



# **Submission from AISNSW and AHISA (NSW/ACT)**

## **Review of the Melbourne Declaration**

14 June 2019

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# Introduction

## The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) and the NSW/ACT Branch of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)

AISNSW as the peak body representing the independent school sector in New South Wales and AHISA as the leading professional membership organisation for independent school Heads, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Education Council's Review of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.

The NSW independent school sector is vibrant and diverse, providing the community with choice, fostering competition and improving standards in education. The independent school sector in NSW has more than 500 schools and campuses, educating 204,000 students and accounting for 17% of NSW school enrolments and 48% of non-government students in a wide range of communities. Two-thirds (65%) of independent schools in NSW are low to average socio-economic status.

Over the last five years, enrolments in the NSW independent schools sector have grown by 20,000 students, or 12%, which is almost double the state's percentage growth in enrolments. Enrolment growth in the NSW independent sector has been a consistent trend for more than twenty years, with most of this growth attributable to the significant increase in the number of low fee independent schools. In addition to having low fees, many independent schools are small, with almost half (45%) educating fewer than 200 students. In NSW, 37% of independent schools are located outside of metropolitan Sydney.

Many independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or educate specific cohorts of students. Independent schools include:

- Christian schools and schools of Christian denominations, such as Anglican, independent Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist and Uniting Church schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Schools of educational philosophies, such as Montessori and Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as Grammar schools
- Community schools, including in Aboriginal communities
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and students at risk
- Schools that enrol significant numbers of international students
- Boarding schools

Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered with the regulatory authority, the NSW Education Standards Authority. 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 those within the Anglican Schools Corporation and Seventh-day Adventist systems.

# Overview

## The role of a national declaration

The collective ownership within Australia of a national declaration on the purpose and role of learning, embraced by the Australian education community, is a powerful statement on the role of education as a universal social good. Devoid of politics and agendas, while recognising diversity of context, the sector-blind approach with a clear articulation of the collective responsibility of the goals is an important element of the Declaration that should be preserved.

The revised Declaration, with its corresponding goals and commitments, must be sufficiently aspirational to remain so for the next 10 years. It will need to be equally relevant to students who are not born yet, as it is those who are currently in school. For students starting school in 2020, the new Declaration will shape the direction of 10 of their 13 years of schooling. It will complete the education of the tail end of Generation Z (1995-2009), and also inform the education of Generation Alpha (2009→), who have not been part of a world without the iPad, Instagram or Facetime.

By articulating and subsequently striving for an ambitious vision for quality education and schooling in Australia, we are collectively establishing a pathway to aim higher than ever before.

Our young people deserve no less.

## Purpose of schooling

Schools are a microcosm of society and reflect the broader ambitions, values and representations of their local communities. While there will rightly continue to be a diversity of schooling options to provide choice, across Australia, schooling should:

- Be accessible and educate all students holistically about the world they live in, upholding the basic human right for children to receive an education
- Help students to realise their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative and spiritual potential and flourish as individuals within a society
- Develop diverse interests and a sense of purpose for all students
- Address learning as a continuous process and instil an appreciation of the learning process in students, to encourage life-long and self-directed learning which enhances adaptability
- Develop a core of essential knowledge, skills and attributes to promote resilience, self-regulation, self-efficacy and agility, for an uncertain future that is ever changing, and enable all students to navigate effective pathways for the future
- Prepare students to become active and informed citizens and contribute to the betterment of Australian society and the global community
- Incorporate the faith, ethos and/or values relevant to the school community. This creates and strengthens community spirit, commitment and support.

Foundational elements to learning such as literacy and numeracy remain crucial in the education of children and young people, and the next decade of schooling will see the development of capabilities, dispositions and knowledge become equally significant as we educate our young people to be actively engaged in a world that we cannot presume to predict.

The current context of unparalleled scrutiny of education and schools, unhelpful use of standardised testing and heavy emphasis on international comparisons risks a further narrowing of the curriculum and a diminishing capacity for schools, leaders and teachers to make educational decisions that are most suited to their school ethos and context. The purpose of education is not solely about a post-school destination or an end of schooling examination result. The intrinsic value of schooling is the development and growth of well-rounded,

good people who are capable of making a worthwhile contribution to the community. This should be emphasised throughout the revised Declaration.

