



18 May 2017

**To Heads/Principals
All NSW Independent Schools**

Dear Principal,

You will be aware of media coverage of the current schools funding 'debate' since the Prime Minister and Minister for Education announced on 2nd May proposed changes to school funding arrangements, to be implemented from next year.

Over a number of years the three schooling sectors in NSW have worked together on many issues and initiatives, particularly the last five to six years through the Minister's Schools Advisory Council. This cooperation is evident in the number of Catholic and government schools involved in the AIS ELEVATE program and the many teachers who participate in AISNSW professional learning programs. Similarly, the AIS has appreciated the NSW Department of Education's role in leading the NSW contribution to key state and national initiatives such as NAPLAN Online and School Communities Working Together.

These relationships have resulted in successful reforms such as 'Great Teaching, Inspired Learning' (GTIL), the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, recent reforms to BOSTES / NESA and a number of others. I hope these partnerships will continue into the future for the benefit of all children in NSW.

AISNSW respects the right of any jurisdiction or individual school to vigorously argue for what they believe is fair and just treatment from any government. However, the arguments and the evidence put forward should always reflect the values and principles of honesty, integrity, fairness and respect for others.

AISNSW intends to respond only with factual information to a number of claims and comments made about the independent schools sector in the media. The following facts are detailed for your information:

1. Data from the ABS Census 2011 show that families with incomes over \$260,000 make up 5% of those with children attending independent schools; 2% of those in Catholic schools; and 1% of those in government schools. This demonstrates the inaccuracy of the claim published in The Weekend Australian (13th May 2017) that: *"Forty percent of those attending independent schools are from families with \$260,000-plus incomes."*

2. Many comments have been made suggesting the independent schools sector consists only of high fee schools serving high SES communities. The reality is the independent schools sector is very diverse with high quality schools in both low SES and high SES areas, as shown by the following Australian Government 2016 Schools Census data:
 - 46% of independent schools have fewer than 200 students
 - 66% are located in lower socioeconomic areas, and
 - 48% of NSW independent school students are enrolled in schools in lower SES areas (SES less than 104).
3. The quality of education provided by independent schools is a key reason that enrolment growth in the sector has continued at a significant rate over many years.

In fact over the period 2002 – 2016, NSW government school enrolments grew by 3.4%; Catholic schools by 10.4%; and Independent schools by 26.9%. From 2015 – 2016 enrolment increases in NSW government schools were 1.1%; Catholic schools 0.1%; and Independent schools 2.3%.

The focus for AISNSW throughout this debate has been to seek the establishment of a fair, needs-based model of funding for the non-government schools sector. The model also needs to allocate funds for children with disability on an equitable basis, irrespective of the school they attend.

The support from independent schools in NSW for a fairer needs-based model has been overwhelming. While a number of schools will experience negative funding growth (in real terms) over the ten year period proposed by the Australian Government, some have advised the AIS that they have been preparing for this change for some time and, as a result, it should cause only minimal inconvenience to their school community. Other affected schools are supportive of the proposed model but are understandably concerned at the impact on parents. In cases where financial hardship may impact on a school, AISNSW will strongly support these schools accessing the Transition Assistance Fund announced as part of the new funding arrangements.

Some of the recent media coverage has focused on a number of high-SES schools that, over the next 10 years from 2018, will supposedly receive significant additional funding.

Under the current arrangements, despite the original Gonski recommendations in 2011 that students with disability attract equal funding support, over 90 independent schools in NSW have received no additional funding for students with disability.

The new needs-based funding model proposed by the Government corrects this unacceptable situation. The 'additional' funding of these schools, many of them named in a recent media article, is made up of two components:

- I. funding for students with disability which, although a core principle and recommendation of the original Gonski report, they have not received since 2013.
- II. recurrent funding indexed at a rate lower than the school would receive if the current model was continued.

Over coming weeks I will keep independent schools in NSW updated on any major developments and to correct and explain any significant misinformation reported in the media.

The unfair and inaccurate reporting which has been prevalent over the past two weeks reflects the worst elements of the debate.

AISNSW is hopeful that a fair, sector blind and needs-based funding model will at last put to rest the ongoing funding debate and the unjustified media attacks on many of our schools which have continued over an extended period of time.

I give independent schools in NSW my assurance that AISNSW will continue to represent them in a manner that upholds the values and principles of honesty, integrity, respect and fairness.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Newcombe', with a long horizontal stroke above it.

Dr Geoff Newcombe
Chief Executive