

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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A FINAL WORD

From the Executive Director

This will be my 115th and final *Briefings* lead article as Executive Director of Independent Schools Queensland. *Briefings*, now in its 25th year, has facilitated debate on schooling issues and informed independent schools and the broader education community about matters impacting schooling and particularly independent schools.

There have been several regular and key themes of my *Briefings* articles over the past eleven years.

The continued increase in independent school enrolments has featured heavily. In 2000, the Queensland independent sector enrolled 80,000 students representing around 14% of all students. Today enrolments have grown to a high of 134,000 or 15.3% of students.

Whilst growth has been across the diversity of schools in the independent sector, it has been strongest in low-fee community and Christian schools and more recently in specialist and Special Assistance Schools.

Sector growth has been well ahead of population increases and as recently reported¹, has been at its highest level in 2020 and 2021 (4 and 5% respectively) for several years. It is particularly pleasing to see most regional areas of Queensland experiencing increased enrolments following several years of challenges for centres located outside of the south-east.

Parents have clearly embraced school choice (as have Governments of both political persuasions) and recognised the high-quality education provided by independent schools.

The vibrant position of the independent sector has been further enhanced by the increasing diversity of schools and the establishment of independent schooling options in most cities and towns across the state. The profile of new independent schools has shifted dramatically with community-driven smaller suburban and regional schools, specialist trade training schools and schools for disengaged students driving sector growth and offering improved choice for parents and families.

Independent schools are genuinely responsive to parent and community

expectations and needs and the valuable ISQ *What Parents Want*² survey over many years has been consistent in identifying what parents are looking for in schooling.

The growth of the independent sector is projected to continue strongly. Recent research by Independent Schools Australia identifies that the number of students in Queensland independent schools will grow by over 28,367 students through to 2030 to reach a total of 158,732.

ISQ's *Independent Schools Infrastructure: Planning to Maintain Choice*³ predicts an additional 41,000 students in the independent sector by 2036 creating a challenge for the sector to provide the necessary infrastructure to accommodate such a large increase in enrolments.

As the sector has grown over the years, its economic significance has also grown where today independent schools contribute nearly \$5 billion annually to the Queensland economy, support the equivalent of 33,560 full-time jobs paying \$2.95 billion in wages and result in over \$1 billion in annual savings to Governments (principally through the contribution of parents to schooling costs through the payment of fees)⁴.

Briefings has been a thought-leader over the years commenting on and proposing policy initiatives whether it be consideration as to reform of the Federation and Government

¹ See for example, *Briefings* Vol 25 Issue 2 (March 2021) at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/briefings-vol-25-2/>

² Available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/what-parents-want-key-findings/>

³ Available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/independent-schools-infrastructure-planning-to-maintain-choice/>

⁴ See ISQ's *Economic Significance of Independent Schools to the Queensland Economy* at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/economic-significance-of-independent-schools-to-the-queensland-economy/>

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responsibility for schooling, taxation as a means of increasing resources for schools, and on-going debates about NAPLAN, Australian Curriculum and other schooling initiatives.

Education reform can often take many years to put into effect, let alone to realise significant benefits. For example, a decade ago there was a “brick wall” between schooling and early childhood education. The need for a more integrated approach to early childhood education and schooling was a frequent topic of *Briefings* articles.

Today, kindergarten is effectively another year of schooling and schools now can have pride in their early childhood provision as part of a seamless education provision for children. Participation in kindergarten has shifted from around 30% of children to over 90%.

Briefings articles calling for Government action on schooling policies (particularly just before elections) often resulted in much debate and sometimes commitments by Governments. More recently ISQ has promoted on-going reform of schooling provision. A good example was last year’s *A Catalyst for Change* which considered positive opportunities for changes associated with the experiences of COVID-19⁵.

Queensland has seen on-going educational reform over the past two decades including the introduction of the Prep year, the transfer of Year 7 to secondary, the Education and Training

Reforms for the Future (ETRF), Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance changes, the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and significant child protection legislation.

All of these have been the subject of *Briefings* articles along with ISQ research promoting schooling initiatives under the banner of *Our Schools – Our Future*. *Briefings* has featured the popular ISQ *Trends Book*, along with frequent research on community perceptions of independent schools. It has also featured one of ISQ’s most popular publications *Schools Speaking for Themselves – Telling the Real Story* which called for schools to communicate the balance between league tables and what schools really do to achieve for their students.

The most written about *Briefings* topic has been schools funding.

Thirty plus years ago when I started working for the independent school’s sector, few would have predicted the level of Government funding now being provided to independent schools. Over that period the Australian Government’s role in providing public funding to independent schools has significantly increased. In 2021-22, the Australia Government will provide \$24.4 billion for non-government schools. This is budgeted to increase to \$28 billion in 2024-25⁷.

