



Name: Independent Schools Australia

Submission date: 3/06/2025

Improve school student outcomes with the best available tools and resources

What (if anything) needs to be done to improve the use of edtech tools (including GenAI) in schools?

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and Education Services Australia (ESA) are already looking at which edtech tools will deliver value to student outcomes in terms of design and impact.

However, the better question would be what needs to be done to support teacher's professional development to foster the use of edtech tools and increase GenAI literacy in schools. School leaders also need to be supported to understand how edtech tools can be used effectively in schools, particularly GenAI.

What more (if anything) needs to be done to improve awareness and access to high quality lesson planning and curriculum materials in schools?

There is a range of work underway through the national agencies to work on the provision of high quality materials, including curriculum materials, for teachers to use in schools.

Is there anything more you would like to say about edtech, GenAI or lesson planning and curriculum materials?

The emphasis on the provision of edtech tools , lesson planning and curriculum materials is an indication of the increased need for support for teachers due to an ever expanding workload and scope. These tools, used well, could lead to improved student outcomes however consideration must also be given to how best we can enable teachers to focus on the job of teaching.

Which of the following best describes you?

Peak body

Are you currently using any edtech tools (including learning games and GenAI) to support teaching and learning in the classroom?

No

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Are there things you would like to do with GenAI or edtech tools that you can't do currently? What's stopping you from doing these things?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using any edtech tools?

not applicable

Do you access lesson planning and curriculum materials online?

No

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using online lesson planning and curriculum materials?

not applicable

Support the workforce through a flexible post-secondary education and training sector

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

In your experience, how well does the credit transfer and recognition of prior learning system operate in Australia? Does it adequately support students to move between courses or have their work experience recognised as part of a qualification? Are there ways it could be improved?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

In the past 3 years, have you applied for credit recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what was your experience in applying for credit recognition or RPL like?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on why you didn't apply?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Work related training

What are the main reasons individuals and/or businesses do or do not participate in work-related training?

The participant did not respond to this question.

What role, if any, should businesses be playing to address any barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

What, if anything, could government do to address barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers and sole traders, how many employees do you have?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For employees/individuals, have you participated in any work-related training in the last 12 months that did not relate to general compliance (such as WHS)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to undertake work-related training?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers or sole traders, have you provided or supported your employees to participate in work-related training in the past 12 months?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you or your employees received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Can you describe whether you accessed any government assistance, what type, and the amount received? If you didn't access any financial assistance, please tell us the reasons why.

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to provide or support your employees to undertake work-related training, such as the time or cost, availability of relevant or high-quality courses, and level of interest from your employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Balance service availability and quality through fit-for-purpose occupational entry regulations

What are the effects of occupational entry regulations? Please describe your experience and name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Do you believe current occupational entry regulations are proportionate to the level of risk associated with different professions? Why or why not? If not, do you have any suggested improvements to regulations to better reflect risks? Please name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes your connection to occupational entry regulations? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which state or territory are you predominantly based in?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Cover sheet: Supporting document #1

INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA



IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR ALL:

LEADING REFORM
THROUGH INNOVATION

APRIL 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Independent Schools Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

Cover photography courtesy of Bethany Christian School, SA, and Hymba Yumba School, QLD.



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1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Australian governments are currently developing the reform priorities for the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), now known as the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) which will commence in 2025. Education Ministers have identified three priority areas for reform for the next national agreement: equity, wellbeing and workforce.

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) supports the articulation of a national policy agenda that improves outcomes for all Australian students by driving national improvement and reform. The development and implementation of agreed reform directions for school education must draw on the experiences and consider the contexts of all three school education sectors: government, Catholic and Independent.

This Report discusses three proposed priority areas of equity, wellbeing and workforce identified in the Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Report, *Improving outcomes for all* (Review Report).¹

Case Studies from ten Independent schools are featured which support the reform directions and have potential for sharing and scaling so every student and educator can benefit. The Case Studies reflect the diversity of the Independent sector and have broad applicability across sectors and schools.

¹ Expert Panel, 2023 – *Improving Outcomes for All*



The Independent sector includes ISA, Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), and individual Independent schools. Together the sector has the capacity to contribute to the development of reform initiatives, and to finding and being part of solutions. Independent schools have a level of autonomy that gives them the freedom to respond to the needs of their students, staff and school community. They are often early adopters of new technologies and their autonomous nature allows them to innovate using evidence-informed practice to improve outcomes for students in a range of contexts.

Independent schools are supported in researching, adopting and implementing innovation in key areas of schooling by the AISs in each state and territory. AISs play a vital role in supporting their member schools with evidence-based and evidence-informed practice, programs and professional development to support innovation and implement national reform.

Independent schools serve many students in Australia experiencing disadvantage and make a major contribution to the education of students from the priority equity cohorts identified in the Review Report. Challenges exist, for example, in identifying effective teaching pedagogy to engage First Nations students and improve learning outcomes.²

Case studies from Hymba Yumba School and Nawarddeen Academy demonstrate successful approaches to supporting First Nations student engagement and learning through culturally responsive teaching practices.

Personalised learning and the implementation of targeted support, data-driven interventions and parent engagement are key practices in the Independent sector.

Independent schools recognise the importance of student and educator wellbeing and implement wellbeing programs ranging from school-wide approaches to one-to-one intervention for the most vulnerable students.

The Independent school sector is actively engaged in promoting evidence-based strategies and initiatives to address teacher workload, attraction and retention, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Supporting and mentoring Initial Teacher Education students to future-proof the teaching workforce is one priority and Shearwater, The Mullumbimby Steiner School Case Study provides an excellent example of the success of the Association of Independent Schools NSW (AISNSW) Teaching School Hubs program.

2 [How ready are Australian schools to help First Nations children to succeed at school?, Monash Education](#)



2

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA



Independent Schools Australia is the national peak body and voice for the Independent school sector. Our membership comprises state and territory Associations of Independent Schools. We work closely with our members to promote choice, diversity and partnership in education, and advocate for ongoing and sustainable levels of Australian Government support through effective policy and fair funding.



Through its member Associations, ISA represents more than 1,215 schools and 716,000 students, accounting for 17.6 per cent of Australian school enrolments, and a workforce of 123,000 people.

ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SECTOR

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 specific educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. A number of Independent schools have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs of a community. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for seven per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INCLUDE:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist 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
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 factors.

The latest available data shows that more than one in six Australian school students attend an Independent school, with more than one in five secondary students attending an Independent school. Students at Independent schools reflect the full diversity of Australian society – including those who experience one or multiple forms of disadvantage. The growth of enrolments in the Independent sector is most notable in low-fee Independent schools.

Most families with children enrolled in non-government schools are middle- to low-income earners, increasingly from multicultural backgrounds, and residing in outer-suburban and inner-suburban communities. Many of these families are facing severe economic stress and are making substantial sacrifices for their children's education.

Most Independent schools are established and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, such as Lutheran schools. These systemic schools account for 17 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. More than four out of five, however, are autonomous non-systemic Independent schools.



The Independent sector encompasses considerable diversity in size, location and the types of students in schools. There is a far greater percentage of Independent schools charging less than \$1,000 per year, including those that charge no fees, than those charging over \$25,000.

The median fee for an Independent school in 2022 was approximately \$5,500, and the majority of Independent schools charge annual fees of less than \$6,000.

Independent schools make a valuable contribution to education in Australia. They are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools, contributing to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

Independent schools are committed to playing their part in improving educational opportunities for young Australians and contributing to a robust and successful national schooling system. They play an important role in educating student cohorts experiencing disadvantage, including those most at risk of permanently disengaging from the education system.

Independent schools support families and students in a wide range of communities, and many students from regional and remote Australia are educated in settings

that are distinctive to the Independent sector, such as boarding schools and Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.

Independent Special Assistance Schools play a critical role in educating students unable to access mainstream schools due to complex barriers. They transform young people's lives by facilitating flexible pathways to employment or further education outcomes.

The 2023 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that enrolments in the Independent sector rose by 3.9 per cent in 2023. According to the ABS in 2023, Independent school student numbers grew by 25,304 students to 666,154 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. This compares to enrolment growth over the same period of 1.4 per cent in the Catholic sector and 0.3 per cent in the government sector.³

3 Data on government and non-government students, staff and schools, www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release





3

INTRODUCTION



BETTER AND FAIRER SCHOOLS AGREEMENT

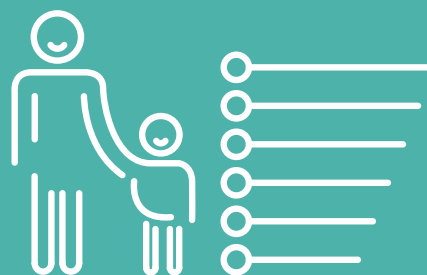
This Report discusses ways that Independent schools are developing approaches to address the three key priority areas identified in the Expert Panel's Review Report: equity, wellbeing and workforce. The included Case Studies highlight innovative practice in these areas based on evidence-based and evidence-informed practice and action research to improve student outcomes.

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) will be a joint agreement between the Commonwealth, states and territories to lift student outcomes across Australian schools. The current National Schools Reform Agreement (NSRA) will conclude on 31 December 2024, with the BFSA to be finalised mid-2024 for implementation in 2025.

In 2022, the Productivity Commission undertook a review of the current NSRA. Their Final Report was released January 2023, examining the Australian and state/territory governments' national policy initiatives and how well they achieved the objectives and outcomes set out in the NSRA, making recommendations to inform the design of a new national agreement.

The Productivity Commission recommended redesigning the NSRA to focus more attention on lifting academic results for all students, supporting quality teaching and school leadership, and promoting student wellbeing.

In March 2023, the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, announced an Expert Panel Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (the Review)⁴ to advise on priority areas for reform that should be included in the new BFSA. ISA's submission to the Expert Panel in response to the Review's Consultation Paper is summarised in the Appendix.



THE REVIEW REPORT WAS RELEASED IN DECEMBER 2023 AND IDENTIFIES SEVEN REFORM DIRECTIONS:

- 1 Lift student outcomes.
- 2 Improve equity.
- 3 Improve student wellbeing.
- 4 Attract and retain teachers.
- 5 Reduce data gaps and limitations.
- 6 Enhance funding transparency and accountability.
- 7 Support innovation and achieve reform.

⁴ [Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Reports, Department of Education, Australian Government](#)



THE EXPERT PANEL HIGHLIGHTED THREE PRIORITY AREAS FOR REFORM FOR THE NEXT BFSA:

Equity

to improve outcomes and address student needs, especially for priority equity cohorts, and reduce concentrations of disadvantage in schools

Wellbeing

to ensure all students and staff feel supported and belong

Workforce

to grow and diversify the workforce of confident and capable teachers and other educators, and ensure they are well supported to strengthen their practice and collaborate.

The Review Report acknowledges that there is already significant investment in many of these areas from governments, school systems and schools. The Expert Panel highlighted the many good practices they witnessed in their school visits and the school-based submissions they received.

The Review Report recommends that sharing and scaling these practices so that every student and every educator can benefit is the critical work of the next stage of reform.

“

The Panel recognised that new investment would need to be accompanied by ongoing evidence-informed education reform. Everyone involved in schools will need to be involved, most notably principals and teachers, whose commitment needs to be supported, including through the development of the next generation of educators to meet growing workforce needs. Success will also require reform, simplification and renewal of systems and implementation mechanisms that underpin the provision of effective schooling. Part of this work will centre on enabling best practice and strong partnerships to be systematically applied over the life of the next Agreement.⁵

”

⁵ [Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Reports, Department of Education, Australian Government](#); 2023 p 8



This Report has been developed to share practices that are improving student outcomes in individual Independent schools. As Independent schools are not systemic, sharing practice to support effective policy change can be challenging.

The Stanford Accelerator for Learning is an interdisciplinary hub for researchers, educators, entrepreneurs and others to collaborate on education learning solutions. Their initiative, 'Systems change for advancing learning and equity' (SCALE), states that key strategies to implement effective education interventions at scale are to engage and connect stakeholders, generate and test interventions and disseminate knowledge and solutions at scale to effect policy change.⁶

This Report forms part of the national conversation to support the reform agenda by sharing success stories of innovative programs in a sample of highly innovative Independent schools.

Approaches to improving teaching and learning should always be based on data and evidence collected from highly regarded international and national research. To support and deliver educational improvement, it is also imperative that solutions have flexibility and can incorporate innovative approaches. This is how data can be collected, new evidence found, student outcomes achieved, and opportunities provided for educators to lead in practice and share examples that can be leveraged by others.

A balanced approach to using current research and exploring new evidence and practice is essential if Australia is to build a Better and Fairer Education System that can continue to meet the challenges of the future and find new solutions to improve education equity and student outcomes. Creativity, innovative practice and action research provide new ways of critical thinking to meet the diverse needs of Australian students.

⁶ [Education Policy and Systems Change, Stanford Accelerator for Learning](#)

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AND THE BFSA

The BFSA will be informed by the outcomes of the Productivity Commission Review and the Review Report. This will set out a program of reforms for all schools in all sectors which may have significant impacts on Independent schools and the families and communities they support.

Articulating a national policy agenda that drives improvement and reform will improve the outcomes of all Australian students. Improving learning outcomes requires an integrated holistic approach that considers equity, wellbeing and workforce. The development and implementation of agreed reform directions for school education must draw on the experiences of and consider the contexts of all three school education sectors: government, Catholic and Independent.

While appropriate funding levels are critical for improving learning outcomes for all students, there are many other factors at play. The characteristics of Independent schools, particularly their autonomy and flexibility, place them in a unique position to contribute to the development and application of school reform initiatives, concepts and approaches.

This autonomy allows Independent schools to respond quickly to the needs of their students, staff, parents and school community, allowing them to adapt to change and incorporate innovative programs and practices.



During the COVID-19 pandemic when communities were forced into lockdown, many Independent schools were able to make decisions quickly in ways that suited their own context and rapidly develop quality 'learning from home' programs.

Independent school leaders encourage innovation, responsiveness to local needs, cross-sectoral collaboration and community engagement. Independent schools are, therefore, ideally placed to trial and evaluate programs and initiatives.

Many Independent schools are early adopters of new technologies. They can respond in meaningful ways to emerging educational research and rapid technological developments such as generative Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Independent schools actively engage in action research and reflective practice, investing in professional development opportunities for their teachers. This commitment to ongoing learning can foster a culture of innovation within the school community. Specific examples of these practices in Independent schools are detailed in the Case Studies featured throughout this Report.

Independent schools value student-centred learning and seek to implement practical, sustainable practices to personalise and differentiate learning to adapt to individual students' needs, interests, and strengths. The multi-tiered system of supports⁷ approach is embedded in many Independent schools, monitoring student progress and providing targeted intervention as required. This promotes student engagement in learning and leads to better student outcomes. Independent schools value communication with their school communities and foster parent engagement to support students.⁸

Independent school leaders work closely with their governing boards to allocate resources efficiently and effectively.

They consider their school context and improvement plan, and invest strategically in facility development, educational programs and resources, new technologies and the professional development of staff.

Many Independent schools are faith-based or have a specific educational philosophy or mission that guides their practices. The focus on a vision, mission and alignment with identified core values can lead to the development of contemporary contextually based programs to provide high-quality education and prioritise pastoral care and student wellbeing approaches.

ISA commissioned research, undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research, *Reform challenges in school education*⁹ articulates three research-informed principles for improving educational outcomes which are consistent with the proposed future reform directions for the BFSa:

- Learning as personal: attempts to address equity tend to be group-based. Successful learning is more likely when an individual's learning needs are understood and addressed rather than inferring learners' needs from the groups to which they belong, including age or year groups, and equity groups.
- Learning as holistic: looking at learning as not just intellectual, but also emotional, social, physical, cultural and moral learning and development. It also encompasses removing the divide between knowledge and skills to recognise that all learning and every vocation depends on both theory and knowledge, and application and skills.
- Learning as developmental: recognises the cumulative nature of human learning, with prior learning providing the foundation for further learning. This is particularly important for curriculum design which should aim to progressively build more sophisticated knowledge, deeper understanding and higher levels of skills over extended periods of time.¹⁰

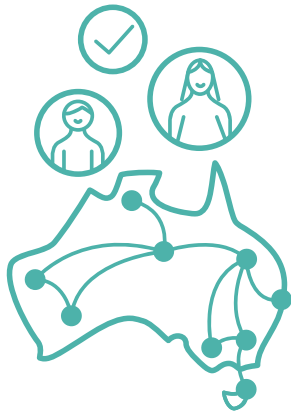
⁷ [Introduction to multi-tiered system of supports, Australian Education Research Organisation](#)

⁸ [Parent Engagement, Independent Schools Queensland](#)

⁹ [Reform Challenges in School Education, Independent Schools Australia](#)

¹⁰ Geoff Masters, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2023 – [Reform Challenges in School Education, Independent Schools Australia](#), pp 14–17

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT



A key finding of the Expert Panel's Review Report was the importance of sharing and scaling effective and innovative practices so that every student and every educator can benefit. This will be the critical work of the next stage of reform.

This Report discusses the priority reform areas identified by the Expert Panel and offers insights from ten Independent school Case Studies that explore new approaches, developed to improve student outcomes. These approaches support national reform priorities and have potential for sharing and scaling so that every student and educator can benefit. These Case Studies reflect the diversity of not only the Independent sector but the Australian education system more generally.

The Case Studies also highlight the critical role of state and territory AISs. While there are many advantages to the autonomy and flexibility of stand-alone Independent schools, they also benefit greatly from their AIS's provision of expert guidance and support, and assistance with strategies to enhance and complement school-level initiatives. AISs also develop and fund initiatives and programs for action research in Independent schools.

Collaboration between education sectors at the local and national level is an opportunity to share learnings for innovative, evidence-based approaches to meet the reform challenges of addressing disadvantage, supporting wellbeing and teacher recruitment and retention.







4



DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE REFORM



OVERVIEW

The *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Consultation Paper* provided an analysis of how Australian school students are performing, and found that too many students are starting school behind their peers or are falling behind in minimum literacy and numeracy standards. The Paper's analysis showed that students from priority equity cohorts such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with disability and students experiencing disadvantage are three times more likely to fall below minimum standards. If unaddressed, this gap increases over time.¹¹

The Independent sector plays a major role in educating the priority equity cohorts identified in the Review Report. Students from priority equity cohorts are over-represented among those students who fall behind in school and the Independent sector is responding to the challenge of improving outcomes for these students with multi-faceted approaches.

Schools, students, society and technology are constantly changing and continuous adaptation is necessary for effective educational reform.¹² Teacher inquiry is closely associated with evidence-based practice and practice-based research. It is student-centred and is often associated with teacher professional development, educational innovation, and school improvement.¹³



The Review Report concluded that in order to improve learning outcomes for all, the priority areas of equity, wellbeing and workforce must be the focus of evidence-based reform and innovation.

11 Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System Consultation Paper, www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system/consultations/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system-consultation, 2023 p 12

12 Rowell et al, 2017. The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research, www.researchgate.net/publication/320150258_The_Palgrave_International_Handbook_of_Action_Research

13 Brian Marsh & Mark Deacon, 10 Feb 2024. Teacher practitioner enquiry: a process for developing teacher learning and practice?, Educational Action Research, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09650792.2024.2313085

PRIORITY AREA 1: EQUITY

EQUITY AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Independent schools serve many Australian students experiencing disadvantage and make a major contribution to the education of students from the priority equity cohorts identified in the Review Report:

- students experiencing disadvantage
- students with disability
- students living in regional, rural and remote locations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Many Independent schools educate a high proportion of these students, and there are schools specifically established to meet the specific needs of priority equity student cohorts.

STUDENTS EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE AND DISENGAGEMENT

Many students experiencing disadvantage are taught within mainstream Independent schools and specialist settings that include:

- Special Schools
- Special Assistance Schools
- boarding schools serving regional and remote families
- Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools, including boarding schools
- schools catering to students from different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds including migrant and refugee families and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.



Students whose parents have a low level of income or education are often at a disadvantage in their education, and like schools in the government and Catholic sectors, many Independent schools draw a high proportion of their student enrolments from low socio-educational backgrounds.

Families with incomes in Australia's lowest income quartile make up 17 per cent of Independent school enrolments. Around 16 per cent of parents whose children attend Independent schools have a maximum educational qualification of Year 12 or below. Locality can also be a measure of educational disadvantage for students, with research showing that students in more regional and remote locations may have poorer education outcomes.¹⁴

The Independent sector is making a significant and growing contribution to addressing educational disadvantage through its Special Assistance Schools. These schools support students who have disengaged from education for a variety of reasons. These include difficult life circumstances or trauma, poverty, bullying, domestic violence, drug abuse issues, mental health issues, homelessness, school refusal or inability to manage in a mainstream school environment for any reason. Students are often referred from community services, juvenile justice and other schools – both government and non-government. A large proportion of Independent Special Assistance Schools reported that either most or all of the young people enrolled at their school have a disability.

Many Independent Special Assistance Schools are full-service schools providing basic needs such as critical dental, medical or housing assistance, childcare for young parents, or support for students to obtain a driver's licence, a birth certificate, or to access mental health care.

¹⁴ [Educational Disadvantage in Regional and Rural Schools, Australian Council for Educational Research](#)





Growth in enrolments in Independent Special Assistance Schools over the nine years 2014 to 2023 was 364 per cent (12,210 students), compared to 24 per cent growth in mainstream Independent schools.

Independent Special Assistance Schools
364% Enrolment growth

Mainstream Independent schools
24% Enrolment growth

Over the same period, the number of Special Assistance Schools increased from 48 in 2014 to 96 in 2023, with Special Assistance Schools located in each state and territory except the Northern Territory.

Total number of Special Assistance Schools
48 Schools 2014

96 Schools 2023

These growth rates indicate the strong demand for Independent Special Assistance Schools to provide young people experiencing educational disadvantage with an opportunity to continue their education and complete school. By completing their secondary education, students have the best opportunity to go on to lead productive and meaningful lives.

CASE STUDY FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

THE PORT SCHOOL, HAMILTON HILL, WA



SUMMARY

The Port School is located at Hamilton Hill, a quiet suburb 22 km south of Perth. The school reengages at-risk students who have not been able to succeed in mainstream school settings. Students at Port School are successful because every student receives tailored and targeted support with provision of wrap-around community and health services. Transition to further study or employment is provided to ensure success.

In WA, Special Assistance Schools are called CARE (Curriculum and Reengagement in Education) Schools and this sums up what happens at Port School. They deeply care about each and every student, acknowledging the difficult and traumatic time that these young people have experienced.

Their vision is to provide a safe, nurturing and supportive environment where students are given a new chance to learn and build self-confidence. Empowerment, diversity, growth and community are all-encompassing school values embedded in the school's culture and programs.

Port School aims to find the 'right fit' option for every student that journeys through the school. Success is defined as personal success, tailored to each individual. Principal Barry Finch received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2022 for services to education and at-risk youth. His calm, pragmatic, relational but no-nonsense leadership style has served the school since 2001, first as a teacher and then as principal. As Barry walks around the school, students seek him out to ask his advice, to ask him to solve a problem or simply to check in.

Port School caters for the majority of their students onsite but also provides targeted specific offsite programs for those with greater needs and extreme life challenges. Both approaches aim to prepare all their students for success and life beyond school.

WRAP-AROUND CARE

At Port School, wrap-around care means anything and everything, depending on each student's needs. This might range from subsidising or paying for dental assistance or glasses to paying for a gym membership if deemed essential to a student's mental health. Each student has an individual education or support plan to eliminate barriers to learning, enable them to experience success or provide opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach, such as a pre-driver program. Classroom size is ten students or less, always with two staff in attendance.



“ They are survivors; it’s amazing they come every day.

Barry Finch, *Principal*

”

UNIQUE PROGRAMS

Port School provides academic and vocational pathways outside the Western Australia Certificate of Education. The school is a Registered Training Organisation and students may study Certificate II and III in General Education for Adults and choose from 11 other VET courses, with support for transition into tertiary study, apprenticeships, traineeships or the workforce. A feature of Port School is that Year 8 and 9 students complete all general classes with the same teachers and education assistants who cover the entire curriculum, similar to a primary school environment.

There is a strong focus on explicit direct instruction which improves participation and engagement, as concepts taught are checked for understanding multiple times throughout a lesson so that mastery is gained before moving on to a new concept. Teachers report that often this is the first time a student has actually experienced success and not feel they have been left behind.

The Mobile Classroom is an offsite program for young people who struggle to engage with the school environment. Two staff, usually a teacher and youth worker, drive the bus to meet students in and around Fremantle and Perth, teaching a maximum of five

students in parks, at the beach or in familiar community areas. Staff build positive rapport and trust to create a space where the most disenfranchised students feel they belong.

The Outreach Program is another offsite program providing one-on-one support for long-term disengaged students. These young people may live in residential care, have extreme anxiety or be at risk of suicide. The program is staffed by male and female youth workers, counsellors and teachers, using community spaces such as libraries, youth centres or other public places. If the student is unable to transition back to school, they may remain in this program until they graduate.

The Port Young Parent Centre is an education program for teenage mums (pregnant or parenting). They receive parent education and support to complete their education, with their children next door in the early learning centre operated by the school.

