SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

From the Executive Director

Supporting students with disability is a high priority for governments and non-government schooling authorities. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians of Schooling*[1] requires schools to provide all students with access to high quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on health or disability. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)* legislates to ensure that students with disability have fair and equitable access to schooling opportunities and is further backed up by the Disability Standards for Education (2005)[2].

The *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001(Qld)* requires that as part of accreditation non-state schools must have written processes about: identifying students of the school who are persons with a disability; and devising an educational program specific to the educational needs of those students who are persons with a disability, that complies with relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

Despite all of this, providing high quality education for students with disability remains a key issue for schools, particularly in relation to the required level of resourcing. The provision of schooling for students with disability is constantly the attention of public commentary and debate, rightly backed by strong advocacy groups. It has also been the subject of numerous inquiries over the years, the most recent including the Senate Education and Employment References Committee[3] and the Queensland Government's *Review of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools*[4].

One of the key trends impacting on independent schools is the significant increase in enrolled students with disability. As outlined in Figure 1, the number of students with disability enrolled in Queensland independent schools has increased significantly. In 2016, 176 Queensland independent schools enrolled 3,094 students with disability, an increase of 31% over the number of students with disability enrolled in 2011. This rate of increase is much higher than the increase in total students enrolled in independent schools.

Figure 1: Students With Disability in Queensland Independent Schools

Source: 2016 Non-State School Census (State) February Collection
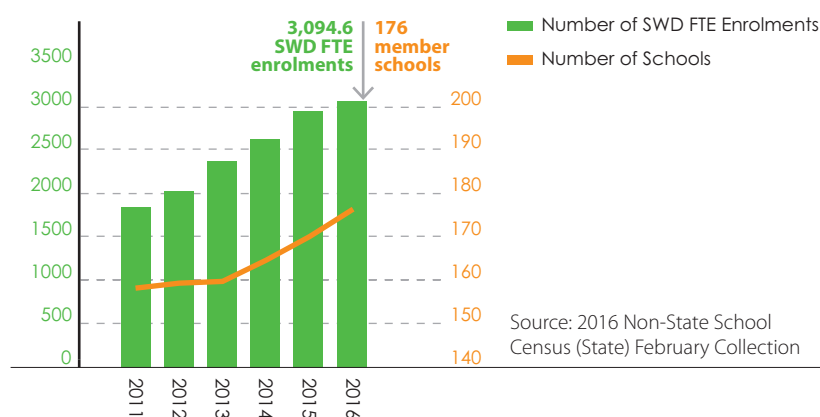
1   See http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf for the National Goals
2   See https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005
3   See http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/students_with_disability
4   See http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/disability/docs/disability-review-report.pdf

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Table 1: NCCD Levels of Adjustment

1	**Support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice (QDTP):** the functional impact of disability would generally require ongoing monitoring by the teacher and school staff; for example personalised learning that is implemented without drawing on additional resources.
2	**Supplementary adjustment:** provided to meet an assessed need at specific times to complement the strategies and resources already available for all students within the school – including modified or tailored programs, specialised technology, intermittent specialist teacher support.
3	**Substantial adjustment:** designed to address more significant barriers to engagement, learning, participation and achievement such as frequent (teacher directed) individual instruction, adjustments to delivery modes.
4	**Extensive adjustment:** provided when essential specific measures and resourcing are required at all times to address the individual nature and acute impact of the student's disability and the associated barriers to their learning and participation.

Table 2: Percentage of Students Identified in the 2015 NCCD by Sector

LEVEL OF ADJUSTMENT	GOVERNMENT	CATHOLIC*	INDEPENDENT	ALL SECTORS
Support within QDTP	5.8%	3.2%	7.4%	5.5%
Supplementary	8.3%	8.6%	6.9%	8.2%
Substantial	3.4%	1.7%	2.0%	2.8%
Extensive	1.9%	0.4%	0.8%	1.5%
All adjustments	19.4%	14.0%	17.1%	18.0%

Government funding support for students with disability is significant and welcomed. The Queensland Government, with agreement from Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC), allocates 6.7% of the total annual recurrent funding pool for non-state schools specifically to support students with disability. This currently equates to $42 million per annum of which $15 million flows to independent schools through a targeted allocation based on verified levels of disability for each eligible student.

In addition, the Queensland Government provides non-state schools with access to its Advisory Visiting Teacher services to support students with disability (to an equivalent of 3 FTE staff per annum for independent schools).