There have been three federal funding models for non-government schools over the past three decades – the Education Resources Index (ERI), the

Socio-economic status (SES) and since 2014, the Gonski model (with several variations).

Each model has had its unique complexities, benefits, and disadvantages. All have been the subject of much public debate and political action. Schools funding has been a never-ending political issue and is likely to continue to be so into the future. Politicians determine Federal and State Budgets that deliver public funding for schooling.

Whilst much of the media and public debate is focused on Government funding of schooling, parental contributions continue to critical to the independent sector. Fee-paying parents (from their after-tax income) account for 56% of the recurrent income of independent schools⁸. In Queensland, this equates to over \$1 billion annually; this level of financial contribution would need to be met by Governments if parents didn’t choose an independent school.

It is also worth noting that 89% of the capital expenditure of independent schools is funded through private sources. A very significant amount of school infrastructure is financed by parents and the community.

Despite this private capital spend in the independent sector, one of the highlights of the past twenty years has been the capital support provided by the Queensland Government to the non-state sector. During the period 2003 to 2021, the Queensland Government has invested \$1.9 billion in non-state school infrastructure, assisting the sector to meet the growing demands for schooling places.

Schools funding will no doubt continue to be a contested area of public policy into the future. For the independent sector the debate is likely to move from the total amount of funding allocated by Governments to how that funding is allocated across

5 Available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/a-catalyst-for-change/>

6 Available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/schools-speaking-for-themselves-telling-the-real-story/>

7 See *Briefings* Vol 25 Issue 4 (May 2021) for further details – <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/publications-resources/posts/briefings-vol-25-4/>

8 See Independent Schools Australia *Snapshot* for data on the funding of independent schools – available at <https://isa.edu.au/snapshot-2021/>

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schooling sectors and to individual schools within the sectors. This will be a difficult debate for the independent sector as illustrated by current changes to the new DMI funding model where there are winners and losers.

I hope the focus of the independent sector continues to be on ensuring that every school gets a fair and adequate level of public funding based on the right of every student to receive government funding support, no matter which school they attend.

The future for the independent sector is very positive – enrolments continue to grow; parents are embracing the quality education provided by independent schools and Governments continue to recognise the importance and contribution of the sector to our schooling system.

I wish every school and their communities all the best for the future. Independent schools are led by exemplary school leaders who despite the increasingly complex environment have the best interests of students at the heart of everything that they do.

Finally, my sincere thanks to all ISQ member schools for their support, collegiality and their work in educating our young people. The future of our young people is in good hands and it has been a privilege over many years to have supported and worked with dedicated school staff, Boards and their support groups.

Best wishes to you all for the future.



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SUPPORTING MIDDLE LEADERS: FOUR KEY AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION



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Powerful middle leadership is vital in any successful school setting, not just because work volume requires delegation, but also because middle leaders are positioned in such a way that gives them particular influence.

They have an acknowledged position of responsibility in the school but they are also still practising as teachers in the classroom, and as a consequence of this work they are well-placed to understand and develop the core business of schooling – learning. This is a role that is not as open to the principal because they are somewhat distant from the classroom; nor is it available to a classroom teacher alone who does not have the resources available to those in more leadership positions.

GROOTENBOER ET AL. (2020, p. 1)

To support Queensland independent schools, Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) facilitates a Middle Leaders program in partnership with Professor Peter Grootenboer, Director, Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University. This training package supports the development of, and compiles research with, middle leaders in independent schools.

As part of the 2021 cohort experience, participants undertook 360-degree assessments from their managers, peers, and team members. These 250 surveys revealed many common themes that school senior leaders could consider as they support the growth of these important staff members.

High-performing middle leaders can contribute immensely to the success of a school. If schools can develop the knowledge and skill sets of middle management, they can positively influence teaching and learning practices, and ensure better learning outcomes for their students.

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
(2020, para. 1)**

1. Self-awareness

One revealing data set for middle leaders reveals they under-rated their own abilities. The survey tool employed required participants to rate their own abilities. Comparing participant data with managers, peers, and team members data, revealed that the average participant-rated scores never matched or exceed their colleagues' ratings. In other words, across all surveyed items, middle leaders rated themselves lower than the people who worked with them.

For senior leaders working with middle management, the lesson is clear – regardless of what leadership capacity they have in mind, it is almost certain that middle leaders believe they are not doing as good a job as others believe. Even in areas they are under-

performing, it is statistically most likely that the middle leaders consider their performance it worse than it is. Some theorists have taken to calling this phenomenon 'impostor syndrome' and, left unchecked, can rob organisations of the full expertise of all staff as they second-guess, and therefore not fully express, their best contributions.