Year 13 is an option for students not quite ready to leave school. They are expected to contribute to the community and take on a leadership role whilst completing an agreed vocational course.

CASE STUDY FOSTERING INDEPENDENT THINKING

BETHANY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, PARALOWIE, SA



SUMMARY

Bethany Christian School (BCS) is located in a low socio-economic area in Paralowie, in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. After working with a number of high-profile global thought leaders in education, BCS has become a leader in the application of student agency. To support this, the school also has a strong focus on teacher professional learning and engagement, with all of the leadership team completing their Masters in Educational Leadership.

BCS enrolls 600 students and for more than 45 per cent of students, English is their second language and more than a third have a disability.

Principal Wendy Matear ensures there is a strong strategic focus on student learning, staff and student agency, leadership, community wellbeing and teacher capacity. The school's philosophy of creative thinking, learning design and personalised learning has influenced the design and purpose of new buildings and learning spaces.

STUDENT AGENCY

The OECD brief on Student Agency for 2030¹⁵ defines student agency as the capacity to set goals, and to reflect and act responsibly to effect change. When foundational skills and knowledge are in place, students can play an active role in deciding what and how they will learn. They can also show greater motivation to learn and the ability to define and set learning goals. Upon meeting BCS students, it can be hard to remember that this is a primary school, as students are self-motivated, independent, creative, eager learners, with a confidence and maturity that surpasses their years.

At BCS, student agency skills commence from the early years, linked to school values, their wellbeing program and student leadership program so that by the time students reach Year 6, they have a repertoire of leadership skills to apply. Students co-create curriculum with teachers, provide input into assessment rubrics, and self-reflect on their own learning. So how did the school start this journey?

Wendy researched national and global educational approaches to identify best practice in student leadership and learning agency.

15 Student Agency OECD – [in_brief_Student_Agency.pdf](#)
[Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)



An excellent opportunity arose in 2016 when the Association of Independent Schools SA (AISSA) offered ten AISSA schools the chance to be part of a Design Thinking project and to work with internationally renowned thought leader Professor Yong Zhao.¹⁶ The project would explore possibilities and challenges in creating schools to build future thinkers and innovators. BCS was keen to be involved. From 2016 to 2019, BCS students and staff were led by Professor Zhao to develop an action research project to promote student entrepreneurship. Students and staff worked alongside Zhao, developing a student media team and creating their own movies and website.

The Design Thinking project led to a better understanding of what conditions support personalised education, increase student participation and develop entrepreneurship.¹⁷ This work culminated in AISSA and the South Australian Secondary Principals' Association (SASPA) co-hosting the 2019 Paradigm Shifters Learning Symposium to showcase school achievements. But this was only the beginning.

The next thought leader to work with BCS staff and students through the AISSA project was Charles Leadbeater¹⁸ (2019 to 2022) with his Student Agency Lab project. Leadbeater is an international authority on innovation and creativity and an expert on student agency. He is advisor to the UK Department for Education's Innovation Unit on future strategies for networked and personalised approaches to learning and education, and lead adviser for the OECD Future of Education and Skills Framework 2030.¹⁹ The Student Agency Lab project aimed to develop robust theory and practice for student agency that can be widely shared among schools.

The third stage of the AISSA project, Meta-Praxis, is in progress (2022 – current), being led by Michael Bunce from the University of East London,²⁰ looking at how learning impact rather than progress can be measured. This project involves students, teachers and school leaders exploring a variety of approaches to create learning environments that enable the development of learner agency, cognitive skills, creative and critical thinking, and personal and social capabilities.

16 Yong Zhao – [Education in the Age of Globalization](#), Zhao Learning

17 [Paradigm Shifters Learning Symposium](#), Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

18 Charles Leadbeater – [Charles Leadbeater](#)

19 OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 – [OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

20 Michael Bunce – [Leading Education Series 7](#), Centre for Strategic Education, Centre for Strategic Education



“ I love doing stuff without help, especially when its big!

Year 4 student

Students should emerge from their schooling as purposeful, reflective responsible agents, investing themselves actively to achieve goals they devise and endorse to shape the future for the better.

Charles Leadbeater, [Student Agency Lab](#)

”

With continued AISSA support, Wendy participated in a study tour in the US and New Mexico, learning how low socio-economic schools work with Indigenous groups, support student learning and develop student-led structures. Upon her return Wendy decided that staff would benefit from professional development in learning design thinking and BCS tailored a program with an external company to enact this goal.

LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

The importance of effective school leadership when embarking on innovative programs cannot be understated. BCS has a united, strong leadership team and all have completed their Masters in Educational Leadership. Wendy hones the strengths and interests of each staff member to benefit students. She utilises their natural gifts and provides them with opportunities to shine. They do not have a teacher retention problem at BCS. Staff love to work there. Consistency and growing together lies at the core of their approach.

Wendy does not necessarily accept that where staff are at is where they will stay. With a smile she says she encourages ongoing learning with 'gentle pressure, relentlessly applied'.

When asked what challenges the school encountered in embarking on these innovative projects with global thought leaders in education, Wendy remarked that selecting key staff was important. One teacher, Nathan, was strategically chosen to be involved from the start, because he was analytical and asked rigorous questions. Wendy didn't want a teacher who would be easily won over.

Nathan involved himself deeply in thinking and learning about the projects and realised they were not in fact projects or programs, but rather a learning philosophy. He is now one of the school's biggest advocates. Nathan stated, 'Students know themselves, we just need to let them have opportunities to show us what they are thinking'.



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

The Independent sector educates an estimated 155,200 students with disability, representing more than a fifth of Independent sector enrolments.

The overwhelming majority of these students with disability are educated in Independent mainstream schools, many employing specialist teachers to work with class teachers and parents to develop individual learning programs. They develop strategies and materials to ensure inclusive environments and meet the needs of students of all abilities. Many schools employ teacher aides to work one-on-one with students during class as well as utilising a range of other adjustments.

It is important that parents and students can choose the educational environment that best meets their learning needs. Over ten per cent of students with disability in Independent schools attend a Special School, which caters solely for students with a disability, and most Special Schools are Independent schools. Parents choose Special Schools for their ability to provide specialised adjustments for their child's specific needs. This includes students who have been assessed as requiring extensive adjustments under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS

There are currently 19,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in 987 Independent schools. Enrolments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Independent schools have grown at an average annual rate of over six per cent per year over the last decade.

There are 45 Independent schools where the majority of students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and 29 schools dedicated entirely to this cohort of students. There are 13 Independent schools serving remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where the Independent school is the only educational option for students in that community.

The Independent sector makes a major contribution to educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on Country. For example, in remote Western Australia there are 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent Community Schools. They are located in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Murchison, Goldfields and Great Southern area. Each of these community schools belongs to the community it serves and has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governing body.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities are amongst the most educationally disadvantaged in Australia. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in remote communities there is limited access to primary school education, and often no access to secondary education.

The Independent school sector is the major provider of boarding school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including for those students who cannot access schooling in their community and for whom boarding is the only option.

In 2023, there were 2,335 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders in the Independent sector, representing 15 per cent of all Independent boarding school enrolments. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders attend over 120 Independent boarding schools. In 2023, there were seven Independent boarding schools that only enrol Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Independent boarding schools serve students and families with limited or no capacity to contribute to the costs of their children's educational and boarding needs. Government funding, including ABSTUDY payments, plays a central role in funding these services. Between 2014 and 2023, there was an approximate 12 per cent growth in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders.

Monash University notes that there is a lack of research into what a culturally responsive pedagogy might look like in Australia. The main issue is the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in developing such pedagogies.

It also states there are challenges in identifying effective teaching frameworks that can be applied more broadly in both urban and rural areas.²¹

Hymba Yumba School and Nawarddeken Academy prioritise the embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and culture throughout their curriculum, relying on Elders, Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders to inform their pedagogy. These Case Studies show what can be achieved to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement and learning in both urban and remote settings.

REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE STUDENTS

There are 412 Independent schools located in regional and remote areas, enrolling 140,350 students and employing over 19,600 teachers and other staff. There are 42 Independent schools located in remote or very remote areas, with 33 located in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.



This equates to 30 per cent of all Independent schools being in regional areas, and three per cent in remote areas. Independent schools located in regional and remote areas tend to be smaller, and half of these schools have enrolments of fewer than 200 students.

Schools in regional and remote areas face significant challenges in the delivery of education due to geography and associated disadvantage. These range from the increased costs of staffing, transport, and ICT through to the delivery of the curriculum, the diversity of available subject choice and the provision of school visits to cultural and other institutions which would be taken for granted in metropolitan schools. Attracting and retaining teachers is a significant challenge for regional and remote schools. The socio-educational profile of schools in regional and remote areas is also on average lower than metropolitan schools.

For students from regional, rural and remote backgrounds, the Independent school sector is the largest provider of boarding in Australia, operating almost 65 per cent of all Australian boarding schools. Almost three-quarters of all Independent boarding students are from rural locations, with 15 per cent of Independent boarding school enrolments being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

²¹ [How ready are Australian schools to help First Nations children to succeed at school?](#), Monash Education



CASE STUDY LEARNING THROUGH CULTURE

HYMBA YUMBA, SPRINGFIELD, QLD



SUMMARY

Hymba Yumba Independent School is a First Nations school located in Springfield, a suburb of Ipswich west of Brisbane. The school's focus is on improving student outcomes in literacy and numeracy, attendance and post-school options through a strong focus on First Nations culture and community, student agency and wellbeing.

Hymba Yumba Independent School is a vibrant school educating close to 290 First Nations 'jarjums', or young people, from Preparatory to Year 12. The school is located in Springfield, on the traditional land of the Jagera, Yuggera, and Ugarapul people in South-East Queensland. The school recently transitioned to a CEO model with former Board member Karla Brady taking on the role.

Hymba Yumba has a strong focus on First Nations culture and community in all areas – from learning and curriculum through to student agency and wellbeing. Karla also has a strong focus on addressing the marginalisation still experienced by First Nations people in many urban areas.

The school aims to provide transformative First Nations education and is focused on improving student outcomes across a wide range of areas including literacy and numeracy, attendance, and Year 13 pathways. The school has a partnership with a Registered Training Organisation offering a Certificate III in Community Service that is available to parents. The school is also engaged in partnerships with other schools to help improve student outcomes in specific areas, including an online partnership focusing on maths with Jubilee Christian College.

While the school has space limitations, there are plans underway to add a new building for arts/dance/radio and digital technology. Going forward Hymba Yumba will prioritise STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) developing jarjum into blerds (black nerds).

COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND WELLBEING

Being an urban community, many of the First Nations families that attend Hymba Yumba have no connection to the land where the school is located. The importance of involving local Elders of the Country in every aspect of the school is made very clear through everyday activities that the local Elders, Aunties and Uncles contribute to and participate in at the school – from school lunches through to helping with students with language and skills development. This engagement also reminds students that while they are visitors, the local Elders give them permission to care for this Country.



Hymba Yumba prides itself on the weaving of cultural significance and knowledge within the whole school makeup. The emphasis at Hymba Yumba of engaging in all aspects of their education and life at school through the lens of culture assists students to discover and understand their own identities as well as solidly orienting them in their First Nations identities.

The school holds Bunji (meaning brother) and Tidda (meaning sister) groups to support, encourage and inspire the jarjum. The Bunji program provides an environment for male role models to support, encourage and provide cultural guidance. It captures traditional protocols and practices to enhance ownership and leadership qualities to the jarjum and the group. First Nations peoples' spirituality, culture and identity are woven throughout the Bunji program. The program provides high-level personal support and development and creates stronger readiness for school, through established Indigenous Education Workers and specialist Teacher Leads in Wellbeing, Culture and Learning Support.

The Tidda program is designed to inspire and motivate Year 7–12 girls to be resilient, independent leaders and have a strong sense of their identity as well as holistic health and wellbeing. The program aims to improve relationships between the Year 7–12 tiddas as well as encouraging older tiddas to be leaders for younger tiddas at school, at home and in the community.

Hymba Yumba strongly emphasises First Nations culture through artistic expression, with a particular focus on visual arts and cultural dance. The school buildings are a visual statement of the link to culture with murals painted by First Nations artists, and student and community art is displayed throughout the school.

Jarjum at Hymba Yumba are involved in cultural dance, enabling them to experience cultural practices that have been used for thousands of years, as they explore the stories, techniques and protocols surrounding traditional dance. Exploring the many different cultural dances of Australia enables the jarjum to gain appreciation and awareness of the large variety of cultural dances practised throughout Indigenous Australia.

Hymba Yumba jarjum have agency and voice through cultural protocols. Staff, students, parents and community members regularly meet in a yarning circle and use a message stick to discuss a wide range of issues. In the yarning circle everyone is equal and everyone is listened to without interruption. The circle provides a safe space for everyone to voice their concerns and share any challenges they are facing. All individuals have the opportunity to speak their minds and be heard.



THERAPY DOGS

Another unique aspect of Hymba Yumba are the three therapy dogs who move between the Junior and Senior School classes having a positive impact on learning and wellbeing. Each dog has a staff handler and senior students can train to become secondary handlers. The senior jarjum also have the opportunity to complete a Petbarn traineeship or a Certificate II in Animal Studies, creating career and pathway opportunities, including veterinary studies.

LEARNING SUPPORT AND CURRICULUM

Culture is also woven throughout the school curriculum and approaches to learning. Cultural lessons take place twice a week in all the classrooms. Last semester jarjum learnt about First Nations 'unsung heroes', such as footballer Jonathan Thurston, and then they were able to take their learning to utilise learning tools, like the Writers Toolbox, and write about what they had learnt.

In the previous semester the focus of the cultural lessons was on the '4 Respects' which underpin learning at Hymba Yumba – respect for myself, respect for family, respect for my community and respect for Country.

Both Karla and Head of Primary School, Jess Endean, are passionate about embedding First Nations knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum. The school begins with First Nations ways of being, knowing and doing and then 'flips' the Australian Curriculum to align firstly with First Nations perspectives.

“ It is the responsibility of every teacher to educate and immerse themselves in authentic First Nations stories. This enables us to contribute to a world where not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jarjum see themselves in our daily curriculum, but non-First Nations students see someone other than themselves as the hero and learn the value in understanding different perspectives. ‘Flipping’ the curriculum in this way to suit the jarjum can bring greater engagement for students as it focuses on what’s important for them, both in the Australian context and globally. ”

CASE STUDY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COUNTRY

NAWARDDEKEN ACADEMY, REMOTE WEST ARNHEM LAND, NT



SUMMARY

Nawarddeken Academy is located in the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area and was established at the request of local Indigenous Elders, who wanted their children to be able to access full-time education in their home communities. Nawarddeken Academy offers a unique model of bicultural, community-driven education, working with community to ensure that Bininj (Indigenous) and Balanda (non-Indigenous) learning is combined in a holistic, relevant way so that young people have the knowledge, skills and confidence to make good life choices and be able to walk in two worlds.

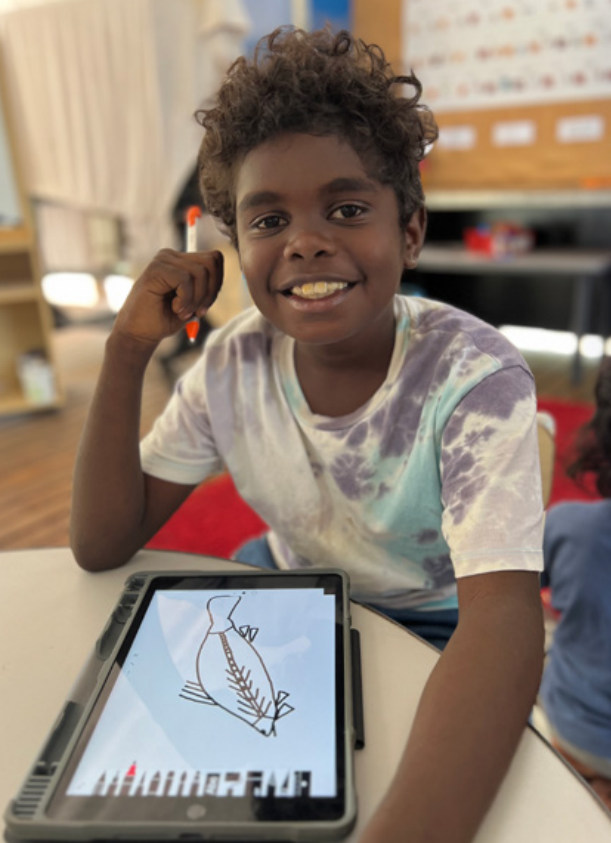
Elders of the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area had long held a vision of delivering a unique model of bi-cultural education in the Kuwarddewardde (Stone Country), on the West Arnhem Land plateau.

Starting in 2014, Elders and community members held conversations, consultations and workshops to design the vision, objectives and guiding principles for delivering bicultural education on Country. With the generous financial support of the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust, Nawarddeken Academy was established and commenced teaching at Kabulwarnamyo school under the auspices of Gunbalanya School. In 2019 Kabulwarnamyo obtained Independent school registration, with the Manmoyi and Mamadawerre schools receiving registration in late 2021.²²

In the early 2000s, Wardeken Land Management rangers established the world's first fire and carbon offsets program, the West Arnhem Land Fire Agreement and through this program, Nawarddeken Traditional Owners have been able to live and work on Country. The rangers were keen to have local schools for their children as the nearest schools were between 1.5 and three hours away in the dry season and inaccessible in the wet.

After decades of waiting, the innovative establishment of these three campuses has proven a game changer, as more families can return to Country and children can attend their local school, learning through a culturally created curriculum. Their key to success has been ongoing collaboration with Elders, Traditional Custodians, Indigenous knowledge holders and rangers to build a sustainable bicultural program. Attendance rates are relatively high and children are fully engaged.

22 Nawarddeken Academy Annual Report 2022 – nawarddeken.org.au/files/ugd/75b820_50a9f4ec85d-6452cac7fe63b4c8215e5.pdf



When in community, student 2023 attendance rates were Manmoyi 79 per cent, Mamadawerre 87 per cent and Kabulwarnamyo 92 per cent.

Nawarddeken Academy works with community to ensure that Biniŋj (Indigenous) and Balanda (non-Indigenous) learning is combined in a holistic, relevant way so that young people have the knowledge, skills and confidence to make good life choices and be able to walk in two worlds. This vision is supported by clear objectives:

- Support the social, cultural, emotional and physical wellbeing of every child.
- Promote intergenerational education where families and communities share learning experiences to conserve Indigenous knowledge, languages and landscapes.
- Empower young people to be strong and confident in Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.
- Preserve Nawarddeken languages and culture through bilingual and bicultural experiential learning.
- Develop clear pathways for young Indigenous people of West Arnhem Land that match their aspirations and the aspirations of their families.

BICULTURAL LEARNING

To fully engage students, Nawarddeken developed their own bicultural community-driven educational approach overlaying their seasonal curriculum (Kuwarddewarrde Malkno Curriculum), with Indigenous knowledge as the core, with the Australian Curriculum. Units of work are linked to high-quality literature and lessons are relevant to what students seek to learn about Country, as well as providing a broader world view. 'Both ways' learning and powerful cultural knowledge are passed on through local Indigenous knowledge.

Students across the year levels may work together for some lessons, and in others, there is more individualised and differentiated learning. Some students have only had access to full-time education in the last two years, since Nawarddeken opened, so many students are on Individualised Learning Plans and require significant support.

With streamed approaches for small group learning and highly individualised teaching, learning outcomes are constantly improving. Literacy (with a focus on the science of reading) and numeracy approaches are unified across the three campuses so that students who may spend time in one of the other schools feel comfortable with a consistent approach.

Student agency is highly valued and students can choose activities and share their learning. Secondary students are involved with the younger students and often lead or take a small group. Secondary students attend school and are supported with distance education, although in 2024 Nawarddeken Academy will be applying to be registered as a secondary school.

TECHNOLOGY

To ensure a strong technology focus, Nawarddeken Academy worked hard to gain access to satellites, hardware and the internet so students can access global knowledge and connect to the world. Students use technology to collect local environmental data and convert that data into presentations and graphs.

Each student has their own iPad. When participating in multi-day bush walks, they are able to record sacred sites, take digital photos of rock paintings and record locations and observations. iPad apps are used as learning tools and then integrated with on-Country learning, the seasonal calendar curriculum and the Australian Curriculum.

“There are not many challenging behaviours here. It is a hub of community and learning. No western way of learning here. Everyone’s knowledge is valued, kids too. The Elders help sort out any issues and we all work together.”

Local educator

STAFF

Education staff at all three campuses are committed and flexible, and adapt to a remote environment where for six months of the year, roads are impassable. Bringing in a casual teacher is no mean feat as it requires creative planning, charter flights and complicated logistics. Nawarddeken Academy values staff wellbeing as retention is important for students to form trusting relationships. The school has also developed several wellbeing strategies valued by staff across all schools.

The strong reciprocal relationship between community and school ensures Indigenous knowledge holders can share their knowledge of Country to pass on to younger generations.

The schools have become important players in their socio-economic infrastructure, providing employment and purpose, linked to knowledge and culture. This innovative model is so successful that neighbouring Indigenous Protected Areas are seeking help from the Nawarddeken Academy Board to run similar schools in their communities. The Homeland School Company has been created through philanthropic funding and together with Nawarddeken Academy will support more community driven and designed bicultural schools to grow in remote areas.



CASE STUDY

WELLBEING, SERVICE AND COMMUNITY

LAUNCESTON GRAMMAR, LAUNCESTON, TAS



SUMMARY

Launceston Grammar is an Anglican co-educational day and boarding school located in Launceston, northern Tasmania. The school has a long history of and commitment to service to the community. Launceston Grammar collects wellbeing data across the school and has identified five drivers of wellbeing which are used for the whole organisation. The school is an illustration of how a focus on whole-school wellbeing can improve the attraction and retention of staff and improve student outcomes.

Launceston Grammar is the oldest continuous day and boarding school in Australia. It is steeped in history and tradition and strongly values community, both inside and outside the school gates.

Launceston Grammar currently enrolls more than 720 students from Prep to Year 12 over two campuses.

Principal Dale Bennett commenced at the school in 2023. He was appointed after a period of significant change and has brought a strong focus on building community, staff and student wellbeing, developing the natural strengths of the school.

Being 178 years old, the school has a rich history. School alumni include significant leaders in civic and business life in Australia and internationally. Dale commented that many school alumni are 'quietly confident and unassuming' and attributed this to the school's longstanding culture of service and community commitment.

Launceston Grammar offers a balanced program as it is just as focused on the arts, outdoor education, sport and technology as they are on academic achievement. Students have many opportunities to shine and be leaders in a variety of programs. This has evolved into a supportive culture where students see each other's strengths and challenges and appreciate each other's talents. Students are proud of their service culture and senior students are committed to providing a daily breakfast program for local students experiencing disadvantage. In the primary school, Year 3 primary students visit local nursing homes and others might fundraise for a charity they are passionate about.

WELLBEING

Launceston Grammar illustrates how a focus on service, community and a whole-school wellbeing approach can improve the attraction and retention of staff. Student voice has been identified as an important platform to not only improve wellbeing but also improve student learning outcomes, providing a sense of belonging, purpose and engagement.

The success of wellbeing is dependent upon staff engagement and ownership of the culture. Their culture journey commenced in June 2022. The leadership team analysed staff feedback and research data and decided upon explicit and immediate actions the school could take.



“ Art is calming and relaxing and takes me into a different world of imagination.

Gabbi, Year 6

Altruistic service promotes positive social engagement and increases positive mental health, building capacity in all Pillars.

Reverend Matthew Pickering, [School Chaplain](#)

”

Personal notes of appreciation, giving staff permission and an expectation to switch off from emails from Friday afternoon to Monday morning, no meetings on Fridays after 3pm, morning teas, authentic staff voice and agency were just a few ways that staff felt valued, and the survey data showed a remarkable improvement in staff wellbeing over a short period of time.

Holistic development is the cornerstone of the school's approach, linked strongly to service, nurturing healthy relationships and valuing a positive strengths culture. Wellbeing data is collected at regular intervals across the school with carefully selected student survey programs. During 2023, the school explored student wellbeing through five pillars that encompass Academic, Spiritual, Psychological, Social Emotional and Physical domains. A newly appointed Director of Student Wellbeing is leading the ongoing implementation of the program based on the data across both the senior and junior campuses, working with staff to ensure that policy, practice and processes are scrutinised and reflect the core wellbeing drivers.

Launceston Grammar's drivers of wellbeing are Purpose, Engagement, Connectiveness, Agency and Perspective. These universal drivers are used for the whole organisation to explore how day-to-day activity, be it lesson plan design, recruitment processes, the staff code of conduct or even the whole school budget planning approach, reflect a strong commitment to whole community wellbeing.

STUDENT VOICE

Survey data showed what students value most about their school is 'a sense of community and belonging'. When asked what type of person they want to be, many responded they want to be kind to others. The school highly values sport and offers as many sports as possible, not just traditional team sports, although team sports are important. As some students prefer individual sports, a mountain bike track project was developed from a student-led initiative, championed with the support of the principal and the community. Students saw the project through from conception to completion resulting in a vibrant mountain biking cohort competing locally and nationally.



