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**Choice and Affordability Fund work plan**

**2020-2021**

**The Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory**

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## Choice and Affordability Fund

### The Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory – Work plan 2020-2021

#### Summary

The Association of the Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT) is committed to supporting the National and local priorities as identified under the Choice and Affordability Funding Agreement. This document is a summary of the work to be undertaken during 2020 and 2021. This work has been designed to support the NT Independent Schools in areas that they have identified as areas of need that fit within the CAF requirements.

The Northern Territory context for Independent schools is substantially different to the other States and Territories of Australia. All NT Independent Schools are located in outer regional, remote and very remote areas. The NT Independent schools cater for a high percentage of socially and educationally disadvantaged students. According to the ABS 2019 data, there are 40 599 students enrolled in schools across the Northern Territory with 5 864 of those enrolled in the 20 Independent schools, 4 845 enrolled in Catholic Schools and 29 850 enrolled in NT Government schools.

Of the 5 864 students enrolled in Independent schools 3 678 are enrolled in schools that are located in Outer Regional, 1 655 are located in Remote areas and 531 are located in Very Remote locations.

The Northern Territory has a total area of **1,349,129 km<sup>2</sup>** which accounts for around 17.5 percent of Australia's total land mass. Our population of 245 562, of which just over 30% (70 405) identify as Aboriginal, is spread over this large geographical area, which impacts greatly on the access to education and other services for many families. This also results in the direct impact on the cost of delivery. Our challenges in providing services are many and varied.

AISNT plans to commit funding across all of the priority areas. The implementation of this work plan will be managed by two current staff members, Executive Director and Deputy Director, with the addition of two new staff members who will have dedicated tasks under this reform plan.

Actions outlined in this plan will include supporting the following reform priorities:

National priorities:

1. Choice and Affordability of Schools
2. Transition Assistance
3. Special Circumstances Funding
4. Strengthening Outcomes for Schools and Educationally Disadvantaged Students
5. Student Wellbeing Support
6. Other Priorities as Identified by the Minister

**Please note that AISNT cannot direct the schools to take part in any of the reform activities as outlined in this work plan. We are only in a position to offer the opportunities to the schools. This does have a direct impact on the level of success that we are able to report.**

**We do however, strongly encourage schools to participate.**

#### 1. Choice and Affordability of Schools

AISNT will employ the services of a chartered accountant with expertise in the area of schools funding to assist all schools, who opt in, to undertake a survey of their current financial health in order to identify and quantify their individual school's financial strengths and weaknesses. The development of strategies and a plan will then be undertaken by the school under the guidance of the chosen chartered accountant.

AISNT will provide schools with access to people with expertise in school improvement to assist the schools to develop and implement School Improvement Plans concentrating on efficiency and improving outcomes.

It is considered important that all NT Independent Schools pay careful attention to their current financial situation including staffing efficiency whilst considering their transition to the new funding arrangements in 2029.

Changes in the Independent Schools' practices to improve efficiency will maintain the NT Independent Schools' ability to offer parents and students viable options in the choice of affordable, quality schooling.

## 2. Transition Assistance

There are four schools identified as qualifying for regional transition assistance in the NT Independent Sector. This includes the two schools who would have been eligible for NAAF under the previous model. These schools will be offered the opportunity to enlist the services of people with expertise in school funding and school improvement planning, to assist them in developing plans that will provide viable and sustainable financial practices whilst maintaining their educational and social integrity. AISNT intends to work closely with each Independent School over the first two years of the program to identify those schools who will require further assistance in the transition process. The schools identified as needing assistance will be required to lodge applications with AISNT which will be considered on a case by case basis. Once identified and approved schools will be provided with the assistance that will best suit their needs in developing and implementing their improvement and transition plans in order to transition smoothly to the new funding arrangements by 2029.

