

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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EVERY STUDENT, EVERY POSSIBILITY

From the CEO

Every student has the right to an education which enables them to achieve their potential. Inclusion of all students with additional needs is a key principle of education in Australia and reflected in legislation. How schools support students with disability, and importantly, how this support is funded, has shifted in recent times.

To understand how schools are managing these changes, particularly in the independent sector, it is important to look at the students with disability landscape from a national, state, and local perspective.

National Level

The Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) Education Declaration, agreed by all education ministers in December 2019, sets out a vision for Australia of a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face. This includes students with disability.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers explicitly references the priority for teachers to support the learning needs of students across the full range of abilities¹.

On a practical level, the Australian Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to develop inclusive teaching and learning programs that build on students' interests, strengths, goals and learning needs to support all students to achieve their potential.

The diversity of students, including students with disability, those who are gifted and talented and those for whom English is an additional language or dialect, can present both extraordinary promise and potential challenges for schools.

State Level

In Queensland, the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) has formed the basis of funding and support for students with disability in all education sectors since the early 2000s, with funding to schools and services

to students based on significant adjustments provided to students with diagnoses in one or more of seven disability categories:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Physical impairment
- Social Emotional Disorder (Psychiatric Disorder) (non-state schools only)
- Speech Language Impairment
- Vision Impairment

However, it has become increasingly evident that these seven categories do not encompass the broad range of disabilities impacting on students' ability to access and participate in a school's education program. For example, students with medical conditions such as diabetes may require significant support at school but do not meet current verification criteria.

In 2017, Deloitte Access Economics delivered a report² to the Queensland Department of Education and Training, Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools, which also noted that EAP was a burdensome process (albeit a well-intentioned one) and produced over-reporting of the need for educational adjustment in order to access funding.

1. Available at <https://www.itsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/download-graduate-level-descriptorsa45e8f91b1e86477b58fff00006709da.pdf>
2. Available at <https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/disability-review-report.pdf>

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As a result of the Queensland Department of Education's Students with Disability Resource Allocation Review, state schools no longer verify students, except in the Intellectual Disability category for the purpose of special school enrolments. This has created confusion in some independent schools with staff assuming verifications are no longer required in non-state schools either.

School level

The advent of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) as a mandatory collection from 2015, based on a broader definition of disability contained in the Disability Discrimination Act, further highlighted the limitations of the EAP in support needs.

In many schools there is a perception that the NCCD has led to significant increases in teachers' workloads. However, the NCCD evidence areas are built on the four areas of personalised learning and support, which reflect the teaching and learning cycle and should be an established part of existing school documentation.

The four elements of personalised learning, which reflects the teaching and learning cycle are³:

1. Consulting and collaborating with the student and/or their parents, guardians or carers
2. Assessing and identifying the needs of the student
3. Providing adjustments to address the identified needs of the student
4. Monitoring and reviewing the impact of adjustments.

Many schools are now taking the opportunity to review their current practices and existing models of support to ensure their model is reflective of student needs, avoids unnecessary duplication, and is sustainable into the future.

ISQ conducts reviews of learning support at the request of principals which provide an opportunity for schools to review current student support practices and identify more efficient systems. Some common themes have emerged from these reviews. Namely, there are benefits from having clearly articulated policies and processes for identifying students with additional needs and consistent criteria for referral for additional learning support if required. It is important to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to avoid