Sport ties in strongly with the five pillars of wellbeing. A specialist high performance mentor works with students on strength and conditioning, combined with health, nutrition and diet sessions with experts in the field. The Physical Pillar is just as important as the Academic Pillar, as sport gives students a chance to take calculated risks, to fail and to succeed. The principal is a firm believer in experiential learning and that 'wellbeing cannot be taught from a text, it must be a way of being'. He emphasised the unique and profound learning experiences gained from Outdoor Education programs in the Tasmanian wilderness.

ART AND FAITH

Artistic expression is also encompassed in the five pillars model. Head of House, Rachel Pickering, is combining the school's framework with art and faith, blending spiritual wellbeing in Christian studies, looking at self, relationships and transformation through art. Art begins in the early primary years where it is a vehicle for storytelling and empathy, connection and compassion. Primary Visual Arts teacher Martine Cook asks her students, 'What is an Artist?' From their responses she sees young children have an innate understanding that making and creating art means you can be yourself, experience beauty, have fun and feel free and that art makes you feel positive and provokes wonder, curiosity and collaboration.

While Launceston Grammar is an Anglican school, it accepts students of all faiths, backgrounds and abilities and has a diverse student population. Students attend chapel once a week and study comparative religion. This openness and acceptance has remained constant throughout the school's history. The focus on character development and strong supportive community provides the foundation to nurture, challenge and inspire confident, resilient young people and to continually improve learning outcomes for whole-of-life success. Everyone is known; everyone is accepted. Teachers respect their students, care for them, celebrate their voice and agency and enable them to do what they need to do to be successful learners.

Their wellbeing focus aligns with the curriculum and the school's commitment to service. It is not an add-on but deeply embedded and aligned with the school's purpose. What happens when you deeply integrate wellbeing into a school? You become more than a set of academic outcomes; you become a community that exists to support young people so they may positively shape the lives of others.

“ An Artist is a risk taker because they try new things even though they don't know what will happen. ”

Mia, Year 2

”





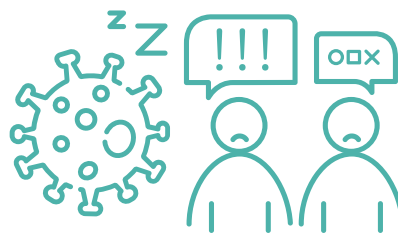
PRIORITY AREA 2: WELLBEING

WELLBEING AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Research shows that the complexity and incidence of poor mental health is increasing and the consequences are extremely concerning. Poor student wellbeing affects school attendance, learning and academic outcomes.²³

Student wellbeing is not distributed equally. Psychological disorder is more likely if a student:

- lives in an outer regional area
- lives in a low-income household
- self-identifies as gender non-binary
- is female (adolescent girls in particular are more likely to experience anxiety than boys or other ages) or
- is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



Other significant stressors may include academic pressure, bullying, the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of sleep, amount of time spent online and lack of physical activity.²⁴

²³ [Students and Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health: Independent Schools Australia 2022](#), p 4

²⁴ [Students and Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health: Independent Schools Australia 2022](#), p 12

Students with a mental illness can lag academically behind their peers, with the gap increasing over time. Children with a mental disorder have progressively higher rates of absenteeism over the duration of their schooling.

In 2022, about 11 per cent of children aged 12 to 17 reported deliberately harming themselves and about 7.5 per cent reported seriously considering suicide in the previous 12 months.²⁵

Children aged 12 to 17 in the previous 12 months

11% Deliberately harmed themselves



7.4% Seriously considered suicide



Young people are increasingly disengaging from school education. One indicator of disengagement is attendance levels – that is the percentage of students who attend at least 90 per cent of the time.

A 2023 study showed that by Year 10, around 40 per cent of young people were regularly missing school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This increased to almost 60 per cent during COVID-19.²⁶

Year 10 students

40% of students regularly missing school pre-COVID-19



60% of students regularly missing school during COVID-19



Studies show wellbeing contributes to engagement and drives student outcomes. Wellbeing programs can support and accelerate students' learning. Choosing the right wellbeing program and measuring its impact and effectiveness are important components of a whole-school community approach to wellbeing.²⁷

Schools are ideal places for children to seek support, and Independent schools prioritise wellbeing, safety and positive relationships. The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework²⁸ describes Australian schools as 'learning communities that promote students' wellbeing, safety and positive relationships so that students can reach their full potential'. Independent schools are committed to this concept.

The state and territory AISs also work with their member schools to develop and implement programs to assess and support student wellbeing. Their programs emphasise the importance of a whole-of-school approach to student wellbeing and promote the latest evidence-based wellbeing strategies and interventions.

Several Case Studies are examples of this collaboration. Independent schools recognise the importance of strong teacher workforce support and development.

As the wellbeing of school staff is closely linked with the wellbeing of students, schools are most effective at caring for students when staff themselves feel supported and well-equipped.

Independent schools have implemented a range of staff and student wellbeing programs ranging from whole-school approaches to one-to-one intervention for the most vulnerable students. These programs focus on the holistic development of students particularly in relation to wellbeing and promoting student agency and positive self-esteem, strategies to promote safe and inclusive school environments and culturally appropriate curriculum and environment.

25 [Students and Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health: Independent Schools Australia 2022](#), p 10

26 Learning Beyond Limits, Insights and learnings from visionary schools and communities working toward a fit-for-purpose learning system; Learning Creates Australia 2023, p 7

27 [Spotlight - Wellbeing in Australian Schools, AITSL 2022](#)

28 [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, Student Wellbeing Hub](#)

CASE STUDY THE PERSONAL APPROACH

BAYVIEW COLLEGE, PORTLAND, VIC



SUMMARY

Bayview College is located in Portland, a low socio-economic area in Western Victoria. The College has approached improving outcomes and wellbeing by developing its own wellbeing program which is aligned with personalised learning and complements their academic and co-curricular programs. The College uses personalised learning to meet individual needs and to track progress and achievement utilising teacher mentors.

Bayview College's vision, 'To Believe, To Think, To Achieve, is proudly displayed in its main foyer and reflected in all teaching and learning programs, initiatives and organisational structures.

Located in Portland, a low socio-economic area, Bayview (an Ecumenical Christian College) is committed to its community, and offers a highly inclusive environment where all students are welcomed.

Bayview College educates more than 280 students from Years 7 to 12, embracing diversity and valuing individual differences. Bayview College's rich educational programs provide a strong foundation for commitment to service and social justice. Students and staff actively participate in and contribute to local, state, national and global issues.

Principal Michelle Kearney has been leading the College for 12 years and her stable leadership, vision for wellbeing and commitment to personalised learning has been unwavering. The College developed its own wellbeing program upon the imagery and meaning of their school crest,²⁹ an encompassing **Circle, with Wave, Anchor and Horizon** (median line). The wellbeing curriculum is further enhanced with the support of Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) and the Wayfinder³⁰ program – a social emotional learning curriculum developed by Stanford University's Institute of Design using the latest adolescent research. The curriculum aims to foster personal development and create a sense of belonging and community, perfectly aligning to the College's vision. ISV provides guidance and support and collates data on the Wayfinder program's success each year.

29 Bayview Crest – [Bayview Crest, Bayview College](#)

30 Wayfinder program – [Wayfinder, Independent Schools Victoria](#)



“ The school is doing something right as the students are amazing. It is the best school I have ever taught at. ”

Casual teacher, [new to the College](#)

WELLBEING ALIGNED WITH VISION

The wellbeing program for each year is designed to complement and support the academic and co-curricular program, based on respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each individual, allowing each student to thrive.

In Year 7 students participate in the *Wave* program as they are ‘riding the wave’ of transition from primary school to secondary school. The Year 7 wellbeing curriculum strengthens social emotional development based on values such as establishing good habits and learning how to resolve conflict. Students form connections to local Indigenous people and the land. Working in small groups, they create a passion project, presenting their product, outcomes and findings to the community.

The *Anchor* program is the Year 8 wellbeing program, providing opportunities for students to develop teamwork skills and a social consciousness as they participate in the development and delivery of projects within the broader community. Year 8 students are introduced to mental health first aid which is followed up in Year 10, and also participate in cyber safety and consent lessons. A strong focus on community supports their connection to school and each other. Students are encouraged to go beyond their comfort zone, set goals for the year and build positive social relationships. The College encourages and supports student voice and participation.

This was evident when Year 8 students pitched a proposal to the Principal to re-plant gardens and re-sand and re-paint their outdoor recreational tables and science room tables. As students had ownership of these activities, they were highly engaged and proud of their achievements.

The Year 9 *Circle* program is taught in conjunction with the Wayfinder program. Although the Wayfinder program is an external resource, Bayview have been able to contextualise it specifically to their school needs and integrate into their highly successful wellbeing program and curriculum. Bayview is now in their fourth year of the ISV supported Wayfinder program and are looking to extend it across all years.

The *Circle* program supports Year 9 students to make connections to learning, to see that learning is lifelong and has purpose. Students are required to work in teams to deal with real-world problems, as they develop a stronger sense of self-worth and an understanding of their capacity to contribute positively to society, navigate challenges and build resilience.

In Year 10, the *Horizon* program looks to the future, supporting work experience and career education. Students participate in an aptitude and career test and analyse their own results which factors into work experience decisions. Students learn how to write their own resume and employment cover letters and members of the local business community participate in mock interviews with students, providing them with real-world experience.



“

It's not about the ATAR, it's about how we create human beings to go out into the world and have a positive impact.

Rhonda Browne, *Director of Community*

”

The College has developed a close relationship with the Local Learning Employment Network which supports students with industry tours, work placement and work experience. Mental health first aid is also a component of the Year 10 *Horizon* program.

Following the completion of the four stages of Bayview's wellbeing program, *Wave*, *Anchor*, *Circle* and *Horizon*, senior students have developed strong social emotional skills, resilience and self-confidence. Bayview continues to provide further opportunities for ongoing personal development through senior camps and other school-based activities.

WELLBEING ALIGNED WITH PERSONALISED LEARNING

The College is committed to a personalised approach to learning. Every student from Year 8 has an online personalised learning plan to meet their individual needs and track progress of achievement in school and in the community. Each student has a teacher mentor and regularly meets with them to set goals; discuss their plan, challenges and aspirations;

and celebrate achievements. Every student works at their own level as the College has a staged, not aged educational approach.

Electives in Years 8, 9 and 10 are multi-aged, which provides opportunities for peer modelling and coaching. This approach has significantly improved social relationships and decreased disruptive behaviours. Year 10 students seeking extension can work at Year 11 level in selected subjects and creative units of work provide subject integration and opportunities to extend lessons into the community and local environment.

In 2024 Bayview will continue to upskill all staff in delivering the wellbeing program and introduce a whole-school values-based program. In mentor classes, students will be taught how to create their own Action Management Plan to further develop positive wellbeing. Having a long-term vision, stable leadership and strong staff and student voice has enabled Bayview to develop innovative programs aligned to their vision and context, to support every student to reach their potential.



CASE STUDY FEELING VALUED, FEELING SEEN

TREETOPS MONTESSORI SCHOOL, DARLINGTON, WA



SUMMARY

Treetops is a Montessori school located in Darlington in the hills east of Perth. The wellbeing of staff and students is a key focus, and the school has participated in the Association of Independent Schools WA (AISWA) Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools Pilot Project to embed a greater strategic focus on wellbeing. Recognising that there is always scope for improvement, and it is important not to become complacent, Treetops has utilised the 'Wellbeing Tree' method to develop their wellbeing plan and set priorities for the future.

Treetops Montessori School blends the Western Australian Curriculum with Montessori and International Baccalaureate philosophies.

Treetops prioritises a highly individualised learning focus for over 170 students from early childhood through to Year 12 in a non-comparative and non-competitive educational setting. The school's overarching commitment to wellbeing combined with a holistic, inclusive and student-centred educational environment is evident in its flexible approach to student needs.

ISA's visit to Treetops highlighted the key role that Principal Stuart Harris plays in the school's vision to build a strong Treetops community. The many opportunities to converse with staff and students provided a real sense of the school's culture and how wellbeing is embedded across the community.

INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH

Treetops offers an individualised inquiry-based model of learning, combined with direct instruction. The school's individualised approach is prioritised by small class sizes, teaching and learning support, a stimulating and engaging learning environment and a student-centred approach to meet the needs and abilities of each child. Activities are planned and targeted to provide support or extension to students as required. Timothy, Year 8, stated that the small classes at Treetops means that teachers really know every student and can help each student learn, and students feel comfortable asking for help. He also said that it was easy to make friends, 'they don't judge you, you can be yourself'.

A pro-social approach commences in the early years and sets the school's culture and tone. Students are extremely creative, use their time wisely and support peers. Across the school, warm relationships and deep respect between staff and students are highly visible and staff reported that Treetops experiences very few student behaviour issues as positive connection, communication and relationships form a strong foundation.



STUDENT AND STAFF AGENCY

Several students volunteered to be interviewed as part of ISA's Case Study. Will, Year 12, stated that he commenced at Treetops in Year 8 as he had been having a hard time at his previous school and had missed many classes. Will stated that 'at Treetops the teachers stuck by me and gave me many chances, even when I was doing silly stuff and now I am doing really well'. Samantha, Year 11, commented that at Treetops you can find your identity, be who you want to be and receive the support you need. Rhiani, Year 9, stated that teachers support student learning and will provide extra time if needed.

Teachers provide freedom to students combined with trust and responsibility. Student voice is valued and many opportunities are provided for students to have a say in school projects and events. For example, Year 1 and 2 students gave input into the new playground design.

Staff also had many positive things to say about their school community. ISA spoke to administration staff, teacher aides, specialist teachers, teachers and the leadership team and the message came through strongly that all staff felt respected, heard, valued, seen and treated as individuals. Staff retention is high as wellbeing and agency is embedded, combined with a strong sense of belonging and care.

WELLBEING

The school's natural environment, located within the trees, provides a sense of calm. Community wellbeing has always been a high priority for Treetops. In 2023 the school applied to join AISWA's Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools Pilot Project (Project)³¹ for a greater strategic focus on wellbeing. Out of 45 school applications, only ten schools could be selected and Treetops were fortunate to be accepted into the Project.

AISWA provided funding and expertise as part of the Project and Treetops appointed a member of their leadership team as a Wellbeing Coordinator one day a week to collaborate with the other Independent schools involved. With the main aim of the Project being systemic improvement in whole-school wellbeing designed around each individual school context, regular meetings between AISWA and school-based staff were organised to build the skills and knowledge of Wellbeing Coordinators and to share understandings between schools.

AISWA's evidence-based organisational tool referred to as the 'Wellbeing Tree'³² is a method of capturing wellbeing initiatives and practices and linking these to the vision and mission of the school. From their own Wellbeing Tree, Treetops created a school wellbeing plan and set priorities for the future. As part of this process staff completed a school readiness survey and considered collaborative ideas, finding that leadership and culture were wellbeing strengths.

31 [Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools Pilot Project \(2024–2025\). Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia](#)

32 Kirkham, J. (2023) – Envisaging a whole-school approach to wellbeing: The 'wellbeing tree'. Education Research and Perspectives, 50, pp 1–35, www.erjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ERP50_Jane_Kirkham-1.pdf

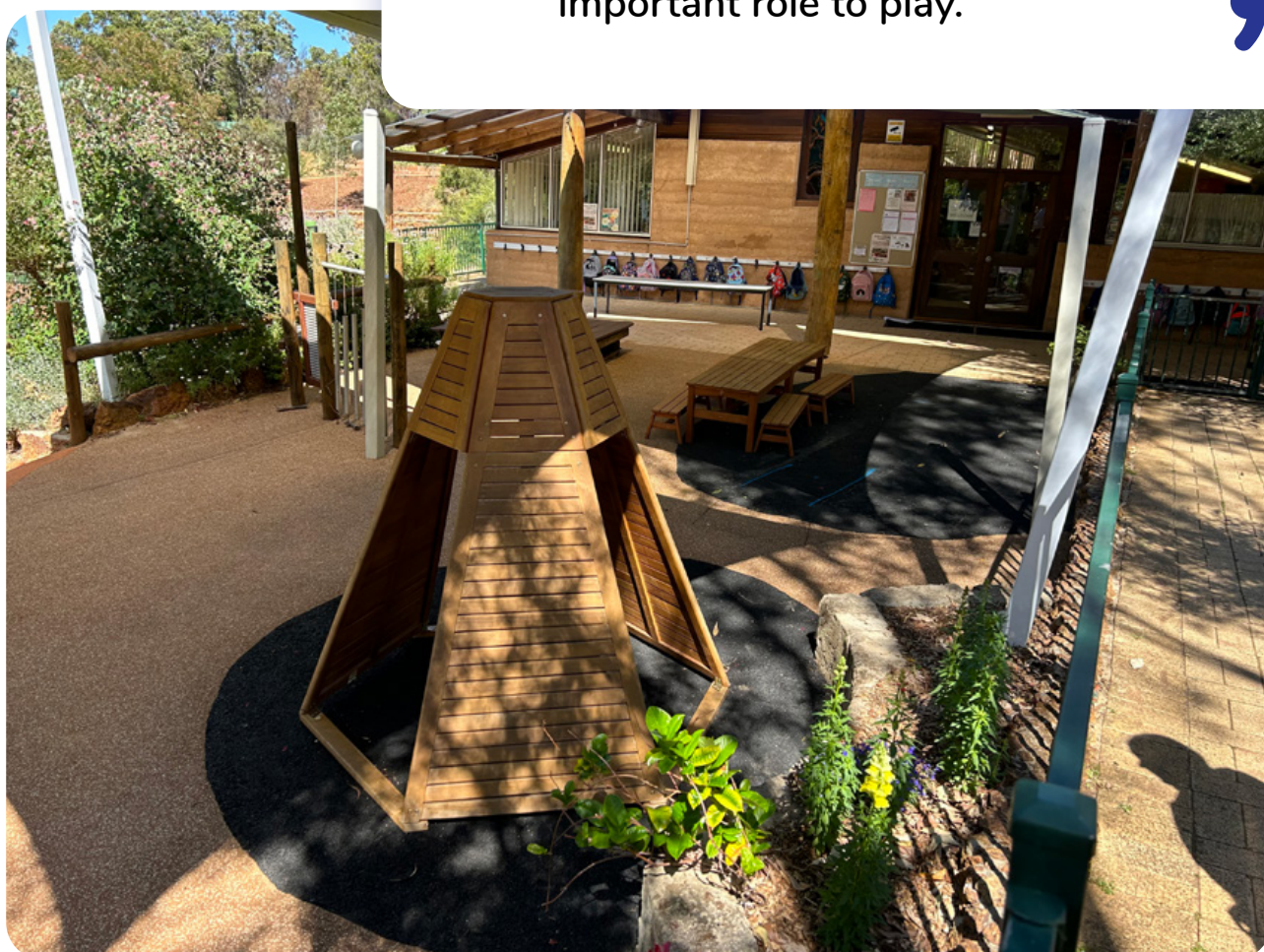


They agreed to focus on improving student voice and community wellbeing. Treetops staff also developed their own definition of school wellbeing, demonstrating staff ownership and investment in school improvement.

In addition to using an AISWA evaluation tool to assess Social and Emotional Learning programs created especially for the Project, Treetops decided to adopt The Resilience Project³³ for 2024 and onwards as this program links strongly to family and community and is their identified area for improvement. Participation in the AISWA Project has facilitated school improvement in wellbeing approaches, making these both visible and achievable.

The Treetops Case Study shows that even when school wellbeing is thriving, there is always room for improvement and no room for complacency. AISWA's Project demonstrates the value of schools working together and the importance of school context, as opposed to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to wellbeing in schools. Although the ten schools involved in the AISWA Project used the Wellbeing Tree tool as a starting point, each school adapted it to suit their own context and wellbeing goals based on a systematic approach to school needs and evidence-informed best practice.

“ Treetops is a village, a welcoming community and everyone has an important role to play. ”



33 The Resilience Project – theresilienceproject.com.au



PRIORITY AREA 3: WORKFORCE

WORKFORCE AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Independent schools employ a workforce of 123,000. There are 61,000 teachers, representing more than 19 per cent of all teachers nationwide.

Australia faces a teacher supply and retention crisis, affecting all schools across all three sectors, especially in regional and remote areas. This is due to a combination of factors including:

- student teachers not completing their degrees
- declining numbers of new graduates
- early career teachers leaving the profession early
- increasing demand from a growing student population
- an aging school workforce.



The Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel 2023, *Strong beginnings*,³⁴ noted that one in five beginning teachers leave within the first three years of entering the teaching profession and that preparing teachers better for the classroom will improve teacher retention.

³⁴ [Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel](#), Department of Education, Australian Government



Collaboration between sectors and jurisdictions is crucial to addressing workforce challenges, including the piloting and implementation of new initiatives.

Many Independent schools, like their Catholic and government counterparts, are struggling to source, recruit and retain teachers with the skill sets and experience required. Middle and senior leadership positions are also extremely difficult to fill. The 412 Independent schools and boarding schools in regional and remote areas are particularly affected by workforce shortages, and consistently report few or no applicants for teaching and administrative positions and a high staff turnover.

The turnover of principals across the sector and the number retiring is a significant workforce issue. In the absence of systemic support many Independent school leaders have additional roles and responsibilities, and report directly to their governing body on all aspects of school operations, governance risk and strategy. Whilst there are many programs being offered by AISs and the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) to encourage, support and mentor new leaders, there are also many school leaders close to retirement age and attracting new leaders is an urgent priority.

The Review Report notes the work that is underway to address current issues but concludes that there is more that governments and school systems can do to grow and support the teaching workforce. The Panel found that the workload and expectations of teachers and school leaders has grown over time, affected by the changing economic, cultural and demographic conditions that are transforming every profession. Such demands, including change and reform, are taking a toll on the teaching workforce and undermining efforts to attract new entrants and retain those with experience, including principals.³⁵

Teaching is a stressful occupation, and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the pressure on teachers and school leaders. With the current workforce shortages, the pressures on schools have not abated. Various data sources, including the Australian Teacher Workforce Data, reveal a shifting workforce landscape.

Teachers are no longer following traditional linear career paths. Mid-career changes, declines in teacher education enrolment, early departures, and more educators transitioning into leadership roles are becoming more common.³⁶

The Independent school sector is actively engaged in identifying and promoting evidence-based strategies and initiatives to address teacher workload, attraction and retention, particularly in regional and remote areas. Independent schools and AISs are engaged in a range of individual and collective initiatives and partnerships to address this cross sectoral, national workforce crisis.

For example, the AIS NSW Teaching School Hubs program³⁷ is part of the Growing and Nurturing Educators initiative, a three-year program to develop innovative, evidence-based projects to grow and nurture Independent school educators.³⁸ The Teaching School Hubs program provides an immersive experience for Initial Teacher Education students as they undertake a Bachelor or Master's degree, providing practical experience to education trainees in Independent schools.

The primary objective of this program is to attract teacher education trainees to the Independent sector by placing them in Hub schools with dedicated, trained mentors, providing trainees with an opportunity to develop confidence and feel part of a school community. For a full school year, trainees are provided with a holistic teaching and learning experience in a highly supportive environment, in addition to their professional experience placements. The program emphasises empathy, mentorship and professionalism and contributes to educator growth and retention, especially in regional, remote and diverse school settings.

Generative AI offers the opportunities to assist in teacher workload reduction. For example Hillbrook Anglican School is exploring generative AI opportunities that will benefit students and teachers. It is developing AI approaches to reduce teacher workload and investigating the use of AI tools to support personalised learning for students to provide targeted, real-time feedback.

35 Improving Outcomes for All: Australian Government Summary Report of the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, 2023 pp 16–17

36 Key metrics dashboard, www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data

37 AISNSW Teaching School Hubs Program, www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/research-and-data-in-schools/the-evidence-institute/growing-and-nurturing-educators/teaching-school-hubs

38 Growing and Nurturing Educators. The Association of Independent Schools

CASE STUDY

GROWING AND NURTURING TEACHERS

SHEARWATER, THE MULLUMBIMBY STEINER SCHOOL, NSW



SUMMARY

Shearwater, The Mullumbimby Steiner School in the Byron Bay hinterland in northern NSW, is using a new approach to attract teacher education students interested in the Steiner education philosophy. The school is a participant in AISNSW's Teaching School Hubs program, an alternative model of teacher training that provides trainee teachers with a paid immersive, mentored school-based experience.

Shearwater, The Mullumbimby Steiner School, is a 52-acre campus bordered by a creek and wildlife corridors. The school provides daily opportunities for place-based learning, fostering imagination and creativity with a strong emphasis on student agency. Shearwater offers Steiner education from 12 months (Playgroup) through to Year 12 for 670 students.

TEACHING SCHOOL HUBS PROGRAM

The Steiner philosophy requires a pedagogical approach that is well understood by teachers and with the current national workforce shortage, then Head of School James Goodlet, was finding it increasingly difficult to attract experienced Steiner teachers. When James heard about the AISNSW's newly established Teaching School Hubs program at the end of 2022, he nominated Shearwater to join.

The Teaching School Hubs program is an alternative model of teacher training that provides Initial Teacher Education students (trainees) with a paid immersive school-based experience, enabling them to gain an understanding of what it means to be a teacher in the Independent sector. The program³⁹ is specifically tailored to meet the diverse recruitment needs of Independent schools and improve teacher retention.

