



Submission to the Review of Funding Task Force

From

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia

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Independent Schools in WA

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia completely endorses the submission made to the review by ISCA (Independent Schools Council of Australia). This submission will not repeat all points made in that submission but give a WA perspective in terms of demography, types of schools and how students are supported in the aim to achieve exceptional educational outcomes anywhere in the diverse state of WA.

The independent sector consists of 147 schools. About 25% of WA independent schools have less than 100 students and most of these cater for small communities often in rural and remote areas. There are 14 Aboriginal Independent Schools in the sector, six CARE (Curriculum and Re-Engagement) schools, Montessori Schools, Steiner Schools, large low fee co-educational schools and long established higher fee single sex schools. Schools are spread from as far north as Purnululu (near Kununurra), south to Esperance, west to Carnarvon and east to the Great Sandy Desert. While the majority of schools are in the metro and outer metro area (including Mandurah), 37 are rural and remote. The sector has schools from a range of religious backgrounds with the majority Christian but also a number of Islamic schools and a Jewish school. The sector has a number of community based secular schools. All schools are run by a governing body that is responsible for the hiring and performance management of the Principal and the financial viability of the school.

There are 17 boarding schools in the sector in WA, with two of these in regional areas, Bunbury and Albany, and three are Aboriginal Schools (one in Coolgardie, another 50 km outside Meekatharra and the third 25 km outside Esperance). Two schools in the sector offer distance education programs to students.

Western Australian Enrolments 2010

	Primary		Secondary		Total Students	
Independent	29,749	12.95%	28,400	22.08%	58,149	16.23%
Catholic	39,918	17.38%	26,463	20.57%	66,381	18.52%
Government	160,052	69.67%	73,787	57.35%	233,839	65.25%
TOTAL	229,719		128,650		358,369	

The numbers of students attending independent schools in WA have been increasing steadily over a number of years. Currently in WA Year 7 students are classified as Primary students, and numbers in Secondary are lower than in 2009 as there is a small cohort going through due to the change to school starting age implemented in 2003.

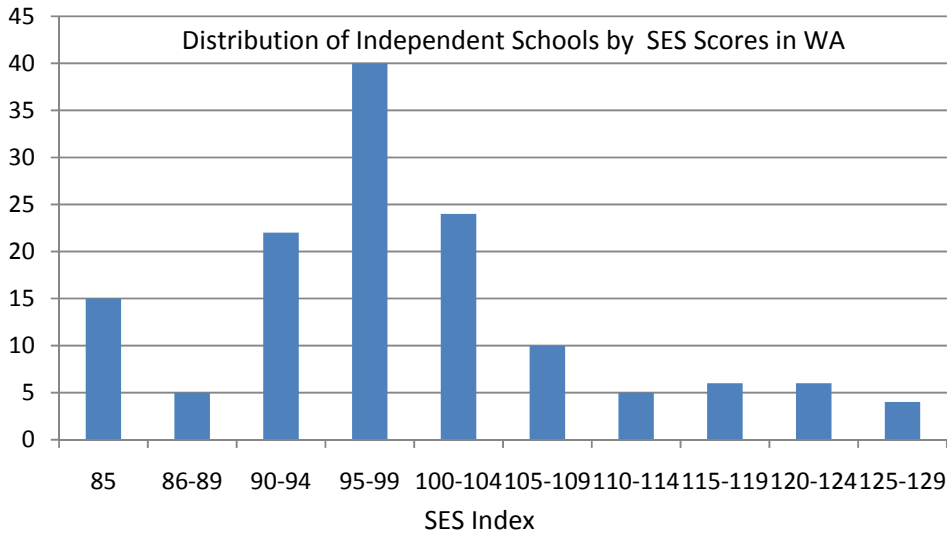
In addition to being a geographically diverse sector, there is also a great range of schools with different educational philosophies, cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. In all cases schools work hard to produce the best outcomes for students while enabling parents to choose a school that they believe best suits their child. The distribution of schools across Montessori, Steiner, Community Schools, Christian Schools of various denominations and Islamic, Greek and Jewish schools is similar to that at a national level.

