

Non-Government Reform Support Annual Report

2023

Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

Executive Summary

The 2023 Non-Government Reform Support Fund (NGRSF) Annual Report outlines the activities undertaken by the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) as described in the 2023 NGRSF workplan and overarching 2019–2023 Strategic Plan. These endeavours have been instrumental in progressing the implementation of key reforms outlined in the National School Reform Agreement and the South Australian Bilateral Agreement. In undertaking this activity, the AISSA has represented the interests of 103 schools, being the full cohort of Independent schools across the state.

Progression of the three identified priorities from the National School Reform Agreement saw schools supported to navigate the practical and legislative aspects of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). Targeted workshops and e-modules saw schools enhance their capacity to provide adjustments and personalised learning experiences for students with diverse needs. Successful progress of other national reform priorities saw a proactive approach to NAPLAN preparation and support that enabled all schools to successfully participate in NAPLAN in the earlier March timeframe. A commitment to supporting schools enact contemporary governance and financial management practices was fulfilled through the annual AISSA Governance Conference and professional learning webinars, to promote accessibility across metropolitan and regional locations. Tailored support provided to individual school boards addressed areas such as governance practices, compliance obligations and strategic planning.

Concurrently, activities aligned with the reform areas in the State Bilateral Agreement have contributed to driving whole-school improvement initiatives. Strategic activity aimed at familiarising schools with the updated Australian Curriculum version 9.0 have furthered curriculum implementation and integration. The collaborative and positive relationship between the three education sectors has complemented the implementation of South Australian State reforms.

The AISSA Leadership Institute played a central role in nurturing leadership capabilities across the sector. Through a comprehensive professional learning program and tailored support initiatives, the Institute facilitated the growth of current and emerging leaders, fostering collaborative communities of practice and equipping leaders with the skills to navigate complex educational challenges. Similarly, initiatives focused on teacher induction and early career teacher mentoring underscored the AISSA's commitment to supporting educators at all career stages.

The activities described in this workplan were made possible through the NGRSF contribution received from the Australian Government. Given the evolving nature of education, a changing and volatile workforce, and continued community needs, sustained funding to the SA Independent sector is imperative for ensuring equitable educational outcomes for all.

Progress against strategic plan

The structure and timing of the AISSA strategic plan were designed to be agile and responsive to new national and local priorities. Consequently, the original 2019–2022 strategic plan was updated for the 2023 program year to ensure the relevance of activities and directions, in alignment with emerging national priorities and cross-sectoral reforms. Whilst continuing to progress previously agreed reforms, a new initiative exemplified the AISSA's commitment to supporting Independent schools to progress the critical national priority of a significantly revised Australian Curriculum. In 2023, this saw the first of a four-year plan for targeted support provided to all schools, using a model that built the capacity of learning leaders to lead familiarisation processes within their schools.

The funding received through the Non-Government Reform Support Fund has remained an essential resource for advancing national and state reforms, facilitating the growth and strengthening of structures, practices and environments fundamental to quality schooling.

Relationship with state and territory government

The three education sectors have maintained their collaborative efforts to align activities across key priority areas so as to enhance the provision and accessibility of quality education for all students in South Australia. In 2023, this saw active engagement from the three South Australian Education Sector Heads, associated groups and working parties, on matters of mutual and State interest. A variety of formal and informal structures and processes have been established to facilitate this cooperation.

Central to this has been the face-to-face meetings of the Education Sector Heads, scheduled termly and supported by a Senior Officers Group. These occasions provided the opportunity for the sharing and deliberation of local, state and national issues. During 2023, in response to the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan priorities to strengthen initial teacher education and address teacher supply, and in-light of a workforce shortage in South Australian schools and preschools, Education Sector Heads established a cross sector Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Steering Committee. The committee was tasked to develop a coordinated approach to working with the regulatory authority and ITE providers to identify areas within the ITE system for potential flexibility and opportunity. Milestones achieved included a better understanding of ITE provider perspectives about employment-based opportunities for pre-service teachers, as well as liaison with the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia to develop a Special Authority to Teach for students in their final year of study to undertake temporary relief teaching.

Education Sector Heads also established a cross-sector Australian Curriculum v9 implementation reference group to foster a collaborative approach across the three sectors to implement the new national curriculum and to enable the sharing of information that may assist each sector with planning and professional learning.

Cross sector committees and working groups continued from Early Childhood to SACE, as well as across key areas including Student Diversity, NAPLAN, and Teacher Certification. Responses and advice were provided in relation to key national initiatives from ACARA and AITSL, in addition to contributing to the National Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and the draft National Autism Strategy.