James has always been passionate about developing leadership capacity in others and was excited when several Shearwater teachers volunteered to be part of the AISNSW mentor program, an essential component of the Teaching School Hubs program. Two trainees, Bodi Smith and Georgia Mossop, were accepted and they became part of the inaugural program at Shearwater.

TRAINEES

Bodi was already employed as a teacher assistant at the school and in 2023 was about to start his final year of study. He was keen to be part of the Teaching School Hubs program as it meant he could be mentored by an experienced teacher and spend one day per week in the classroom, learning on the job. As Bodi was going to graduate that year he wanted to learn more about Steiner education as he knew he wanted to explore Steiner education further and hopefully seek employment in a Steiner school.

39 AISNSW Teaching School Hubs Program, www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/research-and-data-in-schools/the-evidence-institute/growing-and-nurturing-educators/teaching-school-hubs



Georgia was in her second year of study. She wanted to improve her confidence and saw the Teaching School Hubs program as an excellent opportunity to deepen her studies, to ask questions and have more teaching practice beyond the usual set practicum weeks. Georgia was also interested in learning more about Steiner education.

Bodi and Georgia were quickly accepted by the Shearwater community and felt a sense of belonging. They valued the opportunity to form positive relationships with students, families and staff and be part of the school's culture. When on practicums in other schools they reported they felt more pressure, did not feel a sense of belonging or did not feel safe to ask 'silly' questions, whereas through the Teaching School Hubs program, they had the opportunity to take risks and try new things, building confidence and capacity in their teaching.

As part of the Teaching School Hubs program both trainees were paid as a teacher, one day per week for the entire year, which meant less time spent trying to find other paid work and more time focused on their education degree and gaining practical experience, every week.

MENTORS

Kat Barwick, the program coordinator and trained mentor, highly values the Teaching School Hubs program's impact and its focus on trainee self-reflection. She noted the importance of carefully pairing mentor with trainee for greatest success. The Shearwater mentors completed both the AISNSW mentoring program and a Steiner-based mentoring program, so were well prepared to ensure that Bodi and Georgia were supported, were valued and had a voice in how their traineeship was progressing.

INNOVATION MEETS NEEDS

Recruiting teachers with Steiner education experience is always challenging, even more so when there is a national teacher shortage, therefore the Teaching School Hubs program is a positive step towards attracting new teachers to the Steiner philosophy. The flexibility of the Teaching School Hubs program means it is able to accommodate individual school needs and context, create robust teacher education experiences, motivate and inspire staff and build leadership capacity.

“

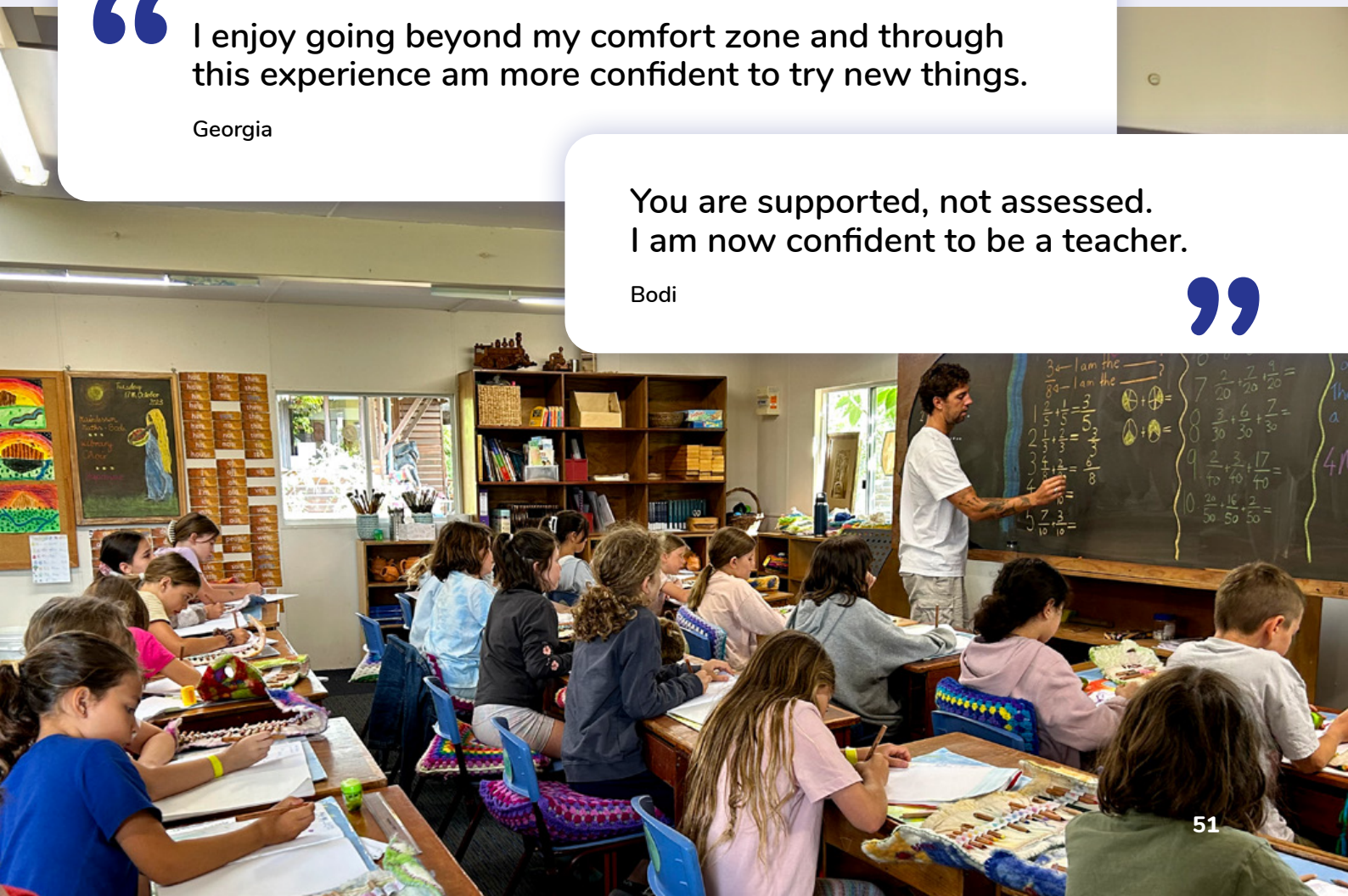
I enjoy going beyond my comfort zone and through this experience am more confident to try new things.

Georgia

You are supported, not assessed.
I am now confident to be a teacher.

Bodi

”



Students benefit as they have two teachers in the room one day per week, allowing more opportunities for personalised learning.

Trainees Bodi and Georgia have greatly valued the Teaching School Hubs program and see it as a stepping-stone to build greater confidence and success as a graduate teacher. They reported the program had fostered and guided self-reflection, supported by a collaborative, professional mentor relationship.

Shearwater's leadership team and the 2023 trainees agreed the program has substantially enhanced the teacher training experience, improved personalised student learning, and developed deep connections between trainees and students, with trainees developing a greater understanding of students with diverse needs.

When Bodi received his teacher registration in term 4, 2023, an opportunity arose when a current Shearwater teacher wanted to reduce their teaching load and he was offered a job-share teaching role. This has proven sustainable and beneficial for both Bodi and the school, with minimal disruption and impact for all concerned. Georgia will continue with her one day per week as a trainee at Shearwater in 2024 with two additional trainees commencing in the new year.

The Teaching School Hubs program has strengthened Shearwater's connection with universities, an important avenue to introduce Steiner education to initial teacher education students. Shearwater will continue with the program and engage three trainees in 2024 in partnership with AISNSW, University of New England and Charles Sturt University. At the time of ISA's visit they had 13 applications!

“ Part of the success is that Georgia is coming in to learn to be a teacher, not just be the assistant ... it is different.

Kat Barwick, [Mentor](#)

The right schools joined the program for the right reasons and they chose the right people. It is a true partnership between AISNSW, the schools and universities.

Tiffany Roos, [Director, The Evidence Institute – AISNSW](#)

”



CASE STUDY

LEARNING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

HILLBROOK ANGLICAN SCHOOL, ENOGGERA, QLD



SUMMARY

Hillbrook Anglican School, located in Enoggera, Brisbane, has a strong focus on digital education and is implementing effective strategies to incorporate generative AI as a platform for innovation. Hillbrook's emphasis on teacher collaboration and support both within the school and across a wider network of schools is driving innovation in digital education.

Hillbrook Anglican School has experienced significant growth over the last five years and is at capacity in 2024 with 900 students from Years 7 to 12. As an Independent school Hillbrook has the autonomy to plan according to the needs of the Hillbrook community and adapt to change as needed. Hillbrook has an open, inclusive and collaborative environment that fosters inquiry, innovation and creativity.

Hillbrook has always had a strong focus on digital education and a personalised student approach and has made great headway in the digital education landscape. Digital literacy and technological intelligence across the school support the incorporation of generative AI as a platform for innovation.

Trust is developed between the school and parent community on the implementation of generative AI educational practice, ethical considerations, challenges and opportunities with regular communication and relevant information for each year level.

Over the past six years, Miriam Scott, Head of Digital Education, has led the development of the school's Digital Access Pass,⁴⁰ a resource influenced by student input, designed to connect and provide students with the knowledge and ethical mindset to approach generative AI with integrity and safety.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers discuss privacy and data content and ensure no identifiable information is provided to generative AI tools. Miriam has been delivering staff workshops to inform teachers how generative AI can be implemented to save time and reduce workload. Hillbrook teachers do not use generative AI to create lesson plans as this is where they use their creativity and professional expertise. Instead they are exploring ways in which generative AI can reduce time spent on administrative and time-consuming repetitive tasks, not replacing teaching practices but increasing time teachers can spend to better support student learning.

UPSKILLING STAFF AND STUDENTS

Both teachers and students have been taught how to effectively use prompts and how to ask generative AI tools the right question for the greatest result and are now confident to generate their own specific prompts. Hillbrook initially established example banks for teachers and students and created online spaces where teachers could share resources, however now they are more focused on using generative AI with the greatest effect. Hillbrook's AI focus group is the result of a collaborative effort between students and teachers. This presents a great opportunity for teachers and students to work together and learn from each other.

The school also provides a series of lessons to students addressing expectations about the ethical use of generative AI as in this example for Year 12 students: youtu.be/P4givEF6BT0.

Hillbrook teachers formed an action research team focused on generative AI, comprising expertise from various subject areas. Together they explored different approaches, including adjustments to assessment and curriculum and providing input into the school's strategic direction.

40 Digital Access Pass – digitalaccesspass.com.au

Hillbrook continues to be proactive in supporting other schools, sharing what it has learnt on their generative AI journey, and providing guidance to those seeking advice. The ever-evolving nature of the digital technology landscape necessitates continuous evaluation and adaptation, therefore teachers and students require ongoing guidance and support to effectively implement generative AI, understanding what is permissible and what is not.

COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

In term 3 2023, Miriam created a network of non-government schools across Queensland, the Qld Network of Emerging Technology (QLDNET). There are currently 32 schools across Queensland, and teachers in QLDNET meet each term to share practice, collaborate, lead practice in generative AI, and develop resources to share with schools without digital technology specialists. QLDNET is not owned by any school and their charter is 'teachers supporting teachers and schools supporting schools'.

QLDNET formed its own group using Microsoft Teams, where all members have the opportunity to take the lead to share their AI practice to support others. QLDNET sees many opportunities for generative AI to support students with personalised learning with access to tutors for any subject or learning need. However it is about more than just generative AI, as digital technology such as the metaverse continues to evolve.

Miriam is working with the AISNSW to investigate the potential of generative AI to support implementation of curriculum reform. She has presented at education events and generative AI forums and continues to openly share her learning with school leaders. Miriam encourages leaders to provide teachers with time and resources to explore new digital technologies and says, 'There are so many competing priorities in a school. One thing Hillbrook did was prioritise generative AI and make it the focus of every meeting to allow teachers to have the freedom to play and explore in school time'.

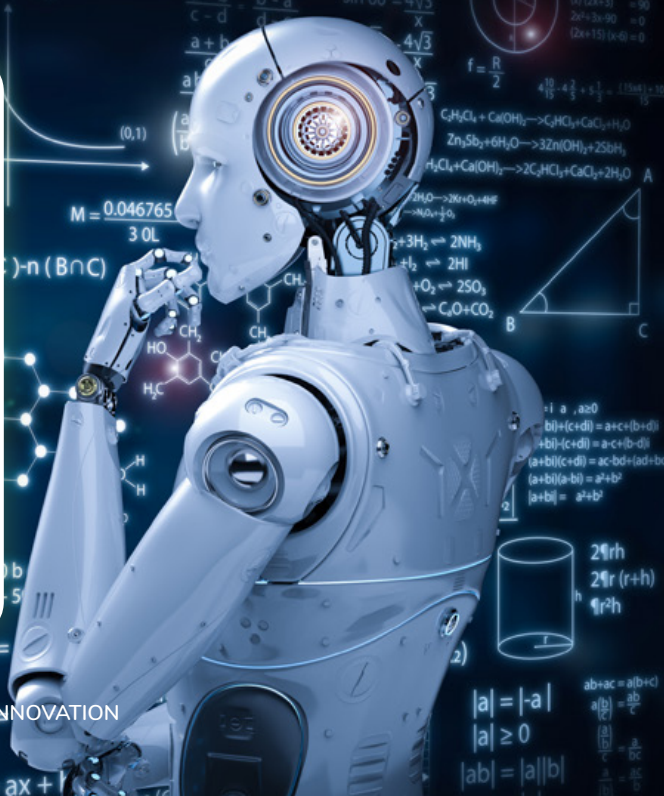
FUTURE IMPACT OF AI

Hillbrook's plans for continuing to incorporate generative AI in 2024:

- Hillbrook are exploring ways that generative AI can provide opportunities for personalised learning and assessment for students and support teacher workload. For example, this could mean teachers identifying how and if generative AI can be used for a specific assessment task. This puts control back into the teacher's hands and makes sure expectations are clear for both teachers and students, supporting consistency across subjects and year levels.
- Hillbrook includes a checkpoint for written drafts where a teacher can access the revision history of student work. Questions are raised in the drafting stage, not the final submission stage.

Generative AI can be a catalyst for change and improvement if implemented properly, leading to the next evolution of education. This change will be driven not solely by generative AI but by the conversations we have and the people involved. Our biggest takeaway from 2023 was to pause and reflect on current practice and put the focus clearly on students and new ways to improve teaching and learning.

Miriam Scott



CASE STUDY A PARADIGM SHIFT

BLUE GUM COMMUNITY SCHOOL, HACKETT, ACT



SUMMARY

Blue Gum Community School is a small community school located in Hackett, close to Mount Majura bushland. The school is highly focused on personalised learning, with an emphasis on student agency through expectations of student competency, resourcefulness, and resilience. Small class sizes and extended time with core teachers ensures students are well known to educators. Educators undertake action research and reflection which is shared regularly with colleagues.

Blue Gum is a small secular Independent school with a strong community focus, offering education for 3–16 year olds. Blue Gum adopts a responsive strengths-based approach to education, where every student can achieve success in a non-competitive environment. Its smallness is a key strength with 75 preschool places and 165 students from Kindergarten to Year 10. Principal, Sophia Williams, and founding Executive Director, Maureen Hartung, are aligned in their vision for Blue Gum to value its Australian cultural context while also connecting internationally, sharing with and learning from educators globally.

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

At Blue Gum, a teaching team works with each multi-age class, presenting learning ‘provocations’ as starting points for students’ deep exploration in their quest for conceptual understanding and skills development. Students’ interests, passions and questions provide the impetus to pursue meaningful research, usually within a cross-disciplinary context. In the high school, teachers broaden their subject lens beyond traditional silos, so that students not only understand discipline fundamentals, but also grasp the overlap/connections between subjects. Consequently, Blue Gum secondary students undertake ‘deep dives’, rather than skimming across the surface of knowledge.

In an interactive and respectful education environment, students are highly motivated to learn. Differentiation is supported by having two full-time educators in every class. This low student/teacher ratio attracts teachers keen to bring a fresh lens to schooling to ensure it is ‘fit for purpose’ in an ever-changing world. Every aspect of schooling, administrative or academic, is open to questioning. A simple management hierarchy ensures quick turnaround when teachers seek to road-test new ideas and adapt quickly in response, encouraging a high level of critical reflection and shared professionalism. Action research is an expectation of every educator at every level.

INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT LEARNERS

Students are seen as competent, capable, creative, responsible, resourceful and resilient, and are given agency and negotiated choice in their learning. Current students act as ‘interpreters’ for new students as they adapt to this ‘high expectations’ approach and ways of thinking about themselves as both independent and interdependent learners.

The interplay between educators and students is also fundamental in setting a positive school culture, which supports students' ownership of their learning complemented by teachers' targeted guidance to ensure curriculum expectations are met. Students are expected to move beyond their comfort zone as they map out a personal work plan, with educators acting as 'critical friends' to invite self-reflection and ongoing improvement.

Small class sizes and extended time with a small number of core teachers ensure that each student's strengths, challenges and individual 'story' are well-known to educators. Each week, a variety of open-ended Learning Explorations invite students to pursue learning at their own level, whether on their own or by collaborating with others. Expanding the classroom out into the natural world is seen as essential for students' health and wellbeing. Regularly spending time in nature is embedded in each class's curriculum, as this offers first-hand connection and understanding of the environment and its importance in their lives.

Equally important is nurturing a strong sense of community. For example, every Friday is dubbed Community Day for primary school students, with students assigned to vertical groups across classes for each term, developing positive relationships

across age groups while undertaking a venture together. Shared experiences may include kitchen garden, community cooking, sport or exploring the nearby bushland of Mt Majura.

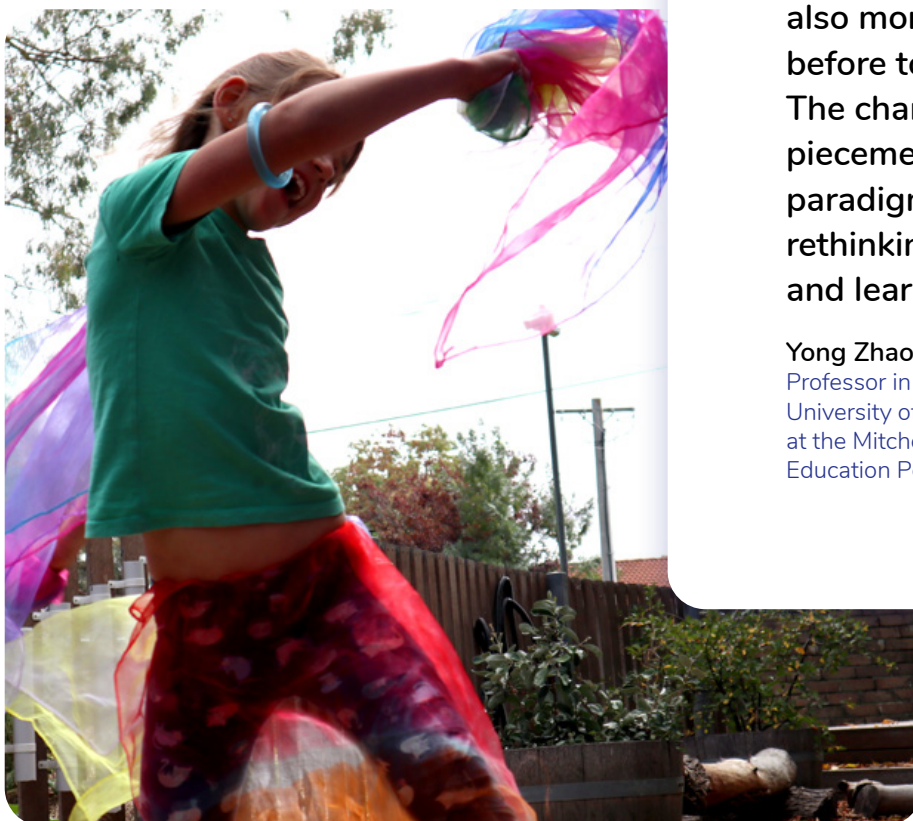
While the school day is 9am to 3pm, classrooms are open from 8.30am. This encourages students to maximise their learning time, or to attend intensive small group workshops targeting additional support or extension. Metacognition is made visible so that students gain an understanding of their optimal personal learning style. Some students might start their weekly program by tackling their most challenging areas first, and seeking assistance from educators or peers, saving their preferred endeavours to savour later in the week. Others opt to reverse this approach. With two educators in each classroom, one can work across the room, while the other works with small groups in direct teaching workshops that provide targeted, intensive support. Students acknowledge their own strengths and challenges and see their class community as a resource to draw on, and contribute to, rather than compete against. Their goals focus on achieving their personal best and continuous improvement.



PERSONALISED LEARNING AND MONITORING

At Blue Gum, each student's progress is carefully monitored by their educational team. They track each student's unique progression, appreciating that they may be at one year level in one strand of a Learning Area and at a different year level in another. Each student's learning profile is continually updated so that progress and development are tracked, and educators can see what support or extension has been provided or is needed. Student portfolios are compiled progressively across the year, with each student contributing annotations and self-reflection on their learning process, for example, their growth across the year and the strategies that were effective for them; challenges they faced and how they overcame them; and the goals they wish to set for the following year. Students are active protagonists in their learning; their voice and input are visible and have a tangible impact on the direction of their research.

While primary school classes pursue collective research investigations, high school students identify personal research questions that arise for them while exploring the fundamentals of different disciplines or bodies of knowledge. Teachers share their expertise and passions in a wide variety of ways to distil the important questions that emerge for students, individually or collectively, capitalising on their curiosity as the motivation for further meaningful research.



Blue Gum is a place of wonder and curiosity, a place where learning is a richly creative and ever-changing hands-on pursuit. Students analyse their learning endeavours using the Australian Curriculum as one reference point; a process that invariably highlights the breadth and depth of their learning, together with the interconnected nature of knowledge, for example, how mathematics relates to social sciences, or how art relates to life.

At Blue Gum, educators are not looking for an educational recipe. They use action research and reflection to question different possibilities through a continuous cycle of evolution and analysis, with findings shared at an annual celebration with colleagues. The evidence base for practice is rooted in the reality of everyday schooling and working with students, all of whom are unique. For students, deep dives into knowledge are balanced with research into personally driven questions, an approach that allows Blue Gum to achieve the best of both worlds.

“

It is apparent that the traditional teacher-centred pedagogy needs to be changed. It is also more feasible than ever before to make the change. The change is more than piecemeal tinkering. It is a paradigm shift, a complete rethinking of how teaching and learning are carried out.

Yong Zhao, *Foundation Distinguished Professor in the School of Education at the University of Kansas. Professorial fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy, Victoria University.*

”

5

SUPPORTING NATIONAL REFORM





All sectors of education are committed to improving the educational outcomes of all Australian students, including those from equity cohorts. All school sectors therefore seek a corresponding commitment from governments to provide resources that support the implementation of agreed reform initiatives.

The Case Studies outlined in this report highlight the significant contribution to innovation and reform made by the Independent sector, including the critical role played by state and territory AISs.

The challenge of delivering national reform is significant for individual Independent schools. Many of these schools serve students experiencing high levels of disadvantage, including students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, students with disabilities, and students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Supporting these students requires skilled staff, customised facilities, and partnerships with support services.

In the non-government school sector, the provision of funding to non-government representative bodies (NGRBs) has delivered an extremely efficient mechanism to support implementation of specific reform initiatives.

NGRBs have an excellent understanding of the operating environment and needs of schools in their jurisdiction and use this to develop programs and supports that enable them to meet government priorities and provide effective evaluation and measurement.

Individual Independent schools benefit from the significant expertise and administrative supports that AISs can provide to assist them in adapting and participating in reform. They will rely heavily on their state or territory AIS for student-focused expertise, support, guidance and resources to implement the reform directions of the BFSa.

With the appropriate level of support from governments, the AISs will continue to provide the necessary support and guidance to their member schools to enable them to meet Australian Government reform requirements.

Understanding, costing, and supporting the implementation of any new initiative for each school, each sector, and each jurisdiction is a critical element for successful implementation of the BFSa.

APPENDIX

The ISA submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System included the following recommendations:

Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

- Any measures to address barriers for the identified priority cohorts must be cross-sectoral so that there is parity and equitable access to reforms and initiatives for students.
- Any targets in the NSRA must be reasonable and achievable for all schools and sectors and should build on existing evidence. For this reason, ISA recommends a separate process to this Review.
- Any reporting against targets to measure the outcomes of schooling in relation to the next NSRA should not impose an unreasonable burden on schools and/or result in a highly data driven approach to education.
- The primary focus should be on what supports schools put in place to support students, more than targets.

Improving student mental health and wellbeing

- Independent schools would welcome an explicit focus on student, staff and school leaders' mental health and wellbeing in the next NSRA accompanied by increased resources to meet wellbeing and mental health challenges, particularly:
 - training and time to select and implement safe and supportive responses to protect and support wellbeing and respond to students at risk
 - increased access to, and cooperation with, specialised services for students, staff and school leaders.
- The Review should consider the value and feasibility of the inclusion of a wellbeing target in the next NSRA as it is not possible to define optimal wellbeing, which makes including a wellbeing target in the NSRA highly problematic.

