



Supporting Queensland's Thriving Independent School Sector

2024 State Election Statement



**Independent Schools
Queensland**

choice & diversity

Queensland's Independent school sector at a glance

235 Schools
147,268 Students

1,193 Overseas students

3,797 Boarding Students

6,519 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

16.8% of total Queensland school enrolments

30% increase in enrolments over the past decade

\$4.73 billion contributed to the Qld economy each year

\$1.56 billion savings in government funding through full fee-paying students



Overview

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body representing Queensland's independent schooling sector.

Independent schools form a key part of the education landscape in Queensland and sit alongside State and Catholic schools in contributing to Queensland society and the safety, learning and wellbeing of all children.

ISQ believes strongly in the need for choice and diversity in the Queensland education system. Parents have the right to choose a school that aligns with their values and meets the needs of their child. Independent schools are best placed to respond to their school communities and should be supported to do this.

To be successful, independent schools need governments at all levels to support choice and diversity in education through appropriate funding and enabling regulation.

Over the past two decades, enrolments in the Queensland independent sector have grown by more than 75%. In 2024, more than 147,000 students are now enrolled in Queensland's independent schools, accounting for nearly 17% of all Queensland school students.

Queensland Government Statistician Office data, backed up by ISQ's own independent analysis shows there will be approximately 100,000 additional school aged children in Queensland over the next two decades.

In this context, parent demand for independent schooling will only continue to build over the coming years.

That is why ISQ's election statement is focused on three key areas where appropriate government support and regulation will be critical in enabling the independent sector to grow and flourish across the state.

1

**Proactive Planning
for New Schools**



2

**Growing and Retaining
the Education Workforce**



3

**Ongoing Support for a
Diverse Independent Sector**







1 Proactive Planning for New Schools

Increased Capital Grants for Queensland's Independent and Catholic School Sectors

Independent and Catholic Schools in Queensland have been fortunate that successive State Governments have recognised the importance parents place of having a choice in where to send their children to school.

An obvious example of this support has been the capital grants provided by the State which are distributed through each sector's Block Grant Authority (BGA). Approximately \$127m per annum is provided through the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), Capital Assistance Supplementary Scheme (CASS) and the External Infrastructure Subsidy (EIS) fund across to the non-government sectors.

This support has played a critical role in building classrooms and educational infrastructure in non-state schools right across Queensland. Capital grants are an essential tool in supporting parental choice across Queensland, which must remain.

However, one of the great challenges of recent years has been the exponential increase in construction costs across the state. Therefore, additional capital funding is required beyond the current baseline to maintain this commitment in real dollars.

Recommendation 1.1:

Assist the non-government sector in meeting demand for new classrooms and school buildings amidst ongoing increases in construction costs by:

- > Merging the CAS and CASS funds into a single ongoing commitment of \$190m per annum, indexed annually by the rise in construction costs.
- > Continue the EIS fund to support schools meet the ever-increasing conditions and infrastructure requirements being placed on them by local and State governments.



Kimberley College



IES College



A New Approach to Planning and Enabling the Development of New Schools.

In recent years the challenges of establishing new schools to service Queensland's growing population have become entrenched and are impacting all three sectors.

As Queensland's population has grown, the planning system has become more complicated and costly as it has focused on consolidating growth in defined areas. As a result, the availability of affordable land for schools has significantly reduced when compared to the period in the 1970s-1990s when many (now large) suburban schools were established in Queensland. The lack of appropriately zoned land and resulting cost of site acquisition in urbanised and greenfield areas is a major constraint.

ISQ commissioned research conducted by Urbis¹ to better understand the land availability challenge. It demonstrated a dearth of available school sites in priority growth areas slated for significant population growth in the coming decade. The evidence outlined in this piece of research reinforces feedback from Queensland independent school leaders that appropriate sites are near impossible to find, and those that do exist are unviable for schools. We are also aware that existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) under the control of Economic Development Queensland (EDQ) do not have adequate land set aside for the anticipated number of school students who will call those areas home into the future. This will significantly exacerbate the problem in the years ahead, potentially creating a serious school supply shortfall.

In addition to the challenge of finding land, the overall cost to build a new school makes new independent schools largely unviable to develop. It is now commonplace for a new school of approximately one thousand students to cost upwards of \$100 million.

Research undertaken by Independent Schools Queensland² and based upon 2024 Queensland Government Statistician's Office data shows that roughly 100,000 school-aged children will call Queensland home over the next two decades. To accommodate the independent sector's share alone, roughly 13 new P-12 schools would need to be built between now and 2042. That's roughly \$1.3 billion in new school investment required in less than 20 years in the independent sector alone.

This is simply unachievable unless we change the way we coordinate, plan, fund and develop schools across the three schooling sectors.

To avoid a future with a shortfall of adequate and appropriate social infrastructure to accommodate these students, governments must plan and act now. It is a very real possibility that failing to provide for adequate choice in schooling would result in significantly more students being accounted for by an increasingly stretched state school network.