To further assist those schools that qualify for regional transition assistance, each school will also be provided with access to programs under the other Choice and Affordability priorities. For example, under *Priority a) – Choice and Affordability*, the specified schools will be provided with access to the services of a chartered accountant. Under *Priority d) - Strengthening outcomes*, schools will have access to a variety of activities that will contribute to improved school outcomes and effective transition.

## 3. Special Circumstances Funding

Funding will be set aside to assist schools who develop a need and fit the requirements as prescribed at paragraph 24c of the Agreement for special circumstances funding. Schools finding themselves in need of special circumstances funding will need to lodge an application for funding. This application will have specific criteria for schools to meet to be eligible for funding. Applications from schools will be considered by a specifically formed committee who have expertise in school management and planning. If successful schools will be required to provide detailed recovery plans.

## 4. Strengthening Outcomes for Schools and Educationally Disadvantaged Students

AISNT will provide schools with access to an Education Officer to assist them in the identification of educationally disadvantaged students and assist in the development of school and teacher plans with a view to improving school and student outcomes. This will include providing the schools the opportunity to elect to use and have training in a specific software (INSPIRE) to identify student adjustments. This will also assist with more accurate and consistent identification for NCCD purposes enabling schools to maximise funding for use with significantly disadvantaged students. Schools will also be provided access to the Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Advisor to assist them with keeping current with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting requirements and practices that support this.

## 5. Student Wellbeing Support

Schools will have an opportunity to take part in professional development and specific networking opportunities to share and enhance the work they are already undertaking in the area of student wellbeing. These will be arranged and supported by AISNT predominantly by the Education Officer and/or the Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Advisor. Schools will also be provided the opportunity to have the Officer and Advisor attend their school to assist with school and student wellbeing. ICT will also be used to ensure all schools have access to the meeting, webinars etc.

Both the Officer and Advisor will be responsible for providing schools with relevant and timely information and updates relevant to wellbeing.

6. Other Priorities as Identified by the Minister

These will be considered as they are identified. Funding that has not been expended in the year provided can be brought back on line to fund priorities as they are identified.

**Summary of budget**

Priority	Activities/Initiatives	Expenditure type	Choice and Affordability funding	
			2020	2021
<b>Choice and Affordability of Schools</b>	Employ the services of a chartered accountant (our preference is John Somerset) to work with schools to assess their financial health. This will provide schools with a clear understanding of their current financial practices and situation and inform areas requiring improvement. It is expected that this information will be used to develop a 'Financial Transition Plan' that outlines a clear transition path to the new funding arrangements by 2029.	Centralised Transition- Regional Assistance (Transition - RA)	\$10 000 \$30 000	\$10 000 \$30 000
	Provide schools working with chartered accountant grant for release and other costs.	Distributed Transition - RA	\$10 000 \$10 000	\$10 000 \$10 000
	Contract services of people with expertise in school improvement planning to assist schools in developing school improvement plans that will support the wellbeing and educational outcomes of students whilst rationalising costs. The aim is to ensure all schools have an opportunity to develop efficient practises without compromising outcomes. This will assist all schools to achieve efficiency savings which will be particularly important for the Regional Assistance Schools who will be required to develop a clear transition path to the funding model by 2029.	Centralised Transition - RA	\$10 000 \$10 000	\$10 000 \$10 000