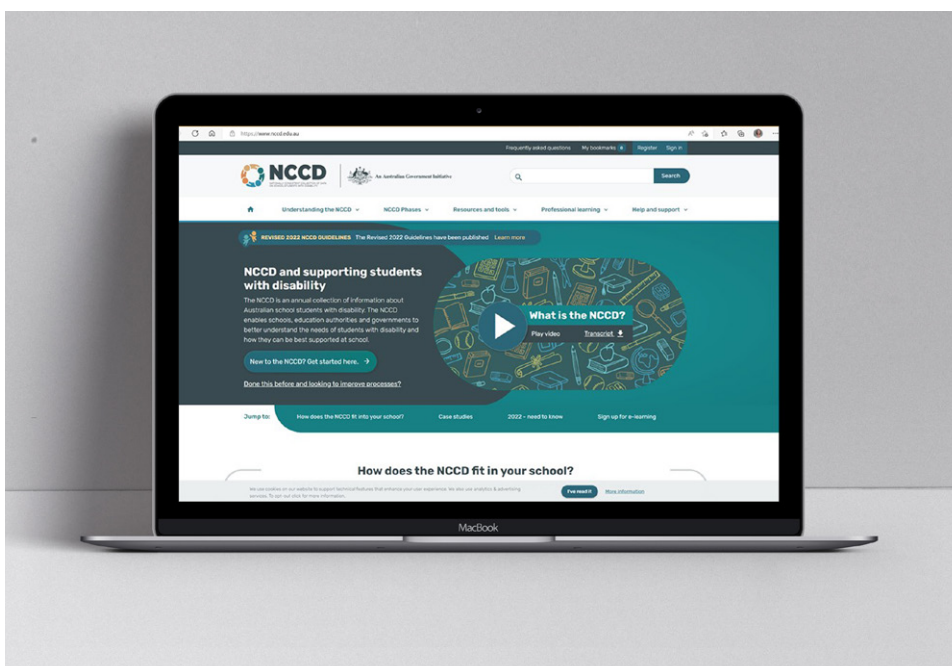


Figure 1: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) website

3. Available at <https://www.nccd.edu.au/personalised-learning-and-support>

Many schools are now taking the opportunity to review their current practices and existing models of support to ensure their model is reflective of student needs, avoids unnecessary duplication, and is sustainable into the future.

unnecessary overlap, confusion and duplication between learning support staff and teachers, who are responsible for the learnings of all students in their class or subject.

Independent schools are regularly reviewing these processes for managing students with additional needs to make sure they are modern, effective, and efficient. The high standard at which they deliver support is testament to their duty to all students and aligns with their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education to support all students, including those with disability, to achieve their full potential.



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ISQ REVIEWS - COMMON FINDINGS AND TRENDS



MARK NEWHAM
Director (School Improvement & Performance)

“ISQ reviews utilise a systematic and transparent process to evaluate information based on industry-standard evaluation frameworks, and an independent and supportive approach.”

Over the last few years, Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) has conducted many reviews in many schools.

Those reviews have covered areas including:

- Board Effectiveness
- Risk Management
- Performance, Teaching and Learning
- NCCD Mock Audits
- Curriculum
- ICT
- Child Protection
- Leadership Teams
- Principal Reviews
- Learning Support

Given that experience, we now have enough data to be able to share some of the common findings of different reviews. Obviously, each school's context is unique, but our hope is that schools may find value in reflecting on whether the findings from reviews completed in more than seventy schools might also have relevance for them.

School reviews can provide powerful insights into schools' practices and identify areas of focus for continuous improvement. Schools seek reviews for a range of reasons including a change in leadership, the need to find efficiencies, the conclusion of a strategic plan period, a major growth in enrolments or period of downturn, a review or investigation by another body such as NSSAB or a crisis event.

