

Dear Colleague,

We are entering a critical period in Australian education, particularly for independent education, with the Review of Schools Funding about to commence and, with it, the inevitable debates about resourcing, inequality and social responsibilities of schools.

Independent schools in Australia and overseas face the challenge of remaining accessible, affordable and financially sustainable while continuing to offer a high quality and diverse curriculum, small class sizes and a broad range of co-curricular activities, supported by good facilities and up to date technology.

Against these challenges, the gap between the actual costs of school education and funding from governments is continuing to widen. This year the NSW Government indexed funding to non-government schools by a mere 0.3%. As this figure is directly related to increased expenditure on government schools, it is a very disappointing result for school education in this State.

On 30th April the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced the 'eminent Australians' who would conduct the Review of Schools Funding and released a Discussion Paper and draft Terms of Reference. With almost 50% of secondary students in our major capital cities now attending non-government schools, the outcomes of the review will have a significant impact on the entire community's ongoing right and opportunity to choose the type of school that best suits each child.

In determining the make-up of the review panel, it is also clear that the Deputy Prime Minister sought, and has achieved, a good balance of views and expertise. The panel will be chaired by David Gonski AC, Chancellor of the University of NSW, chairman of the Australian Securities Exchange and chairman of Sydney Grammar School.

There are a number of aspects of the review that one must be aware of:

1. the review will cover all schools and all sources of funding;
2. consultation has commenced on the Terms of Reference (until the end of May);
3. it appears (but is not absolutely clear) that the non-government sector will continue to have an ongoing funding relationship with the Commonwealth - this would be strongly welcomed by the sector;
4. it appears likely that funding will continue to be allocated in a four year cycle;
5. there will be a strong focus on support for students with disabilities, indigenous students, students at risk and students from remote areas; and
6. interpretation of the statement that 'every child needs to be supported' seems to imply a base level of entitlement.

Evaluating Excellence in Independent Schools

In this transparent political climate schools must be proactive in ensuring that their school communities are aware of what makes their school unique and different from other schools. It is important that all stakeholders know what makes their school an excellent school, beyond the basic information contained on the *MySchool* website.

To assist schools to examine their own effectiveness, the AIS has developed an initiative called 'Evaluating Excellence in Independent Schools' which has been piloted in several member schools.

How is this done?

The AIS aims to support schools in undertaking a school evaluation using a research-based toolkit. This enables a school to highlight strengths, identify key priority areas that need support, engender a sense of ownership among members of the school community (parents, students and teachers) and develop a clear action plan that allows improvement to occur.

A school has access to a range of school evaluation data which allows a school to draw some conclusions by looking at quantitative data, people's views and observations. The evidence collection involves student data (NAPLAN, HSC, school based assessments), surveys, focus group discussions and observations and analysis is then facilitated by AIS, as well as by an internal school-based team.

Who is involved?

Ideally, the evaluation process will involve the entire school executive, all teaching and non-teaching staff, students, parents and the AIS as an external participant.

What is the process?

The evaluation initially involves around 8-10 days in a school over a semester, often a mix of half and full days, and involves conducting a whole-school evaluation incorporating surveys, student data, discussion groups and shared learning experiences. These elements focus on the following key questions:

1. How good is our school?

Analysis of school self-evaluation identifies strengths and areas of concern

2. How great can we be?

Issues raised and action required are identified in workshops using the AIS *How do you know?* document as a toolkit

3. How do we get there?

A school action plan is developed with clear links to school context

4. What have we achieved?

The school identifies ways to sustain and maintain the achievements that have occurred

William Carey Christian School has been involved in the pilot program being run by the AIS. The principal of the school, Ian Wake, said:

"The process of evaluating all aspects of your school is simultaneously challenging and exciting. The process of thinking through how good your school is and asking 'how do you know?' has been transformational. The strength of the model is that learning and teaching are at the heart of the underlying framework linking with all the various dimensions of what it means to be an excellent school. This is not a program for the faint hearted. Be prepared to have your own perceptions and assumptions about your school challenged."

Frank Crawford, Chief Inspector of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Scotland, and advisor to the AIS on the evaluation model, worked with the pilot schools and the AIS Reference Group and Steering Committee for the project during his visit to Australia in March.

"I have been really impressed by how quickly the pilot schools have developed a framework for self-evaluation. The framework brings together the broad outcomes for students and the four simple but powerful questions for all of us in education about understanding how good we are and can be."

"The framework allows teachers to focus on the key learning relationships that matter - between them and the students, and among the students themselves."

"The best way for schools to improve is for them to take ownership of the process - that means schools taking responsibility for their own performance and their own development. Sometimes that needs a change in mindset but to do it you need self-evaluation. Only when you know yourself inside out can you take the steps needed for improvement. So - own it! And just do it!"

School self evaluation is becoming more critical as the Australian community, including parents with children in independent schools, demand to see improved outcomes from their investment in schools. We must be able to effectively measure our achievements and understand how we can continually improve. The pilot program is now complete and ten schools are about to embark on implementing the program.

Schools interested in utilising the evaluation framework should contact Sally Egan, Assistant Director: School Evaluation & Performance at segan@aisnsw.edu.au

Teacher Performance Appraisal

Teacher performance appraisal has assumed a greater prominence in independent schools that are striving to improve education outcomes for their students. In 2003, Professor John Hattie from the University of Auckland stated:

“Teachers’ knowledge and skills have a significant impact on the learning outcomes of their students.