<b>Transition Assistance</b>	<p>The 4 identified Regional Assistance Schools, (which includes the 2 schools that would have been eligible under the former NAAF), will be offered grants or other assistance as identified, via an application process, to assist them in the development and implementation of transition plans that outline clear transition paths to the new funding arrangements by 2029.</p> <p>These will be considered on a case by case basis that will be based on meeting the criteria for the grants. The criteria will be developed by AISNT with input from a reputable Chartered Accountant and Education Consultant.</p> <p>It should be noted that the projects outlined in the Choice and Affordability Reform have a strong emphasis on assisting the Transition – Regional Assistance schools in examining their current practices to identify efficiency savings that will assist them in transitioning to the new funding model by 2029.</p> <p>Programs outlined under the banner of the Strengthening Outcomes Reform will assist the Transition - Regional Assistance schools by providing two support officers whose responsibilities will be to provide support to the schools in the areas of special needs education and reporting, including NCCD support, and in curriculum, assessment and reporting. This will provide services that schools will no longer need to pay higher duties or part time staff to cover. This will therefore provide a more efficient delivery of services that takes advantage of the economy of scale.</p> <p>Please see both the above-mentioned reform areas where the funding dedicated to Transition – Regional Support Schools has been identified.</p>	Centralised	\$20 000	\$20 000
		Distributed	\$60 000	\$60 000
<b>Special Circumstances Funding</b>	<p>Funding will be set aside to assist schools who meet criteria for special circumstances funding. Schools will be required to apply for the funding as and when needed. AISNT will provide a detailed application process that collects the prescribed requirements as described under paragraph 24c of the Agreement. A Special Circumstances Funding Evaluation Committee will be established to consider applications and monitor schools who have been granted assistance. Schools will be required to work with an approved</p>	Held Centrally for distribution as required.	\$200 000	\$200 000
		Distributed	As required	As required

	financial expert to develop and implement their recovery plans.			
<b>Strengthening Outcomes</b>	ACTIVITY 1: Employ an education officer to work with schools to assist in the identification of educationally disadvantaged students and develop plans to improve school and student outcomes. This position is centralised to take advantage of the economy of scale and relieve pressure on school budgets, in that they can use the services of the Education Officer' rather than having to pay higher duties or employ someone to replicate this work.	Centralised Transition - RA	\$30 000 \$70 000	\$30 000 \$70 000
	Provide schools with grants to cover release time and other costs for school while working with the Education Officer.	Distributed Transition - RA	\$10 000 \$10 000	\$10 000 \$10 000
	Activity 2: Offer all schools access to the installation and training for the INSPIRE software solution developed by Catholic Education NT and SRA Information Technology. INSPIRE is an integrated software platform, which identifies students with learning disabilities, then suggests processes and teaching strategies based on the category, severity and demographics of the student. At the same time, INSPIRE collects all evidence required for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) scheme and helps schools submit their annual reports to secure funding for adjustments required to implement inclusive education practices.	Centralised Transition - RA	\$20 000 \$90 000	\$30 000 \$90 000
	Activity 3: Employ an office based Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Advisor to work closely with the schools to engage with the priorities of the Australian Curriculum review i.e. the assessment priorities (e.g. online formative assessment, NAPLAN Online etc.) By centralising this service, schools will not need to employ people in positions of responsibility to replicate this role. This is particularly relevant to our small schools and provides an economy of scale that schools can capitalise on. This will save schools on staffing costs.	Centralised Transition - RA	\$30 000 \$30 000	\$30 000 \$40 000
<b>Student Well Being and Support</b>	The AISNT will organise and facilitate professional development and network forums to share existing practices and examine new research findings and practices related to student wellbeing.	Centralised	\$30 000	\$30 000

	This will assist schools in keeping current with the most up to date developments in wellbeing to be used to inform their schools practices.			
	Provide support to schools for travel and other costs related to attendance at forums and network meetings.	Distributed	\$20 000	\$20 000
	Provide individual school support as required including the setting up of required hardware and software to enable meetings, webinars and other gatherings via ICT.		\$20 000	\$20 000
Administrative costs			\$26 870	\$27 780
<b>Total Expenditure</b>			<b>\$746 870</b>	<b>\$767 780</b>
Amount Retained for use in Future Years			<b>\$596 684</b>	<b>\$621 456</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$1 343 554</b>	<b>\$1 389 236</b>

#### 10 year profile and rationale for the expenditure of funds in future years:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Allocation to AISNT	\$1 343 554	\$1 389 236	\$1 436 470	\$1 485 310	\$1 535 810
Total Estimated expenditure Profile	\$746 870	\$767 780	\$836 470	\$985 310	\$1 135 810