There are 13 high fee (\$14,000 - \$20,000), low Government funded schools in the WA independent sector while the majority are low fee with a few middle fee schools. The high fee schools all have programs of bursaries particularly for country students and to take in Indigenous boarding students.

Across the independent schools there are approximately 180 Indigenous boarding students most of whom are on various bursaries, scholarships and Abstudy payments.

The WA independent sector has a greater number of schools with an SES below 100 than the national average. In WA 60% (80) of independent schools have an SES of less than 100.

Number of Schools



The predictions for growth in the West Australian education sector can be seen below and it is evident the greatest growth is expected in the independent sector. These predictions are based on work done by DEEWR (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations) on projections of future demand for places in schools Australia wide and on ABS data. An estimated 95 new schools will need to be established in the WA independent sector by 2020 to cater for the growth in student numbers. Predictions of growth in the independent sector in WA are higher than predicted growth elsewhere in Australia.

	2010 (actual)	2020 (predicted)	Change (no.)	Change (%)
Government				
Primary	160,052	223,367	63,315	40%
Secondary	73,787	90,189	16,402	22%
Total	233,839	313,556	79,717	34%
Catholic				
Primary	39,918	53,469	13,551	34%
Secondary	26,463	34,139	7,676	29%
Total	66,381	87,608	21,227	32%
Independent				
Primary	29,749	47,398	17,649	59%
Secondary	28,400	54,281	25,881	91%
Total	58,149	101,678	43,529	75%

All Independent Schools in WA go through a thorough school registration process that ensures standards are met and good governance processes are in place. Schools are autonomous, and are responsible for their own decision making and financial management and operate efficiently to maximise student outcomes. AISWA supports the Principal and Board having the independence to develop the policies, procedures and culture of the school in ways that meet the needs of their community whilst still working towards goals for the education of all Australian children as developed by the government.

The sector believes that the funding models for education should reflect three fundamental concepts:

- Parental choice of schooling to meet these needs of their children, including:
 - geographical location
 - religious or educational philosophy
 - access to co-curricular activities and extended school days
 - a school culture that meets the needs of their children and provide a sense of community
 - affordability
- Diversity of schooling options
- Committed partnerships between schools, parents and governments.

To support these concepts, the following principles should underpin school funding policies:

- A basic financial entitlement for all students.
- Additional needs-based support to recognise relative educational disadvantage of students, e.g. students with disabilities, from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous students, and students from rural and remote areas.
- Stability and predictability supports responsible planning within the school and for families planning their personal contributions to their children's schooling.
- Annual indexation.

The essential criteria for public funding structures for non-Government schools are:

Equity – per student funding for schools serving communities with similar attributes should generally be comparable.

Incentive – the funding arrangement should support students in a way that encourages, not discourages, parental investment in schooling.

Flexibility – schools should not be locked into a particular funding level that impedes them from responding to changes in their school community.

Transparency – assessment of need should be based on reliable and transparent data.

Simplicity – the funding arrangements should be simple to administer, with low administration costs for government and low compliance costs for schools.

Predictability – schools should have a high degree of certainty about future funding to facilitate financial planning and management.

AISWA supports the funding principles outlined in ISCA's submission.

- **The independent sector highly values its direct funding relationship with the Commonwealth Government.** Dealing directly with Commonwealth means funds are used efficiently and effectively. This point can be demonstrated with reference to the Smarter Schools National Partnerships where funding for all three sectors in each state was provided by the Commonwealth to the states. In order to access funding under these National Partnerships the independent sector had to work with the education authority in their state. While in WA we have very good relations with the other two education sectors this model of funding is not considered to have been an efficient or effective

approach to delivering funding to independent schools for a range of reasons primarily involving bureaucratic processes and lack of autonomy and flexibility in decision making for the sector because:

- Implementing the partnerships involved an additional overlay of both Federal and State bureaucracy resulting in significant additional costs in terms of time, funding and delays to implementation;
- Systemic approaches to funding and initiatives undertaken did not recognise the needs or context of independent schools and were consequently not readily transferrable to independent schools;
- The bureaucratic processes meant that agreements were still being negotiated and no funding had been provided to independent schools more than a year after the initiative being announced;
- The identification of schools and the allocation of funding was frequently inconsistent, inequitable and lacking justification in terms of the funding provided to across schools; and
- The determination of targets needed for rewards varied considerably across the states and has been identified by the COAG Reform Council as an area where changes should be made.