Using external reviewers is often favoured by schools because they

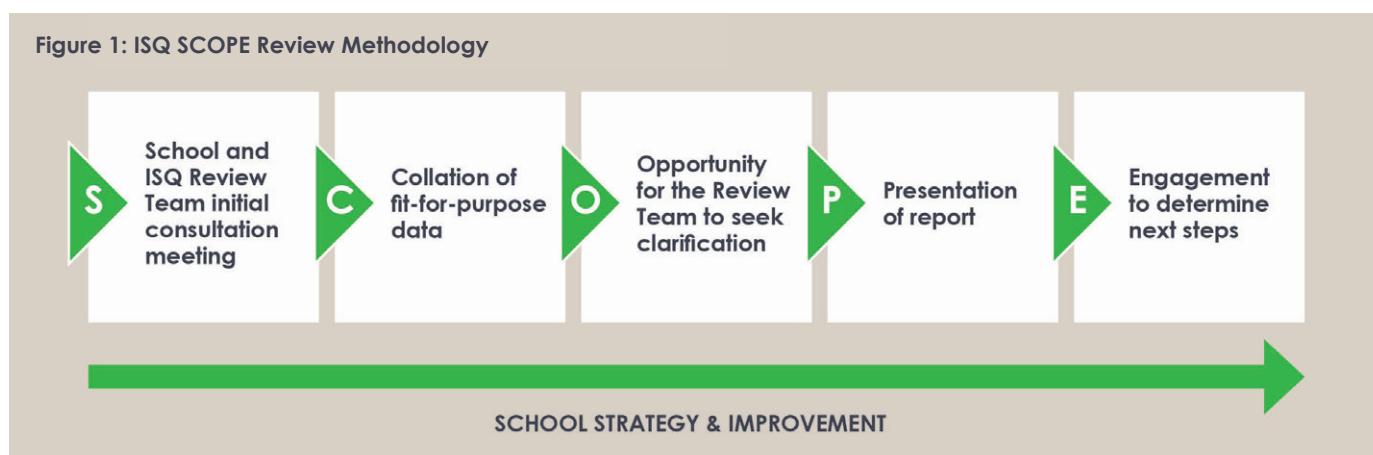
are generally regarded as impartial, objective outside experts with a broad perspective gained from working with many different ISQ members. They are also seen as lacking the potential biases and political motivations of internal reviewers, and their findings are therefore perceived as having a higher degree of validity and fairness. Conversely, external reviewers may have difficulty establishing trust with stakeholders or not grasp particular nuances of the school's context, compared to internal staff.

To deal with these possibilities, significant attention is paid to pre-visit communications with school stakeholders to establish trust and transparency. Further, already established relationships and a desktop analysis ensures a school's context is well understood. This enables subsequent school visits and interviews, whether online or face to face, to get to the heart of any issues, real or perceived. Benchmarking a school's data against 'like' schools can also assist in providing insights.

ISQ reviews utilise a systematic and transparent process to evaluate information based on industry-standard evaluation frameworks, and an independent and supportive approach.

No matter what type of review ISQ conducts, they are aligned with ISQ's SCOPE methodology.

Figure 1: ISQ SCOPE Review Methodology



School and ISQ: The Review Team consults with the school to understand the purpose, desired outcomes, and scope of the proposed review. The school reviews and confirms a project proposal document to ensure an agreed timeline and deliverables.

Collation of fit-for-purpose data from a diverse range of valid, reliable, and relevant sources including document and desktop reviews, purpose-built surveys, and stakeholder interviews.

Opportunity for the Review Team to seek clarification during the analysis and synthesis of input data while preparing the initial review report. The Review Team frames opportunities for growth using a future-focused, strengths-based approach.

Presentation of report including a detailed summary of findings with key recommendations. The Review Team will ensure that schools have opportunities to clarify and ask questions before the report is finalised.

Engagement with key stakeholders to determine if the review met expectations and achieved intended outcomes. At this stage, the Review Team also offers options for ongoing support.

Common findings from Board Reviews

Several key trends and patterns have been observed from the data collected in board reviews (see Table 1).

Additionally, providing professional learning across all these areas is likely to be worthwhile to upskill both individual directors and the board as a whole.

Common findings from Strategic Planning Reviews

Schools often seek a review of their strategic plans, processes and

documentation which help illuminate the school's current strategic position and ways in which to build a 'winning' strategy for the future.