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Allocation to AISNT	\$1 588 028	\$1 642 022	\$1 697 848	\$1 755 576	\$1 815 266
Estimated expenditure profile	\$1 988 028	\$2 142 022	\$2 297 848	\$2 377 032	\$2 411 950

The funding that has been retained will be used in the last 5 years of the program to assist schools who fit the Regional Transition Profile as well as other schools who will be undertaking changes in their operations as a result of the planning they have undertaken during the first five years. As schools move into the future they will need to take steps and plan to maintain their financial viability whilst ensuring they are in a position to continue to improve their educational, social/emotional and spiritual well-being programs. They will need to maintain their vigilance to ensure they are well equipped to meet the needs of their students and continue on a path of improvement. The retained funds will be fed back into the budget during the final five years to enable the implementation of improvement plans that result in the schools improving their outcomes as well as those of the students.

AISNT has worked with the schools and identified that there is a concern by the majority that there will be a need for extra funding from around 2023 to 2024 but particularly from 2025 on. There is a desire for some security moving into this period as there will be a better and more accurate understanding of the effects of the new funding model on their provision of services and support.

It is also the intention of AISNT to bring the retained funds back on line earlier if required once the Non-Government Reform Support Funding ends in 2022 and/or if further priorities are identified by the Minister. We will also continue consultations with our schools on identifying other areas of priority and evaluate our funding decisions based on this information.

## **Choice and Affordability Fund**

### **AISNT– Work plan 2020-2021**

#### **Initiative/activity: CHOICE and AFFORDABILITY**

Employ the services of a Chartered Accountant and other school finance and school improvement experts to work with schools to assess their financial health.

Provide schools working with the chartered accountant and other experts in school improvement access to funds to cover their costs.

The aim is to ensure all schools have an opportunity to develop efficient practises without compromising outcomes. Changes in the Independent Schools’ practices to improve efficiency will maintain the NT Independent Schools’ ability to offer parents and students viable options in the choice of affordable, quality schooling.

**Relevant national/local priority:** Choice and Affordability of Schools

#### **Description:**

All schools will be offered this opportunity. Our aim is to have at least five schools undertake this activity.

AISNT will use funds centrally to obtain the services of people with expertise in schools’ funding and planning to undertake surveys for the schools who opt in to this activity. In the case of the financial expert he/she will provide schools with accurate information on their current financial health by assisting them to identify and quantify their financial and operational strengths and weaknesses. This will then feed into the school working with the chosen expert to develop a strategy for continued improvement in their financial health. Schools can also opt to work closely with people with expertise in school improvement planning with a view to increasing efficiency without compromising the continuing improvement in their educational, social/emotional and spiritual programs.

Schools will be provided with direct assistance to cover reasonable costs incurred whilst working with an identified expert. This assistance will be provided in the form of grants based on a calculation of likely costs.

The overall aim of these initiatives is to ensure the sustainability and viability of NT Independent schools into the future with respect to the transitioning to the new funding arrangements in 2029. It is essential to provide affordable choices in education for all families across Australia. AISNT aims to ensure schools are in a strong position to provide these affordable education choices.

<b>Indicative budget</b>	<b>Expected outcomes</b>	<b>Indicators of success</b>
<b>TOTAL 2020: \$80 000</b> This includes \$20 000 in direct school support. <b>TOTAL 2021: \$80 000</b> Using the same breakdown as for 2020 above.	Schools will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have an understanding of their current financial and operational strengths and weaknesses.</li><li>• Develop a strategy that provides for continual improvement in their financial health.</li><li>• Develop and assist schools on the implementation of the whole school improvement strategy plan.</li></ul>	At least: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Five schools working with experts and report a better understanding of their financial strengths and weaknesses.</li><li>• Five schools develop strategies for continued improvement in their financial health.</li><li>• Five schools commence the implementation of their whole school improvement strategy.</li></ul>



**Initiative/activity: TRANSITION ASSISTANCE**

Schools offered access to a chartered accountant with expertise in schools’ funding to undertake Financial Planning and Policy and Procedure Development for current and future financial health.