- **AISWA believes that every child has a right to have their school education supported by a basic financial entitlement from the Commonwealth Government and state funding. Additional funding beyond this basic financial entitlement should be allocated on a needs basis.** Australian society recognises that it is a fundamental right for all children to have access to schooling in the compulsory years. It is a core function of governments to provide this access, and successive Commonwealth governments have recognised their responsibility to support a school education for each Australian child, irrespective of family background or school. Future governments should continue to do so.

The concept of a basic financial grant, to which all students are entitled regardless of the school they attend, acknowledges that every student is a member of the Australian community, and that all schools bring benefits to society. The existence of a basic financial entitlement provides assistance and incentive to parents who are willing to pay substantial after-tax dollars for schooling. Funding beyond this should reflect the needs of students and levels of disadvantage.

For the schools that offer distance education programs these students should receive an entitlement equivalent to that of all students as the cost of this education provision is substantial.

- **Changes to government funding arrangements should leave no school worse off in real terms.** It is important to recognize that maintaining the dollar amounts of funding to schools, but not adjusting such amounts in real terms significantly disadvantages schools and their students. Any reduction in government funding (from maintenance in dollar terms only) for independent schools will need to be addressed by increasing the level of private income required to be raised by the school community or through a reduction in the quality of the educational provision in affected schools. Raising the level of private income will have a significant impact on the individual schools and the school community.

Parents expect to be able to organize their finances on the basis of a school's current fee structure. Changes to fee structures could result in significant financial strain for parents resulting in significant enrolment changes and affecting the financial viability of the schools concerned and disruption to the education of individual students. Where adjustments to fee structures are considerable there would be a drift to government schools and this would cause stresses to the government system in terms of their capacity to cater for larger numbers.

Schools also need to plan their finances well in advance based on an assumed level of resourcing. Significant changes to the resource base of individual independent schools will impact on the financial structure of these schools necessitating possibly major changes.

Most independent schools are not part of a system – and are not able to rely on any pooled financial assistance, so the impact of any reduction in their funding needs to be addressed by the school community itself.

- **Government funding arrangements should provide independent schools with stability and predictability.** Stability and predictability in funding is critical for quality school provision. AISWA endorses the established policy of providing legislated quadrennial funding for non-government schools, adjusted annually to meet cost increases. This facilitates financial planning and management within schools, enhancing their capacity to provide the best quality education with the resources available to them.

Stable and predictable funding arrangements also support families in planning for the private funds that they commit to their children's schooling. Independent schools need stable and predictable funding to plan and deliver their education programs. They depend substantially on parents to fund their programs. The level of fees paid by parents in an independent school is determined by the cost of the particular education the school offers, and the amount of government funding provided for each student at the school. Stability in the funding schemes used by governments enables schools and parents to make provision for future schooling costs.

- **Government funding arrangements should ensure that there is no disincentive to private effort.** A key principle that the funding arrangements of governments should not act as a disincentive to private contributions and investment in school education. Some critics of independent school funding argue that it is somehow inequitable for schools to benefit from the contribution made by parents and that government funding to relatively high fee schools should be reduced in order to create a level playing field. Parents of students in independent schools who pay tax subsidise the education of all children in Australia whilst using their after-tax dollars to contribute to the schooling of their children through school fees. It is the right of all taxpayers in Australia to spend their after tax dollars in accordance with their own priorities, and as the Australian tax system is based on principles of equity, it would be unreasonable for education funding to operate as an additional income equalisation system. The model for government funding for non-government schools should continue to provide an incentive for parents to contribute their after-tax dollars to their children's education.
- **The value of grants should be maintained in real terms by appropriate supplementation.** It is important that governments contribute to the increasing costs of schooling through annual indexation of grants based on a specific schools index. The use of the AGSRC as an index to supplement general and targeted recurrent funding over time ensures that the relationship between Australian Government funding for non-government schools and overall government expenditure in government-owned schools is broadly maintained. With no regular indexation, the value of government grants declines and the increased costs must be met by greater parent contributions.