The Australian Government also provides significant funding for students with disability through a loading in the current School Resource Standard (SRS) funding model. The loading is equivalent to 186% of the SRS for each student with a disability at a mainstream school, and 223% for each student with disability at a special school.

Notionally, this loading allocates some $1.5 billion in 2017 to support students with disability. However, the specific loading is wound into the general recurrent grant rate for each school with a resulting loss of transparency. ISQ has advocated for a more specifically targeted allocation of the Commonwealth's funding contribution for students with disability and hopes that this will be addressed in the proposed new funding model for schools to apply from 2018.

The Australian Government has also provided an additional $118.2 million for students with disability in the 2016/17 Budget. Queensland independent schools will receive approximately $4 million of this additional funding through this most welcome initiative.

Independent schools also allocate significant resourcing to students with disability from their private income given that the government funding support does not meet the total costs of providing the required adjustments for these students.

Despite this high level of resourcing, the call for additional government funding has been long and consistent. ISQ, in conjunction with QCEC, has made formal submissions to the Queensland Government for the past two years seeking additional funding for students with disability, whilst the need for more government support has been a central feature of submissions in relation to schools' funding to the Commonwealth by the Independent Schools Council of Australia for many years.

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Funding, although critical, isn't the only issue when it comes to students with disability. How students are identified is also a complex and pressing matter.

Current identification and funding arrangements for students with disability are based on state/territory government endorsed criteria and assessment procedures. In Queensland, this is the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) which identifies students with disability who require significant education adjustments. The EAP is applied consistently across the three schooling sectors and has been in place for many years. It involves a rigorous assessment based on professional expertise in order for a student to be identified as a student with disability and therefore eligible for additional funding support.

Not surprisingly, the processes for identifying students with disability varies across states/territories resulting in differences in the percentages of students identified and likely distortion of funding equity across the nation.

In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to work towards a nationally consistent approach to identifying students with disability resulting in a new identification model, the *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability* (NCCD).

NCCD has been progressively implemented by schools since 2013, with almost all schools participating in the data collection in 2015 and 2016.

NCCD is a different way of identifying students with disability and is based on

definitions contained in the *Disability Discrimination Act*. It focuses on the level of adjustment provided to a student based on their functional needs. It also relies on the professional knowledge and judgement of teachers taking into account a range of information and evidence. Under NCCD, students are identified according to four levels of adjustment as outlined in Table 1.

NCCD has realised what was always predicted – the number of students identified is significantly higher than the number of students verified under state/territory criteria.

Table 2 outlines that 18% of students were identified through the 2015 NCCD[5] with the largest number in the Supplementary category. This compares with approximately 4% of students that

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5   For the full report on the 2016 NCCD see
      http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Accessible%20version%20of%20Improving%20educational%20outcomes%20report.pdf
6   Education Council Communique 7 April 2017, available at
      http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/EC%20Communique%207%20April%202017.pdf

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

are identified as students with disability under state/territory verification processes.

As noted in the report on the 2015 NCCD, "the results show observable variability across states and territories and sectors" bringing into question the value of the data. It is expected that the results of the 2016 NCCD will be released shortly, with the Education Council recently reporting "although there continues to be variability in the results reported across jurisdictions in the 2016 NCCD, there is a smaller range than was reported in 2015".[6]

Schools are rightly frustrated that they have to currently undertake two separate and different identification processes for identifying students with disability. This is time and resource consuming.

In the longer term, it is clear that the nationally consistent identification process for students with disability will prevail and will be the benchmark for the allocation of resources by governments to support this group of students.

The recent review of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools notes "a misalignment between the diagnostic model under the EAP and actual resourcing needs of students with disability[7]" and highlights that "Australian Government funding policy will over the longer term give consideration to establish the NCCD as a method of resource allocation more broadly".[8] It recommends that the suitability of

NCCD to determine funding should be reviewed at appropriate junctures in its development.[9]

Although the Education Council has deemed that the NCCD data is not yet of sufficient quality, the Commonwealth has already utilised it in the allocation of its additional $118.2 million for students with disability granted in the 2016/17 Budget.[10]

How governments will provide the additional resourcing to support the 18% of students who are being identified under the NCCD is a question which also remains unresolved. At this stage, it appears that priority will be given to providing additional resources for students identified as requiring substantial and extensive levels of adjustment.

Schools need to pay close attention to the NCCD to ensure that students are correctly identified. This will ensure that future funding support flows to students where it is required.