Our current and future teachers

- ISA recommends that the Review note and support the current work underway in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan and Initial Teacher Education processes and limit recommendations regarding teachers to those that sit outside current work streams.

Collecting data to inform decision making and boost student outcomes

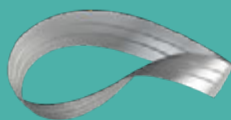
- The Review should consider the possible targeting of available evaluation measures to specific reforms to better align with, and measure, the intent of the reforms.
- There must be a compelling rationale and evidence base for the collection of any new data, as well as a clearly articulated rationale for the ways in which data will be used to improve student experience and outcomes.
- Any new data collections must take into account the administrative and resourcing burden on individual schools, sectors and jurisdictions.

Funding transparency and accountability

- The Review should recognise that the Schooling Resource Standard funding model was based on the principles of subsidiarity and flexibility, with the acknowledgement that schools are best placed to know and meet the needs of their students.
- The Review should acknowledge that schools are best placed to know and to meet the needs of their students, and therefore reporting at the individual school level against specific loadings is not appropriate.



Cover sheet: Supporting document #2



INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA

SUPPORTING THEIR FUTURES

A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER BOARDING

October 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Independent Schools Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.



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1. INTRODUCTION – A LIFELINE FOR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities, boarding schools represent more than just a place of learning—they are a lifeline. In the absence of local educational facilities, these schools offer the only opportunity for thousands of students to access a high-quality education. Yet, despite their critical importance, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools are at a crossroads.



These schools work tirelessly to address the unique and often complex needs of their students. Beyond academic instruction, they provide essential support for well-being, cultural continuity, language preservation, and spiritual growth. Independent boarding schools recognise the significance of maintaining connections with students' families and communities, fostering an environment where students can flourish both academically and individually. They offer a culturally rich experience, honouring the diverse traditions and languages that shape their students' identities.

However, this invaluable service is under threat. Over the past decade, inadequate and inconsistent funding has led to the closure of two Indigenous boarding schools, with a third being forced to cease its boarding operations. Today, only nine majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools remain, and they are struggling to survive. The financial pressure to meet the costs of providing boarding services has become unsustainable, and without urgent, stable funding, more schools are at risk.

These schools are not just vital to the students they serve—they are essential to the future of Indigenous communities. Without them, the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians will only widen. A long-term funding solution is desperately needed to provide these schools with the security to plan for the future, retain skilled staff, and continue to offer a culturally safe, nurturing environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can succeed.

The case studies included in this report highlight the difficult situation many boarding schools currently find themselves in, and the urgent need to address the shortfall in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students.

The time to act is now. Without immediate intervention, we put at risk the futures of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students across the country.

2. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body for Independent schooling in Australia. ISA represents the sector on national issues and engages with the Australian Government, national agencies, media, key stakeholders, and the wider Australian community.

Working with the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), ISA represents 716,800 students, over 1,215 schools and a workforce of 122,000 people.

Independent schools are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools. They make a valuable contribution to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

The Independent school sector is diverse, and schools serve a wide range of communities. The latest available data shows that more than one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school. For secondary students, it is over one in five.

Students at Independent schools reflect the full diversity of Australian society – including those who experience one or multiple forms of disadvantage. These students include:

- high-needs students with disability attending special schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending remote 100 per cent Indigenous schools
- students living in regional, rural and remote locations
- highly disadvantaged and disengaged young people attending Independent special assistance schools.

Most families with children enrolled in Independent schools are middle-to-low-income earners, increasingly from culturally diverse backgrounds, and residing in outer-suburban and inner-suburban communities. Many of these families are currently facing economic stress and are making substantial sacrifices for their children's education.

According to the most recent data, the majority of Independent schools charge annual fees of less than \$6,000, and there was a greater number of schools charging less than \$1,200 per year than those charging over \$20,000. Some Independent schools charge no fees at all. More than half of the sector's recurrent income comes from parents and families.

Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a specific educational philosophy or alternatively recognised curriculum. Some have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs or to reflect the religious values of a community. 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 schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example, Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the sector but the majority of schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

3. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER BOARDING IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities are some of the most educationally disadvantaged students in Australia. For many of these students, there is limited or no access to school education, particularly at the secondary level. An Independent boarding school is often the only option for regional or remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who must board away from home to access education.

The Independent sector is the largest provider of boarding school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are educated across a range of settings and in different types of schools in the Independent sector. Some Independent boarding schools provide education to significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while others have entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts.

In 2023, twenty-five Independent boarding schools had more than 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. Of these schools, nine had 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, totalling 606 enrolments. Close to half of the 2,335 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders in the Independent sector attend schools with either very large numbers or a high concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders.

Many of these students come from remote communities where primary-level education is the only schooling locally available and they must leave their communities to undertake secondary studies.

Often these schools serve students and families with limited or no capacity to contribute to the costs of their children's educational and boarding needs. Government funding, including ABSTUDY payments, play a central role in funding these services.



4. KEY POINTS

There is a critical need for extra resources to assist Independent boarding schools that educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These schools are significantly contributing to the education of some of Australia's most disadvantaged students. Without certainty of additional funding support, more of these exceptional schools could close, putting their students' futures at risk.

This report provides four case studies of the current challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools, and highlights the following key points of focus on this urgent national issue:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities are some of the most educationally disadvantaged students in Australia.
- Due to the lack of educational facilities and opportunities, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities are educated away from their home communities in boarding schools.
- The Independent sector is the largest provider of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding education in Australia.
- The additional costs of educating students from regional and remote communities in boarding schools away from their families and communities include not only living and educational support, but also health, pastoral and cultural support, and costs associated with maintaining links to home communities. For boarding schools where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities make up all or the majority of the student body, these additional costs threaten the financial viability of boarding provision.
- These extra costs have been examined, quantified and validated by several independent studies and reports commissioned by governments in recent years.
- As shown in these independent reports, the additional costs of educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in boarding schools with large numbers of these students are not being met. Schools are addressing this demonstrated shortfall through a variety of means, all of which impact the viability of schools and the quality of education that can be provided.
- The number of Independent boarding schools educating both large numbers and high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students from remote communities is small, between 10 – 15 schools.

Additional ongoing funding for Independent schools educating large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students must be provided as a matter of urgency so that the ongoing viability of these schools can be assured.



CASE STUDY 1

YIRARA COLLEGE, NT

Located just outside of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, Yirara College wants to enable its students to respect and live out their spiritual and cultural identities.



Principal Wesley Meurant knows that by supporting Yirara College's 185 boarding students, they are providing a vital service to the school community. 'Standardised schooling cannot cope, accommodate or home any of our students. The remote communities know this, which is why they strongly desire to see their children come to Yirara.'

As a testament to its success, Yirara currently has 3rd generation students enrolled at the school, whose grandparents were students of the school in the 1970s. Yirara has become a 'right of passage' for many community members across the Northern Territory, and the benefits the school offers to Aboriginal youth are widely recognised.



Value and Demand of Boarding

Boarding services not only offer value for the student, but also their community and family. 'Visiting remote communities and speaking with elders and families, they all want and ask for the same thing, they want choice. Choice as to where to send their children and the option to send their children out of community life if there is a need to do so. The reality for many families in community is that community schooling and education is not appropriate for most children and as such, options for education in boarding schools are essential' said Principal Meurant.

Remote community schools struggle consistently with attracting and retaining quality educators. This results in varied levels of educational outcomes in different communities. Boarding schools provide consistency and ensure outcomes. They are also able to provide access to VET programs and can upskill students who desire to go back to community.

Yirara College's ability to increase its student numbers is limited to the level of funding that it receives from grant programs. Meeting the growing demand without additional funding would mean increasing student/staff ratios and risking damage to staff morale and retention. Many enrolment applications are rejected due to Yirara's limited ability to increase staff numbers in areas of need, such as academic and wellbeing support.

Due to the nature and environments that Yirara's students come from, the demands on staff can be extreme. Most of its students enter Year 7 with a reading level equivalent to a Year 1 student. This gap in education demands intense assistance. Coupled with the high proportion of students at Yirara who are living with disability (50 per cent of its students require substantial adjustment needs), Yirara College requires a high level of staffing and support.

As a consequence of underfunding for Aboriginal students in boarding, Yirara struggles to employ the services and necessary staff to ensure optimal running of the college.

Student Needs

Many of Yirara's Aboriginal students require additional support and care due to complex backgrounds and for some, having lived in severe disadvantage. Additional student needs include:

Cultural needs – Boarding schools need to have access to community leaders and significant family members from home communities to ensure connection is maintained. Cultural differences are also vastly disparate from one community group to another region's community group, so care and attention are a necessity when supporting these connections.

Language needs – Students from community locations often learn English as a second language. Constant encouragement for students to speak their traditional language and share their language is an important step towards validation and cultural acceptance.

Spiritual needs – The vast majority of Aboriginal students from community possess a strong sense of spirituality and will often attribute daily interactions, problems or sickness as a spiritual consequence. Understanding and respect of this worldview is required.

Facility maintenance and borrowing capacity

Yirara College was built in 1972 with money provided by the Commonwealth Government. There hasn't been a significant capital injection since that time. As the school is a not-for-profit, and all spending is non-discretionary, the ability to maintain the physical infrastructure of the school, also given the inadequate funding for students, is severely limited.

Insurance policies will no longer cover Yirara for water damage during the wet season due to the school's inability to service the outdated roofing structures. Yirara has therefore needed to look for loans to ensure that it can conduct repairs, which is incredibly difficult as commercial banking institutions consider Yirara's capacity to service a loan as a high-risk proposition given inadequate recurrent funding sources for Aboriginal students in education.

Funding uncertainty

According to Principal Meurant, when considering all factors, Yirara students are already underfunded by nearly \$12,000 per student every year. Almost all of the staffing, maintenance and educational challenges Yirara faces can be attributed to this shortfall in funding.

The impact of the loss of the Indigenous Boarding Provider grants on student outcomes would be 'disastrous' says Principal Meurant. If Yirara ceased to operate in Central Australia, there would be no options for the remote community children who the school supports. This would result in widening academic outcomes, a deterioration in cultural, social and emotional outcomes and communities feeling helpless to provide for their children's futures.

Without Yirara, its remote Aboriginal students would almost certainly disengage from education in the secondary schooling years. Yirara is the leading option for secondary schooling outcomes in the Central Australian desert. The College's Lutheran heritage prepares young people for productive lives post-school. Without Yirara as an option, the effects would be felt for generations.

Yirara's students are among the most disadvantaged in Australia, which leaves Principal Meurant bewildered that funding is not being established as a priority. 'The only way to close the gap is to broaden and deepen support through positive grant making and funding opportunities. This can be achieved through supporting the choices of Aboriginal families and validating those choices.'

Principal Meurant paints a dire picture of the future if Yirara College is not able to secure sufficient ongoing funding to continue to offer boarding services. 'We are a 95 per cent boarding provider. Without boarding there would be no school.'

5. THE FUNDING GAP FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER BOARDING STUDENTS

To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities are engaged and supported in culturally appropriate ways in their school education, there are significant additional costs incurred by boarding schools enrolling these students. The types of additional services required to be provided by Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools include:

- Boarding house parents with high staff-to-student ratios.
- Culturally appropriate training and support to ensure the enrolment and retention of students.
- Pastoral care to meet the often complex and high-level needs of students including those from disrupted and traumatic backgrounds.
- Health services – students often have complex and chronic health needs, including undiagnosed disabilities, which require ongoing and comprehensive monitoring and treatment.
- Social and emotional support for students living away from home who have strong family, community and cultural links with their community.
- The need to ensure staff are familiar with and can build and maintain links and understanding of students' home communities.
- Additional teaching staff to provide personalised education plans, one-on-one or small group tutoring, and additional educational support outside of school hours, to address students' often significantly lower education achievement levels.
- Transport costs – both staff and students may need to travel multiple times between school and communities for a variety of educational, cultural and pastoral reasons.
- Cost of administering ABSTUDY and other government services on behalf of the school and student families.
- Extra salaries and travel expenses for liaison officers who facilitate communication between the school, families, and communities.

The additional support needs of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are currently not being met by existing funding mechanisms. The reasons for this underfunding include:

- Schools cannot charge fees for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities as their families have no capacity to pay.
- The loading for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students provided under the School Resource Standard funding through the Australian Government's Department of Education is for 'in-school' education-related expenses, not for essential support requirements to engage and retain students whilst living away from home.
- There is no specific Australian Government payment to schools to support the needs of disadvantaged students who can only access school education through boarding.
- The current level of ABSTUDY does not factor in the support requirements of high-needs students living away from home.
- The level of ABSTUDY transport support is limited and does not adequately address the costs of essential student travel or permit an appropriate level of flexibility in its application.

Schools are addressing the shortfall in available resources by either cross-subsidising from other essential services or operating boarding services at a loss.



CASE STUDY 2

WONGUTHA CAPS, WA



The Wongutha Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School (CAPS) is a co-educational Christian boarding school in Western Australia that creates a home away from home for Aboriginal youth in Years 11 and 12. The school's 60 students are all boarders, who are predominantly from remote areas of Western Australia. Wongutha CAPS prepares these students for life after schooling, with a strong Vocational Education and Training (VET) program which supports the fulfillment of student potential.

Value of boarding

Boarding at Wongutha CAPS gives students an opportunity to access schooling away from home, where educational offerings may be limited or not available. Through its VET programs, the school gives Aboriginal students exposure to other possibilities in education and training in a wide range of industry and trades such as farming, retail, hospitality. Students then take their knowledge and skills back home to enrich the community and contribute to the economy. It also provides the opportunity to engage with and build relationships with other Aboriginal students from different regions and areas.

Students who go away to boarding schools like Wongutha CAPS gain life skills and progress towards independence. Attending school in a regional (or metropolitan) area also affords students with access to sport and community groups, further expanding their social and physical development opportunities.



Student needs and facilities

To deliver high-quality boarding services such as those provided at Wongutha CAPS, significant staffing and pastoral care costs are borne by the school, over and above what the average Australian school would require. Students require support from highly qualified and experienced staff that are culturally competent and trauma informed. This support is required around the clock and can include access to medical or health and wellbeing services outside of business hours. There is also need of a higher ratio of staff to student care because of the complex backgrounds Aboriginal students at the school often have.

Further, maintaining facilities which are of an appropriate standard for the student group is an ongoing challenge for Wongutha CAPS. Principal Brendan Franzone highlights the importance of students progressing over time from highly supported to more independent living to equip them with life skills to successfully transition to further study or work. This is necessary to prepare students for independent living post schooling. This requires further development and the renovations of the current residential facilities. This will include building culturally appropriate communal areas including spaces to facilitate cultural cooking. However, without certainty around

grant payments for the school, these projects are unable to be prioritised as capital needs to be available to cover the day-to-day costs of operations. Mr Franzone expressed his appreciation to the government and National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) in particular for the recent years of funding to support boarding at the school and hoped that it will continue.

Funding uncertainty

If the current grant arrangements are not renewed, there will be a direct and immediate impact on the quality of teaching and support that Wongutha CAPS is able to provide. These impacts include:

- The level of education and care would lessen as student/staff ratios would need to be higher. This would impact student outcomes, such as academic, cultural, social and emotional development.
- Staff roles would be much more challenging, leading to potential burn out and lack of staff retention.
- Activities provided for students would become more limited in terms of frequency and variety. The provision of these activities play a crucial role in retaining students who are already prone to struggle with issues such as homesickness and cultural disconnect.
- The school would need to significantly supplement the boarding budget, taking away from other education needs, programs and support. The current NIAA funding has reduced the requirement for the school to subsidise the boarding component considerably, making it possible to deliver the significant educational support that these students need.
- As some students come from communities where there are no or limited offerings for senior high school students, it would likely be the end of their schooling.

As summarised by Principal Brendan Franzone, 'Students would not have the level of wrap around support that they currently have. Any reduction in this would be detrimental to both students and staff in all areas.'

In the case that the school could not continue to operate boarding services for their students due to rising costs and diminishing Commonwealth Government support, Principal Franzone is clear on the outcome for Wongutha CAPS, 'We would close down.' Over 70 years legacy assisting First Nations people to be equipped and empowered; vocationally, socially-emotionally and spiritually, with life skills to find a sense of hope and fulfillment, would no longer be available. This would leave a significant number of young people still striving to bring change for themselves and to their communities to be further marginalised and disadvantaged.



6. AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER BOARDING STUDENTS

Under the current Commonwealth Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding model, schools receive base funding plus loadings. The loadings include additional funding to address various types of educational disadvantage:

- School location
- School size
- Low socio-educational advantage
- Students with disability
- English language proficiency
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

However, in many Independent boarding schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, the funding they receive is not sufficient to meet the specific and additional needs of their students.

Historical Additional Funding Measures

While it is true that the Commonwealth Department of Education no longer funds boarding for any students, this has not always been the case. It was the removal of specific funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and additional funding for boarding students from remote and very remote communities that first created significant funding uncertainty for these schools.

‘Under the previous socio-economic status (SES) funding model, schools received general recurrent grants directly from the Commonwealth. Additional funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was provided under the Indigenous Supplementary Allowance which replaced a suite of programs with a single per-capita payment in 2009.

There was an additional Indigenous Funding Guarantee (IFG) to compensate those schools that suffered an ‘unintended’ funding cut on implementation of the Indigenous Supplementary Allowance designed to maintain their funding at 2008 levels until this funding ‘caught up’.

In recognition of the impact on non-remote boarding schools from 2011, schools with students from remote and very remote communities boarding at a non-remote campus received an additional boarding supplement.¹

In further recognition of the funding shortfall at a number of boarding schools, the Australian Government announced in the 2014 Federal Budget that a special payment of \$6.8 million would be available to non-government schools with either a large number or large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students.

This payment was extended for two more years in April 2015 with additional funding of \$3.6 million in 2015 and a further \$1.9 million for 2016. In 2015, 17 Independent boarding schools were eligible for this additional funding.

1 [ISCA Submissions – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://aph.gov.au/ISCA-Submissions)

In confirming the extension of this payment in 2015, the then Department of Education and Training described it as an interim measure to support schools while ‘the Government’s responses to the *Review of Australia’s Welfare System and the Forrest Review*,² including consideration of ABSTUDY arrangements, are underway.’

While this recognition of the additional costs was welcome, the short-term assistance provided by the Australian Government did not provide a long-term solution to the structural problem of insufficient resources to ensure the ongoing viability of these schools.

When the Final Report into the review of Australia’s welfare system, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes* was released in February 2015, it was largely silent on issues relating to the adequacy of ABSTUDY. The Forrest Review recommended simplifying ABSTUDY processes and ensuring ‘that it is sufficient to cover the full costs of students attending boarding schools from remote communities’³ however, this was not acted upon.

Recent reviews and costings

As noted above, Australian and state/territory governments have commissioned independent research into the additional costs borne by boarding schools educating students from regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Australian Government commissioned the Project Vale Report⁴ and the Grant Thornton Report.⁵

Other relevant studies and reviews include:

- The Review of Funding for Schooling (‘Gonski Review’), 2011.
- A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory (‘Wilson Review’) for the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2013.⁶
- KPMG Non-government Indigenous Boarding Schools Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016.⁷
- The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, *The power of education: From surviving to thriving. Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, 2017.⁸
- The Study Away Review, 2017 commissioned by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.⁹
- Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers - Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research for the Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2017.¹⁰
- Indigenous Boarding Design Review 2023 undertaken by the NIAA in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Education.

2. [Creating Parity - the Forrest review | NIAA](#).

3. <https://indigenousjobsandtrainingreview.dpmc.gov.au/recommendation-2-school-attendance>

4. Commonwealth Department of Education Report, not publicly released

5. [boarding-investing-in-outcomes.pdf \(niaa.gov.au\)](#)

6. [A share in the future, Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory](#)

7. https://education.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/384153/Non-government-Indigenous-boarding-schools_KPMG-report.pdf

8. [Committee Report - Final.pdf \(aph.gov.au\)](#)

9. [Study Away Review \(niaa.gov.au\)](#)

10. [Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers | Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research \(anu.edu.au\)](#)

The Grant Thornton Report, 2019

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet commissioned Grant Thornton to improve the understanding of the benefits and impacts of existing investments in boarding provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The review, *Boarding: investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – An analysis of the investment in support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending boarding schools and facilities*,¹¹ was released in June 2019. It examined 27 boarding providers enrolling around 1,900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island secondary boarding students.

The Report confirms the findings of previous reviews. The funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding providers is insufficient to meet the full costs of delivering these services.

At the time of the review, the three-year average annual revenue per boarder from 2015 to 2017 at the 27 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding providers analysed for this report was \$16,679 and the comparative average cost per boarder was \$22,927, representing an average shortfall of \$6,248 per boarder.

Across the three-year average of 1,918 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders in the boarding providers included in the analysis, the shortfall per boarder represented a total annual revenue shortfall of \$11,982,732. The median average revenue and cost per boarder for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding providers in 2017 were \$18,697 and \$25,012 respectively—a shortfall of \$6,315 per boarder.

ISA understands that this funding shortfall continues today.

The report also highlighted provider concerns and issues regarding ABSTUDY, including the adequacy of ABSTUDY to meet the true cost of boarding, the complex and inflexible administration requirements, and the challenges of communicating with the ABSTUDY administration team.

The Report concludes that the higher the proportion of boarders who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, the greater the significance of the increase in the cost to boarding providers. It recommends supporting boarding providers to address the financial pressures they face when educating the highly disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders they enrol.

Grant Thornton recommended a range of additional financial supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools to address challenges including health support, needs-based funding for support services and improvements to ABSTUDY administration.

The Grant Thornton Review Report also reinforced the findings of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse,¹² Recommendation 14.3, which states ‘The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that needs-based funding arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island boarding students are sufficient for schools and hostels to create child safe environments’.

The Report makes it clear that there is a need for additional needs-based funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, so that schools have the capacity to provide the necessary child-safe environments.

11. [boarding-investing-in-outcomes.pdf \(niaa.gov.au\)](#)

12. [Final report | Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au\)](#)

CASE STUDY 3

DJARRAGUN COLLEGE, QLD

Djarragun College is a non-denominational Independent College specialising in providing an excellent learning environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Prep to Year 12. As a boarding school, Djarragun provides opportunities for students from across Australia. There are currently 25 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students at the College who come from regional communities and 115 from remote communities.



Benefits of boarding

The value that Djarragun College provides for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students includes:

- Access to Quality Education: Boarding provides students with access to a broader range of educational resources and experienced teachers, helping them achieve academic success compared to schooling options in remote communities, often where there is no secondary schooling pathway.
- Tailored Learning: Djarragun College offers culturally relevant and supportive learning environments that are sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and draws on a culturally safe day and boarding program.
- Cultural Continuity: Djarragun College incorporates cultural education and practices into the curriculum, allowing students to maintain and strengthen their cultural identity.
- Peer Support: Students build connections with peers from similar cultural backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- Independence and Responsibility: Boarding helps students develop life skills, such as independence, responsibility, and resilience, which are crucial for personal growth and future success.
- Family Support: Boarding can alleviate some of the pressures on families by providing a stable and supportive environment for students, allowing families to focus on their roles in the community.
- Safe Environment: Boarding provides a safe and structured environment that supports the physical and emotional wellbeing of students.
- Access to Support Services: Students have access to a range of support services, including counselling and health services, to ensure their overall wellbeing.
- Career Pathways: Boarding students are exposed to various career pathways and opportunities, preparing them for successful futures beyond school.

CASE STUDY 3: DJARRAGUN COLLEGE, QLD (continued)

Growth

Djarragun College consistently receives a high number of enrolment expressions of interest and applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families seeking boarding opportunities for their children. The demand for boarding spaces significantly outweighs the number of available places, indicating a strong desire among families to access the educational and cultural support offered by the College.

Many students from remote communities exhibit poor school engagement, which can be attributed to various factors, including lack of resources, limited access to quality education, and socio-economic challenges.

Students often enter Djarragun College with literacy and numeracy skills well below year-level standards, requiring additional support to bridge these gaps. The complex needs of students from remote communities, including trauma, health issues, and educational challenges, require a higher level of support and resources.

The College's funding, both from government sources and ABSTUDY, does not adequately cover the costs associated with meeting the complex needs and individualised support for a larger cohort of students.

Additional funding is necessary to provide the specialised staff, resources, and programs required to support students effectively. Increasing student numbers without additional funding would strain existing resources, potentially impacting the quality of education and support provided to all students.

To maintain high-quality support and education, Djarragun College must be selective in its admission process, prioritising students who can benefit most from the available resources. This approach ensures that the College can continue to provide a nurturing environment where students can thrive academically, culturally, and personally.

The projected demand for boarding spaces at Djarragun is expected to remain high, driven by the reputation of the College and the lack of alternative educational options in remote communities. Families continue to seek opportunities for their children to receive a quality education in a culturally supportive environment.

To accommodate the growing demand, Djarragun College needs to explore options for expanding its capacity, including seeking additional funding, partnerships, and community support. Strategic planning is essential to ensure that any expansion aligns with the College's mission and capabilities, allowing it to serve more students without compromising quality.