Project Report

The 2023 Non-Government Reform Support Annual Report outlines the key actions and initiatives undertaken by the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) to achieve the objectives outlined 2023 workplan and overarching 2019 – 2023 Strategic Plan. It details activity undertaken in support of implementation of national policy initiatives as described in the National School Reform Agreement, as well as the key state commitments outlined in the South Australian Bilateral Agreement.

National School Reform Agreement Initiatives

2023 saw the continued provision of advice to schools to manage and implement the practical and legislative aspects of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) and Disability Standards for Education (DSE). AISSA-led workshops facilitated opportunities for participants to collaborate and develop common understandings of best practice in providing adjustments and developing personalised learning and assessment for students with diverse needs. In partnership with a national inclusion specialist, a four-part series of e-modules was developed that focused on integrating inclusive education strategies with planning using the Australian Curriculum. Approximately one-third of the SA Independent sector completed these e-modules, thereby enhancing their capacity to create universally designed units of study and assessment tasks that include curriculum adjustments. The "Working Towards Excellence in Inclusive Education" series supported schools in reviewing and strengthening their inclusive educational practices. Through this process, the AISSA led and supported a subgroup of schools in reviewing current practices and planning for improvement in areas such as deepening knowledge and understanding, pedagogical approaches, and whole-school improvement.

Successful preparation for the earlier 2023 NAPLAN window in March was achieved through the support of AISSA staff, so that all SA Independent schools met their national obligations to offer participation in the NAPLAN to students at years 3, 5, 7 and 9. A close working relationship with the SA Testing Administration Authority, through the cross sector NAPLAN working group, enabled consistency of messaging and process across the whole of SA. A statewide practice opportunity complemented school-based preparatory activities. The AISSA delivered a range of training opportunities, including those focused on student disability and accessibility, and provided a help-desk service to facilitate a smooth and successful testing experience for schools and students. Additionally, the AISSA played a crucial role in communicating school participation information for field and sample assessments. Communication about the new Opt-In assessments at the end of 2023 resulted in high levels of school interest for participation in 2024.

The AISSA also implemented a range of governance programs, including the annual Governance Conference, to address critical areas of board leadership. A suite of professional learning, focusing on contemporary and effective governance and financial management obligations, was offered as after-hours webinars to maximize the accessibility and participation of board members in metropolitan and regional locations. In light of the critical implications of cyber security for all schools, a governance-specific webinar was provided, focusing on business continuity, corporate responsibility, and the operational and strategic aspects of cyber security. Key AISSA staff also provided intensive, tailored support to individual school boards on a needs basis, covering areas such as effective governance practices, compliance obligations for school governors, chair and principal relationships, operations, and strategic planning.

South Australian Bilateral Commitments

Reform Direction A: Supporting students, student learning and student achievement

In 2023, the AISSA continued to work with individual schools on their improvement projects, including building evaluative capacity to review their practices against a domain of the AISSA High Impact School Improvement Tool. Notably, one school presented its project and improvement journey at the 2023 ACEL National Conference. Additionally, the Wellbeing domain of the tool was reviewed by Professor Donna Cross, and the Inclusive Education domain by Lauren Swancutt, both leading professionals in their fields.

The Australian Curriculum has undergone significant revision. In response, the AISSA embarked on the first year of a longer-term strategy to support schools with the familiarisation and successful implementation of version 9 of the Australian Curriculum. The model employed developed the capacity of school-based learning leaders, who then led familiarisation processes within their schools. The initial phase of this initiative involved a professional learning suite across all eight Australian Curriculum Learning Areas that utilised both face-to-face and online learning. Ongoing support was facilitated through online 'health check' opportunities, with feedback serving as a valuable mechanism for improving practice in schools and shaping the program in subsequent years. This strategy complemented the curriculum familiarisation and implementation approaches of the government and Catholic sectors.

Reform Direction B: Support teaching, school leadership and school improvement

The work of the Leadership Institute has continued to focus on enhancing the capacity of current and emerging leaders within the sector, including Principals new to Independent schools and Deputy Principals. This has been pursued through a comprehensive professional learning program, fostering networking opportunities, and providing individual companionship and in-school support. Leaders engaged in these initiatives have become integral members of open, collaborative, and outward-facing communities of practice. The programs have also equipped leaders with the skills to navigate complexity and change, ensuring that their schools remain relevant and effective amidst evolving educational landscapes. A vital part of the AISSA leadership offerings was to support leaders to build and sustain partnerships with other schools, universities, institutions, and outside organisations. The ongoing work of fourteen school impact hubs has contributed to the reimagining of concepts of learning, assessment, and transition. These hubs have developed, applied and reflected upon innovative practices and models that acknowledged the broader value and impact of holistic learning and growth. Central to this effort has been the design and implementation of a digital mapping tool, tailored by each school to reflect its unique context. As the three-year project approaches its conclusion in 2024, schools are ready to consolidate their efforts and evaluate the efficacy of methods that may offer an alternative to conventional assessment approaches.