Education is a state interest that needs to be integrated within planning instruments. With a lens on future population growth alongside a significant increase in demand for choice in schooling options, it is evident that current policy commitments do not adequately plan for schools as important social infrastructure.



Recommendation 1.2:

Establish a School Planning and Delivery Taskforce with representatives from the Independent, Catholic and State School sectors along with Treasury, Economic Development Queensland, the Department of Education and the Department of Planning.

This Taskforce should immediately look how the planning system can be better calibrated to prioritise land for new schools where they are needed now and into the future. The Taskforce should also explore new policy approaches to remove the existing barriers to the establishment of new schools. Specifically they should explore options including but not limited to:

a. | Unlocking government land through ground leases to non-government schools.

This is an option used for social housing through the Homes for Queenslanders Plan that may also be suitable for the development of new schools.

b. | No Interest loans for the development of new non-government schools.

The Queensland Government has previously provided no interest loans to developers for catalytic infrastructure in new developments. Extending these type of arrangements to non-government schools, which are catalytic social infrastructure, could unlock a number of new schools at a very low cost to government.

c. | Incentives including land tax concessions for landholders who lease premises to non-for-profit schools on long-term leases.

Providing incentives to landowners and investors might encourage a wave of private capital to enter the new school market, in the same way it has entered the health and build-to-rent markets. This would create a potential new capital funding stream for all three sectors to access.

d. | Allowing land provided for non-government schools to be used to offset a developer's infrastructure charges contribution.

Allowing developers to "offset" the cost of land for a new school as critical social infrastructure, in the same way they would for a park, might increase land availability in existing greenfield growth areas.

e. | Working with local governments to fast track the rezoning of land in established areas where the existing zoning is no-longer suited (for example some older industrial areas) to facilitate social infrastructure such as schools.



The Rockhampton Grammar School

To avoid a future with a shortfall of adequate and appropriate social infrastructure to accommodate these students, governments must plan and act now.





2 Growing and Retaining the Education Workforce

Tapping into the rich expertise of Queenslanders

For the past three years ISQ has represented the independent sector as part of the Trade to Teach working group, alongside the state and Catholic sectors and other education stakeholders. The objective of this group has been to support the implementation of a Trade to Teach initiative that attracts and retains experienced professionals working across a variety of Industrial Technology and Design (ITD) trades and bolster a diminished teaching workforce.

Whilst this initiative succeeds by bringing in a much-needed wealth of current and industry relevant skills into schools, the overall immediate outcomes serve to benefit the state schooling sector, with teaching roles and training opportunities only offered in government schools.

Without significant system backing, the independent schooling sector will always struggle to implement comparable initiatives on our own. Not allowing participants in the Trade to Teach program to also take up positions in non-government schools grossly limits the impact of this program, particularly in regional, rural and remote schools which are struggling most with teacher acquisition.

Recommendation 2.1:

Enhance the impact of the Trade to Teach program by allowing participants to undertake training opportunities and teaching roles in all three sectors, effectively opening opportunities for more participants and growing the overall education workforce.



St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School



Streamlining data collection for an overburdened workforce

Two key workforce surveys canvassing teachers and school leaders in Queensland - ISQ's Member Workforce survey and the Department of Education's Teacher and School Leaders Workload Survey - have revealed the significant burden collecting and reporting student data is having on the sector's workforce.

While some data collection activities are intrinsically important with many directly linked to school funding, others are now outdated and, in some cases, duplicating data collection happening elsewhere.

ISQ believes there is scope for this data collection to be reduced by ceasing the Non-Government School State Census collection, which mostly duplicates data collected in the Commonwealth Non-Government Schools Census. Doing so would result in both a freeing up of staff time, as well as see significant cost savings to schools and taxpayers.

Recommendation 2.2:

Reduce duplicate data collection by ceasing the costly Non-Government School State Census collection, in turn reducing the administrative burden on teachers and school leaders.

Building proactive parent/teacher relationships for more productive schools

Parent engagement is backed by 60 years of research which shows that effectively engaging parents in their child's education can not only enhance students' achievement and wellbeing, it is also a vital ingredient in high performing schools.

Parent "engagement" is much richer and deeper than a parent's "involvement" in school-based activities. Engaged parents value education, have high-but-realistic expectations for their child, and are informed and scaffolded by their child's teacher/s in ways to value add to that learning at home. The hallmark of authentic, effective and sustainable parent engagement is families and schools working together in partnership and respecting each other and their unique roles in a child's educational journey.

Parent engagement was also one of the key themes identified in the Department of Education's recent Teacher and School Leader Workload Survey.

Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network, has been fortunate to be leading this area of parent engagement with financial support from the State Government.

However, its current one-year \$140,000 Service Agreement with the Queensland government ends on June 30, 2025. Given the current and projected growth in independent enrolments, an increased and ongoing funding commitment from the next Queensland Government to sustain this important parent engagement support for schools is critical.

Recommendation 2.3:

Recurrent annual funding of \$180,000 with CPI increases annually for the Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network. This certainty of funding will support QIS Parents Network's work to enhance parent engagement in independent school communities through a range of initiatives and programs.