Therefore schools are seeing a formalised appraisal process as a means of motivating teachers to continue their professional learning, become more reflective practitioners, participate in professional learning communities and focus their efforts on providing an excellent learning environment for all of their students.”

Schools also recognise appraisal as an opportunity for focusing teacher professional development to enable them to implement aspects of their mission statements, meet strategic targets, and provide feedback on the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning to their school board and school community. Teacher performance appraisal is an occasion for supporting, recognising and rewarding teacher excellence.

AISNSW Initiative

A number of NSW independent schools have requested AIS assistance to develop a teacher appraisal system that is linked to the NSW Teaching Standards Framework.

To assist schools, the AIS is developing a framework that can be customised to the specific needs of schools and the range of professional roles teachers have within their schools. The project will be run by the Independent Schools Teacher Accreditation Authority (ISTAA) and Frank Crawford, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland,

has been appointed as academic advisor and mentor. A reference group is being established which involves representatives from a range of independent schools, including Moriah College and St Andrew’s Cathedral School, who have requested involvement in the development and piloting of the framework.

The AIS will also develop a web portal so that schools can access the appraisal tools and store information that is gathered during the process in a secure and confidential environment. The accumulation of information on the portal will enable schools to track information about teachers during their employment at the school and enable the analysis of data such as engagement in professional development, growth of professional knowledge and skills, the impact on students’ learning outcomes and the extent to which strategic initiatives are implemented and achieved

Teacher Appraisal Framework

The teacher appraisal framework will utilise the NSW Professional Teaching Standards and include standards that are based on the school’s ethos and values or mission statement. Standards will be developed for positions of responsibility, including heads of faculties, deputies and pastoral co-ordinators. This framework will complement the appraisal framework that has been developed by the AIS for non-teaching staff.

School staff will be involved in the development and/or customisation of the standards so they reflect the expectations of the school. The standards will be aspirational so as to promote continuous improvement in teaching and learning, but will also be realistic so teachers can demonstrate their achievement.

Schools will establish their own reference group, involving staff, to promote transparency both in the purpose of appraisal and the process itself, and to identify resourcing implications for the staff and the school. The appraisal process will involve peer collaboration, coaching and mentoring and the collection of evidence to demonstrate that standards have been achieved. Evidence collected during the appraisal cycles can then be used by teachers for accreditation through the NSW Institute of Teachers and ISTAA.

With increased accountability and expectations of teachers, it will be important for schools to implement appraisal programs that do not place an undue burden on teachers but support the continual development of their expertise in educating students.

The AIS is cognisant of the desire within independent schools to provide excellent educational opportunities for their students through the employment and continuous development of teachers. Processes that assist schools to develop effective teacher appraisal methods, based on aspirational standards and that involve teachers in their planning and implementation, are imperative to ensure that NSW independent schools maintain their edge in what is becoming an increasingly competitive educational market.

For more information about the AIS teacher performance appraisal initiative and how your school can benefit, contact Estelle Lewis, Director: Teacher Accreditation at elewis@aisnsw.edu.au

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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.

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The Government's assurances that the review is *'not about taking money away from schools'* and that *'no school will lose a dollar of funding'*, while welcome, remain slightly unclear. However, the reference to *'school budget per student'* and the exact nature of any funding guarantee, mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister, will need some further clarification. While a funding guarantee technique is currently used to manage small changes in a school's SES, the reference to *transitional assistance* implies significant changes to a school's allocated funding under a new funding regime. There is also no reference to indexation or the concept of *'not losing a dollar of funding in real terms'*.

While it would be both unwise and unreasonable to expect the Government to pre-empt the outcomes of the review, if assurances are given for political or other reasons the impact on schools of those assurances must be clear.

For the first time the Government has developed a national Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for all schools. The index reflects the household income, education levels and employment status of the families that send their children to a particular school. The publication of this index was strongly opposed by some sections of the community. This is understandable as an analysis of the index clearly debunks the myth that all well-off parents send their children to independent schools.

Each year independent school parents contribute, on average, over 50% of the cost of educating their child. As Warren Mundine, former national president of the Australian Labor Party, said in an opinion piece published in *The Australian* newspaper in May 2006: *"Strong commitment by families to their child's educational development needs*

to be commended", and *"I want to see more family investment... not less."*

It follows that we should be developing a funding model that encourages and rewards parents from both government and non-government schools for contributing their after-tax dollars towards the education of their children. Let us hope that we never in any way revisit the 'Latham model' of funding in which parents would have been penalised for the fees they paid.

Interestingly, a recent survey conducted for the AISs in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland showed that community support for independent schools increased from 54% to 70% from 2001 to 2009. Two out of three respondents believed that students should receive the same level of financial support from governments regardless of school choice.

In responding to the Review of Schools Funding, the independent schools sector will continue to argue that any schools funding model should include:

- an entitlement for all students
- additional funding based on need
- stability and predictability through a legislated relationship with the Commonwealth and a four year funding cycle
- annual indexation through an accurately determined education cost index linked to the AGSRC.

The main assurance that the independent sector demands of the government is that no school will lose a dollar of funding in real terms, now and in the future.

Dr Geoff Newcombe
Executive Director