Commonalities in the area of strategic planning were more difficult to identify as methods, and questions posed at schools vary significantly. The most standout school strengths identified were around the notion of 'values, faith

Table 1: Common findings from Board reviews

The areas most frequently cited by board members as issues that need to be addressed include:	In order to address these needs, common ISQ recommendations to school boards include:
Board recruitment, selection, induction, and professional development.	Board recruitment and selection could be improved after undertaking a skills analysis, by the development of a pipeline of potential directors and consideration of some form of remuneration. Having the company secretary develop an extensive induction pack, providing mentoring for new directors and the regular evaluation of directors will assist in improving board performance.
Risk management process	An external review and evaluation of risk management processes as well as the consideration of potential software solutions could provide some useful insights.
CEO oversight and appraisal	The provision of a clear and comprehensive contract, unambiguous expectations, ongoing feedback, mentoring or coaching as well as encouraging external networking are all factors which could improve CEO oversight, appraisal and performance.
Strategy development and implementation	Undertaking stakeholder engagement prior to the development of strategy as well as the regular monitoring of implementation in board reports should improve strategic outcomes.

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and tradition'. The most significant school opportunity identified was 'community engagement'. Similarly, some of the most common school aspirations were around both these areas as well as 'culture' and 'learning programs'. The most common result measures were around 'parent satisfaction', 'enrolments' and 'student outcomes'.

Common findings from Principal Reviews

A Principal review collects and analyses data from self-reflection, stakeholder feedback and interviews to create a report about the principal's performance, acknowledging strengths and achievements (commendations) and including future-focused recommendations for professional growth.

The process of a Principal review begins with collecting and reviewing a range of documents such as:

- Current Principal position description
- Organisational structure and reporting lines
- Strategic Plan and any relevant supporting documents
- Samples of written output by the Principal (e.g. board reports, speeches, etc.) selected by the Principal
- Written self-reflection of the Principal against the six domains of the Principal Performance Improvement Tool

ISQ then configures and develops a 360° Reflection Tool and supplements that data by conducting face-to-face interviews with the Principal, past and current students, parents, all direct reports, key staff (teaching and non-teaching) from across the school, community partners and the Board.

Finally, we prepare a strengths-based and future-focused report for the Principal, including:

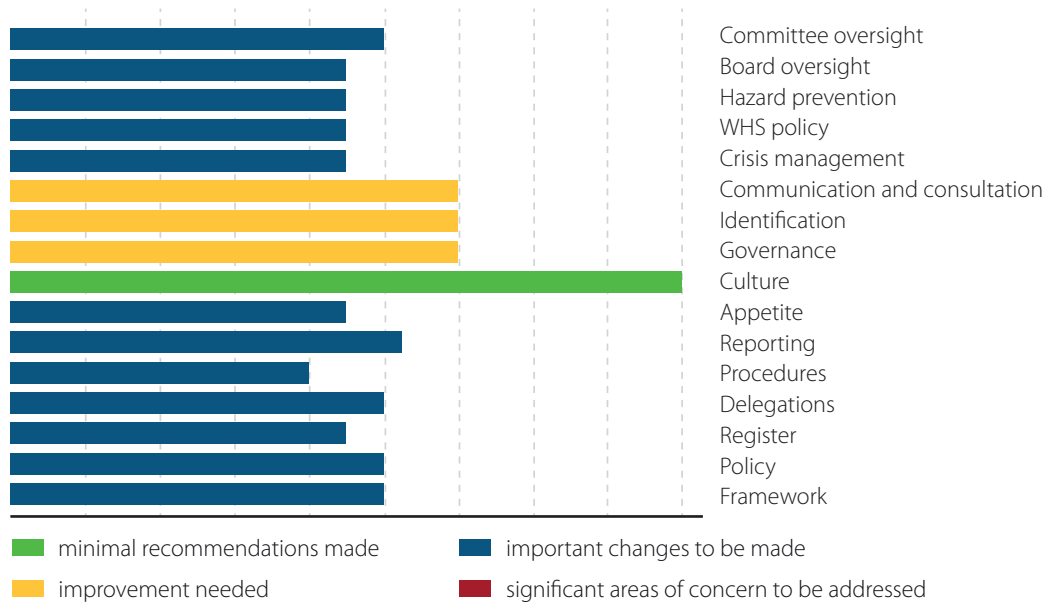
- Analysis of survey and interview feedback from stakeholders
- Future-focused recommendations on areas for further professional growth