While the AGSRC provides a sound basis for supplementation it is an index, and is not a comprehensive or direct measure of government school recurrent costs, and it is based on data that can be up to 18 months old. AISWA accepts the use of the AGSRC to determine the level of general recurrent funding to non-government schools, while recognising the limitations of the methodology. AISWA also supports the continued indexation of the Commonwealth Government's Capital Grants Program in line with movements in the Building Price Index.

- **State government contributions are an important source of funds for independent schools.** Independent school funding is a partnership between Commonwealth and state governments and school communities. State governments provide around 28 percent of total government recurrent funding for independent schools. While the amount of funding provided by each state to the non-government sector varies, the contribution is significant to individual non-government schools and in many cases is crucial to their financial viability.
- **Eighty percent of capital expenditure in independent schools is funded by school communities but despite this level of community effort the future enrolment-driven capital needs of independent schools will not be able to be achieved without government assistance.** The independent sector is the fastest growing schooling sector, with an additional 95 schools estimated to be needed in the sector in WA by 2020, and the demand for capital support is high. Parents contribute more than 80 percent of the cost of buildings and equipment in the independent sector, mainly through school fees. (This figure reflects the long term funding trends in the sector and does not include the one-off effect of the Building the Education Revolution). Schools embark on extensive fund raising campaigns, which at times means a school may appear to have considerable financial assets, but in reality these are earmarked for new classrooms, science laboratories and other capital infrastructure. Investing in, and maintaining, capital infrastructure in an independent school is an extremely expensive exercise and in some schools is met solely through parental contributions and in others to a large extent met by these contributions.

In the independent sector the Commonwealth Government Capital Grants Program is distributed on a needs basis, with priority given to disadvantaged school communities with the least capacity to raise funds. Many long-established independent schools receive no capital assistance from governments. The extent and quality of their facilities reflect instead from many years of contributions from families, former students and other donors. Most independent schools borrow funds to finance capital development and spread the cost of these borrowings over the generations of students who will benefit from the investment. This debt servicing is built into school fees.

Capital funding under both the Commonwealth Government's Capital Grants Program and the Building the Education Revolution initiative (as well as the Commonwealth's Trade Training Centres and the National Secondary School Computer Fund element of the Digital Education Revolution Program) are administered through Block Grant Authorities (BGAs). The BGAs have been administering Commonwealth Capital Grants for several decades and have a proven record of efficient management of capital works programs.

The BGAs have an established relationship with independent schools and experience in delivering Commonwealth capital programs. The independent sector is not constrained by the bureaucratic processes of the large education systems and has the capacity and flexibility to respond to issues as they emerge. Because of the nature of independent schools and the requirement for funding capital infrastructure through privately raised funds, independent schools must invest in careful, long-term planning for their capital investment. Efficiency is driven by the scarcity of funds and the need to justify expenditure of privately generated funds to the school communities who have worked hard to raise them.

The efficiency of the independent sector in delivering capital infrastructure has been clearly demonstrated through the Building the Education Revolution initiative.

Average project costs per square metre for halls, classrooms and libraries in WA were for the government sector \$2,258, for the Catholic sector \$3,010 and for the independent sector \$2,289 based on regionally adjusted figures¹.

¹ Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce – First Report – 15 December 2010

The BER Implementation Taskforce First Report also reported on complaints under the BER initiative by jurisdiction. The number of complaints in the independent sector were insignificant, also a reflection of efficiency of the sector and the benefits of the established relationships.