Prioritising support for teachers at all career stages, the AISSA facilitated the induction of teachers new to the profession by bringing together early career and mentor teachers. This initiative provided opportunities for collaborative learning and practice-focused mentoring. By referencing the quadrants identified by AITSL as critical to successful induction, the AISSA created avenues for professional relationships to flourish. These efforts focused on fostering environments conducive to reciprocal and dialogical conversations between graduate and mentor teachers. Additionally, support was provided to enhance understanding about developing positive student relationships and learning environments. The program also focused on building teacher confidence in areas such as cultural competency as well as implementing curriculum frameworks, including the new Early Years Learning Framework, Australian Curriculum v9.0, and teaching and learning strategies in senior years.

Reform Direction C: Enhancing the national evidence base

In 2023, each school continued to have access to a Senior Educational Consultant, whose role was to partner with them in their pursuit of enhancing educational outcomes for students. The delivery of education services was guided by a commitment to the independence of each school and their individual philosophy. AISSA staff worked alongside schools to advance their educational goals through tailored support which was complemented by a program of professional learning opportunities. Staff also provided accurate, relevant, and timely information regarding local and wider education agendas, supporting the successful implementation of key national reform areas as a priority. Throughout the year, the four AISSA Education Reference Groups met regularly. A highlight at the start of 2023 was the inaugural gathering of all curriculum leaders into an interconnected sector of practice, where David de Carvalho, the (then) Chief Executive of ACARA, emphasised the importance of curriculum as a tool for educators.

Summary of 2023 achievements

1. Project title	2. Project description and activities	3. Expected outcomes/ Overall achievements	4. Indicators of success	5. List any additional or variations of Activities undertaken/Achieved outcomes
<p>Improve the quality of information on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability and to improve the efficiency and integrity of the data collection</p>	<p>Successful engagement with the practical and legislative aspects of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) and Disability Standards for Education (DSE) relies upon best practice in the field of inclusion of students with disability.</p> <p>The AISSA will continue to support schools to consider how relevant school structures and practices may best underpin and ensure intentional planning, consultation and documentation that lead to strengthening student outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NCCD provides a mechanism for schools to strengthen their beliefs and practices in support of equitable access to schooling for students with diverse needs. • A tailored approach will support staff to increase their understanding and skills in inclusive practices. • Continued whole of school staff engagement with the DSE e-learning modules. • Engagement with relevant professional learning resources and tools on the NCCD Portal including the Reflection Tool. • A sub-group of schools will be assisted to review their delivery of inclusive education, curriculum development and pedagogical approaches within their unique school communities. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of schools will be supported to improve the efficiency and integrity of the data collection. 57% achieved • School review of inclusive practice and delivery of service will be undertaken. This will involve schools new to the improvement cycle and/or schools on a continuous cycle of improvement in the area of Inclusive Education. Achieved 	

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	<p>Through a tailored delivery approach that references ongoing evaluative feedback, school leaders, including Inclusive Education Consultants, will be supported to best engage with new and emerging themes and practices, be supported to review practice, plan for improvement, and build capacity to lead other school staff in best practice.</p> <p>Schools are continuously strengthening practices to improve outcomes for students with diverse needs and there is an anticipated need that support will be required in the future, especially at times when a new student with diverse needs enrolls in a school, during transition times, and in planning for post school options.</p>			

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<p>Strengthening NAPLAN, including through bringing the test window forward to term 1 from 2023 and offering schools the opportunity to opt-in to assessment of students' ability in Science, Digital Literacy and Civics and Citizenship</p>	<p>The AISSA plays a pivotal role in supporting Independent schools in SA to successfully meet their national obligations to offer participation in the NAPLAN to students at years 3, 5, 7 and 9. In 2022 all Independent schools participated in NAPLAN online and years 3 and 5 students in Steiner schools successfully undertook NAPLAN using alternate format materials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and staff across Independent schools will successfully transition to a term one NAPLAN event in 2023. • Schools will be informed about the purpose and opportunity to opt-in to sample assessments. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Independent schools with students from Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 successfully participate in NAPLAN in March. Achieved • Years 3 and 5 students from Steiner schools successfully undertake NAPLAN in March using alternate format materials. Achieved • Information about the opt-in sample assessments, commencing with the Civics and Citizenship assessment in 2024 has been provided to schools. Achieved 	