The 2017 NCCD will be conducted on 4 August 2017. Extensive support materials and links to nationally available guidelines and professional learning materials are available on the ISQ website at www.isq.qld.edu.au/consistent-collection-of-data. ISQ also continues to provide extensive professional training for its member schools on the implementation of the NCCD. Details can be accessed at www.isq.qld.edu.au/events-directory.

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7 See http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/disability/docs/disability-review-report.pdf, Executive Summary page xix
8 See http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/disability/docs/disability-review-report.pdf, Executive Summary page xx
9 See http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/disability/docs/disability-review-report.pdf, Recommendation 6.1 page xx
10 Funding was allocated to independent schools based on the number of students in the Substantial and Extensive levels of adjustment.

2017 ISQ STATE FORUM

LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES

Angela Maiers

Liberating Genius in schools through her global You Matter movement, Angela will inspire you to prioritise emotional and social intelligence in classrooms as a method to improve student wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Richard Gerver

Richard is an internationally recognised author and authority on change management. The former principal will show you how unleashing human potential can lead to organisational transformation.

Prof. David Christian

Professor David Christian is co-founder of the Big History Project with Bill Gates, and is Director of the Big History Institute at Macquarie University. The Big History Institute is dedicated to taking Big History to schools around the world.

Mark Sowerby

Inaugural Queensland Chief Entrepreneur and an influential business leader, Mark offers valuable insight into Queensland's start-up ecosystem – a key generator of jobs in the state's transitioning economy.

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WHY AND HOW SCHOOLS NEED TO ACT ON PARENTAL CHOICE RESEARCH

SHARI ARMISTEAD
Director (Strategic Relations)

"Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives – choice, not chance, determines your destiny."

Aristotle

The fundamental right of parents to choose the school for their child/children is central to independent schooling sectors everywhere, including Australia. Vast research has been undertaken worldwide on school choice and just about everyone has an opinion.

Gaining insight into the decision-making process of parents is incredibly valuable information for independent schools, but only if schools make the choice to act on the research.

Choice Factors

Recently, Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) conducted research into choice by parents of students at independent, Catholic and government schools. The results of this survey and comparisons with an earlier survey concluded:

"What parents want from primary, secondary and long-term education coincides with expectations that their child will gradually mature into a more well-rounded person" (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2017, p. 13). "This includes reasons such as good teachers (53%), educational excellence (50%), good facilities (47%), supportive and caring environment (45%)" (p. 11).

More than a decade ago Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) began surveying parents of independent school students about their decision-making process when choosing a school. There have been three What Parents Want surveys (2007, 2011 and 2015) and the 2017 ISCA research reinforces the ISQ research findings.

The 2014/2015 What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey findings were the same as those in the earlier two surveys in relation to the most important factors for parents choosing an independent school:

- preparation for students to fulfil their potential in later life
- good discipline
- encouragement of a responsible attitude to school work
- the high quality of teachers
- teaching methods/philosophy.

Sources of Information

ISQ's surveys found:

"The most influential sources of information were family, friends and colleagues, followed by other parents with children at the school, the school website and the school open day" (Independent Schools Queensland, 2015, p. 5).

These sources are remarkably similar compared with the top influencing sources identified by ISCA where "word of mouth is still the most influential source of information when choosing a school, but parents are highly receptive to personal interactions with the school" (2017, p. 13).

The ISCA research goes on to suggest that schools take note of the research in relation to word of mouth as the top influencing source.

"Although this factor is challenging for schools to control, the high level of influence of school open days, interactions with school staff, and personal experiences, suggest that there is an opportunity for schools to attract parents using these personal methods" (p. 14).

Parents are More Discerning

Former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who is Chair of The Global Partnership, told the 2017 Global Education and Skills Forum in Dubai the MySchool website had transformed public perceptions about state and non-state schools in Australia. Ms Gillard told the Forum many parents in Australia had a choice about what school to send their child to and relied on a range of information to inform their decision.

"Whether they get that information talking to their neighbour at the shops, whether they get it out of a tabloid newspaper, or whether they use the very sophisticated data set we put before people through the MySchool website they will make those choices. My own view is choices without information is really just guessing" (Global Education & Skills Forum, 2017).

There has never been more information made available to parents about schools in Australia. The research indicates parents are becoming more discerning when it comes to school choice, starting the decision-making process earlier and being more likely to consider a greater range of schooling options across all sectors (Independent Schools Queensland, 2015).