### Summary of submission

The currency of the two broad goals have stood the test of time and continue to provide clarity for schools, systems and governments around the overarching purpose of schooling. Goal 1 'Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence' is universally supported by the independent school sector. At a high level, Goal 2 'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens' is also supported, however the sub-goals underpinning Goal 2 require extensive reconsideration to reflect current and future impacts from the broader social, economic and educational environment.

Likewise, the Commitments to Action and the accompanying sub-actions should be amended to ensure that the Declaration itself remains sufficiently aspirational and relevant for the next decade. Whilst additional Commitments to Action are proposed by this submission, no comment is made regarding those that should be removed.

This submission is structured by themes that should be prominent in the revised Declaration. These themes cut across Goal 1, Goal 2 and the Commitments to Action.

## 1. Equity and excellence in education

### A renewed emphasis on equity and diversity

Diversity within and between schools should also be recognised in any reframing of the Declaration. Australia is a pluralistic, multi-faith and multicultural society; schools across the country are microcosms of the communities in which they are located. The independent school sector in NSW is diverse, representative of varied communities across the State. In addition to providing mainstream schooling, the independent sector includes special schools and special assistance schools for students at risk. The diversity within school sectors should also be acknowledged.

Whilst the current expression of Goal 1 targets Australian government in collaboration with school sectors, schools also perceive equity and excellence as relevant to their local context. Education is a powerful mechanism to minimise inequity whilst simultaneously celebrating diversity. However, there is still a long way to go in ensuring that all students attain improved educational outcomes.

Across the country, educational, social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) young people continue to be below those of non-ATSI background. Providing a stronger focus for ATSI students to gain access to quality and equitable education pathways, while being able to hold strong to their cultural heritage, no matter their geographical location across Australia is essential. School leaders and teachers should authentically engage in cultural professional learning to breakdown stereotypes, enhance their understanding of ATSI histories and cultures, along with understanding the need to provide greater support to ATSI students and their communities in education pathways. Inequity for ATSI students remains very real and a strong statement with a tangible commitment is required. Reducing this inequity must be a higher priority for education sectors, government organisations and a leading component of any national education agenda.

Students outside metropolitan areas continue to lag behind their metropolitan counterparts in academic results and should continue to be a driving focus of the education agenda. Education must also seek to maximise the academic and social development for students with a disability, to enable full participation in all aspects of life.

Students from a refugee background should continue to be identified within the sub-goals. Many of these students continue to experience significant trauma and disruptions to education and require extensive and sensitive support from educational experts and institutions. Schools, as the hub of the community, have a pivotal role in supporting these students and their families to feel connected and engaged with Australian society.

## Excellence

The importance of ‘excellence’ as an aspiration is a pivotal element of any national declaration.

Excellence in education cannot be understood as simply “educational outcomes”. Rather, excellence is an ethos that underpins the approach taken by classroom teachers, school leaders and education sectors. It is the *pursuit* of excellence for all that captures the spirit of the goal.

In addition to the aspiration towards excellence being pivotal, it is important that as a nation we recognise and celebrate excellence in schools.

## Promoting excellence in teaching

Teachers are the greatest in-school determinant of student outcomes. Therefore, the concept of excellence must extend to promoting excellence in teaching. An ongoing commitment to continually upskill teachers in order to deliver the Educational Goals is a fundamental component to ensuring that educational structures, sectors and classrooms are equipped to strive for, and to meet the aspirations articulated within the Educational Goals. School leadership is another significant factor in student outcomes and it is important to recognise the role that school leaders can and should play in promoting excellence in teaching.

Enhance the action ‘*supporting quality teaching and school leadership*’ to promote excellence in teaching and learning through ongoing development for teachers and leadership to constantly adapt and respond to an ever-changing world.