Provide schools working with the chartered accountant access to funds to cover their costs.

Provide schools with the opportunity to apply for grants and/or assistance to assist them in the development of Transition Plans that outline clear transition paths to the new funding arrangements by 2029.

**Relevant national/local priority:** Transition Assistance

**Description:**

The four identified schools identified for regional transition assistance, including the two schools identified that would have received support under the former National Adjustment Assistance Fund will be offered this opportunity. Other schools will be offered the opportunity to be included in this in depth financial assistance.

There are four schools identified as qualifying for regional transition assistance. These schools will be offered the opportunity to enlist the services of the chartered accountant as described above, to undertake extensive work to evaluate their current financial health and work with them to develop plans that will provide viable and sustainable financial practices whilst maintaining their educational and social integrity. This work will include assisting the school in understanding the impact of the full implementation of the funding model on their recurrent funding income and developing strategies for the continued improvement in the school’s financial health as well as developing sound financial governance policies and procedures to underpin these strategies.

The schools needs will be considered on a case by case basis and will need to meet the criteria to be developed by AISNT in conjunction with experts in school funding and school improvement. This process will decide the type of assistance each of the schools will require to meet the aim of transitioning to the new funding arrangements by 2029.

Schools will be provided with direct assistance to cover reasonable costs incurred whilst working with AISNT appointed experts. This assistance will be provided in the form of grants based on a calculation of likely costs.

Indicative budget	Expected outcomes	Indicators of success
<p><b>TOTAL 2020: \$80 000</b></p> <p>\$20 000 of the \$80 000 will be retained to contract experts as required.</p> <p>\$60 000 will be available for distribution to schools.</p> <p><b>TOTAL 2021: \$80 000</b></p> <p>Using the same breakdown as for 2020 above.</p>	<p>Schools will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and have an understanding of their current financial and operational strengths and weaknesses.</li><li>• Understand the effects of the full implementation of the changes to the AG funding model on their recurrent funding income into the future</li><li>• Develop sound financial governance policies and procedures to underpin strategic improvement in Financial Management.</li><li>• Commence the implementation of the whole school improvement strategy under the developed policies and procedures.</li></ul>	<p>At least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Four schools work with the expert and report an improved understanding of their current financial strengths and weaknesses.</li><li>• Four schools will report on their understanding of the effects of the new funding model on their AG recurrent funding income.</li><li>• Four schools develop sound financial governance policies and procedures to underpin strategic improvement in Financial Management.</li><li>• Four schools commence the implementation of their whole school improvement strategy.</li></ul>

**Initiative/activity:**

Special Circumstances Funding Grant

**Relevant national/local priority:** Special Circumstances Funding**Description:**

All Schools will be informed that the Special Circumstances Funding program will be funded under the Australian Government Choice and Affordability Funding Program managed through AISNT.

This grant program will be set up based on the requirements as outlined in the CAF Agreement and the current guidelines for the AG Special Circumstances Funding. A sub-committee of three will be set up to provide guidelines and a pro-forma grant application for schools use and to consider grants as they are received.

AISNT is committed to assist schools to recover from unforeseen financial downturns in order to make every effort to have schools remain open and provide viable and affordable options of choice in education.

Indicative budget	Expected outcomes	Indicators of success
<p><b>TOTAL 2020: \$200 000</b></p> <p>If there is need to increase this amount due to the number of schools qualifying this amount will be increased using the retained funding pool.</p> <p><b>TOTAL 2021: \$200 000</b></p>	<p>Schools will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply for Special Circumstances Funding under the set of guidelines developed by the AISNT Sub Committee using the current AG Special Circumstances Funding Guidelines.</li> <li>• Provide a five year business and recovery plan as per the requirements of the guidelines.</li> </ul> <p>AISNT will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a sub-committee of three who will develop guidelines and grant application pro-forma using the current AG Special Circumstances Funding Guidelines.</li> <li>• Consider grant applications as they are received.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide all requirements outlined in the guidelines in their application.</li> <li>• Show the steps the school has taken to overcome the financial difficulty and what steps it will take using the Special Circumstances Funding.</li> <li>• Provide information on how the sub-committee members were chosen and who they are.</li> <li>• Provide the guidelines and pro-forma applications</li> <li>• Provide data on how many applications received and how many were funded and how many were not funded.</li> </ul>

