

# Federal Election Statement 2022

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND



Moreton Bay College

**Independent schools are a key part of the education landscape in Australia and sit alongside government and Catholic schools in contributing to Australian society and the safety, learning and wellbeing of Australian children.**

### AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

Independent schools represent a significant and increasing number of families.

- 667,259 students attend an independent school – that is one in six Australian school students and more than one in five secondary students.
- Independent school enrolments have grown by 20%, or more than 105,000 students, in the last 10 years – the highest growth rate of any school sector. In 2021, enrolments in independent schools accelerated further still, increasing by 3.1% (19,888 students)<sup>1</sup>.

The independent sector represents families at all income levels.

- Half of independent schools collect annual fees of \$5,000 or less and only 8% of independent schools collect an annual fee above \$20,000.
- Growth in the independent sector is greatest in low-fee schools. Over the past five years almost 60% of enrolment growth has been in schools serving low-income families.

The independent sector makes a significant financial contribution to the Australian economy.

- Independent schools save governments \$5.5 billion each year.
- 110,412 people are employed in independent schools, earn \$8.8 billion in salaries and wages, and contribute PAYG tax of \$1.6 billion and a further \$882 million in superannuation.
- Parents whose children attend independent schools contribute \$7.65 billion annually through school fees.
- Nearly 90% of all capital development in independent schools is funded by parents.

### QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

Queensland independent schools educate more than 136,000 students at more than 270 campuses, representing around 15.7% of all students including 19.7% of secondary students in the state.

<b>229</b>	<b>independent schools</b>
<b>136,000</b>	<b>students</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>primary only schools</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>secondary only schools</b>
<b>157</b>	<b>combined primary &amp; secondary schools</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>Special Assistance Schools (42 sites) &amp; Special Schools</b>
<b>4</b>	
<b>172</b>	<b>schools offer Prep</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>boarding schools</b>

1. These figures include independently owned and operated Catholic schools in 2021, which the ABS groups with diocesan-owned and operated Catholic system, schools

# Independent Schools Matter

## FIVE PRIORITY AREAS FOR AN INCOMING AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

To maintain the choice, diversity and contribution of independent schools, funding certainty is needed including maintaining the current level of indexation and the Choice and Affordability Fund.

**Additionally, Australian Government investment in the following five areas is required to ensure ongoing quality education and the success of Australian students in a resilient and diverse independent school sector.**

### 1. WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Independent schools urgently require resources at the school level to address the acute mental health needs of students and support protection and prevention programs for students and staff.

The wellbeing and mental health needs of students have substantially increased in number, complexity and severity. Funding is needed for (i) training staff; (ii) in-school wellbeing programs; (iii) engagement of experts; and (iv) the effective selection and application of the mental health resources available through third parties.

**Student wellbeing is a big issue in Queensland with the number of funding applications for students diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder and requiring a significant education adjustment increasing by 138% in the five years from 2016 to 2021.**

**In the same period, the proportion of Queensland school students reported as having a social emotional disability and for whom schools need to provide additional support has increased from 25.5% to 35.8%.**

**ISQ's commissioned research paper: *School Leaders' and Staff Wellbeing is Critical for Student Success* by Professor Donna Cross also highlights the need to facilitate equitable access to trained mental health professionals in all Australian schools to respond to the increasing complexity of student behaviour and mental health and wellbeing difficulties.**

### 2. NATIONAL REFORM PRIORITIES

A commitment to funding the implementation of current and emerging national educational reforms and issues of national significance in independent schools beyond 2023, is critical.

Funding to the non-government sector to implement the Australian Government's educational priorities has proved highly successful over three decades.

The Non-Government Reform Support Fund (NGRSF) is due to cease at the end of 2023 with schools still requiring significant support to implement current and emerging Australian Government education reforms priorities.

**Funding provided through the NGRSF has also enabled key national education requirements to occur, including 105 Queensland independent schools transitioning successfully to NAPLAN Online in 2021 with the work to transition the remaining independent schools ongoing.**

### 3. CONSEQUENCES OF FUNDING REFORM

Additional funding is required to support schools hard hit by changes to the funding methodology manage their transition to new funding levels and remain accessible to families.

Addressing the elements of the model that have resulted in these pressures, including refining the loadings for disadvantage, is also necessary to resolve these unintended financial consequences and reduce the need for additional funding.

The new Direct Measure of Income (DMI) methodology, has had a differential impact on schools with up to one third (350) of independent schools losing approximately \$1.8 billion through to 2029, compared to what they would have received under the previous funding arrangements. This has left a small group of independent schools struggling to remain viable and facing an uncertain future.

The \$455 million provided through the Choice and Affordability Fund is insufficient to compensate for these losses.

**Around 30% of Queensland independent schools are expected to lose funding over the next eight years compared with the previous socio-economic status methodology. In total these Queensland independent schools are projected to receive \$375 million less in Australian Government funding between 2021 and 2029.**

## 4. REGIONAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

The degree to which independent schools can continue providing high quality boarding options in regional and remote locations depends on: (i) additional resourcing to cover the costs of goods, transport, technology and connections to family and culture; (ii) incentives to attract and retain a quality workforce; and (iii) capital funding to improve the living and learning environment.

Two thirds of boarding schools across Australia are in the independent sector, with almost half (61) in regional and remote locations and seven percent (10) serving mainly Indigenous students.

Student enrolments in regional, rural and remote independent schools are growing at the same rate as metropolitan enrolments. For many families, regional and remote boarding provides the only practical educational option, yet repeatedly, reports have shown regional boarding schools are chronically underfunded, particularly Indigenous boarding.

Independent boarding schools are estimated to have contributed approximately \$1.8 billion in GDP in 2019-20, representing 0.10 percent of the total contribution to GDP by all industries.

The number of jobs supported by independent boarding schools (including both initial and flow-on activity) equated to approximately 0.11 percent of national employment.

Students who attend an independent boarding school instead of a fully-funded government school save taxpayers approximately \$123.3 million.

Nearly two-thirds (62.9%) of boarding students attending schools in Queensland attend independent schools.

In 2021 there were 754 Indigenous students enrolled in 31 of the 34 Queensland independent boarding schools. The number of Indigenous boarding students increased over the past two years, with 112 new enrolments in 2021 alone.

Many of these significant economic and social contributions will be eroded if boarding schools are financially unsustainable and forced to close.

## 5. CAPITAL FUNDING

An increased allocation to, and more flexible application of, the Australian Government Capital Grants Program (CGP) is required to help fund infrastructure and support the substantial enrolment increase (almost 20,000 students in 2021) in the independent school sector concentrated in low-fee schools

The CGP provides limited funding for educationally disadvantaged students in non-government schools. In 2021, the CGP delivered \$179 million for the entire non-government sector.

The administrative limitations on the grants mean that money can be difficult to direct to projects where it will have most impact. Greater flexibility is required to augment the considerable contribution made by independent school families.

**Nearly 90% of the capital works in independent schools are funded by parents and through borrowing, with independent school families and communities providing \$1 billion in 2020 to fund capital projects. This level of contribution is unsustainable in low-income and disadvantaged areas.**

According to a report by independent experts AEC Group: *Economic Significance of independent schools to the Queensland Economy*, families who choose a Queensland independent school for their children instead of a fully-funded place at a State school, free up \$1.02 billion in capital and recurrent grants funding. Each Queensland independent school on average contributes \$24 million to the Queensland economy.



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*Clockwise from above: Moreton Bay Boys' College, The Rockhampton Grammar School, Enkindle Village School*

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