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<p>Improving governance and financial management practices in non-government schools to strengthen financial viability, improve business decision making and build resilience to mitigate unforeseen circumstances.</p>	<p>The AISSA understands that high quality governance is critical to the growth and longevity of schools across the Independent sector. An Independent School Board is responsible for leading schools strategically into the future utilising quality governance practices.</p> <p>2023 will see the resumption of the AISSA Governance Conference. The conference focus will be on the research commissioned by AISSA in 2021 on 'Barriers to Choosing an Independent School'. This will enable Boards to accurately explore value propositions and their relevance in ensuring the viability and long- term sustainability of the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boards are better equipped to navigate uncertainty and understand the need to be agile, resilient, and adaptive to their ever-changing context. Increased awareness of contemporary and effective governance and financial management obligations. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of Board members participating in professional learning report improved understanding of financial, legal and effective governance practices. <p>100% achieved</p>	

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	<p>Additionally, a range of professional learning sessions for board members and school leaders will be offered to enable boards to stay informed, remain responsive to the current climate and keep abreast of contemporary issues and challenges. This series may include topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cybersecurity - Contemporary Processes for Principal Appointments, Induction, Review and Support - Principal wellbeing. 			

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	<p>These sessions will continue to be delivered as interactive webinars as this delivery mode has been shown to maximise accessibility and participation for all board members in both metropolitan and regional locations. Post-activity feedback surveys provide valuable insight into program strengths and the future needs of school boards. Bespoke support is also made available to individual boards as requested by the school.</p>			
<p>Improving Student Learning and Achievement</p> <p>Evidence informed improvement practices that meet the cultural and contextual needs of students in Independent schools are provided through the use of the High Impact School Improvement Tool</p>	<p>In 2023 AISSA will build on the work of previous years that has supported Principals and their leadership teams to undertake a structured process to build capacity for innovation and improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools will strengthen their capacity to evaluate their practice and undertake innovation and improvement initiatives, as relevant to their context. Case studies of school improvement initiatives are added to the HISIT, and available to all schools via the AISSA website. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All participating schools will evaluate their practice in one domain of the HISIT. <p>Achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schools participating in this initiative. <p>2</p>	

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	<p>Using the AISSA High Impact School Improvement Tool (HISIT), consultants will work alongside school teams to undertake a self-assessment that enables each school to design and deliver a pathway forward and to measure impact in one of the key domains of the tool.</p> <p>This is the first year in a new two-year program designed to support school evaluative processes and planning perspectives critical for future implementation priorities.</p> <p>In preparation for 2023, the Wellbeing domain of the HISIT will be reviewed by Professor Donna Cross and the Inclusive Education domain by Lauren Swancutt, both leading professionals in their fields.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of case studies published on the AISSA website. 2 and a further 2 are under development during 2024. 	

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	<p>It is anticipated this program will continue to build the professional capital of the Independent sector and lead to the enrichment of the HISIT as schools provide further case studies recording the diversity of the innovation and improvement processes undertaken. Ongoing evaluative feedback from participating schools will help build the success of this initiative.</p>			
<p>Implementation of the Australian Curriculum v9.0</p> <p>Quality student learning experiences are fostered through the implementation of the revised Australian Curriculum.</p>	<p>The Australian Curriculum has seen significant revision. In support of this key national resource to build quality learning experiences for students, the AISSA will embark on the first year of a longer-term strategy to support SA Independent schools with familiarisation and successful implementation of version 9 of the Australian Curriculum (AC v.9).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders will develop curriculum leadership skills and capabilities that will enable them to successfully implement curriculum changes in their schools <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of participants report an improved understanding and confidence to effectively lead curriculum implementation. <p>93% achieved</p>	

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	<p>This is an important initiative that will see targeted support provided to all schools from 2023-2026. A model that builds the capacity of learning leaders to lead familiarisation processes within their schools will be used.</p> <p>Key personnel will be school leaders and teachers in primary, middle and secondary school contexts who have responsibility for curriculum implementation and improving teaching, learning, assessment and reporting practices.</p>			

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	<p>In 2023, the first phase of this initiative will involve the provision of a professional learning suite across all eight Australian Curriculum Learning Areas through face to face and online professional learning. Online 'health check' opportunities will provide continued support and learning for participants. Participant and school feedback will provide valuable mechanisms for improvement of practice in schools and the shaping of this program during 2023 and subsequent years.</p> <p>This strategy works in parallel to approaches for curriculum familiarisation and implementation by the government and Catholic sectors from 2023 - 2026.</p>			