Government contributions to capital are efficient not only in terms of effective delivery but also in their capacity to leverage additional private investment in schooling. For example, the BER funding for independent schools in WA across all three elements of the BER was able to leverage a contribution from within the independent sector of almost \$66 million.

Earlier in this submission the predictions for the growth of the WA sector, and in particular the independent sector was presented in a Table on Page 2. Governments at both Commonwealth and state/territory level will need to find the billions of additional dollars to accommodate these students regardless of the sector. Governments must acknowledge and support the role of the non-government sector in establishing new schools by providing significant capital assistance to establish and expand new schools. Without the capacity of the non-government sector to leverage private capital investment, governments will not be able to meet future demands for school enrolments. Governments must also recognise that schools currently or new schools potentially serving low SES-communities have limited capacity to raise private income for capital purposes and will need significant government assistance in order to establish and expand schools serving these communities. This Review of Funding must consider the capital investment implications of projected enrolment growth.

- **Targeted and needs-based funding needs to increase to ensure that students with special needs are not disadvantaged because their parents have chosen an independent school.** Targeted Program funding is very significant for the independent sector. The majority of schools in the sector operate as separate autonomous entities, and there is no capacity to move funds between schools to address the needs of schools enrolling students with particular educational needs. Targeted programs provide an essential source of funds in the sector to address the educational needs of educationally disadvantaged students in independent schools.

Independent schools serve the full spectrum of Australian society with an increasingly diverse range of enrolments including growing numbers of students with special needs, many of whom are involved in inclusive education programs in mainstream classrooms. Targeted funding has been critical in supporting independent schools to offer a choice of education to parents of students with a disability, students from a language background other than English including newly arrived students, students with social, emotional and behavioural problems, students in rural and remote locations and students with additional learning needs.

When a child with a special need enrolls in an independent school the additional costs associated with educating that child are met by the entire community of that independent school. The fees for the parents of that child are not increased to cover this shortfall. Funding provided under the Commonwealth Targeted Programs provides some assistance to some schools to help meet these additional educational costs.

Targeted program funding is administered on behalf of the Commonwealth Government by State Associations of Independent Schools (AISWA in WA). AISWA signs a Targeted Program Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth Government. AISWA provides a vital role in delivering funding within the sector as a whole, taking responsibility for assessing relative need and managing the allocation of funding to individual independent schools in accordance with Australian Government guidelines. AISWA has an excellent understanding of the independent schools in WA which facilitates in ensuring the appropriate targeting of Targeted funding to most effectively address disadvantage.

In addition, through the Australian Government Targeted Programs, specialist education consultants are employed to provide support and advice to schools with students with special needs and access to these consultants is available to all schools at no cost to the school. Should this not be available and the schools need to access this support on a fee for service, for many schools the cost would be prohibitive and thus the students' outcomes would be potentially compromised. By providing supplementary funding to AISWA, the utility of targeted funding is maximized by increasing the purchasing power of targeted funding as well as providing a range of services to schools

Delivering Targeted Programs through AISWA maximises the utility of relatively limited available funds. If very small amounts of supplementary funding were provided directly to schools, the capacity of individual schools to purchase services for their educationally disadvantaged students would be extremely limited.

It is essential that general recurrent funding continues to be complemented by targeted funding to enable independent schools to better meet the education needs of particular groups of students and to realise the Government's policy goals, including supporting the achievement of the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, the COAG targets and the outcomes and targets set out in the National Education Agreement.

A key outcome of the Review of Funding for Schooling should be consistent level of support for disadvantaged students across the school sectors. Students should not be disadvantaged in terms of funding to address disadvantage because their parents had chosen an independent school. As a general principle, the level of funding provided under the various targeted programs should be based on a realistic assessment of the resources and activities required to achieve the desired policy outcome regardless of the type of school a student attends. As a consequence, the quantum of funding available under Commonwealth Government Targeted Programs should be significantly increased to ensure that the educational needs of students with special needs in independent schools are adequately addressed and to support the access to choice for all parents seeking to enroll their children in independent schools.

