of epidemic proportions. While these claims may be true there is currently no reliable evidence to support them. Therefore, the main issue is that the attrition rate in Australia is, in fact, *not* well established, it is unknown.<sup>2</sup>

He further notes that there will be a broad range of influences, personal, professional and other, that contribute to teacher attrition and that these influences are likely to apply at to a varying degree depending on the context of the teacher. Factors such as level of schooling (primary, middle, secondary), subject speciality, gender of teacher, part-time or full-time and contract or permanent status, location, and school socioeconomic status are likely to be relevant when considering attrition and retention rates.

Weldon goes on to indicate that reliable national data and ongoing measurement is required to enable governments, policy makers, employers, schools, and initial teacher education providers to develop policies for supporting and retaining teachers and school leaders on the basis of evidence. Weldon also outlines a range of practical, policy focused questions which such data could inform in order for implementable strategies to be developed.

Some of the issues concerning current data and public discussion of teacher attrition, particularly in the early career stages, was previously identified by AITSL.<sup>3</sup> In 2017 the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy, a key recommendation of the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* report, commenced. The Strategy is a joint project between all Australian state, territory and Commonwealth governments, and funded by Education Council, and is being managed by AITSL. By combining and connecting data relating to all initial teacher education students and teachers in the workforce over time, the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy aims to build a comprehensive picture of Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD).

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<sup>2</sup> Weldon, Paul. (2018) Early career teacher attrition in Australia: evidence, definition, classification and measurement. *Australian Journal of Education*, 62:1, 61-78.

<sup>3</sup> AITSL (2016) Spotlight - What do we know about early career teacher attrition rates in Australia? Retrieved from <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/spotlight/spotlights-attrition.pdf>

ISCA is contributing to and strongly supports the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy. Successful completion of the project will significantly address many of the issues identified by Weldon, add to our national understanding of the teaching profession in Australia, and enable governments, policy makers, employers, schools, and initial teacher education providers to better support the profession.

## Conclusion

ISCA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission in response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the *Status of the Teaching Profession*.

ISCA has previously made submissions which contributed to the outcomes contained in the reports *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, and *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*.

ISCA acknowledges and supports the ongoing work of AITSL in providing national leadership in promoting excellence in the teaching profession, and in driving national reforms.

Independent schools in Australia employ over 91,600 staff, of whom 54,200 are part-time or full-time teachers. This equates to approximately 47,300 full-time equivalent teachers.

ISCA research shows that parents see teachers as pivotal to the development of their children's academic and broader life skills. 'Good teachers' is the most significant reason parents enrol their child in an Independent school.

Teachers who are employed and work in Independent schools must meet the same requirements for teacher registration and registration renewal as teachers who work in the government or Catholic sectors.

The diversity of the Independent sector is reflected in the attitudes schools have in relation to teacher employment and work. Schools need teachers appropriate to their communities from a range of backgrounds and experiences in order to meet the needs of their existing and growing enrolments.

Recent research shows that Australia currently lacks reliable national data concerning teacher retention and, in particular, early career teacher attrition. The absence of such data makes the implementation of evidence-based public policy difficult.

ISCA strongly supports the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy. Successful completion of the project will significantly address many of the issues created by the current lack of reliable national data.

ISCA

21 December 2018