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The AIS leadership team invites you to contact them on (02) 9299 2845 or via email to discuss any of the issues raised in this newsletter or other schooling matters.

## **BER Projects**

So far the Australian Government, through the AIS, has provided more than \$xxxm to NSW independent schools under the School Pride and Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21) elements of the BER Program.

All of the xxx School Pride projects, worth \$xxm, have now commenced and many have already been completed or are in the final stages of completion.

Round 1 of the P21 program saw \$xxxm in funding approved for xxx projects, and a further xxx projects approved in Round 2. The majority of Round 1 projects have commenced and Round 2 projects are also progressing well.

The AIS BER Team have greatly appreciated the assistance of schools in complying with the extremely tight deadlines for all stages of these projects and the willingness to provide all of the information required by the Australian Government.

## **BER Payments**

Some minor delays have been experienced in forwarding the first payment under P21 and School Pride elements to a number of schools. Following positive discussions with DEEWR, this issue and future cashflow issues have hopefully resolved.

There has been a delay, however, in the approval process for the 3rd round of P21 projects due to scheduling issues in the Deputy Prime Minister's office. The DPM is responsible for the final approval of all applications under the program. We have been advised that the approvals should be completed by early September. We are awaiting further advice from DEEWR as to whether this delay will affect the project commencement and completion dates.

## **BER Liaison Officers**

The AIS has appointed a number of BER Liaison Officers whose role it is to visit each school in a designated area to monitor progress of the projects being funded through the BER program. Each Liaison Officer will contact schools at various stages of each BER building project and complete a simple report which will be provided to the AIS and, in turn, to DEEWR. This reporting process is a requirement under the terms of the contract with the Australian Government.

## **BER Media**

There has been considerable media attention on the BER program, focusing primarily on its implementation in government schools in each state and territory. It is a credit to the independent sector that few, if any, problems have been reported with the program. This is largely due to the capacity of independent schools to act quickly and make clear decisions about their infrastructure needs, and their ability to involve local builders and tradespeople, as well as meet other requirements such as the employment of trainees and apprentices.

In July you will have received a copy of the first AISNSW BER Project Update which featured several schools with projects underway or completed under the Schools Pride element of the program. This newsletter provides information to the community about the successes of the sector in implementing the program. It is our intention to produce the newsletter once each quarter. We welcome contributions from schools for inclusion in the newsletters. Please send any contributions about your BER project/s to Louise Bailey in the AIS BER Team at lbailey@aisnsw.edu.au



# Executive Newsletter

August 2009

The Association of  
Independent Schools of  
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## Dear Colleague,

For some time now the AIS, through its governance workshops and Leadership Centre programs, has been raising the issue of the corporatisation of the management of independent schools. The move to a business management model has seen the role of the Head become far more complex with an increased focus on management issues in areas such as legal, industrial, financial, governance, compliance, information technology and marketing. The school Board's role has also changed through greater exposure to personal liability, heightened levels of accountability, an increasing government focus on corporate governance of for-profit and not-for-profit organisations and a realisation of the challenges of school affordability and ongoing financial sustainability.

An increasing number of articles are being written on this issue. Dr Leslie Payne from Murdoch University has conducted research in this area and suggests that the governance discourse today is primarily about development and efficiency. Robert Evans, in an article entitled *'Why a School Doesn't Run or Change Like a Business'*, reflects on how some school boards want school management to adopt more corporate-style approaches to employment relations, bonus systems and poorly performing staff, and to try to quantify school performance against improvement targets.

Skip Kotkins, in a presentation to an institutional leadership conference, comments on the opportunities for independent school boards to learn from their for-profit counterparts. However, he makes the point that there are significant differences in the way for-profit and not-for-profit organisations operate, and that while corporate experience and expertise can be a valued asset to a school board, in some areas it can be a liability.

In light of the Australian Government's transparency agenda through school reporting and the inevitable associated league tables, it is interesting to explore a particular aspect of Kotkins' comparisons. Kotkins examines the difference between the concepts of shareholders and stakeholders. He notes that the absolute mantra of for-profit boards is the phrase 'increasing shareholder value' and parallels this to the responsibility of a not-for-profit board to understand and deliver on the expectations of its constituencies.

Independent schools have always focused on the development of its students and in many areas this development is difficult to quantify.

The Australian Government's transparency and accountability agenda is moving education into an era of quantifying and comparing 'increased stakeholder value'. While independent schools are well used to accountability to a broad stakeholder constituency, under the current government's proposed reporting framework success or 'value-added' will be judged through a very narrow lens. The many activities and valued opportunities that independent school students experience will not be reflected in the reporting framework.

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## School performance and evaluation (cont. from page 1)

While independent school parents are well aware of the range of experiences offered by independent schools it is highly likely that they will be sensitive to the indicators used in describing their school performance, irrespective of their inherent validity, as this data will be reported and compared by media.

The language of poor, good, high quality and outstanding schools may also be used in certain quarters and this will introduce additional sensitivities for school management and school boards.

If the independent school sector cannot significantly change the proposed national reporting framework then independent schools must consider broadening the framework to truly reflect the quality of schooling that they offer.

Kotkins comments that parents live their lives as consumers and don't leave their consumer expectations at the school gate. They will be comparing schools and be asking "how good is our school?". He also suggests that the view that everything can be measured is an increasing trend in the corporate world and is gradually being introduced into school management practices. School boards will not only ask "how good is our school?", they will expect the answer to be supported by data.

In this current climate of transparency and the political expectations accompanying the school reporting framework it is important to consider how others have dealt with such pressures. There is a need for us to recognise our effectiveness in schools and link this with continual, planned school improvement.