Additional student needs

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional or remote Australian communities often have complex additional needs. Some examples of the additional support that Djarragun College provides to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students include:

Area	Cost	Delivery Requirement
Individualised Learning Programs	Development and implementation of personalised education plans for each student to address the significantly lower academic abilities.	Hiring specialised staff to design and monitor these programs, including special education staff and learning specialists.
Tutoring and Mentoring Services	Providing one-on-one or small group tutoring sessions.	Hiring additional tutors, both in-house and external, to address learning gaps and offer mentorship.
Cultural Education Programs	Organising cultural events, workshops, and classes that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and traditions.	Hiring cultural educators, guest speakers, and artists, as well as purchasing materials and supplies.
Community Liaison Officers	Employing staff dedicated to maintaining strong ties with students' home communities.	Salaries and travel expenses for liaison officers who facilitate communication between the school, families, and communities.
Mental Health Support	Providing access to mental health professionals specialising in trauma-informed care.	Hiring counsellors, psychologists, and social workers who are culturally competent and trained to address complex trauma.
Health Services	Offering on-site medical and dental services, as well as nutritional guidance.	Partnering with local health providers, funding for medical supplies, and employing a school nurse or health coordinator.
Accommodation Upgrades	Upgrading and maintaining boarding facilities to meet health and safety standards.	Renovations to ensure safe and comfortable living environments, including appropriate furnishings and amenities.
Boarding Staff	Hiring additional boarding staff to ensure 24/7 supervision and support.	Staff training in cultural awareness, trauma-informed care, and crisis management.
Student Transportation	Arranging transport for students to and from remote communities, including flights and bus services for extended periods of Sorry Business and Cultural level, beyond the beginning and end of term.	Coordinating logistics, purchasing tickets, and providing escort services when necessary.
Field Trips and Excursions	Organising educational and cultural excursions to enhance learning and cultural connection.	Funding for travel, entry fees, and accommodations for students and staff.
Extracurricular Programs	Offering a variety of extracurricular activities to promote social skills and personal development.	Funding for sports teams, arts programs, and clubs, as well as hiring coaches and instructors.
Weekend and Holiday Programs	Organising activities and support during weekends and holidays to ensure ongoing engagement.	Staff supervision, activity planning, and resources for programs that keep students engaged outside of school hours.
Cultural Competency Training	Providing ongoing professional development for staff to enhance cultural understanding and skills.	Workshops, training sessions, and resources focused on cultural awareness and inclusive practices.
Trauma-Informed Care Training	Training staff to recognise and respond to trauma-related behaviours effectively.	Access to experts in trauma-informed education and related materials for staff development.

CASE STUDY 3: DJARRAGUN COLLEGE, QLD (continued)

Boarding facilities maintenance and expansion

Djarragun College also faces challenges in maintaining and upgrading existing boarding facilities to ensure they meet contemporary standards for safety, comfort, and cultural appropriateness. Ongoing maintenance requires significant investment to address wear and tear, ensuring facilities remain safe and functional for students. The reliance on recurrent funding for maintenance also limits the capacity to invest in new infrastructure.

Funding for capital projects in boarding is limited, making it challenging to finance large-scale expansions and upgrades. Most available funding is allocated to ongoing maintenance, leaving little for significant infrastructure improvements.

The style of boarding houses needed to adequately support students with complex trauma backgrounds requires additional resources and specialised design. This need further strains the available budget for capital improvements and increases the financial burden from significant investment and resulting debt levels.

Designing culturally appropriate spaces involves integrating elements that reflect students' cultural heritage, promoting a sense of belonging and identity. This includes using culturally significant designs, materials, and facilities that accommodate traditional practices.

Boarding facilities maintenance and expansion

In 2023, the College wrote off over \$825,000 in invoiced boarding fees for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This is a result of parent's incapacity to meet a shortfall in the expected ABSTUDY subsidy, due to:

- delays in ABSTUDY approval not being retrospectively applied
- changes in ABSTUDY eligibility status after enrolment
- full ABSTUDY entitlement not achieved due to attendance testing or parent means testing
- students with allocated places withdrawing and ABSTUDY only covering pro-rata fees.

There are also other additional costs (and risks) in operating a boarding facility where parents have no capacity to pay. In particular, there is no underwriting from a parent to meet unplanned costs for their child in relation to:

- damage to property
- missed transport
- emergent and compassionate events falling outside ABSTUDY policy e.g specialist healthcare.

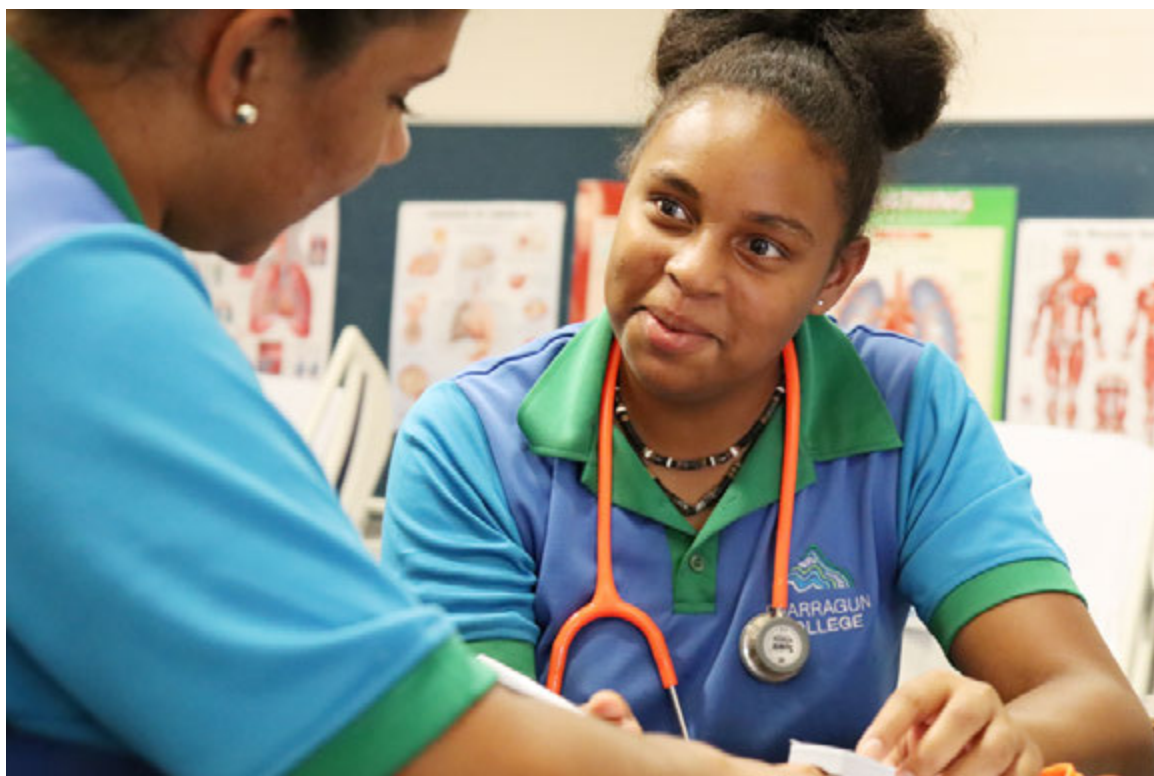
Boarding already operates on a very fine operating margin before these unplanned write-offs. As a result, the College's shortfall needs to be met via:

- drawdowns on any reserves held for business development and operational contingency
- deferred capital works, noting that recurrent school funds cannot be used for boarding facility improvements and/or operating costs
- overreliance on debt for both operational and capital purposes, noting that boarding related debt servicing is also subject to the above factors.

This funding and cost uncertainty, in an environment of debt stress, creates significant ongoing issues for the College. Some of the challenges and risks Djarragun College faces due to funding uncertainty are included below.

Area	Challenge	Impact
Competitive Salaries	It is increasingly difficult to offer competitive salaries to attract and retain highly qualified staff, particularly in the boarding sector. The growing demand for skilled professionals in the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) sector has intensified competition in the job market.	Djarragun College faces challenges in recruiting experienced and culturally competent staff necessary for supporting the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This can lead to high staff turnover, which disrupts student support and continuity of care.
Qualified Staff Shortages	The need for specialised staff, such as psychologists and social workers, to work during boarding hours is essential to address the additional needs of students.	The increased costs associated with hiring these professionals strain the College's budget, as they require competitive salaries and benefits to ensure their availability outside regular school hours.
Higher Ratios Required	Best practices in boarding standards recommend higher staffing ratios to provide adequate support and supervision. However, current ABSTUDY funding levels do not cover these needs.	Djarragun College must exceed standard staffing levels to ensure a safe and supportive environment, leading to additional financial pressures that are not fully covered by existing funding models.
Resource Allocation	Limited funding restricts the ability to invest in essential programs, resources, and infrastructure improvements necessary to support student development and wellbeing.	Insufficient resources can hinder the College's ability to provide high-quality educational and extracurricular programs, affecting student engagement and outcomes.
Cultural and Community Programs	Funding constraints impact the implementation of cultural and community engagement programs, which are crucial for maintaining students' cultural connections and identity.	Without adequate funding, these programs may be reduced or eliminated, potentially affecting students' sense of belonging and cultural continuity.
Budgeting and Financial Planning	Uncertainty in funding complicates long-term budgeting and financial planning, making it difficult to commit to multi-year initiatives or improvements.	The College may need to make short-term decisions that prioritise immediate needs over strategic, long-term goals, potentially compromising the overall quality of education and care.
Impact on Strategic Initiatives	Funding unpredictability affects the ability to implement strategic initiatives aimed at improving educational outcomes and student wellbeing.	Essential projects, such as facility upgrades, new program development, and technology enhancements, may be delayed or shelved, impacting the College's ability to fulfill its mission effectively.

CASE STUDY 3: DJARRAGUN COLLEGE, QLD (continued)



Impact if boarding could no longer be offered

If Djarragun College could no longer offer boarding, the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, particularly those from remote communities, would be substantial and multifaceted. Given that many of these students do not meet the enrolment standards expected in other boarding schools and have limited educational opportunities in their home communities, the consequences could be severe.

In many remote communities, there are limited or no educational facilities that can provide the level of education offered at Djarragun College. This means students might have no viable alternative for continuing their education, potentially leading to a complete cessation of their formal learning. Students who struggle to meet enrolment standards at other schools may face rejection or placement in schools that cannot adequately support their needs. This can result in significant academic setbacks, widening the gap between them and their peers.

Djarragun College integrates cultural teachings and practices, which are crucial for students' cultural identity and connection. Attending mainstream schools that lack cultural competence can lead to feelings of alienation and cultural disconnection. Students might struggle to maintain their cultural identity in environments that do not understand or value their background.

The transition to new schools or back to communities with limited resources can increase stress and anxiety, exacerbating any existing mental health challenges. Access to mental health support, such as counselling, may also be limited or unavailable.

Without access to quality education and career guidance, students may have fewer opportunities to pursue higher education or meaningful employment. This can limit their socioeconomic mobility and future prospects.

Boarding students often benefit from structured transition programs that prepare them for life after school. Without these programs, students may face difficulties adapting to new environments, whether in further education or the workforce.

The challenges of finding suitable alternative education may lead to higher dropout rates among boarding students. Without adequate support and options, students might disengage from education entirely, reducing their chances of achieving their potential.



7. ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY originated in 1969 as a Commonwealth Government program designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education beyond secondary school. ABSTUDY provided grants for courses of study at universities, colleges of advanced education, technical colleges, centres for vocational training and other institutions.

Today, the program has expanded significantly beyond the original remit to assist more broadly with costs related to study, housing, living expenses and travel. ABSTUDY for students that need to study away from home now comprises a range of payment types including multiple supplementary payments and benefits:

- ABSTUDY School Fees Allowance
- ABSTUDY Living Allowance
- Additional Assistance
- ABSTUDY Fares Allowance
- ABSTUDY Incidentals Allowance.

While ABSTUDY is a key component in funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding, many issues associated with ABSTUDY have been noted throughout this paper. These include the complexity of administration, transport arrangements and variable funding that does not meet the additional costs of boarding for most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students.

As the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA), ISA commissioned the report, Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers in 2017. It found that 'schools, along with Indigenous secondary boarding students from remote areas and their families, deal with barriers to providing education for these students. One of these barriers is the complex bureaucratic system that schools, families and students need to negotiate to obtain ABSTUDY funding.'¹³

The Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers report found that there were four key areas of concern that were highlighted through consultations with Independent schools and communities:

ABSTUDY funding is inadequate

Every school indicated that the amount of boarding funding they received was insufficient to provide proper support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote areas. The costs of providing for these students is not met by ABSTUDY payments. Because they do not receive adequate funding, schools attempt as best they can to make up the shortfall from other sources.

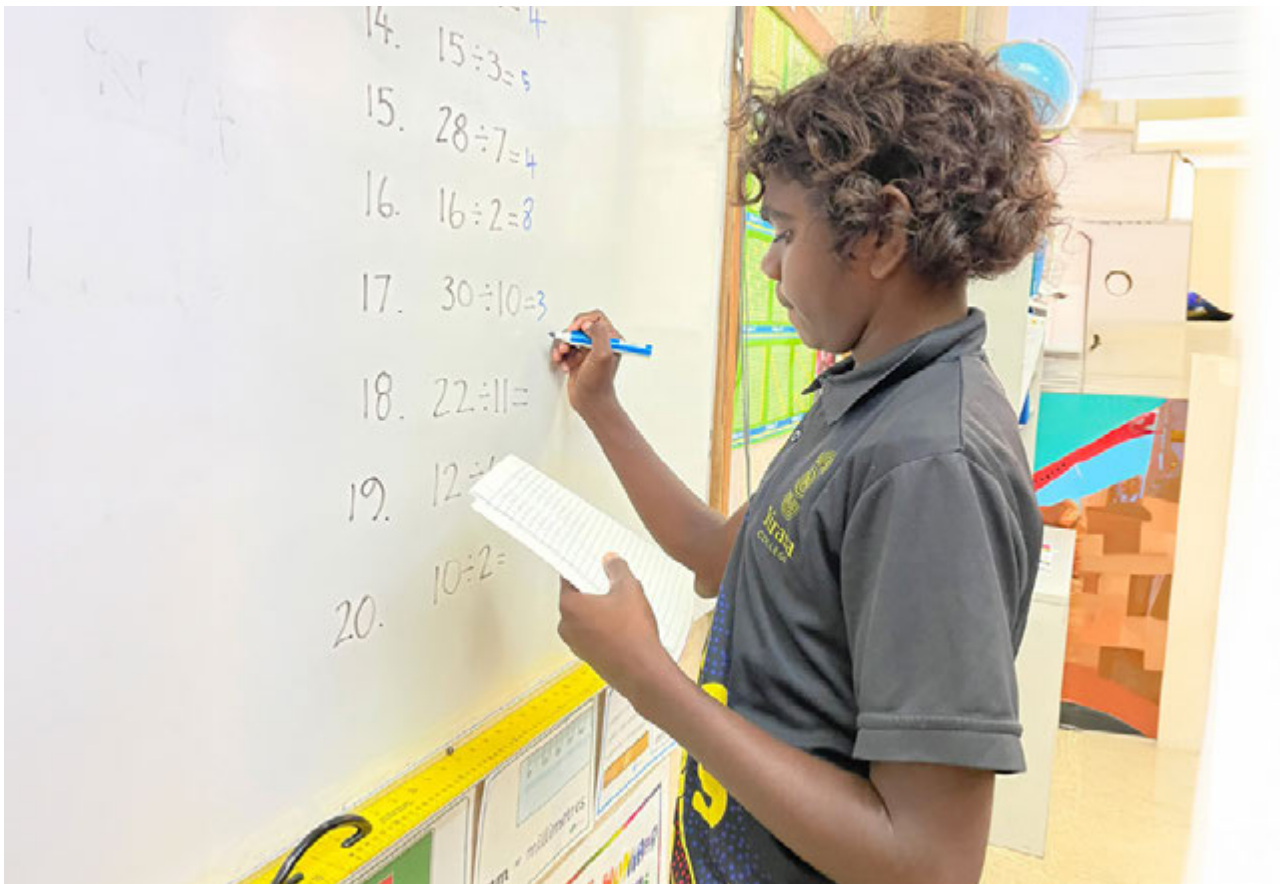
Administrative burden associated with ABSTUDY

Schools commonly reported that managing ABSTUDY payments requires a tremendous amount of administrative time. Further, the process is not a simple one. Students' families/parents/guardians need to apply for the ABSTUDY boarding funding, which is then channelled to the boarding school with the family's authority.

While this funding arrangement means the schools are in some respects at arm's length from the ABSTUDY claim process, they can also find themselves involved in identifying the best way to support families in applying for ABSTUDY.

Parental means-testing adds a further layer of complexity to the process. Students' ABSTUDY payments can be reduced once parents start earning a certain level of income. From the perspective of the schools' budgets and cash flows, the lack of transparency regarding changes in students' ABSTUDY payments is a vital concern.

13. [CAEPR - Barriers and Bureaucracy, Bridges and Brokers 2017 \(anu.edu.au\) p3](#)



Communication difficulties associated with ABSTUDY

The communication process between parents, schools and Services Australia is complicated, with difficulties being exacerbated by privacy provisions. There are several different types of communication challenges involving the different parties engaged in the ABSTUDY process including:

- information about ABSTUDY not being readily accessible to schools or families
- schools' difficulties accessing information about students' payments
- communication with Services Australia.

Management of student travel

Student travel has always been a challenging issue for schools. Though some problems relate to ABSTUDY policy, administrative procedures, funding, and services, the overall complexity of travel remains high. Schools had diverse approaches to students' travel arrangements, depending on their locations and the home communities of their students.

The report notes that 'there were some significant recurring themes. Again, the distinct character of students' home environments – remote Indigenous communities – was a common element. The distance between these communities and the students' secondary boarding school, and limited transport options creates several obstacles to education.'¹⁴

Roundtables held recently with Independent boarding schools indicate that all of these issues remain as key concerns for the boarding providers.

14. [CAEPR - Barriers and Bureaucracy. Bridges and Brokers 2017 \(anu.edu.au\) p22](#)

8. CAPITAL FUNDING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools also require special consideration in relation to their capital needs.

Capital development in Independent schools is primarily funded by parents and the schools' communities. On average, these contributions account for ninety per cent of funds for capital development. It is extremely difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools to raise private income in order to meet their capital needs, as their students' families and communities often have a limited capacity to financially contribute.

The difficulty of providing for new or improved capital infrastructure in regional and remote areas is compounded by the significantly higher costs of building materials and labour compared to metropolitan areas. Costs may be doubled or tripled due to issues such as transport fees, access to construction expertise and extended construction times due to weather delays.

Due to these factors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools based in regional and remote communities can struggle to provide and maintain appropriate boarding facilities that foster an environment conducive to supporting students living away from home, while also meeting the needs of their highly disadvantaged students.

The current capital funding opportunity for boarding facilities in Central Australia is welcomed by Independent schools. However, without sufficient recurrent funding to ensure that ongoing staffing and other supports are in place, it will be difficult for schools to offer additional boarding places.



9. NIAA INDIGENOUS BOARDING PROVIDER GRANTS

Boarding schools with large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were greatly affected by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, as most boarding students returned to their communities for the duration of the pandemic. This significantly impacted both students' learning and schools' funding.

In response, for the last several years schools with large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students have been able to apply for additional annual recurrent funding through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Boarding Provider grants administered by the NIAA.

The 2023 Federal Budget allocated \$21.6 million for a one-year extension of NIAA's Indigenous Boarding Providers Grant program in 2023-24 to support approximately 2,300 students across around fifty boarding providers including Independent boarding schools.

This funding has been critical to schools' ongoing ability to support and educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. Despite the importance of this additional funding, the Indigenous Boarding Providers Grant program funding will cease the end of 2024, leaving affected schools with limited options to address funding shortfalls. Currently there has been no funding announced to replace it for 2025 and beyond.



CASE STUDY 4

HAILEYBURY RENDALL SCHOOL, NT

Haileybury Rendall Schools' (HRS) vision is to be recognised as a great world school. Located in Darwin, Northern Territory, HRS currently enrolls four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students from regional communities and 86 from remote or very remote communities.



A core part of HRS' culture is its commitment to Reconciliation and Closing the Gap. Its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are diverse, representing over 30 communities from across the north of Australia. There are often limited schooling options after Year 7 for young people who stay in their community. The excellent education programs provided by HRS benefits the students and the communities that they live in, as many graduates return to work and share their education as leaders, improving the lives of their family and friends.

HRS has experienced strong growth, increasing by approximately ten remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders every year. With the continuation of sufficient funding, HRS hopes to keep pace with this demand and provide access to high-quality education and opportunities to as many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as possible.

Benefits of boarding

Boarding at HRS provides a choice and the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and very remote communities to access an outstanding contemporary education and gives them a real chance to live and walk in two worlds – their community and the HRS campus. Strong connection with community families is an essential piece of the supportive experience.

Boarding with HRS provides an education where students can achieve their potential through focussed numeracy and literacy development, along with studies in humanities, science, health and physical education. In a culturally responsive environment that HRS has deliberately crafted, everyone involved enjoys the two-way learning that occurs, while also maintaining strong ties to culture and country.

Boarding facilities maintenance

HRS does not receive capital funding support of any kind to maintain or improve its boarding facilities. Some areas are quite tired, even with HRS gradually improving and replacing what it can with available resources. Essential improvements such as new bathrooms, improved security, and new furniture and bedding are funded entirely without government support, adding some pressure to HRS's financial viability as a boarding school.

Funding uncertainty

To fully support and provide continued excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, HRS is partially reliant on two major grants from the Commonwealth Government each year. One is for Indigenous Boarding Providers from remote Australia and the other is for Intensive Numeracy and Literacy education. A portion of the cost of boarding life is also funded by ABSTUDY. This support all means that even the most disadvantaged students from remote communities continue to have the chance to attend HRS, and receive an education that otherwise would not be possible.

The continuation of these grants after several years remains essential for HRS to continue support for those Indigenous students who are experiencing a disproportionate level of disadvantage and inequality. However, these grants are both expiring at the end of 2024, and HRS does not yet have a guarantee of their continuation. As a result of attempting to budget well into 2025 and beyond, this uncertainty means that HRS is hoping soon for assurances that recurrent funding will be established into the future.



10. URGENT ACTION

It is time to secure the future of Indigenous Boarding Schools.

For decades, successive governments have conducted countless reviews, all reaching the same, irrefutable conclusion: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding schools require immediate, targeted support to survive and thrive. The evidence is overwhelming and undeniable.

These schools serve as a lifeline for some of Australia's most disadvantaged students. Yet, they are being forced to operate under a constant financial strain, where the gap between income and the actual cost of delivering a culturally safe, high-quality education is widening by the day.

This crisis is not abstract. It is real, urgent, and already unfolding. In the last decade alone, two Indigenous boarding schools have closed their doors forever. One has ceased offering boarding, and unless immediate action is taken, more will follow. What will be the cost of inaction? The future of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students hangs in the balance. These are not just numbers; they are the dreams, aspirations, and potential of young lives - of future leaders, elders, and changemakers from remote communities who depend on these schools for an education they cannot access anywhere else.

These schools are doing the heavy lifting, shouldering the responsibility of bridging the vast educational gap that exists for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Without secure, stable funding, we risk undoing years of hard-fought progress.

Now is the time for action. The Australian Government must step up and develop a long-term funding model that offers these schools the certainty they need to plan for the future - one that allows them to attract and retain passionate staff, maintain essential infrastructure, and most importantly, provide a culturally rich and nurturing environment for students who are far from home.

The solution is not complex, but the stakes are high. The cost of keeping these schools open is far less than the social and economic price Australia will pay if these students are lost to the system.





INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA



Cover sheet: Supporting document #3

ISA SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE PERCEPTIONS AND STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

DATE MARCH 2023

1. KEY POINTS / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Independent school sector is a key contributor to vocational education and training (VET) through the provision of VET onsite as a registered training organisation (RTO) or through engaging students in external VET courses or school-based apprenticeships.
- Independent schools offer careers advice to students and families. On-going professional development, staffing and resourcing is required to provide the most up to date information.
- Independent schools form key relationships with industry and business to ensure robust and engaging VET courses and apprenticeships can be offered. However as there is no coordinated and comprehensive approach amongst school sectors, government and industry, developing these relationships at an individual Independent school level takes significant time and resourcing.
- VET is increasingly becoming a focal point in education for Independent school senior students, providing not only transition into apprenticeships and further education and training, but also as a pathway to university entry through alternate entry programs and directly into employment.
- To improve the status and perception of VET, the focus on ATAR as the only credible senior schooling option needs to change so that students can take advantage of the many opportunities that VET school pathways can provide.¹

2. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISA represents more than 1,200 schools and 688,000 students, accounting for 17 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. The latest available data shows that one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school with more than one in five secondary students attending an Independent school.

Independent schools cater for a range of communities with many students educated in regional and remote locations and in settings which are distinctive to the Independent sector, such as boarding

¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

INQUIRY INTO THE PERCEPTIONS AND STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SUBMISSION

schools and Special Assistance Schools. Independent schools offer a range of educational experiences and services that are not readily available from other providers.