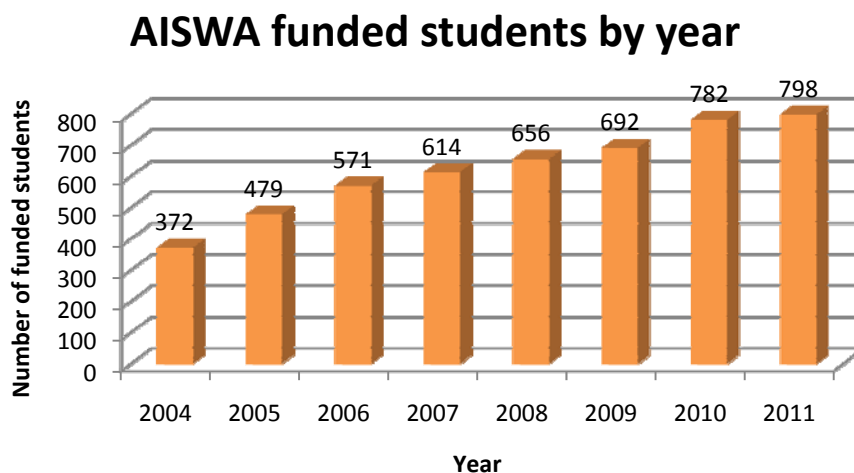
One area not currently addressed by Commonwealth Targeted Programs is the area of student wellbeing. When students or their families have health, social or emotional problems, effective learning cannot occur. Governments should recognise that schools are often the most effective location to reach students and provide intervention and assistance. Particularly for schools who find it difficult to raise private income. Some consideration should be given to providing assistance to schools address student wellbeing issues through the provision of specialised intervention services.

Another group of students that are not well catered for in the current arrangements are those accessing distance education in the independent sector. Over 600 students in the sector access their education through distance education through one of two schools that provide this. Under current arrangements distance education students in the independent sector receive only \$3,883 from Government sources (Australian Christian College, My School Version 2) which is a similar per capita grant provided to the wealthiest schools, while the WA Government School of Isolated and Distance Education receives just over \$32,000 per student.

- **Students with disabilities should receive the similar levels of additional support regardless of the type of school they attend. This support should be flexible and recognise the particular needs of individual students.** The independent sector believes that school choice should be available for the parents of students with disabilities just as it is for other parents. It is highly inequitable and possibly discriminatory that parents of students with disabilities should have their access to the school of their choice constrained by differential application of government

financial support. This differential level of support is most manifestly cruel when a student with disabilities is constrained in their capacity to attend the same school as their siblings because of the differential in funding they attract between government and non-government schools. Students with disability should receive additional funding support because of their disability, not because of the type of school they attend.

The number of students with special learning needs funded through AISWA with Targeted Programs funding have increased steadily over the last eight years. In addition the severity of their disability has also increased resulting in very low amounts of assistance provided to students with a mild disability.



Future funding arrangements should also continue to recognise and support independent Special Schools and Special Assistance Schools which provide alternative education settings for students with high-level needs. Parents should be able to choose a non-mainstream educational environment if it is the best option for their child.

For students with disabilities in government schools, the cost of their education provision is met by the Australian community as a whole. Students with disabilities in independent schools generally receive significantly less government funding for their educational support needs than if they were educated in a government school. For students with disabilities in independent schools, the Commonwealth Government provides a small amount of additional support under its Targeted Programs, specifically the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program, but there remains an often significant gap in funding to meet the needs of these students.

A key outcome of the Review of Funding for Schooling is therefore, that the needs of all students with disabilities be appropriately funded by the community through government expenditure, regardless of the type of school in which they are educated. Students with disabilities should be funded according their educational needs and this funding should follow the student regardless of the type of school they attend.