In addition to ISQ's What Parents Want surveys which involve parents with children enrolled at independent schools, ISQ and Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia co-commissioned TNS Research in 2014 to undertake qualitative and quantitative research targeting parents with a child to commence primary or secondary school in the next few years, but not yet enrolled in a school and with no particular school decided with certainty. The research participants were parents in the decision-making stages in both Queensland and Western Australia. TNS Research confirms that school choice is strongly driven by school reputation and the perceived quality of the education offered. This particularly includes the principal and teachers; and factors which underpin a safe, happy, quality learning environment for their child, that is well managed, controlled and disciplined (Independent Schools Queensland, 2014).

"Independent schooling is generally seen to offer distinct advantages in terms of quality education/teaching, better facilities, greater discipline and increased career advantages" (p. 2).

Again, these key choice factors identified by TNS Research are similar to other research findings. TNS Research went on to recommend that independent schools consistently communicate their strengths in education and teacher quality, as well as the academic benefits enrolment at the school offers and the disciplined nature of the environment to drive consideration of the offer. All of these highlighted strengths are of course the most influential factors parents consider when making their choice of school.

Strategies for Action

Drawing on the research and tips from the experts, some strategies are offered for schools to act in relation to each key finding regarding the most influential sources of information.

Word of Mouth

In a digitally disruptive world, leading customer-centric management consultant and acclaimed UK author Don Peppers says customers are the biggest disrupters of all.

Peppers told the World Marketing and Sales Forum in Melbourne in 2016 that: "Customers now create more value, more quickly, than any other single kind of business asset."

Parents are a schools' most valued customers. Peppers says the secret to customer loyalty is a "frictionless" experience (2013, para. 4). Remove the obstacles, the customer simply wants their needs met in the most frictionless way possible.

How do schools do this? Peppers says get customer feedback and listen to it, the good and the bad, and share it with staff. Eliminate the friction in your customer service experience one problem at a time. Figure 1 outlines the four qualities of a truly frictionless customer experience – reliable, valuable, relevant, trustable (Peppers & Rogers, 2016).

If you earn the trust of your parents they will treat your school like a friend and will become your best "word of mouth" advocates. At the Forum, Peppers told the audience a customer's value as a referrer is primarily due to their "authority" within their peer group.

> ### How your school can act on this research
>
> Provide timely, accurate information to your parents. Tell parents the story of your school, why it is the best for them and their child/children, if they believe you they will tell others, including prospective parents. Peppers says the human mind finds "story" most persuasive and to never underestimate the power of a good story.

Figure 1: Four attributes of a frictionless customer experience

1. RELIABLE
Service as advertised, response time prompt, privacy protected, make difficult experiences more human.
2. VALUABLE
Good service at reasonable price, no hidden costs.
3. RELEVANT
Different customers treated differently, every customer treated appropriately; differentiate customers according to their need and treat them like a person.
4. TRUSTABLE
Proactively watch out for each interest; apologise for mistakes, take responsibility for problems, communicate frankly. Above all, be authentic; be human.

Adapted from Peppers (2013)

WHY AND HOW SCHOOLS NEED TO ACT ON PARENTAL CHOICE RESEARCH

School Open Days & School Visits

School visits are amongst the more important sources of information for decision-making, with 83% of parents visiting a school prior to making a decision. Over 80% of parents considered the school visit as very useful or extremely useful. This reinforces the emphasis schools need to place on ensuring the school visit is well planned and addresses the needs of individual parents. When visiting schools parents considered the most important person for them to meet was the principal (Independent Schools Queensland, 2015).

ISCA (2017) found interaction with the school in a face-to-face context proved to be one of the most popular sources of influence for parents with children across all different types of schools. This includes, school open days (35% Independent, 33% Government, 24% Catholic), interaction with school staff (34% Independent, 33% Government, 38% Catholic) and personal experiences with the school (31% Independent, 34% Government, 19% Catholic).

How your school can act on this research

Plan your school open day/s well in advance, involve your school community, staff, current parents and students and promote it via your website, direct marketing, and social media. Tell the story of your school, help prospective parents see themselves as part of that story.

Influence of Child

Interestingly, ISCA (2017) found the influence of the child in the choice of their primary school has grown since its 2006 survey when 18% of independent school parents recorded at least some influence, compared to 43% in 2016. It is a similar case in the child's level of influence in the choice of secondary, whereby 36% of independent school parents noted that their child had at least some influence in 2006, compared with 55% influence of the child recorded in 2016.