Independent schools make a valuable contribution to education in Australia. They are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools, contributing to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

Independent schools are committed to playing their part in improving educational opportunities for young Australians and contributing to a robust and successful national schooling system.

Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist 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 factors.

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 schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

3. ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

ISA has prepared this submission in response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's inquiry into the perceptions and status of vocational education and training (VET), and Commonwealth supported information on VET available to students, and how they impact:

- education and training choices of students, particularly those who lack the necessary foundation skills, or experience other disadvantage
- employer views and practices in relation to engagement with VET.

ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

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4. INTRODUCTION

ISA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry into the perceptions and status of VET and to highlight the crucial role that the Independent school sector plays in VET, career advice and upskilling young people for future employment.

In the Independent school sector, VET is seen in many, but not all contexts, as a highly valued educational opportunity for young people to learn important knowledge and skills and have an opportunity to develop employment-based skills and gain certification.

VET is also increasingly becoming a focal point for senior students, providing not only transition into apprenticeships and further education and training, but also as entry into university through alternate entry programs or directly into employment.

AISs and individual Independent schools build ongoing strategic partnerships and relationships with industry and local businesses to link students to future employment opportunities and on the job training through RTO providers, whether these are school RTOs, AIS RTOs or external RTOs.

AISs also support Independent schools with professional development for careers advice and share career and VET related resources with schools, providing advice on available funding initiatives such as the Gateway to Industry Schools Programs (GISP), a state funded program providing Queensland schools with the opportunity to engage with industry through expos, work opportunities, and employers visiting schools.

ISA represents the Independent school sector on national issues, working closely with AISs to understand opportunities and challenges regarding VET, careers advice, funding, student training costs, staff skills accreditation and information regarding ongoing and new initiatives across states and territories.

5. INFORMATION AVAILABLE ABOUT VET AND OTHER PATHWAYS

All student and parents should have access to current and professional career guidance at school however the Independent school sector is extremely diverse and schools vary in their ability to provide dedicated career guidance practitioners and/or a VET coordinator. Many Independent schools have only one staff member who manages both roles and some schools do not have the resources for either role. Therefore, the amount of information students receive on VET qualifications and pathways will differ across schools.

In order for students to receive comprehensive advice, school career guidance practitioners and counsellors must have a sound understanding of the labour market and a thorough understanding of training, study and employment options available.

Careers advisers in schools require ongoing professional development to provide up to date advice to students regarding employment trends, workforce demands, emerging occupations and career opportunities. Students also require evidence-based information to make informed decisions about senior schooling choices and post school decisions relating to further study or employment.

There is an abundance of information available to students, published by state, territory and Commonwealth governments, however knowing where and how to find reliable and up to date information can present challenges for students, parents and schools due to the large number of

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available websites and resources and the lack of a central, authoritative repository. The frequency of updates to information means that keeping abreast of changes can be quite challenging and highlights the necessity to have well resourced, experienced staff in schools to navigate this for students and families.

Students receive advice from a wide range of sources including both formal and informal advice provided by career guidance practitioners, teachers, parents and carers, family, friends, employers, and student recruitment officers working in tertiary institutions. Students also see and hear a range of information presented through media and a variety of other experiences, e.g., work placements, industry tasters and tours, tertiary talks and tours, simulations, etc.

The range of information available can be overwhelming and confusing, particularly to students, and parents and carers. There is both subtle and explicit messaging from an array of sources, including parents and schools, which may encourage students to view a university pathway as the ideal, with other study choices seen as second best. This is not in the best interests of all students nor in the best interests of the nation.

The organisation [Year13](#) has conducted research which highlights the value of current, up-to-date, careers advice. The research reflects data sourced from over 4,000 students from across Australia indicating that 48% of students get their career advice from parents, 17% from siblings and 23% from careers advisers. While 66% of parents said they had a well-rounded understanding of university, only 16% said they had an understanding of VET. This may be a contributing factor in the smaller proportion of students who consider VET pathways and apprenticeships.

5.1 STATE OVERVIEWS

The diversity of the Independent school sector is also reflected in the delivery of VET in schools (VETiS), which varies considerably across states and territories. For this reason, this submission includes not only a national response, but also provides information specific to each state and territory to highlight the complexity and the broad range of delivery of VETiS.

The AISs in each state and territory play a significant role in supporting schools that deliver VETiS or access VET through external training providers. This section highlights some of the initiatives and supports available to inform students and their families about Career Education, VET and future pathways.

5.1.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) provides regular meetings for VET Coordinators and career guidance practitioners which include presentations from industry representatives, training providers, career education leaders and agencies, as well as relevant WA government departments. These meetings provide WA Independent schools with the most current information on VET courses, pathways and employment opportunities.

AISWA also organises an annual Training Providers Expo for providers currently delivering to schools or who are interested in working with schools. They also invite universities to this event to showcase their alternative pathways.

AISWA disseminates important information to schools such as the WA Department of Training and Workforce Development's website ([DTWD VET for Secondary Students](#)) which has a dedicated section for schools. This includes valuable information on the funded programs available to school students and a useful guide to managing School Based Traineeships and Apprenticeships.

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5.1.2 TASMANIA

Tasmanian Independent schools have responded positively to recent policy changes supporting more informed school-to-work transition and raising career awareness. The Tasmanian Government's *Years 9-12 Project* has created a vision for VET that "By 2030, all learners in Years 9 to 12 will have access to high quality personalised, customised and localised vocational learning and VET opportunities to support their career and life aspirations."

A strong focus on VET in Tasmanian schools and general vocational learning including career education has resulted in:

- a greater focus on VET that aligns with Tasmanian workforce needs
- ensuring school-based training meets national training standards with a particular focus on work placement
- improved and informed pathway planning for students through years 9-12
- a renewed senior secondary curriculum that reflects contemporary workforce knowledge and skills
- access to contemporary career information that supports greater knowledge about workforce requirements
- a focus on education and industry partnerships that support school students attaining VET qualifications which are valid and ensure appropriate performance to meet industry expectations: Certificate I and II VET qualifications for years 11 and 12, Units of Competence (not full qualifications) at years 9 and 10
- flexibility to meet changing skills needs in particular industries allowing Certificate III qualifications in approved circumstances
- greater promotion to schools and students of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships for Certificate III qualifications in high demand skills areas.

5.1.3 NEW SOUTH WALES

There is growing evidence of a positive change in the perception of VET in NSW Independent schools which may be due to the increase in the availability of information to Independent school students and increased uptake of VETiS.

Informed career advice and/or exposure to employment pathways commencing in primary school and lower secondary school is important and effective, as is the opportunity for students to engage in real-life work experience.

Within the NSW Independent school sector there has been a consistent increase in the number of Independent schools joining the AISNSW Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in order to deliver more VETiS. In 2015, there were 85 Independent schools delivering programs through the AISNSW RTO and in 2023 there are 125 Independent schools, an increase of almost 50 per cent. Similarly, the number of students undertaking VET in NSW Independent schools has grown over 70 per cent from 2,003 to over 3,500 in that same period.

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Since 2015, the number of students in NSW independent schools participating in School-Based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (SBAT) has also increased. In 2022, there were 520 NSW Independent school students in Year 11-12 engaged in a SBAT.

NSW Independent schools aim to meet the diverse learning needs of their students and for many schools this has resulted in a greater amount of information being available and a broader curriculum being offered including the following programs.

- The NSW Department of Education [RIEP program](#) (Regional Industry Education Program) promotes career related activities for students in NSW, available to both government and non-government schools.
- The [NSW Careers Advisers Association](#) is a well-regarded organisation and offers careers related information and opportunities to NSW Independent schools through its individual and organisational membership.
- Students studying VET engage in work placements and NSW schools are well supported by local Work Place Service Providers (cross-sectoral program across NSW schools).

5.1.4 QUEENSLAND

In Queensland Independent schools there is a growing awareness of the value and integrity of vocational programs in schools across influencers and decision-makers such as school leaders and parents. There are more professional development opportunities and more support for career guidance practitioners to expand their knowledge of vocational pathways.

Career guidance and information made available to Queensland Independent school students is mostly made available through the following organisations:

- Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)
- Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT)
- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA).

To support schools in navigating the amount of information available, ISQ has a dedicated Education Services Advisor (ESA) for vocational education, skills and training providing guidance and relevant details to Independent schools regarding:

- professional learning opportunities provided by ISQ and external organisations
- the submission of applications for VET activity, work experience, structured work placement data and school-based apprenticeship funding
- the latest VET sector news including regulatory updates from ASQA and the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA), changes to legislation, Commonwealth and state funding opportunities, program initiatives, professional learning and training package updates
- access to regular one-to-one support to member schools to inform and advise school VET practitioners in a range of areas such as VET tasks, training products and how they align to the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), delivery and assessment.

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ISQ also provides a dedicated Member Hub for VET, accessible to all ISQ member schools. This Hub comprises resources, forms and guidance materials to enable schools access to the latest information and processes for the implementation and operational delivery of VET programs in schools.

In addition to the above, ISQ funds two accredited training programs to enable the provision of support, information, guidance and valid training opportunities for students on vocational pathways.

- Training and Assessment Education (TAE) Certificate IV to qualify schoolteachers so that they may deliver vocational programs in school as well as their curriculum subjects.
- Certificate IV in Career Development to qualify career guidance practitioners and expand their awareness of VET pathways. The program established between ISQ and the assigned RTO specifically includes career education electives to support vocational students.

DESBT provides information to Independent schools by holding regular network forum events across the regions including stakeholders such as:

- Department of Education (DoE), providing information supporting work experience opportunities, insurance and processes
- Sector representatives including ISQ providing information regarding VET practices, professional learning, application processes and guidance to support VET Coordinators, RTO managers and career guidance practitioners
- Australian Apprenticeship Network Providers, providing information regarding school-based apprenticeships and traineeships opportunities and processes.

Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) provide the latest regulatory updates for school RTOs and information pertaining to the achievement of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) through VET pathways. QCAA has a dedicated school portal with areas focused entirely on VET, providing information about specific qualifications which are current on the [National Register of VET](#), the required amount of training and the QCE credits allocated with respect to each of those training products.

5.2 COMMONWEALTH FUNDED INFORMATION ABOUT VET

Information disseminated by the Commonwealth should be clear, concise and promote a good understanding of VET and VET outcomes, including a coordinated approach that ensures consistent information between states and territories about the VET sector, including VETiS. Clear pathway options for students that show how VET and university options can intersect, could dispel the VET versus university dichotomy that has long existed in education.

It would also help if the information was tailored to all stakeholders, such as students, parents and carers, career guidance practitioners, VET practitioners, and school leaders. Industry could also support the distribution of industry information relevant to users to help increase their understanding of the range of available options.

The provision of a quality career education program in schools plays a fundamental role in helping to improve information available to students about the range of future pathway options. In recent years, there have been various reviews into career education, such as the Commonwealth government's 'Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy' [Future Ready -](#)

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[Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](https://www.dewr.gov.au) and a recognition that career education needs to be strengthened in schools.

For the VET sector to be better understood and promoted, career education in schools needs to be highly valued, resourced and quality training provided. The Commonwealth government could investigate this further to ensure that future resourcing of trained career guidance practitioners is available for secondary schools.

Meeting the current recommendations around the resourcing for the provision of career education can be a challenge for schools. The Australian Centre for Career Education [Australian Centre for Career Education \(ceav.vic.edu.au\)](https://ceav.vic.edu.au) recommends one full time professional (i.e., qualified with a Graduate Certificate in Career Development or higher) career practitioner for every 450 students plus two associates (with a Cert IV in Career Development), as a team. They also recommend that the professional have teaching qualifications but if not, that they work closely with teachers to deliver career education programs.

Some elements that comprise good practice in career education include:

- ensuring the promotion of learning with unbiased and up to date career and labour market information
- providing beneficial interactions with VET providers
- supporting students to explore all study options available to them, both vocational and academic
- engaging and involving parents and carers, including helping them to understand and value all career and study options.

As school staff often provide informal advice to students, it is essential to increase their knowledge in regard to VET pathways and academic options. In addition, improved specialised training is required for career education practitioners. This could help prevent inaccurate, outdated, and biased information being conveyed to students and the wider school community, and would encourage staff to recognise that all pathways should be valued.

6. PERCEPTIONS AND STATUS OF VET SECTOR

In the Independent school sector, the perceptions of VET vary, and the value placed upon selecting a VET pathway of study is heavily influenced by many factors. However, the perception and status of VET is showing gradual signs of improvement which could, in part, be attributed to recent reviews and investigations into the VET sector. There have been several reports and reviews proposing significant policy changes including the following.

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- *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training (2020)*² commissioned by the Education Council and undertaken by Professor Peter Shergold AC, that provided 20 recommendations towards a national strategy on VETiS.
- *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System (2019)*³ commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by the Honourable Steven Joyce, that included a section on providing clearer pathways for secondary school students through VET programs.
- The NCVER Report, *VET for secondary school students: post-school employment and further training destinations (2020)*⁴ that noted selecting the right VET course and pathway can make a substantial difference to secondary school students looking for direct transition from school into an apprenticeship or full-time ongoing employment.
- The Productivity Commission's report on *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review (2021)*⁵ noted that the reliability and usefulness of career information and advice for school students requires significant improvement and that schools and their advisers often have little experience with VET therefore may favour universities.

However, even with the focus on VET and the many reviews and reports, many educators are frustrated that the on-going singular focus on ATAR necessarily results in a narrow curriculum focus, denying students the opportunities that VET school pathways can provide.⁶

For some years, the University of Melbourne's Assessment Research Centre and other academics have been researching the value of an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) versus other assessment pathways such as VET certification, learner profiles and microcredentials, looking at multiple ways to assess a student's knowledge and skills and application of their skills.⁷

The media focus on publishing school ATAR league tables, comparing the highest achieving students, schools and school sectors, leaves many educators feeling that this influences public perception and reinforces ATAR as the ultimate goal for senior schooling.

² Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training," 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/looking-future-report-review-senior-secondary-pathways-work-further-education-and-training>.

³ Hon Steven Joyce, "Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System | PM&C," accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system>.

⁴ Josie Misko et al., *VET for Secondary School Students: Insights and Outcomes*, 2021.

⁵ Productivity Commission, "National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review Study Report," January 21, 2021, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/skills-workforce-agreement/report>.

⁶ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

⁷ Enterprise Professor Sandra Milligan Melbourne University of, "An Alternative to ATAR," Pursuit, October 29, 2019, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/an-alternative-to-atar>.

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As a result, many families and students believe that the only possible pathway to enter university study is to gain an ATAR. The push for ATAR-based courses also impacts school-based decisions regarding what courses to offer, in order to meet the demands of their community.

Yet despite this public perception, ATAR alone is not the basis on which most students gain entry to university. Many students are accepted based on VET qualifications and training, workplace experience, early entry, mature-age entry or alternative selection processes.⁸

Anecdotal evidence indicates that there has been an overall positive shift in school communities in relation to the status of VET, however, other factors, such as the value placed on VET as a pathway, the resourcing available to support VET and career guidance in schools, and the skills and experience of individual VET coordinators, can have an impact at a local level. Having a flexible timetable and the teachers needed to support the inclusion of VET in a student's program can present challenges in schools.

However, the perception amongst certain parts of the community that VET has a lower status/value than a university pathway remains. In this context, educating both students and parents that the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, ensuring that students are guided into the correct VET course, and overcoming the stereotype that VET is only for disengaged or struggling students, are essential.

Some government initiatives steer students into programs that link with areas of skills shortage. Limiting the variety of courses that students can access in this way may undermine the overall value that VET can have for a young person and their exploration of potential future pathways and could, in fact, create skill shortages in other areas.

Employer engagement varies depending on the industry and this may limit student opportunities for work experience and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Feedback from AISs indicates that some industries and employers are very accommodating, whilst others make it difficult for Independent schools and students to engage in work programs, resulting in students pursuing other opportunities.

6.1 EXTERNAL RTOS

Higher certificate levels that are not government funded are provided at considerable cost to parents. Feedback received by ISA noted that in addition to these fees, some RTOs will schedule program delivery and assessment across a single line of the traditional timetabled curriculum resulting in no more than 220 hours of supervised training, irrespective of whether the program is a Certificate II qualification or a Diploma in order to maximise financial returns.

As a result of this form of delivery, there can be a perception that 'VET is easy' and qualifications such as Diplomas (AQF level 5) are not difficult to obtain. However, VET programs, especially at Certificate III level and above, do have a high level of rigour and challenge around the acquisition of skills and the independent application of required industry knowledge. To achieve this rigour, activities must be assessed across a range of different industry relevant contexts and over a

⁸ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, "Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of Senior 13Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training."

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sufficient period of time in accordance with training package requirements, industry expectations at the entry level and the identified ability of the student cohort.

As some RTOs are limiting the amount of training provided to school students, the applicable assessment activities may not be as rigorous. This is a key contributing factor to the view held by industry that school students are leaving school with the paper credential but not the required skills, contributing to the current skills gaps. A review of systems, delivery and assessment practices and greater RTO accountability could improve the quality of professional, trade-based workforces.

Another issue noted by AISs is that in some instances, especially across regional, rural and remote Independent schools, trainers and assessors supplied by external providers do not have the experience of providing adult learning to senior secondary school students and often deliver and assess using the same pedagogical approaches as they would to mature adults.

6.2 INDUSTRY

As noted above, many industries have reported that often students emerge from school with the credential but not the actual skills. In addition to the RTO issues outlined above, this may also be partly attributed to schools incorrectly placing 'underachieving' students in vocational education and training programs. This perception that VET is still primarily a pathway for those with low levels of literacy, numeracy, or who are disengaged from learning to achieve an ATAR may be affecting the perception and status of VET more broadly.

Whilst vocational programs at levels 1 and 2 may provide opportunities for under achieving students to acquire lower-level skills in specific subject areas, identified learning needs must be addressed through bespoke programs which are focused on supporting these specific areas.

6.3 STATE AND TERRITORY AIS PERSPECTIVES

The following section provides views from some state Associations of Independent Schools about the perception of VET.

6.3.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In 2014, The School Curriculum and Standards Authority raised the perception of VET by making it mandatory for non-ATAR students to complete a minimum Certificate II in order to achieve their Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). However, WACE criteria changed again in 2019 and VET was no longer a mandatory option for non-ATAR students. As a result, in 2020 there was a significant increase in applications for funded courses offered by TAFE. This outcome was a positive result for the standard of VET delivered to school students as there were more students selecting qualifications that they were interested in and that related to the state priority occupations list (SPOL). However, whilst this outcome was a good result for the status of VET delivered to secondary students (VETDSS), it led to TAFE being oversubscribed and many students missing out on their course selection.

In 2022, DTWD addressed this increase in applications by providing additional places in their VETDSS program. In addition to a significant increase in course options, they also permitted Year 10 students to access these funded courses for the first time. Another new initiative was to include skill sets in the VETDSS program.

Due to changing programs, initiatives and options, perceptions of VET are also continually changing.

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6.3.2 TASMANIA

There has been a significant shift toward more positive attitudes on VETiS programs amongst Tasmanian independent schools largely as a result of the Years 9-12 Project being a cross-sectoral initiative with strong partnership qualities established and maintained by Government, Catholic and Independent school sectors.

Most Independent Tasmanian schools with a year 9-12 presence have established VET programs or are planning to incorporate these in the next couple of years.

There has been particular interest among smaller Independent schools in developing supportive strategies for school-to-work and viewing Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASbAs) as a useful way to engage with VET in a practical way while supporting better post-school outcomes including post-year 10 transitions to future work and training.

Many of the national Trade Training Centres established from 2007 work closely with both industry and Independent schools to deliver high-demand skills through their VET programs particularly in construction, automotive, hospitality and horticulture and aquaculture.

There are still challenges, as even amongst the most committed Independent schools there are perceived or actual barriers. The following is a sample of perceptions from some Tasmanian Independent schools:

- VETiS programs are relatively complex requiring partnerships with employers and RTOs which for many Independent schools are new experiences.
- Running VETiS programs based on individual student interest is expensive, disruptive to school timetables and operations and is hard on teacher resources like professional time and compliance demands.
- VETiS is most appropriate for students who are not embarking on an ATAR-generating program. Only a couple of Tasmanian Independent schools demonstrate a major commitment to VET, where *all* students are expected to complete a VET program.
- Recruiting and upskilling suitable VET teachers is expensive. VET teachers require a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 and \$4000.
- Work placements for VETiS programs can be difficult to secure although many Independent schools use their existing parent and business networks to secure such placements.

Since there is no dedicated RTO for Independent schools in Tasmania, there is a greater tendency to use on-line RTO services with dedicated VETiS providers like IVET (<https://www.ivetinstitute.com.au/>).

As an outcome of post-COVID skills shortages there has been some sizeable shifts in the attitude of Tasmanian employers across all industry sectors to school-based VET demonstrated through:

- more pro-active engagement by industry with schools promoting training pathways into their respective industries. In Tasmania, mining, forestry, aquaculture, hospitality, tourism and construction industries now actively seek opportunities to engage with students through VET taster programs, industry expos, site visits and joint educational activities
- active promotion to schools of ASbAs for industries seeking to rebuild their workforce

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- ongoing collaboration between schools and industry to promote VET programs and provide work placement opportunities, particularly through industry associations such as the Master Builders Association that has a wide-ranging program working with schools to recruit apprentices in the construction industry.

New and emerging skills required in renewable energy and drone pilot aviation has seen industry engage with schools, provide on-site training and future employment and career opportunities.

The Tasmanian Department of Education is directly engaging with industry to determine how VETiS and ASbA programs can align with industry skills needs, and looking at the appropriate level of qualifications that can be delivered by schools. There is also a more pro-active stance by TasTAFE in supporting better industry training pathways and working more directly with schools to nurture school-to-TAFE programs. This sends a clear message that school-based training is legitimate and is endorsed by the peak industry training body.

Tasmanian Independent schools that perceive the value of running a VETiS program generally have:

- a school commitment to ensuring all students have access to a VET program, will participate in, and in many cases complete, a VET qualification
- school leadership that actively promotes VET programs to students, parents, and the local community
- a capacity to engage with local business and industry in effective partnerships where students are provided access to work placements and to ASbAs
- qualified VET personnel on campus particularly those responsible for coordinating and delivering VET programs that can work constructively with RTOs
- resourcing of VET is treated no differently to that allocated to more traditional subject areas
- flexible approaches to innovative VET program delivery with some schools even creating school-based enterprises which employ trainees and apprentices from the student population.

6.3.3 NEW SOUTH WALES

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) recently announced the removal of subject categories for the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) and the subsequent impacts for calculation of the ATAR. VET subjects were previously identified as category B subjects and students could only have one category B subject calculated in their ATAR. The removal of 'categories' means that students can study more than one VET subject and still have it calculated in their ATAR. This will apply for the first time in the 2025 HSC and significantly improve the status of VETiS in NSW.

The growing prominence of awards and competitions is also raising the profile of VET. AISNSW is actively seeking an increased presence of Independent schools, students and staff in events such as WorldSkills and the NSW State Training Awards. The intention is to raise the profile of VET in the NSW Independent school sector and highlight the achievements and opportunities that are possible through a VET pathway.

6.3.4 VICTORIA

In Victoria, the perceptions and status of the VET sector have affected the level of employer engagement and recruitment and retention of the VET educator workforce. The VET sector has faced funding cuts over the years which has meant many reduced programs and resources. Anecdotally,

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many VET educators feel undervalued and that they are expected “to do more with less” in an area that has increased the administrative and compliance load. With limited resources, the VET sector may be constrained in its ability for Independent schools and industry to engage at an optimal level.

The recent Victorian Firth review [vocational-applied-learning-pathways-report.pdf](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/vocational-applied-learning-pathways-report.pdf) ([education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au)) made several recommendations in relation to the VET sector, including providing students with more exposure to applied learning and exploration of vocational areas in the middle secondary years to foster a greater understanding of career pathways and help build the career aspirations of students.

It is important that schools recognise that VET delivered to secondary students (VDSS) does not equate to career education. In many schools VDSS coordination is bundled into the career practitioner’s position description. This often precludes the career practitioner from being able to implement good practice in career education, let alone VDSS.

Parents and carers are influential when it comes to student enrolment choices therefore programs such as the Victorian Department of Education’s Engaging Parents in Career Conversations (EpiCC), and a program developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 2003, Parents as Career Transition Support (PACTs) can improve the status of VET. Though PACTs requires a refresh, it has been taken up and adapted by others over the years and EpiCC is still available on the Department’s website. Both programs are designed to provide parents and carers with current information and resources about careers and pathways. EpiCC relies on the career practitioner to deliver it in the school, however, due to insufficient time in the timetable and limited school resources, this is often not possible, despite many career practitioners recognising they need to involve parents and carers more.

6.3.5 QUEENSLAND

VET in Queensland Independent schools has a strong profile with 175 Independent schools offering VET qualifications to students through TAFE Queensland, private RTOs, school RTOs and / or school-based traineeships or apprenticeships (SATs). In 2022, this represented an increase of 11% in the last two years.

Queensland Independent schools provide a range of VET qualifications: Certificate I, II, III and IV as well as Diploma level qualifications. In 2022 this equated to a total of 312 qualifications being delivered to 22,129 students across years 10 to 12 in Qld Independent schools.