- **Funding arrangements must recognise the particular needs of indigenous students and schools with large numbers of indigenous students, allowing schools to provide a high level of service and flexible and innovative approaches to indigenous education.** There are 14 Aboriginal Schools in the independent sector in WA educating approximately 870 indigenous students, and over 200 indigenous students across other schools in the sector. Almost all the

boarding schools have indigenous students as boarders and these are supported to some extent by Abstudy grants but also by each school community through bursaries and other partnerships.

As a group, indigenous students tend to face greater barriers to educational achievement. Contributions by parents, or caregivers, to the cost of schooling is minimal, and often non-existent, particularly in the remote communities where many of the schools are based. The remote schools face high costs due to their remoteness or distance from large population centres. It is also important to recognise that although indigenous students may be attending schools in urban or regional areas, they may need additional support due to their individual circumstances, particularly if they are from remote areas. Many indigenous students face significant health and well being issues and this should be recognized. Schools, with no additional revenue through fee collection, provide breakfast and lunch programs, significant after school activities and address many emotional and health issues.

Many independent schools in remote indigenous communities are the sole providers of education for these communities. These schools have limited capacity to raise private income and heavily rely on government assistance to maintain their operations. All these schools operate at resource levels significantly less than government schools serving similar populations as sole providers. As sole providers of education to these usually significantly disadvantaged communities, these schools should receive at least similar levels of support as government schools. This issue is noted in the Emerging Issues Paper, which states there are high delivery costs in rural and remote schools and that non-government schools serving these populations “did not appear to benefit from the level of funding provided to government schools servicing communities on a sole provider basis.”²

The My School V2 site makes this point clear with a non Government remote aboriginal school in the Fitzroy Valley (Yakanarra Community School) having a net recurrent income per student of \$21,280 and the nearby Government Fitzroy Valley Remote Community School (Ngalapita Remote Community School), having a net recurrent income per student of \$65,699. Even the Government District High School in the town of Fitzroy Crossing has a higher net recurrent per student income of \$27,878 and that school does not have the access issues of truly remote schools.

The remote indigenous schools face higher costs for transport, utilities, staff salaries and accommodation, maintenance, insurance and building capital infrastructure than schools in regional and metropolitan areas. A number of schools in the Kimberley and Pilbara can only be accessed by air during the wet season, and this may be from December through April so access is difficult but also very expensive and becomes an additional cost the school must bear. Educating children in a remote school often involves a broader range of services to ensure attendance, good health and support for children who may not have strong support for their education from the home.

The sector has three Indigenous Boarding Schools and these schools face many additional challenges catering for the needs of their students. Many arrive at school with quite low literacy and numeracy levels so specialist classes and one-on-one sessions must be arranged. To support these students away from home requires additional support staff at the school level. There are individual cases where a boarder cannot stay at the school due to a range of problems so the additional cost of returning that student to the community is often borne by the school.

Improving the educational outcomes of indigenous students requires both levels of funding which recognise the particular circumstances of these students and innovative and flexible approaches to supporting students. The independent sector has longstanding concerns about the funding circumstances of independent schools which cater predominantly for indigenous students. It is critical that governments recognise that these schools are in a unique position to access and assist

² Review of Funding for Schooling – Emerging Issues Paper – December 2010

these children and this opportunity can be missed or not fully utilised due to lack of resources and a lack of recognition of the way resources should be applied.

The Commonwealth and State governments should commit additional resources to ensure that indigenous students attending independent schools are supported at a level commensurate with that which indigenous students receive in government schools. Independent schools which cater predominantly for indigenous students also require special consideration in relation to their capital needs, recognising their very limited capacity to raise private funds.

Government funding needs to acknowledge the special needs of indigenous students, particularly those from remote areas. It should also be noted that the attendance of indigenous students can be erratic and schools can be penalised financially through per capita funding arrangements right at a time when they need additional resources to ensure they are in a position to attract and retain these high need students.

Schools need to provide high levels of support services to encourage and retain school attendance for these students, but fluctuating attendance and as a consequence fluctuating funding can be counterproductive to providing this support. In recognition of the special services these schools need to provide to attract, support and retain their indigenous students, particularly those from remote areas, schools catering to these students should be provided with a base level of funding not totally linked to per capita enrolment.