Also, consider enhancing cross-sector collaboration in parent engagement to aid schools, parents, and teachers in supporting students.



Djarragun College

Shoring up the teacher workforce for our majority Indigenous and remote schools

Regional and remote independent schools continue to experience significant difficulties procuring staff to fill early childhood, primary and secondary teaching positions as well as specialist teacher positions. The sector's most remote locations have had vacancies lasting up to two years or more, and principals often are juggling their leadership roles with having to fill these vacancies full-time in the classroom whilst trying to manage their school.

This is particularly prevalent in Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (MATSI) schools.

Currently the Queensland Department of Education, and Queensland Catholic Education Commission in Queensland provide Teaching Scholarships for a small number of undergraduate teacher education students. The scholarships provide financial assistance and connect students to supportive networks and mentors while they continue their studies.

These scholarships target both First Nations and non-Indigenous undergraduate Teacher Education students, especially those in their final year of their degree studies.

Without system backing and funding to provide similar scholarships, the independent sector struggles to attract new graduates to teach in regional and remote independent schools, and in particular MATSI schools in these locations, ultimately impacting the quality of education available for these communities.

Recommendation 2.4:

Expand relevant teaching scholarship programs, such as the Pearl Duncan Teaching Scholarship and the Aspiring Teacher Grant, to include placements within the independent schooling sector to help alleviate teacher shortages in all schools located in regional, rural and remote parts of the state.





3 Ongoing Support for a Diverse Independent Sector

Enabling greater work opportunities for at-risk students

Special Assistance Schools (SAS) provide alternative educational settings for students with high-level social and emotional needs and cater for students who are at risk, have behavioural difficulties, or whose needs are better met by flexible learning structures that may not be available in all mainstream schools.

SAS's make an important contribution to addressing educational disadvantage by generally serving young people who are disengaged from mainstream education. In Queensland, Independent Special Assistance Schools represent the fastest growing area in the sector with enrolments tripling over the past five years to 5,772 students.

To better prepare these students for a working life after school, SAS leaders have called for a greater focus on developing meaningful relationships between students, mentors and industry off the back of positive and structured work placements.

Initiatives are already in place to facilitate this type of activity, such as the School 2 Work Transition program. The program delivers \$3 million over 3 years (2022–25) to support school students who are at risk of not transitioning successfully from school to further education, training or employment, by providing tailored solutions to improve post-school outcomes.

The program funds organisations to support priority school groups through the creation of strong and effective school-industry partnerships; connecting schools, students and employers to maximise local employment opportunities and create youth-friendly workplaces enabling tailored assistance and support approaches to be provided to under-represented student groups.

However, the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) qualification requirements for this program currently sits at 900 points, which is too restrictive to have a real impact across this growing number of schools.

Recommendation 3.1:

Raise the ICSEA score to qualify for the School 2 Work Transition program from 900 to 1000, effectively seeing the number of eligible Special Assistance Schools jump from 9 schools to all 25 SAS schools in Queensland.



Nambour Christian College



Concordia Lutheran College



Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers

Jurisdictions across Australia are dedicated to boosting the number of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALT) through the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. In Queensland, ISQ has played a key role in certifying HALTs for the independent sector. However, the certification process is complex and expensive. To enhance HALT certification uptake across Queensland, a coordinated approach involving all three sectors, led by the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), is essential.

Recommendation 3.2:

Support the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) to establish itself as the certification body for all HALTs in Queensland.

Supporting the wellbeing of all Queensland school students

Schools and families shoulder the significant responsibility of supporting children through a myriad of modern issues including school refusal, mental health issues and online safety.

Mental health challenges don't discriminate and government-funded interventions and supports should be equitably distributed to all sectors and all school children.

Recommendation 3.3:

Extend the state-school-only Student Wellbeing Package (wellbeing workforce increases + GPs in schools) to the non-government school sectors.

The Glennie School





Delivering Queensland's world class education across the globe

Many Queensland independent schools are proud of the world-class curriculum they produce and see it as a key item in the attraction and retention of their future student cohorts.

As of 2020, about 11,400 international schools in more than 200 countries are 'importing' their curriculum from educational institutions such as Cambridge; Oxford; Pearson; the US College Board's Advancement Placement Program and the International Baccalaureate.

The school sector on the other hand is an area with enormous potential for growth across Australia. Students who go into a school curriculum from Australia (whether in their own school at home; via distance education or as CRICOS students in Australia) can then be provided appropriate academic pathways that support entrance into Australian university placements.

Currently, however, the delivery of offshore curriculum is limited to only Queensland's government school sector through Education Queensland International.

Recommendation 3.4:

Implement a fit-for-purpose model which allows all non-government schools to participate in Queensland's offshore curriculum delivery arrangements, ensuring schools are not being unduly burdened in this process by legislation.

Continue the regulatory reform of Non-State Schools

In 2023, the Queensland Government conducted an independent review of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Framework. The final report, released in 2024, outlines a sector-supported roadmap for ongoing regulatory reform.

Recommendation 3.5:

Continue to implement the recommendations of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Framework Review 2024.



St John's Anglican College

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