Table 2: Most frequent principal commendations and recommendations

These commendations for principals have occurred most frequently:	These recommendations for principals to consider have occurred most frequently:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● role modelling leadership qualities ● supporting staff ● fostering positive relationships with stakeholders ● communicating shared vision ● focusing on improving student outcomes ● collaboration with staff ● supporting student well-being ● leading educational trends ● leading use of data ● leading strategic change ● positively influencing school culture ● enabling conditions for learning ● employing effective management skills ● displaying professionalism ● good communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● collaborate more with staff ● engage in (personal) professional development ● develop professional networks ● attend to own well-being ● employ management skills (e.g. decision-making, project or change management) ● seek more board support ● build culture ● improve communications ● source ideas for innovation ● develop confidence in strategic conversations ● clarify delegations

The most standout school strengths identified were around the notion of 'values, faith and tradition'.

Figure 2: Effectiveness of school's risk management



Common findings from Risk Reviews

A risk review provides a comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of the school's current risk management framework, processes and documentation and includes recommendations for improvements to be considered to support the Board and Executive in their governance roles.

Figure 2 provides generalised indicators of the effectiveness of school's risk management against sixteen evaluation criteria.

The areas of risk management most needing attention tend to be risk procedures and registers, crisis management, risk appetite, followed by board oversight.

Common findings from Child Protection Reviews

Schools often seek an independent review of their child protection policies, processes, and practices to assist in

ensuring compliance and to receive recommendations which will improve their performance in this area.

These recommendations occurred most frequently.

- update school policies to reflect recent changes in legislation
- increase school's engagement with stakeholders
- improve staff training in this area
- review and update educational approaches and programs
- publish relevant documents for stakeholders on school website
- increase use of data in setting improvement agenda

Common findings from Curriculum Reviews

The Curriculum and Assessment team at ISQ conducted 17 curriculum reviews from the beginning of 2019 to the end of February 2022 (including four follow-up reviews).

As with other reviews, a Curriculum review follows the SCOPE Methodology. In particular, there is a negotiation

as to the purpose and scope of the review including how wide ranging the review will be (e.g. only the primary school; only core subjects etc.). The criteria to be used is also negotiated. Some schools have their own planning template or design elements that they expect to see in the unit planning.

Some schools request as a first step that we provide professional learning on what the expectations will be in the review, before staff are given time to develop their units. The review occurs and then we return to the school to deliver the findings to staff through further professional learning.

Common areas for development have included:

Significance of the achievement standard: Some teachers do not start their planning from the achievement standards and do not appreciate the importance of gathering evidence of that standard.

Concept of alignment: Alignment of the achievement standard to what is taught, assessed and reported on is critical to unit planning.

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Intent of the curriculum: Some teachers have not engaged with the 'front-end' of the curriculum including the rationale or aims, or the videos by the lead writers.

Over-reliance on external sources: Often the alignment of an external resource to the curriculum is very poor. Some teachers could be more discriminating about their choices in support materials.

Assessment and rubric design practices: Some teachers could better consider how to gather the evidence of what students know and can do. The assessment may have no alignment to either what was taught or to the achievement standard.

Differentiation: Some teachers could better demonstrate in their planning that they know how to take account of the differences in understandings across the students in their classrooms. Some teachers need more support to diagnose the issues that students have and then what to do next.