The Scottish Government has adopted a model called 'How good is our school?' (HMIE Improving Scottish Education 2007) which was developed in conjunction with legislation that requires all schools to self-evaluate their practice and develop an annual

school improvement plan. This model allows schools to pause to reflect on the necessity to highlight their strengths, identify key priority areas that need support, engender a sense of ownership of these among its stakeholders, and develop a clear action plan that allows improvement to occur. The resulting research, the evolution of this model over time and the release of the Scottish National Curriculum for Excellence enables schools to consider the questions: *What can we improve on?; How good is our school?; How do we know?; What is our capacity for improvement?; and How good can we be?*

The Scottish model is based on a framework which contains a set of quality indicators that help schools work out where they are placed in terms of improving their quality and aiming for excellence. These indicators are linked closely with school self-evaluation carried out by all stakeholders.

School self-evaluation is about effectiveness and improvement that leads to change that is beneficial for all. It is embedded with a range of reflective professional processes which help schools to get to know themselves well, highlight their strengths, identify their agenda for improvement and promote innovation. This process of self-evaluation also ensures the maintenance of high quality practice where this already exists.

In Scotland there is now a culture within schools to reflect and engage in professional discussion based on a shared understanding of quality and a shared vision of their aims for their students within their particular context. School self-evaluation can stem from various sources – quantitative data (analysing NAPLAN data), people's views (from students, teachers and parent surveys) and observation (peer

teaching and reflection). Self-evaluation is forward looking, is about change and improvement - whether gradual or transformational - and is based on professional reflection, challenge and support. It also involves taking considered decisions about actions which result in clear benefits for students in our schools.

At the culmination of this process, schools in Scotland identify areas for improvement and consider and plan for excellence by considering 'How good can we be?' and 'How do we get there?'

Recently, Sally Egan, an Assistant Director at the AIS, spent time with inspectors from the Scottish Department of Education to discuss the Scottish model and how it could be applied in the Australian context.

To determine how the Scottish example might be used for the benefit of NSW independent schools, the AIS recently convened a meeting of Heads to discuss the model, research and evaluations being used in Scotland. The response from this group, which will now form the Steering Committee for the initiative, was very positive. A Reference Group of executive teachers has also been established to work with Sally to adapt the model and develop a draft working version to be trialled in a number of volunteering schools.

This is a very exciting initiative which will work to keep the NSW independent schools sector at the forefront of educational progress in this country.



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## Keep Them Safe - child protection reforms

As has been mentioned in previous AIS communications with schools, the 2008 Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW, led by Justice James Wood, made 111 recommendations for proposed changes to the NSW child protection system.

Arising from Justice Wood's report, in March 2009 the NSW government released *'Keep them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing'* as its plan to reform child protection in NSW. At this time the Government committed \$230 million to the rollout of *Keep them Safe* and the implementation of the recommendations. An additional \$520 million was announced in the 2009 NSW budget, totaling \$750 million to *Keep them Safe* over the next 5 years. The Government has stated that this money will be used to *"improve child protection services across the board, improve collaboration between government and non-government and allow greater sharing of responsibility"*.

The central theme of the reform is for agencies to move away from the mindset that child protection is the sole responsibility of the Department of Community Services (DoCS), to the view that it is a shared responsibility that requires a collective response from both government and non-government agencies.

Areas of key reforms include:

- Raising the threshold for mandatory reporting of risk of harm to **'significant risk of harm'** (commencing January 2010)
- Government agencies (including Westmead Children's Hospital & Area Health Services, NSW Police, Department of Education and Training, Department of Housing, Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and Department of Juvenile Justice), are in the process of setting up specialist Child

Wellbeing Units (CWU). These units are to be fully operational by January 2010. For independent schools the DoCS Helpline will have the role of a CWU.

- The role of the CWU is to help agencies identify at risk children, provide advice and support, and educate mandatory reporters on 'significant risk of harm'. For matters not meeting the definition of 'significant risk of harm', CWUs will identify other avenues of assistance that can be provided.

- Changes to information sharing within the legislation are expected to be proclaimed in October 2009 and will allow for greater sharing of information between agencies regarding the safety, wellbeing and welfare of children.

- The NSW Government will fund non-government agencies and local councils to establish Regional Intake and Referral Services (RIRS). RIRS will work with the Child Wellbeing Units to improve access to services for children and families.

### The role of the AIS

The AIS has been involved in discussions with a range of government and non-government agencies to determine the impact of these reforms on independent schools and to ensure that the needs of independent schools are understood and given appropriate consideration.

This has included:

- attendance at the Child Protection Advisory Group Cross Sector Forum to liaise with other non-government organisations and develop an understanding of the impact of the reforms on independent schools.
- participation in a three day Mandatory Guidance Workshop coordinated by DoCS. The workshops were focused on structured decision

making and the development of a common assessment framework for mandatory reporters.

- representation on the Department of Premier and Cabinet Senior Officers Group which is drafting the definition of 'significant risk of harm'.

In addition, the AIS has been in communication with the Minister for Community Services, the Hon Linda Burney MP, to discuss the impact on the independent sector of these reforms and to consider the most appropriate ways to implement them.

### Resources for schools

A number of resources are being developed that will assist independent schools to understand the reforms, the new frameworks and the role that independent schools will play in the statewide strategy to improve the child protection system. These include:

- A common assessment framework for mandatory reporters to use that will assist agencies to determine whether the definition of 'significant risk of harm' is met, and
- Mandatory Guidelines to assist agencies in navigating the new child protection system, including changes to child protection legislation.

The AIS will be providing briefing sessions to Principals/Heads of all schools towards the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010 detailing the key reform areas and the implications for independent schools.