If you've ever had a voice in your head telling you that everyone in the room must be smarter than you, that your success is due to luck instead of skill, or that the proper response to a compliment is a counterargument, you've experienced the symptoms of impostor syndrome.

MELINDA FRENCH GATES (2018, para. 3)

That all said, a healthy amount of humility and high standards can be a good thing. When competent people lack appropriate confidence, Grant believes there is an "upside to feeling like an impostor" (2018, pp. 51-52): it means leaders are more willing to shrug complacency, question assumptions and learn more. Though senior leaders should counsel against overly negative self-image, the solution is not to push middle leaders to over-confidence. Rather, a leader's modesty can be an organisational strength when it allows them to change their mind and seek new solutions, rather than hold on to less successful ways of working.

2. Recognise Strengths

ISQ's research also revealed significant commonality around middle leaders

highest rated qualities. Namely, that they are hardworking, and have integrity and high ethical standards. For senior leaders, the right response to these strengths is two-fold. The first is to recognise them. When it comes to increasing the likelihood of staff engaging in work, one of the single best things a senior leader can do is pay positive attention to their team.

Research completed by Gallup uncovered that a manager who pays no attention to their team will have a ratio of disengaged to engaged staff of 20:1 (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). Even giving negative attention – giving feedback on a team's weaknesses – improved the ratio significantly. For every disengaged staff member, the research showed there were two engaged. However, to improve things in a positive manner, Gallup says that leaders who focused their attention on their team's strengths and their most significant work successes, observed the disengaged to engaged ratio soar to 1:60 (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019).

While positive attention is the first response, the second is to recognise that these qualities do not necessarily translate to great leadership. In a school context, particularly when promotions are made from within, middle leaders often are promoted to leadership roles due to the quality of their classroom practice and diligence – things that their colleagues can recognise and value but are also distinct from what makes a good leader. Without guidance, middle leaders can mistakenly conclude that their job is to make their team work as hard as them. Research

completed by Robinson et al. (2009) would contend, that a leader's best energy should be spent on "the core business of teaching and learning". Indeed, their synthesis of 139 studies showed an effect size of 0.84 when leaders promoted and participated in teacher learning and development – twice as effective as establishing expectations and evaluating teaching. If student outcomes are the measure of success, and it probably should be, then permitting and encouraging your middle leaders to become leaders of the professional development of their teams is crucial.

3. Accountability Training

Of all the items the middle leaders were assessed on, the lowest score was for middle leaders' ability to recognise and challenge poor performance in others. It is a commonly expressed difficulty for middle leaders to hold accountable the same people that they work with on a day-to-day basis. Being a school middle leader, by definition, means that they are both managing and leading a team of people, while still teaching in the classroom often in very close proximity to their direct reports. Furthermore, middle leaders are regularly friends with the teachers they are tasked to lead, particularly when their appointment was made internally.

It is likely for these structural reasons, as well as the fact that accountability conversations can be unpleasant, that middle leaders find this one of their most prescient areas for growth. To these ends, school senior leaders could consider providing training and support to their middle leaders in the following areas.

- **Setting team goals.** Clear performance indicators are a motivating way to drive teams forward. A key role of middle leaders is to translate the strategic priorities

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of the school into meaningful actions that their team can make, and then developing some sort of scorecard so they know when they are doing well. Having this written down and shared can be a shortcut to improvement.

- **Having difficult conversations.**

While frequently unpleasant, there are ways in which to prepare and to have a difficult conversation with an underperforming staff member. Typically, this includes finding common ground, zeroing in on the issue that needs to be addressed, explaining why an issue is problematic, listening to the staff member's point of view, and then planning a way forward. Role play can be a useful developmental activity to build confidence.

- **Providing employment guidance.**

Middle leaders need to be well versed in your school's performance management processes and how they can, or cannot, be used by middle leaders. Clarity can save a lot of pain in the long-term.

4. Pushing Through Delegation

Finally, 250 respondents were asked to suggest a development activity for their middle leaders. The most common response was stop taking on too much and delegate more. Middle leaders have many reasons for failing to delegate. Quality is a common concern, with personnel beliefs that they can do a task better than anyone else.

At other times, middle leaders feel that they do not want to overburden their team by asking them to take on more. Or they are aware that any form of delegation will require the middle leader to train and coach the appointed delegate.

All these challenges can be overcome and, importantly, by delegating well middle leaders are able to dedicate more of their limited time to thinking and acting more strategically and are able to take a longer-term view of planning for operational and process improvements, design effective evaluation and support the development of their teams. While some routine work is part of every employee's responsibility, if a middle leader is so overloaded that they cannot consider wider organisational goals, then it's likely no one in the team will. Delegation is a critical skill for leading a high-performing team. Senior leaders may be able to assist middle leaders by helping identify tasks that can be delegated and clarifying the reasons why. A practical 'review' of all the tasks currently undertaken by a middle leader, ranked from most to least critical, can prove useful.