# 2. Frameworks to support learning

## Educational structures with flexibility to respond to the changing world

The pace of social, technological and economic change over the next decade is anticipated to increase at an accelerated rate. Any structures or initiatives must allow local flexibility for deeper learning experiences. Within any school across the country, students within a classroom are all different. Flexibility for contextual decision-making is pivotal to ensuring schools are empowered to lead an environment that is responsive to broader changes and the needs of their unique contexts. The emphasis should be on designing a schooling environment that suits the needs of the student. Therefore, the classroom, the types of schools and the structures supporting those schools must be flexible in adapting to their respective needs. This includes flexible curriculum delivery frameworks with a full range of curriculum options supported by schools, including school-based vocational education and training, to meet student needs.

New commitment to action to embed flexibility to respond to a continuously changing environment

## Digital technology

A significant challenge over the next ten years is the continued acceleration of social and technological change. Technology is no longer a separate strand of learning, rather, an integrated tool. Supporting young people to become critical and ethical users of technology will continue to be an important consideration for all education sectors. Given that students will increasingly become creators of digital content rather than mere consumers of

knowledge requires schools to ensure that they develop the capacity to exercise responsible digital citizenship. Students need to be able to engage confidently and positively with digital technology in order to effectively participate in an increasingly globalised society and communicate respectfully with others.

Young people will continue to develop digital and media fluency that is already in many cases surpassing that of the teachers who are educating them. In an age of global connectivity and opportunity, we should not only focus on the use of technology in student learning, but the potential for education sectors and schools to harness the benefits of technology more effectively to provide the flexibility needed to deliver a broad curriculum that is relevant to all learners. Supporting education leaders in this challenge will be vital.

Revise the *‘supporting quality teaching and school leadership’* action to enhance the digital literacy of educators

### A holistic approach to health and wellbeing

Education of the whole child and the wellbeing of young people should be a distinct focus of the revised Declaration. Societal changes such as family structures, the nature of work and the pervasive nature of social media have required schools to undertake increasingly greater roles that traditionally would have been the responsibility of parents or the community.

Supporting positive relationships with self, peers, educators and family is an essential element of ensuring overall student wellbeing, a responsibility that is increasingly the remit of schools. With schools increasingly serving as the centre of community hubs, a holistic approach to mental health across the school environment combined with targeted intervention is important. With increasing pressure and expectations on schools to be a ‘one-stop-shop’ for students, professional expertise is necessary to support educators and implement strategies for vulnerable young people and their families.

Social and emotional competencies or capabilities should be embedded to ensure that children and young people are supported to become resilient members of their communities. These are essential skills to be transferred across a range of contexts and are vital for wellbeing, academic success and progress. To this end, learning how to navigate complex interpersonal situations will continue to be a feature.

New commitment to action to increase student wellbeing

## 3. Knowledge and capabilities

### Capabilities and dispositional approaches to learning

Currently the Australian Curriculum includes seven general capability areas. Whether referred to as capabilities, dispositions, attributes or 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, the importance of broader competencies has been confirmed in research and should feature as an integral component of schooling alongside disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. The potential impact of the general capabilities has not been realised, due to the insufficient status placed upon them. The status of the dispositions a young Australian may need to navigate a complex and changing world should be enhanced.

A stronger and more coherent emphasis on designing learning that is focused on capabilities and dispositions, in conjunction with disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, should be at the core of learning design from

Enhance the *‘promoting world-class curriculum and assessment’* action to strengthen capability and dispositional approaches to learning

early childhood education onwards. Competencies are most effectively taught when embedded in discipline specific knowledge and contexts. Embedding capabilities and positive dispositional approaches is important for creating well-rounded citizens and has economic and social implications for the broader Australian community.

### Contributors, consumers and creators of knowledge

Young people today have access to more information than ever before. While the role of schools to impart knowledge will continue to remain integral, the ability to think critically about the sources of knowledge is increasingly important in educating young people to be informed citizens in a globalised society where they are bombarded by information.

In contemporary society, the lines between an individual's public and private identity are already blurred. Over the next ten years, it will become increasingly important to educate young people to understand their role as a contributor to data to enable better informed decisions, including an understanding of the implication on individual privacy. This includes assessing both the technical and social aspects of data.

The ability of students as responsible citizens to distil, interpret and analyse data to help distinguish truth from fiction will continue to require increasing sophistication of data literacy skills. The concept of "fake news" is requiring young people to disaggregate and assess sources of knowledge to become critical consumers of knowledge who are able to question and critically assess various sources of information in order to ascertain their reliability and usefulness.