Common findings from Learning Support Reviews and NCCD Mock Audits

Increasingly, schools seek to address the needs of students with additional learning needs and Learning Support reviews and NCCD mock audits support the school to identify priority areas for improvement. Issues addressed may relate to the school's learning support structure, staffing, resourcing, and current practices such as practices

related to students eligible for State Government Education Adjustment Program (EAP) funding and/or inclusion in the NCCD (Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability).

A common finding is that teacher planning for differentiation and more significant adjustments where required, has room for improvement. Some teachers lack the confidence and skill to differentiate effectively and monitoring and review of the effectiveness of any adjustments provided by teachers is not very common.

Often teachers will refer any student with additional needs (regardless of how minor) to learning support. This can lead to learning support teachers then developing plans, allocating teacher-aides and requiring teachers to document all adjustments in their planning whether the student requires adjustments in that class/subject or not.

This can also lead to the possibility that teacher aides are being used as the 'disability specialists' in a school, which can paradoxically result in a less qualified person being responsible for the students with the highest needs.

Some schools are collecting a great deal of evidence for NCCD purposes and a common recommendation from completed mock audits is that what is required is that a teacher identifies a student's needs, provides adjustments

ICT reviews provide insights into the following 12 review areas

1. School ICT strategy
2. Governance and compliance
3. Operational risk, disaster recovery and data integrity
4. Financial and budget management
5. ICT infrastructure, equipment and networks
6. Software licensing, third party contracts and procurement
7. School applications - operations
8. School applications - teaching and learning
9. Communications
10. ICT management performance
11. ICT integrations and professional development
12. Student engagement and ICT impact



Learn more about ISQ Reviews

[CLICK HERE](#)

where required, monitors the effectiveness of those adjustments and student progress and talks to parents about how their child was going and then records that work in a systematic way such as unit plans, four times a year.

Common findings from ICT reviews

An Information, Communication & Technology (ICT) Strategic provides member schools with specialist advice across multiple areas of a school's ICT environment. The 12 review areas are highlighted on the previous page. It can be used to the maximise a school's ICT budget and impact, or support the implementation or improvement of the ICT program. See the common findings from ICT Reviews [here](#).

Common findings from the Supporting School Improvement Program

While not a review in the sense of those discussed above, the Supporting School Improvement Program (SSI) (previously known as Self Improving Schools Program - SIS) has many of the same features and is a rich source of data in terms of identifying common areas for development.

All Australian schools are required to have an ongoing, cyclical improvement plan, that clearly identifies actions taken and reports to the community annually.

The SSI program is designed to support schools in developing the capability to manage their own improvement cycle and gives individualised support to schools through tools, resources and mentorship. Schools join the program for a variety of reasons, including the awareness that they need an ongoing, cyclical improvement plan. This may have been identified in an ISQ School Review process or in preparations for a NSSAB Review.

Some schools join the program as they find themselves in a situation of ongoing change. This may include

changes in leadership, staff turn-over or change fatigue due to attempting to implement many initiatives at once. These schools are looking to have a reset and stop to reflect on priorities, based on structured, research-based tools and processes.

We also see schools who previously participated in the SIS Program, revisit several years later as they have had a large staff turnover and would like to train up another group of people to engage in this process and develop leadership skills.

Common areas that arise through school reflection for growth and improvement are:

- Teacher performance and development framework
- Curriculum - literacy and numeracy
- Curriculum unit planning - including differentiation
- Assessment and feedback for students
- Use of data
- Student and staff wellbeing
- Staff culture
- Pedagogy

Conclusion

While the findings from the many different reviews informs school practice and improvement of those individual schools, it also informs the work of ISQ. Using different reviewers across reviews takes advantage of the range of skill sets of staff and knowing the issues that are causing the most concern for schools ensures that the ongoing support provided by ISQ, through our activities, is always relevant to schools and their needs. Further, utilisation of the SCOPE methodology provides a consistent and evidence-based approach that ensures no matter the type of review or context of the school, a set of recommendations are provided that are unbiased, relevant and useful.

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