The workload involved in reviewing a middle leader's tasks, parcelling up packages that could be distributed to others, and providing the training and support so the delegate can succeed, is almost always worth it in the long-term. Though it may be quicker for the middle leader in the short-term to complete the task themselves, good leaders are encouraged to push

through this stage and not take tasks back prematurely. In a workplace where everyone does a little, a lot gets done.

ISQ supports schools to develop their middle leadership teams in several ways. ISQ's Education Services teams can meet with schools to co-design school-based professional learning strategies; middle leadership development can be specifically targeted as part of ISQ's Teacher Growth and Development Program, or schools can apply for participation in ISQ's Middle Leaders program, which offers 360-degree analysis of participating middle leaders, ongoing coaching, and leadership development events.

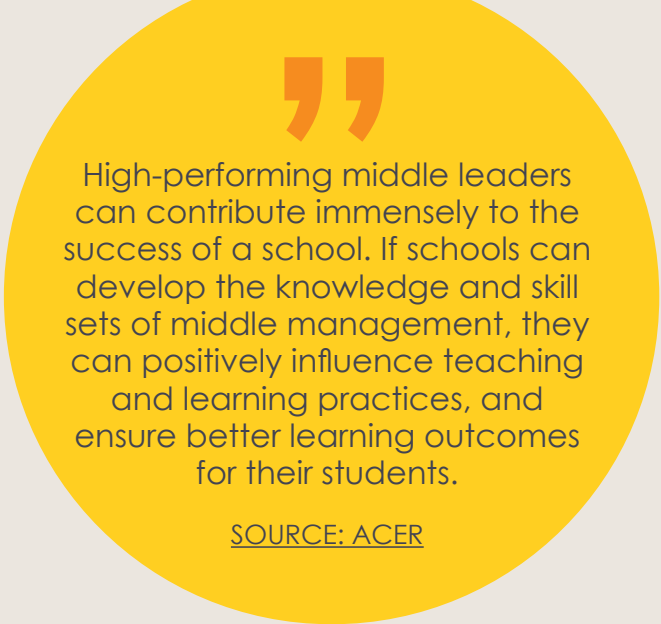
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ISQ's Middle Leaders Program: The Training Your School Middle Leaders Need

ISQ's 2021 Middle Leaders program commissioned its participants to undertake 360 assessments from their colleagues.

250 educators (21 middle leaders, 53 managers, 72 peers and 104 team members) completed these assessments, with the collective results revealing many common themes.



1. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Queensland independent school middle leaders SCORED CONSISTENTLY HIGH IN SELF-MANAGEMENT QUALITIES

SCORING IN OR ABOVE 90TH PERCENTILE

Resilience
Integrity
People Skills

Capability
Results
Efficiency

2. INDUSTRY

Queensland independent school middle leaders ARE WELL KNOWN AMONGST THEIR COLLEAGUES FOR GETTING STUFF DONE

HIGHEST RATING STATEMENTS

These middle leaders are hardworking and have a good work ethic

97%
AGREE

These Middle Leaders complete work in a professional manner

This group behaves to very high ethical standards

3. AWARENESS

Queensland independent school middle leaders CONSISTENTLY UNDER-RATED THEIR OWN ABILITIES

INSTANCES OF OVERALL SELF-ASSESSMENT COMPARED TO THEIR 360 ASSESSMENT

RATED THEMSELVES
Below: ALL | The same as: NONE
Above: NONE

MOST UNDER-ESTIMATED QUALITIES

This group consistently delivers good results

BELOW 10th PERCENTILE VS ABOVE 90th PERCENTILE

This group has the right industry experience to be very effective

BELOW 25th PERCENTILE VS ABOVE 90th PERCENTILE

4. TRAINING

Queensland independent school middle leaders IDENTIFIED TWO KEY AREAS WHERE FURTHER TRAINING AND SUPPORT MIGHT BENEFIT

LOWEST ITEM SCORE
ACCOUNTABILITY

The middle leaders recognise and challenge poor performance in others

HIGHEST IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY
DELEGATION

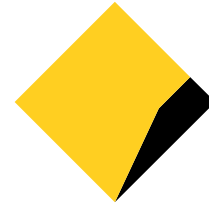
Stop taking on too much and spreading yourself too thin; delegate more

ISQ thanks its 2021 Alliance Partners

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Gold Alliance



Silver Alliance



Bronze Alliance



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