- **Accountability arrangements must not compromise the governance, innovation and autonomy of independent schools.** The autonomous governance arrangements of independent schools are the single most important factor that underpins the sector's diversity, and greatly enhances the range of schooling choice for Australian families. Most independent schools are established and governed on an individual school basis. Some schools with common aims and educational philosophies, however, are governed and administered as systems. AISWA supports the Principal and Board having the independence to develop the policies, procedures and culture of the school in ways that meet the needs of their community whilst still working towards goals for the education of all Australian children as developed by the government

The steady growth of the independent sector is evidence of the public confidence in the accountability of independent schools through the mix of contribution to education policies, legislative compliance and self-regulation. Independent school enrolments continue to increase because many parents and community groups find that self-governing schools are more accountable to their immediate communities than is possible for schools that are part of large centralised systems.

To respond effectively and creatively to the needs of the students and communities they serve, independent schools need a liberal degree of autonomy. With comprehensive governance and regulatory mechanisms already in place, the independent schools sector would argue that any consideration of future accountability requirements should be balanced by a commitment to the innovation and diversity that characterises independent education.

The independent schools sector would be concerned about proposals to introduce further accountability requirements for Australian Government funding that would:

- Increase the administrative burden and costs related to such requirements;
- Compromise the ability of schools to respond to the communities they serve;
- Discourage innovation and excellence in educational programs and their delivery;
- Reduce the diversity of the independent sector.

Accountability reporting should be designed, co-ordinated and rationalised so as to minimise the administrative burdens placed on schools. This is particularly relevant in a federal system of government with different layers of accountability requirements, and is especially important for non-systemic schools and small school systems which do not have the support of large bureaucracies.

Conclusion

AISWA believes the current SES Funding model works well for the sector and would support this, with indexation, as the way forward. The SES model recognizes the challenges in WA faced by a large state with many rural and remote schools and this model targets funds to the most needy students. With the predicted growth in the total numbers of students in Australia, and a large percentage growth in independent schools the quantum of money available from the Commonwealth must be increased to ensure all schools receive adequate support. AISWA does not believe the ICSEA score on the My School site is a robust measure and continues to have great concerns about the data used to generate that Index. The sector would not want to see that Index used as part of any future funding model.

It should also be recognized that the growth of independent schooling provides savings to governments, in particular State and Territory Governments, as parental contributions to the cost of educating their children is much greater in this sector than the Catholic or Government sectors. All students should receive a basic financial entitlement from the Government and an increase in this from the Commonwealth from the current 13% would go some way to addressing the issue of funding maintained schools.

The Independent sector provides efficient and effective education to increasing numbers of Australian children and this growth has been greater in WA than many other states. This growth has been possible through support from parents and governments in a partnership that should be ongoing into the future. In the sector over 80% of the cost of providing capital infrastructure in independent schools is through parental contributions. These contributions serve to provide the Commonwealth Government with significant savings, as these parents continue to subsidise the Government Schools through their taxation payments. Ongoing support from government to assist with capital infrastructure is essential if the needs of a growing population are to be met.

There are a few groups that need significant additional support including students with special learning needs and indigenous students. This review of funding must address these issues as the funding for students with disabilities is inadequate and support for these students from government should be the same regardless of where parents choose to send their child to school. Although some advances have occurred in the educational outcomes of indigenous students more needs to be done to actually narrow the well documented gap between the outcomes of indigenous and non-indigenous students.

AISWA would like to see the contribution of the sector to educating young Australians recognized in ongoing funding in real terms, attention given to the needs of students with special needs and indigenous students, and that the contribution of parents to educating the young members of Australian society be recognized and schools not penalized for that contribution. AISWA is committed to working with Governments to ensure all Australian children receive an education of an internationally recognized standard. It is axiomatic that schools in the independent sector continue to receive the resources required to achieve this goal.