**Initiative/activity: STRENGTHENING OUTCOMES**

Employ Education Officer and Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Advisor to work directly with schools

**Relevant national/local priority:** Strengthening Outcomes

**Description:**

Employ an Education Officer and Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Advisor (CARA) to work with schools to assist in the identification of educationally disadvantaged students and develop plans to improve school and student outcomes. Both the Officer and the Advisor will work directly with schools on a request basis. They will offer regular advice and undertake regular communication with all of the Independent Schools in the NT. They will work closely with the schools to assist in the development and implementation of strategies to assist students who are identified as requiring assistance.

Provide schools with grants to cover release time and other costs for school while working with the education officer and CARA. These grants will cover reasonable costs.

The Education Officer will liaise between the school and SRA Information Technology in regards to the installation and training for the use of the Inspire software developed by Catholic Education NT and SRA Information Technology. All schools will be offered the opportunity to opt in to this activity. AISNT will centrally fund the installation and training costs. Schools will be offered funding to cover reasonable costs they incur during their involvement in this activity.

AISNT and our member schools are concerned with the need to collect accurate and consistent data on students requiring adjustments for the sake of ensuring they are adequately catered for in regards to their education and social well-being. We are also providing this opportunity to ensure our schools can provide more accurate and consistent data for inclusion of NCCD student numbers on the schools census.

The Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Advisor will work closely with schools on the requirements that relate to the National Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting body (ACARA). He/she will be actively involved in the process of change that is occurring at ACARA and the Australian Curriculum Review. Schools will be provided with timely updates related to the review and other developments occurring with ACARA.

AISNT aims to provide schools with the options for support in the important areas of schooling such as curriculum understanding and implementation and reporting and assessment best practice to inform requirements. This will provide all schools with a strong option to maintain and/or improve their current practices resulting in them being a strong and affordable choice in education for families of the Northern Territory.

Indicative budget	Expected outcomes	Indicators of success
<p><b>TOTAL 2020: \$290 000</b>  <b>TOTAL 2021: \$310 000</b></p> <p><b>Activity One</b>  2020: \$120 000  2021:\$120 000</p> <p><b>Activity Two</b>  2020: \$110 000  2021: \$120 000</p> <p><b>Activity Three</b>  2020: \$60 000  2021: \$70 000</p>	<p>Education Officer will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work closely with all schools to assist in the identification of educationally disadvantaged students and develop strategies with the school to assist these students.</li> </ul> <p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work closely with the education officer to identify students who are educationally disadvantaged and develop strategies to improve student outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>The School will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with SRA Information Technology and the Education Officer to install and use the INSPIRE Software in their school.</li> <li>• Undertake PD in the use of Inspire</li> <li>• Increase the consistency and number of students identified who require educational adjustments.</li> <li>• Develop strategies and plans for the students who are identified as needing adjustments.</li> <li>• Implement the strategies and improve outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>The Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Advisor will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work closely with schools to assist in the identification and understanding of requirements that are related to curriculum, assessment and reporting.</li> </ul>	<p>The Education Officer and school will provide records on the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of schools involved</li> <li>• Number of students identified.</li> <li>• Number and types of strategies developed.</li> </ul> <p>The Education Officer and school will provide the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of schools involved in the use of INSPIRE.</li> <li>• Number of staff involved in PD.</li> <li>• Number of students identified.</li> <li>• Number and types of strategies developed.</li> </ul> <p>The Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Advisor will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep diarised information on the schools contacted/visited including the type of assistance provided.</li> <li>• Provide numbers of staff he/she provides professional development for at each school.</li> </ul>