The increasing role of young Australians not only as consumers of knowledge, but creators of knowledge, must be emphasised.

Enhance the '*active and informed citizens*' goal to understand their role as contributors, consumers and creators of knowledge

### Developing the skills of learning

Whilst the acquisition of knowledge remains an essential component of schooling, the increasingly availability and accessibility of information will require students to be flexible and adaptable over their lifetime, applying their knowledge and skills in a range of different contexts. To this end, learning the skills of learning becomes even more vital to facilitate a lifelong love of learning, whether it be in formal post-schooling options, or self-directed adult learning. Instilling a curiosity to discover and a passion for inquiry will provide young people with the skills to prepare them to confidently approach life's future challenges and ensure that they are self-motivated and well-equipped to continue to adapt as successful adults.

Enhance the '*confident and creative learners*' goal to demonstrate curiosity and motivation for learning

## 4. Transitions with schooling

### Early childhood education

Many independent schools in NSW provide early learning as an extension of the school's activities, providing strong transitions from before school to formal school education. In many instances, this provides continuity of learning from early childhood to Year 12, a unique integration model supporting the educational and social growth of children and young people. Enhancing the status and recognition of early childhood education is



crucial as part of the continuum of learning. The revised Declaration should seek to strengthen the connection between early childhood education and formal schooling to provide a smooth transition for young children and their families.

Revise the *'strengthening early childhood education'* commitment to action to enhance the continuity of learning through connects between early childhood education and schooling

### Post-schooling pathways

Schooling should provide all students with opportunity. Schools have a moral imperative to help ensure that all students are provided with multiple post-school pathways to prepare them to confidently and creatively navigate their future, and facilitate options for employment, education and training. Promoting university, vocational education and training and other post-schooling pathways as equally valid and valued is a shared responsibility of schools, government and broader society.

It is timely to question the continuing emphasis on end-of-school examinations and traditional approaches for determining university admission post-school. In a changing world, these mechanisms are no longer fit for purpose in their traditional form due to the multiple pathways available to students now and in the future. Currently, schools are experiencing constraints on teaching, learning and assessment and the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by young people continue to grow.

Revise the *'supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions'* commitment to action to promote opportunity for young people to access multiple post-schooling pathways

Within schooling, there should be a greater emphasis given to providing meaningful opportunities for students and schools to engage with industry, universities and other post-school education options to provide more innovative and enriched learning. Such partnership activities enable engagement with real world problems and collaborative solution design, as well as offering students the potential to accumulate tangible recognition for experiences and achievements in formal and informal education, the workplace and community involvement. As such, 'developing stronger partnerships' should remain a discrete Commitment to Action.

## 5. Citizenship

### Local, national and global citizenship

The collective responsiveness and broader social justice responsibility of young Australians should also be emphasised. The changed nature of globalisation means that young individuals have greater accessibility and engagement with global issues and individuals overseas. Australian young people are exposed to, and participating in, international conversations in an unprecedented way through a wide variety of channels, including social media, online gaming, internet streaming and travel experiences. Preparing students to actively participate in global conversations and issues requires intercultural understanding, multiple language skills as well as deep critical thinking skills.

Due to the increased diversity in the makeup of our society, there is a need to nurture not only an appreciation, understanding of and respect for cultures, practices and faiths other than one's own. Along with democratic tenets, the rights and responsibilities of a citizen within their community to engage respectfully in issues where

there is a diversity of opinion will become increasingly important. Social and emotional foundations are linked to moral and ethical foundations, which are fundamentally important for solving dilemmas or conflicts. A greater focus, therefore, needs to be placed on developing empathy in our learners.

Within this enhanced global and cultural perspective, also lies the opportunity to strengthen the learning of languages among Australia's young people. Australians engaging in a global world should be encouraged to see value in learning another language.

Enhance the '*active and informed citizens*'-goal to question, empathise and respect

## Concluding Remarks

AISNSW and AHISA (NSW/ACT) appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and is happy to provide further comment on any of the points raised in this submission.