How your school can act on this research

Having current students present at school open days is a good way to engage prospective students, as is having current students lead or be involved in school tours when prospective parents visit with their children. Photos of students at school excursions, sporting and cultural events shared on social media and on the school website help prospective students imagine themselves in these situations and better relate to the school. Students are also ambassadors for a school wherever their behaviour is on show, such as at competitions and on public transport. The better behaved and the more involved and engaged that current students are, the better advocates they make for prospective students.

School Website

ISCA (2017) found the use of the school website to inform the choice of school has grown in prominence since 2006 (5%) compared to 30% in 2016. They highlight the need for schools to ensure that their website is user-friendly so they can capitalise on parents that are doing private research or "scouting" at their own leisure (p. 14).

Research by imageseven (2016) undertaken in Australia and Ireland found a number of common mistakes made in school websites:

- no search function
- not having admission/enrolment information for prospective parents as a top-level navigation
- no telephone number of the school on the homepage
- no welcome from the principal
- not including fee information
- not being mobile friendly
- taking longer than the recommended time to load
- no social media presence.

Their research results from 100 non-government Australian schools (25% in Queensland) found 20% of schools do not have a search function, which is a major stumbling block. They caution it is important to remember that when prospective parents arrive at a school website they want answers to their questions, as quickly and with as little effort as possible. Therefore, having a good search function is vital.

"Almost 20 percent of schools had no welcome message at all, and a startling 90 percent did not mention how many years the Principal had been at the school"; "Your school can have the best marketing, the best website, a strong academic performance and the best facilities, but at the end of the day people buy people, and the Principal is the most important person to a prospective parent in any school.

The vision and values of the leader are very important to a prospective parent, do not overlook them. That is why it is good practice to have a brief background of the Principal, including their length of tenure with the school, to the fore of your website" (imageseven, 2016, p. 9).

More than 40% of the schools surveyed did not have the school phone number on the homepage, which, as Peppers would say, is not a frictionless experience. According to imageseven, prospective parents are far more likely to call a school rather than complete an enquiry form or send an email because people still like to talk directly to people, and people often make the sale (2016).

Speed to load is the key performance component for a modern website. "Websites should aim to load in the blink of an eye. Speed is important because studies indicate that 40% of web users expect a load time of three seconds or less. Otherwise they'll abandon a site completely. Consumers who stick around end up developing a negative brand perception for schools with slow websites" (imageseven, 2016, p. 10).

How your school can act on this research

Audit your school website, ensure there is a search function and admission/enrolment information is a top-level navigation. Make sure the school telephone number is on the homepage. A welcome from the principal is important, as is mobile responsiveness and website loading speed. Social media is also important and should be visible on the website.

Conclusion

Independent schools enjoy a strong reputation and the majority of parents aspire to send their children to an independent school. Much of the parental choice research over the years, including the most recent, reveals common decision-making factors and most influential sources of information that parents seek out to help them make their choice of school.

School choice is one of the most critical decisions any parent will make in respect of their children. Understanding how and why parents chose a school is crucial in ensuring independent schools continue to meet the needs of parents, their valued customers. The research is there, it is now up to schools to act on it, ensuring the excellence and long-term viability of their schools.

Schools Marketing and Communications Forum

Looking for new ideas or inspiration to amplify your school's presence and voice in a competitive marketplace?

This half-day forum will energise and connect you with marketing and communications experts across a range of fields to provide you with new thinking, practical tactics and mountains of motivation to attack 2017 and beyond. Experts will share their knowledge and experience across a range of areas including:

- Relationship marketing. How well are you leveraging the parental choice research to meet the needs of your parents and students?
- Teaching-led market positioning. Find out how to incorporate your school's teaching approach in your positioning strategy.
- Storytelling and heart-centric marketing. Finding your school's voice and telling your school's story through its community of characters is a powerful and authentic way to engage with audiences.

The forum will end with a networking lunch where participants can share their common experiences and learnings in the school marketing space.

LOCATION:
ISQ Professional Learning Centre
Level 5, 500 Queen Street Brisbane

DATE:
15 June 2017

TIME:
9.00am–1.00pm

COST:
Member: $100
Non-Member: Not Available

SUITABLE FOR:
School business management group

FURTHER INFORMATION
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Click here to register for this event
http://events.isq.qld.edu.au/id/1007

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