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<p>Leadership Institute The AISSA Leadership Institute supports governing councils, leaders and leadership teams to govern and lead in a rapidly changing education landscape</p> <p>Building leadership capacity and capability</p>	<p>The AISSA Leadership Institute builds the leadership capacity and capability of leaders at all levels to effectively lead in these volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) times.</p> <p>Contemporary and quality programs will be offered to the range of leaders, including aspiring, middle and senior leaders. This will include a networking hub for principals new to the Independent sector, as well as separate hub for Deputy Principals. A Women in Leadership program will provide an opportunity for women to connect with and learn from other successful women, from both inside and outside of education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders will develop contemporary leadership skills and capabilities that will enable them to navigate uncertainty, innovate and lead with confidence. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of participants report an improved understanding and confidence to effectively lead school operations and change in a rapidly changing education landscape. <p>88% achieved</p>	

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	<p>School Impact Hubs will continue to support school leaders to explore alternative approaches to recognition of learning that can capture the dynamic complexity of learning and its artefacts. Impact Hubs will explore local and global partnerships and will focus on the ways leaders can create a culture that welcomes innovation, change and renewal, in addition to strategies to build culture and gain commitment from staff.</p> <p>Feedback and qualitative school data are used to share school successes and inform current and future program directions.</p>			
<p>Early Career and Mentor Teacher Development</p> <p>Inducting early career teachers to the profession through the provision of professional learning and mentoring</p>	<p>The quality of support early career teachers receive is critical in helping them cope with the demands of the job, build morale and increase their knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early career teachers will feel supported and successful in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establishing positive learning environments - the crafting and implementation of effective teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60% of early career teachers participating in the Early Career Teacher Program will report enhanced understanding and confidence as a beginning teacher. 89% achieved 	

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	<p>This program will bring together early career and mentor teachers to provide opportunities for collaborative learning and practice-focused mentoring.</p> <p>Referencing the quadrants the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has identified as critical to successful induction – Professional Practices; Professional Identity; Wellbeing; and Orientation, this program will present an invaluable opportunity for reciprocal professional relationships to grow and flourish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - their identity and participation as professionals in their school community and - gathering evidence of their practice aligned to the Proficient career stage to meet the requirements for full registration with the SA TRB. • Mentors will grow in their practice-focused mentoring skills and confidence to support and guide their early career teacher. • Reciprocal professional relationships will grow between the early career teacher and their mentor. <p>Achieved</p>		

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	<p>Specific foci will include fostering environments for reciprocal and dialogical conversations; developing positive student relationships and learning environments, building teacher confidence to growing cultural capacity; and exploring enacting curriculum frameworks including the new Early Years Learning Framework, the Australian Curriculum v9.0 and teaching and learning in the senior years.</p> <p>This program supports the building of practice-focused mentoring, professional relationships, teacher resilience and wellbeing. Within the broad program framework, participant feedback through surveys and exit tickets will allow sessions to be nuanced to meet teacher need.</p>			

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<p>School Improvement Model</p> <p>Each Independent school is supported to meet both national obligations and strategic school improvement initiatives, through the provision of expert support and advice</p>	<p>The AISSA Senior Educational Consultant Team will continue in the long-established and strategic approach of working with individual leadership teams. This approach fosters excellence in strategic, instructional and transformational leadership attributes, to progress both the school's strategic directions and national and state obligations.</p> <p>This is undertaken through a range of bespoke services including school visits and meetings, as well as the development of resources and supporting documents. Support is tailored to meet the unique context of each site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools continue to strengthen their structures, practices and the environments that underpin quality schooling. <p>Achieved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of schools have been supported with school improvement initiatives. <p>100% Achieved</p>	

2023 Budget Expenditure

Project Activities	Reform Support Funding
NCCD	
Improving NCCD	\$244,042
NAPLAN Online	
Assisting schools administer NAPLAN	\$93,319
Improving governance and financial management	
Improving governance and financial management	\$46,130
Reform Direction A - Improving Student Learning and Achievement	
High Impact School Improvement Tool	\$198,212
Supporting Implementation of the Australian Curriculum v9.0	\$111,109
Reform Direction B - Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement	
The AISSA Leadership Institute	\$223,852
Early Career Teacher Development	\$41,763
Reform Direction C - Enhancing the national evidence base	
National improvement & school improvement	\$362,983
Administration of Projects	\$132,590
TOTAL	\$1,454,000