The highest number of students achieve a qualification at Certificate II level. There is, however, a significantly higher number of Certificate III level qualifications being offered for study across years 10 to 12 compared to 2021. This data shows an increase of 24% in Certificate III qualifications being actively delivered and reported on, and a 6% increase in student enrolments at this level.

School-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements have increased over the past 5 years despite the impacts of the Covid pandemic with a total of 1,143 in 2022.

Negative perceptions of VET may be exacerbated by:

- insufficient advice provided by careers guidance practitioners in schools
- lack of ‘try a trade’ type work experience activities undertaken prior to sign up

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- parents finding willing RTOs and employers ready to engage and sign up their child, irrespective of their suitability and without any career advice
- schools being at the 'back end' of the arrangements, sometimes only being informed once the [Australian Apprenticeship Support Network](#) provider is ready to complete the training contract sign up
- employers being 'disappointed' with the levels of literacy, numeracy, maturity, accountability, responsibility and work ethic shown by some school students.

When considering VET perceptions within Queensland Independent schools, it is important to consider the diversity of the sector and the wide range of differing student cohorts. Some schools are strongly ATAR focused with the majority of students primed for university inclusion. Depending on context, some schools have a dual approach or may promote multiple pathways, valuing each approach and individual student need. However the value placed of vocational pathways is not consistent across Independent schools.

6.4 INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

Australia's school-based VET system compares well to international comparison, particularly in terms of program delivery and quality of training.

Some examples of national and international efforts where industry drives school-based VET programs include:

- the strong German and Swiss industry ownership of apprenticeship systems which link directly with schools. In Switzerland nearly 65% of senior secondary students are enrolled in an apprenticeship program <https://www.aicgs.org/publication/the-swiss-apprenticeship-system/>
- Komatsu Australia's Apprentice Development System also engages directly with schools through a series of programs like its STEM Punks ([STEM Punks](#)) which both alert students to career opportunities with Komatsu as well as providing an apprenticeship recruitment avenue
- UAVAIR's drone pilot program Certificate III in Aviation (Remote Pilot) being delivered to several Independent and government schools in a number of Australian states including Tasmania. The aviation company actively engages with schools because senior secondary students are regarded as top-line recruits into this part of the aviation industry.

7. SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

There are many successful partnerships that support VET programs for Independent school students, however access to supportive partnerships can be complex and there is a wide range of initiatives across states and territories.

7.1 AISS AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

AISS support schools in VET matters, although their capacity to support schools varies across states and territories due to size and other factors.

- AISS network with industry bodies and private RTOs to support schools to maintain relevant training and qualifications and be strategic in their program offerings to students.

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- AISs support schools with VET compliance and quality standards and provide ongoing training or professional development for VET teachers.
- AISs organise VET network meetings, offer webinars, send out VET newsletters, support industry connections with schools and provide practical advice and support to VET Coordinators in schools.
- Some AISs have developed their own Guides to VET for their member schools and organise online or face to face workshops for school staff involved in VET.
- AISs share information about external resources for teachers and students to access, such as the *myfuture* website, Year 13 and the National Careers Institute.
- Some AISs have a dedicated VET consultant to work with Independent schools to promote and support the increase and establishment of school VET programs.
- AISs also support ISA's role in national representation by participating in a policy working groups.
- In NSW, AISNSW is an RTO for over 125 Independent schools offering over 35 VET qualifications.
- In Queensland, ISQ supports over 175 Independent school RTOs engaged in the provision of VET courses or school-based apprenticeships, ensuring rigour and accredited training for educators. ISQ also conducts compliance checks on schools' VET programs.

7.2 INDUSTRY AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Although it can be challenging, it is important that schools liaise with industry when possible to ensure training and qualifications are meeting employers' needs for knowledge, skills and practical application. Many Independent schools form strategic relationships with industry and local businesses to ensure the provision of robust and engaging VET courses and apprenticeships.

The 2020 report, *Looking to the Future*, states that in order for students to understand future work expectations and how to access employment or training opportunities, a more systematic approach for schools to be able to engage with industry and employers is needed.⁹

AIS feedback indicates that successful employment outcomes for students can be enhanced when RTOs help facilitate and coordinate work placements for students enrolled in VET courses, particularly in industries such as Aged Care and Child Care where the qualification demands substantial work placement.

When RTOs coordinate placements, the load is spread between employers and exposes students to a wider variety of organisations and workplaces. Other benefits include the coordination of dates to reduce unintended conflicts with school activities and a more streamlined process for employers, students and the schools supporting them.

⁹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

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Success is dependent on successful communication between the RTO, school and employer, working together to support students and prepare them with any training required prior to placements. Ensuring that students are mentored while they are training is also essential.

In the Independent school sector, schools are encouraged to develop their own partnerships with industry, whether that be through their parent body, local sponsors, or local trades and businesses. Establishing these partnerships can be time consuming and are dependent upon the skills and time available to VET Coordinators in schools.

Strong Independent school-industry partnerships frequently display:

- an industry-initiated approach for schools to engage students in VET programs. Eg. The construction industry in Tasmania is engaging in this practice as a method for recruiting future apprentices based on their VETiS exposure,
- a willingness and flexibility by business to recognise the constraints that operate within schools, such as school-timetabling, extra-curricular activities, school holidays, assessment and examinations,
- business recognition of the importance for students to complete senior secondary education and not recruit students partway through a program,
- industry actively promoting the value of VETiS programs to parents, teachers and school-communities,
- industry being willing to work with RTOs and schools to facilitate on-the-job training and assessment, reporting of student achievement and progress and jointly celebrating student success,
- providing non-exploitative work placement where students can acquire the skills recognised in the qualification and are not seen as free or cheap labour undertaking mundane or monotonous tasks, and
- a willingness by schools to engage with industry in supporting VETiS programs by encouraging teachers to visit students on-the-job, participating in joint assessment activities and jointly advocate for and promote programs to stakeholders and school communities.

Some AISs also support schools to liaise with industry. For example, Independent Schools Tasmania has formed strategic relationships with the Mineral Council, Seafood Industry Council, TasTAFE, Beacon Foundation and Wool Industry Australia so they can connect their member schools and support them in setting up school-based apprenticeships.

7.3 STATE AND TERRITORY BASED PARTNER PROGRAMS

Partnerships between schools and businesses, government bodies and other education providers is a central component to the success of VET and related career pathways work. The benefits of successful partnerships between VET providers and employers have been acknowledged in recent Commonwealth and state governments reports and reviews.

Successful partnerships between VET providers, governments, schools and employers are possible when there is sufficient time and resources allocated to developing and maintaining relationships. It takes a concerted effort and dedicated people to build these relationships.

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Below are some examples of state and territory based partnership programs offered around the country to Independent school students, including in regional and remote areas.

7.3.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The Construction Training Fund (CTF) is a statutory body that collects a 0.2% training levy on all building and construction projects in Western Australia greater than \$20,000. Revenue from the levy is channeled back into the industry with programs that support workforce training, upskilling and career-enhancing opportunities. They have played an active role working with Independent schools in promoting pathways into the construction industry. Each year they run a number of 'Try-A-Trade' programs that are short 1–3-day workshops giving students a taste of different skills and jobs in the industry. They are always well attended by school students.

The CTF also funded the establishment of the Construction Futures Centre. The Construction Futures Centre (CFC) is a career development facility, using AR, VR, simulators and games to give both young people and adults some ideas of what construction is and what careers are available in the industry.

CTF also offer school students a scholarship program to study certificates in Construction.

Other Industries are well represented by their Industry Training Councils. AISWA regularly invites training councils to present at their VET Coordinators Network meetings to share the current job climate and training opportunities within their industries.

In WA, the state's Department of Training and Workforce Development has injected funding to prioritise opportunities for school students to participate in VET courses and VET related activities. The Department of Training and Workforce Development has a service agreement with AISWA to provide funding to AISWA member schools for the support of the delivery of Vocational Education and Training delivered in Independent schools.

Other significant programs that the WA state government has funded that has significantly raised the profile of VET are:

- VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VETDSS) programs -including additional hours being delivered from 2022 : [DTWD VET for Secondary Students](#)
- Year 9 Career Taster Program: <https://www.careertasterportal.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/>
- the Skills West Careers and Employment Expo: <http://skillswestexpo.com.au/>
- Careers and VET Expo: <https://www.careers-expo.com.au/>.

The 'Bunbury Trade Training Centre' consortium has been highlighted as a best practice model. WA Independent school students can enrol in the trade training centre in a variety of qualifications that provide pathways to employment relevant to the wider Bunbury / Busselton area. What makes this cluster successful is that it is privately run by a separate entity 'South-West VET Link'. Most classes are filled and even oversubscribed.

The Commonwealth funded Industry Training Hubs were set up in 2021 in the areas of Armadale and Wanneroo. These training hubs provide the following services to Independent schools:

- Information sessions from industries and employers in these regions such as 'The Australia Medical Association, Master Plumbers Association (MPA) Skills, Main Roads.

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- Funding for the Graduate Certificate in Career Education.
- Expo for VET providers and Employers in the region.
- Regular information sent through to schools on availability of jobs and school-based traineeships and apprenticeships in those regions.
- Parent webinars to build understanding of VET.

7.3.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

Successful industry partnerships aligned to specific VET course delivery in NSW Independent schools are particularly evident in rural and regional areas. For example:

- Partnerships with local builders and local industry in the trade areas.
- Strong sports-industry partnerships for VET delivery with top tier sports organisations such as Cricket Australia, Netball NSW, Sydney Swans, Sydney Kings, Sydney FC, South Sydney Rabbitohs and others.
- A small number of NSW Independent schools source work placements for their own students, however the overwhelming majority are sourced and coordinated through local Work Placement Service Providers.
- Beyond VET, the [AISNSW Pathways and Partnerships program](#) supports schools in developing [Partnership Frameworks](#) which guide the development of effective and sustainable partnerships with businesses, government bodies and other education providers.
- AISNSW has brokered and nurtured substantial relationships for NSW Independent schools with major organisations such as Collins Aerospace, eHealth at NSW Health, Sydney Science Park, the NSW Rural Doctors Network and others.

The [Waratah Project](#), an apprentice and trainee partnership with Bennelong Energy Services enables participating schools to actively build culturally inclusive and safe post-school pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Through this Project, AISNSW provides support to 35 NSW Independent schools to develop whole school structures that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student academic, wellbeing and post-schooling success and access to apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities.

The Project develops connections between schools and employers that continue throughout the year, and employers regularly contact schools to provide new opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who gain an apprenticeship/traineeship through the Bennelong Cup receive a \$1000 scholarship to assist in the purchasing of study equipment and tools required to succeed and allowing for a smoother transition from schooling into study and employment, along with ongoing support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors.

AISNSW also holds an annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership event providing Year 9-12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with opportunities to explore and plan their post-school pathways. This annual event connects students and their schools with both

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university and VET pathways as students attend workshops that develop greater understandings of the options, programs and support networks.

In 2022, over 120 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent school students from across NSW attended the AISNSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership event, with schools providing positive feedback on increased student confidence in developing and choosing post-school study and employment pathways.

7.3.3 QUEENSLAND

In Queensland, DESBT's initiative to fund organisations such as the Gateway to Industry Schools Providers (GISPs) is proving to be very successful. GISPs' purpose is to initiate programs that connect industry with schools. GISPs fall under the following sector categories: advanced manufacturing; aerospace; agribusiness; building and construction; community services; food, wine and tourism; health; information, communications and technology; minerals and energy; and screen and media.

There has been a significant increase in GISP program participation across Queensland. In 2022 a total of 103 Queensland Independent schools actively participated in these programs, representing more than a 25% increase in participation when compared to 2021.

DESBT provide VET in Schools (VETiS) funding for identified vocational qualifications most commonly at the Certificate II level. From enrolment and completion data issued to ISQ by the QCAA at the end of 2022, the number of qualifications across Queensland Independent schools at the Certificate III level is higher than the number of Certificate II level programs offered.

DESBT provides funding to ISQ to support Independent school-based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements and VET programs in Independent senior secondary schools.

DESBT also fund a number of organisations recognised as Gateway to Industry Schools Providers (GISPs). There are currently 10 GISPs, each providing a range of services and support pertaining to the needs of industry including access to industry representatives, expo events across the state for school students to attend, funding initiatives and professional learning for teaching in these areas.

As part of the [Queensland Workforce Strategy](#), DESBT fund a number of organisations in the [School-2-Work Transitions](#) program. Each of these organisations submitted a bespoke program for consideration, such as fee-free places for Certificate III in Information Technology traineeship, programs to enable the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provide further support and training for literacy and numeracy.

ISQ has representation on the [Trade to Teach](#) Working Group. For those who hold a trade qualification and want to pursue a teaching career in Industrial Technology and Design (ITD) a Trade to Teach internship pathway is available. However, this opportunity is only for teachers entering state schools and not the Queensland Independent school sector.

7.3.4 VICTORIA

Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (VicLLENs) are funded by the State Government. LLENs act as a broker to facilitate engagement with employers and work with local communities, including Independent schools and VET providers, to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of young people. This model could be adapted to provide greater support to Independent schools/VET providers in developing relationships with employers and industry.

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The Foundation for Young Australians published a series of reports, including a toolkit to promote School-Industry partnerships and collaboration. Such a toolkit may provide an impetus for partnerships and help Independent schools/VET providers and employers to better understand mutual needs.

7.3.5 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In South Australia, the Department for Education's VET for Schools Policy approves which programs and qualifications can be delivered in schools. Whilst Independent schools are not bound by this policy and are free to access any programs they wish, the viability of courses outside of those approved by the Department limits offerings.

Despite the government's aim to steer VET students into courses linked to skills shortages, there is a lack of information about these opportunities or meaningful "taster" courses. This means that students (and their parents) may be reluctant to commit to 12–24-month programs in years 11 and 12, or they may disengage from the program because they could not make an informed decision about course content prior to enrolling.

There are a few examples where South Australian Independent schools and RTO's have been proactive in the joint development of meaningful and financially viable "taster" programs for Year 10 students, allowing students to make informed decisions before committing to the larger government subsidised programs.

7.4 DIVERSE MODELS IN THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SECTOR

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. A number of Independent schools have a strong focus on the delivery of VET.

The Australian Industry Trade College (AITC) delivers programs that enables the right amount of training and exposure to industry, not only for students to obtain their qualification, but to learn work ready skills, capabilities and attitudes that employers require. Due to their strong relationships with industry, they are able to place students on school-based apprenticeships and traineeships whilst ensuring they also maintain and achieve a blended program of general and essential subjects.

Another example of diversity in the Independent school sector is the Men of Business Academy (MOB) that provide programs for disadvantaged male youths and supporting health and mental wellbeing. They structure an individualised learning model for each student to not only teach industry qualifications, but also include activities to maintain student engagement. This involves healthy eating, scheduled gym time and group activities, with dedicated social areas and outings that support mental health and well-being.

These examples illustrate how VET can be structured for delivery in schools in a variety of engaging ways that enable students to fulfill their own personalised needs and gain qualifications to enable transition into the world of work and further study. Promoting flexible models of VET delivery could encourage the adoption of VET within more traditional school models of learning.

8. COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMS

Recognising and reducing the barriers to improving VET programs and delivery requires a strategic, nationally coordinated approach encompassing all stakeholders. Without clear delineation between

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Commonwealth and state and territory government responsibilities, the result is often mixed messages and a duplication of information and services.

There are several Commonwealth programs and initiatives that provide important VET information to students, families and schools:

- The National Careers Institute provides links to major information sources around employment and workforce demands ([Home | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)) and careers information through the Explore Your Career portal ([Explore Your Career | Your Career](#)).
- *myfuture* provides an extensive range of online resources to support career exploration and planning, *myfuture* is currently involved in exploring a project to provide virtual work exposure (formerly work experience) for students in association with Education Services Australia (ESA).
- Training.gov.au ([training.gov.au - Home page](#)) provides a comprehensive listing of VET qualifications, Australian Training Package information and RTOs across all industries.
- The Commonwealth government's Skills and Training website at [Skills and Training - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](#) provides extensive information, including for school students, on VET.

While there is an abundance of support material made available from government agencies, it is often fragmented and /or duplicated. The National Careers Institute (NCI) could potentially lead and broker career information and resources nationally, rationalising the extensive and diverse range of current material available online.

Streamlining of information at the national and state level would be of great value, especially in virtual interactive career exploration and work experience digital resources such as those found on *myfuture* and the Victorian Department of Education's Virtual Industry Careers Experience (VICE) website. Some initiatives occur locally via individual projects. The North West Tasmanian Industry Training Hub has been producing similar high-quality apprenticeship digital resources.

9. BARRIERS TO IMPROVEMENT

The delivery of VET in Independent schools is complex across sectors and jurisdictions. Whilst the perception of VET in Independent schools is changing, ATAR still dominates senior secondary education and remains the predominant factor in university admission procedures with VET often seen as an alternative pathway. There are challenges and barriers which need to be considered to improve VET programs in schools and increase uptake across the Independent school sector.

9.1 ACCESS TO VET

Students facing barriers to access should not be precluded from accessing VET opportunities that are available to other students and it is important to explore creative solutions to enable access.

In rural and regional areas, VET faces significant challenges in terms of student access to, or choice of VET programs due to limited provision, high financial costs, transport and distance.

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools have restricted access to training and work experience due to the distance to the nearest town with the necessary facilities.

Occasionally a regional TAFE may travel to deliver some courses in a bulk delivery model, but it is

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hard for this model to be financially viable given that the cost and low number of students in those schools.

Ways to improve access for students with additional needs, including students with disability, and from low socio-economic backgrounds is also a key consideration to enable as many students as possible to undertake their choice of VET options.

Fee-free places at TAFE can be an attractive incentive for young people, although these places typically do not apply to the non-government school students who access these courses. ISA is strongly of the view that the school sector should not be a determinant of whether or not a student with disadvantage can access VET.

9.2 SCHOOL CAPACITY

There are many factors that Independent schools need to consider before offering VET programs to senior secondary students, either as an RTO in their own right or through external RTOs. For Independent schools wanting to explore VET options, this can be difficult to navigate. It is not easy to integrate VET into senior secondary studies, requiring students to undertake additional VET study, often offsite, and also maintain their regular school studies.

In many Independent schools, the size of the year 10-12 cohort can be quite small. Independent schools seldom have many more than 200-300 students in senior secondary cohorts. In comparison, some government sectors include sector senior secondary colleges with senior student enrolments typically over 1200 students or as systems, government schools have the capacity to cross subsidise the cost of VET delivery across the entire system.

By contrast Independent schools therefore rarely have dedicated, whole VETiS classes taught by an industry-trained and qualified instructor. An alternative model could be to provide students with individual, customized programs with training provided by an external, often online RTO under the direction of a school-based VET teacher-coordinator who has a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

9.3 STAFFING CHALLENGES

A key staffing issue for Independent schools offering VETiS, is that teachers must have accredited VET qualifications as well as teacher registration. The formal qualification to deliver VET requires both current industry experience and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which is not sufficient for teacher registration. This can affect VET program offerings when staff members leave, affecting student choice, school programs, school infrastructure, costs and resources and staffing arrangements.

Seemingly continuous changes to training packages and VET teacher training upgrades require significant time, effort and financial cost for both RTOs and schools. Ensuring VETiS teachers retain industry currency with the opportunity to return to industry or engage in refresher programs and to engage in moderation and validation exercises involves time out of school and may incur relief teacher costs. These factors have had a detrimental impact on the appeal of VET for some schools and teachers.

VET teachers often become the VETiS coordinator in schools, supervising students undertaking a variety of VET courses, managing school support strategies, coordinating work placements and

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ensuring compliance in line with RTO requirements. This can be a challenging role particularly if they are required to teach in other subject areas.

RTO trainers may find it difficult to move from adult training models to senior secondary school students. Students have different levels of maturity, life experience and understanding to adults, which needs to be considered in the delivery of VET programs to senior students.

In high demand skills areas, particularly in construction, it is difficult to recruit VET teachers since the industry often offers more substantial incentives and, for young teachers in particular, the industry often head-hunts them to return to industry.

In relation to careers advice, as noted earlier there is often inadequate resourcing and funding of career education in schools. In some schools the function of providing careers advice is fulfilled by a school staff member or teacher whose substantive role may not be careers advice, though they are allocated some dedicated time to this task. In schools where this is the case, time allocation varies, as does the experience and expertise of the staff member responsible for careers advice.

9.4 LACK OF WORKPLACE EXPOSURE

Workplace exposure helps students build their understanding of the world of work, make more informed career choices, increase their networks, and helps to build a better understanding of VET and available career pathways.

Workplace exposure is an element of good practice in career education but Independent schools may find it difficult to adequately resource workplace exposure opportunities for students as the administrative requirements related to work placements are cumbersome and time consuming.

A more systematic approach to support more industry-school collaboration and programs for industry-school partnerships at scale would be welcomed by the Independent school sector.

9.5 FUNDING AND COST CONSIDERATIONS

Many Independent schools face major barriers to the delivery of VETiS programs due to the costs associated with accessing RTO services and upskilling teachers to meet VET training requirements, particularly the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

There is also inconsistent funding of VET across school sectors and a lack of equity in student expenses associated with undertaking VET courses. Cost can therefore act as a disincentive for students to study VET in the senior secondary years or as a post-school pathway.

VETiS programs may carry direct and hidden costs over and above what it costs to deliver the Australian Curriculum and more traditional programs. These include:

- staffing qualifications and availability - recruiting and upskilling of VET teachers and co-ordinators, in particular obtaining the required Certificate IV in Training and Assessment which can cost between \$1500 for an online course to \$4000 for a conventional face-to-face program
- the provision of specialist VET resources such as industry standard workshops, childcare and hospitality facilities, including safety equipment, tools of the trade and/or uniforms
- transport costs for students

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- impact on teacher time particularly in relation to planning work placements, negotiating with RTOs, supervising students undertaking online training, and meeting RTO compliance requirements
- impact on school planning including structuring the school timetable to allow for work placement and school-based apprenticeships, resourcing and student selection procedures
- increased administrative workload due to more complex assessment and reporting processes.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this submission, ISA has outlined the value of VET in Independent schools, and the perceptions and status of VET compared to ATAR for university pathways in the sector. ISA has also highlighted the significant considerations and challenges of VET delivery in Independent schools, both as RTOs and through external RTOs, and the importance of industry-school engagement.

ISA recommends the following actions and initiatives to continue which will improve the perceptions and status of VET in the Independent school sector but also more broadly amongst a range of key stakeholders in education.

Funding for students

- Any government funded VET places or other VET opportunities should be made equally accessible for all sector of education, including the non-government school sector.
- To address skills shortages, consideration be given to financial support packages for students in all school sectors undertaking VETiS in relation to in-demand skills areas and consideration to support RTOs and school costs in program delivery.

Partnerships

- ISA supports the implementation of the recommendation in *The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training* that working relationships between education authorities and industry bodies need to be formalised so that industry engagement and partnerships become a sector-wide feature of secondary schooling.

Workforce

- Further investment in the current VET workforce is required to ensure it is up to date with the needs of industry e.g. programs where VET teachers / trainers spend time in industry.
- Including VET as an elective in the Bachelor of Education rather than requiring teachers to separately undertake the TAE Certificate IV in Training and Assessment would assist in addressing the current shortage of trainers.
- Registered teachers with industry backgrounds and experience should be supported to attain a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment so that VETiS can be expanded and make it easier for those with industry experience to work in the sector.

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Careers advice

- Study programs for school-based career guidance practitioners should be funded to align their awareness of VET pathways alongside academic pathways and how these two can be combined to represent an increasing number of blended student pathway preferences.
- Provide comprehensive and coordinated support to all school sectors to enable greater offerings of VET opportunities and targeted work experience rather than ad-hoc approaches so that students can truly experience the 'world of work'.
- Support the development of more 'try a trade' type activities, enabling learners to 'try before they buy'.

Perceptions and status of VET

- Enhance the use of terms and language used across the vocational education sector to positively influence parents and carers. It must be acknowledged and recognised that vocational education is 'education', and not something simply to encourage learners to become physical workers.
- Provide incentives for decision-makers in schools to encourage VET provision and to promote the value of VET so that it is seen as a valid alternative pathway to ATAR and not as an alternative for under-achieving students.

11. CONCLUSION

Ideally, the delivery of VET in schools should lead to the development of employability skills for school students so they can enter the workforce with credentials, and the necessary skills to work independently, to show an intrinsic level of enthusiasm to engage with the job at hand and to apply a level of accountability across their tasks.

However, although attitudes are changing, lower perceptions of VET versus ATAR persist across schools, RTOs, universities, industry, governments and state and territory education authorities.

There are a range of actions and initiatives that can be taken across governments, industry and education providers that can improve this perception in the community and elsewhere and lead to a greater recognition of the role of VET in skilling Australia's workforce and meeting skills shortages. As noted in this submission, a more comprehensive and coordinated approach towards the provision of VET may better serve future needs.

ISA welcomes the work of this Review and looks forward to any recommendations which will lead to improved education and industry strategies to effectively educate young people and provide them with a range of options and pathways that will be engaging and meet their interests, passions and career choices.