



Association of Independent Schools
of the ACT Incorporated

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Mr Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training
ACT-Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
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Dear Minister

Input into the ACT Government's 2008-09 Budget

I refer to the Chief Minister's letter inviting input to the ACT Government's 2008-09 Budget.

The Association of Independent Schools of the ACT (AISACT) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to policy development within the Territory Government and is pleased to provide our submission to you for Cabinet's consideration.

About our schools and the Association

AISACT is committed to excellence in ACT Independent Education. Our values are based on diversity; choice; working cooperatively and collegially; and mutually respecting the independence of individual schools, across all sectors. We also value fairness for all, and within, sectors in education in government support and funding.

AISACT represents all seventeen ACT independent schools, which account for twelve percent of primary enrolments and twenty-seven percent of secondary enrolments. One in five students in the ACT attend independent schools – over 11,400 students.

In the decade from 1996, enrolments in ACT independent schools (not including the three independent Catholic schools we represent) increased by over thirty-eight percent.

Towards 2020

Towards 2020 is an important document. The principles of choice, diversity and opportunity are affirming ideals. In an educational environment such as the ACT's where over forty percent of students are educated in non-government schools, these notions have particular importance in a macro policy setting.

Of interest within the context of the concepts discussed in *Towards 2020* is comment in a press release of 25 September 2007 by the Federal Labor shadow minister for education, Mr Stephen Smith MP, who said

"Australia's international competitiveness in education, skills and training can only be achieved through a truly collaborative effort with the States and Territories and the Catholic and Independent school systems.

Federal Labor is committed to such an approach."

Given the non-government education sector's size in the ACT, Mr Smith's comments are particularly pertinent and we ask they be given consideration by the ACT Labor Government as you frame next year's Territory Budget.

Our specific suggestions below for the Budget are framed within our three core values of diversity, choice and independence.

Students with Disabilities

AISACT requests the Government review its level of funding for students with disabilities. We would welcome the opportunity to work with your officials to 'clear the fog' that surrounds funding in this key education area and to ensure that there is a higher level of funding for all students with disabilities in all sectors from both the Territory Government – and the Australian Government.

A student's individual level of need should be the basis for which funding is provided, irrespective of what school they attend and which level of government – Australian or ACT – provide it. The introduction of portable funding with students with disability would be a welcome start to addressing resourcing problems, so that government funding for these students follows them no matter which school they attend.

Indexation

AISACT requests that the Territory Government implement a more realistic indexation factor to maintain the real value of funding.

A 2.75% increase as was the case in this year's Budget does not recognise the costs of providing education in the ACT. AISACT raised this specific point in our appearance at an Assembly Estimates hearing in June and are aware of a number of other organisations in the wider ACT education sector that share our concern.

Improvement in education programs, compliance costs for increasing government regulation and movements in salaries and conditions for staff all contribute to the rising cost of schooling. AISACT believes it is important that funding for students keeps pace with increased costs through annual indexation that is realistic.

Interest Subsidy Scheme

AISACT request that the Government considers reintroducing an interest subsidy scheme for non-government schools. As we noted in our submission last year, we would be more than happy to discuss a possible new version of the scheme or the introduction of a new scheme of capital support for schools.

There are a number of models that could be used in examining this proposal, including, for example, utilising the existing ACT Block Grant Authority structure which both the Catholic Education Office and Association of Independent Schools form. Existing synergies and representation from across the non-government sector point to this idea being one of potential reflection, and we welcome others your Government may wish to consider.

AISACT thanks you and your Cabinet colleagues for your consideration of our submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Irvine', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Jeremy Irvine
Executive Director
27 September 2007

