

Non-Government Reform Support Strategic Plan

2019-2022

Independent Schools Queensland

Non-Government Reform Support Fund

Independent Schools Queensland – Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Queensland's 210 independent schools are a vital part of the state's education system. They are diverse and decentralised as well as being autonomous. They do not receive the direct system support available to most other schools in Australia.

The Non-Government Reform Support Fund (NGRSF) will ensure Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) can provide the support and assistance to independent schools to implement reform priorities. NGRSF means support will be available to more staff in more schools and in more locations. Without the NGRSF, the support provided by ISQ to independent schools to implement national policy initiatives would be limited in scope and reach.

The NGRSF, through the annual ISQ Action Plan, will support schools to implement the three reform directions outlined in the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA):

- a) Supporting students, student learning and student achievement;
- b) Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement; and
- c) Enhancing the national evidence base.

The NGRSF also supports the implementation of state specific actions included in the bilateral agreement between Queensland and the Commonwealth on implementation of school education reform and priorities identified by the Federal Minister for Education and Training.

The strategic long-term objectives of the NGRSF for ISQ are to support schools to develop:

- a strengths-based improvement agenda that is driven by high-quality teaching and school leadership, supported by ethical and expert governance and enriched through effective partnerships with parents and communities;
- a deliberate focus on evidence-based differentiated teaching and learning to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for every child;
- capacity across each school to amplify the impact of support and contribute to sustainable improvement; and
- support to collect, manage and utilise educational data to communicate impact and improvement.

These objectives will be achieved through a range of strategies including:

- Provision of professional development to expand the capabilities of school leaders and staff in the identified reform areas. This professional development will include a significant proportion of online learning opportunities to cater for the needs of regional and rural schools;
- Individual school reviews and assessments (e.g. readiness for NAPLAN Online, whole school reviews with a focus on educational outcomes, governance reviews);
- School based projects and pilots (e.g. education data projects);
- Consultancy support in relation to implementation of reform initiatives and school improvement strategies;
- Courses and networking opportunities (e.g. Aspiring Principals, Support for Curriculum Leaders);
- Direct support services (e.g. ATSI educational strategies).

ISQ will apply qualitative and quantitative evaluative tools and strategies to measure the impact of all major NGRSF programs and services. All measurement and evaluation activities undertaken by ISQ will align to the NSRA's performance framework.

Current context

ISQ provides leadership and support to independent schools and represents and promotes the interests of independent schools to government and the community. ISQ plays a key role in assisting schools to implement reforms, including those agreed to in the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA).

Queensland's 210 independent schools are a vital part of the state's education system. Together, these schools educate more than 122,000 students, or 15 per cent of Queensland's school students.

Independent schools offer parents' choice in the education of their children. They enable families to select schools and early learning programs that best serve the children's needs. Independent schools also enable families to choose schools/early learning programs that best promote the values they believe are important.

A key feature of Queensland Independent schools is diversity. The sector comprises:

- Non-denominational schools
- Schools with church or ethnic affiliations e.g. Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Jewish and Islamic schools
- Montessori schools
- Steiner schools
- Schools that specialise in serving students with learning difficulties
- Special Assistance Schools
- Schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Schools with programs for gifted and talented students.

In addition to diversity in affiliations and alignment with different educational philosophies, the Queensland independent sector is characterised by its decentralised nature. Independent schools are in 37 different Local Government Areas across the state. 40% of schools are located outside of the south-east corner of the state. They play a critical role in the provision of schooling in Queensland regional areas.

The decentralised nature of the Queensland independent sector presents challenges and opportunities for school engagement in reform agendas. The provision of support and assistance across a decentralised sector also presents challenges.

Independent schools are autonomous stand-alone entities and therefore do not receive the direct systemic support available to most Australian schools.

Given the autonomous nature of independent schools, it is essential that reform activities are contextualised to local needs. As a result, ISQ provides services, reform support and activities for independent schools which are responsive to each individual school's operating context.

The NGRSF will ensure support is available to more staff in more schools and in more locations. Without the NGRSF, the support provided by ISQ to independent schools to implement national policy initiatives would be limited in scope and reach.

The NGRSF activities are designed and implemented following extensive consultations with reference groups representative of the sector.

National Policy Initiatives

The NGRSF, through the annual ISQ Action Plan, will support schools to implement the three reform directions outlined in the NSRA:

Supporting students, student learning and student achievement

Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement

Enhancing the national evidence base

State-based cross sector initiatives as agreed to in Schedule E of the NSRA that address these reform directions will also be supported through the NGRSF:

- Implement Queensland's new senior assessment and tertiary entrance system
- Expand the Transition Support Service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students transitioning to and from boarding schools
- Recognise the explicit value of teaching experience and proven ability in the classroom by rewarding highly accomplished and lead teachers
- Conduct moderation of Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability across Queensland schooling sectors.

All three schooling sectors in Queensland have identified and are collaboratively progressing these reforms as they build on Queensland's existing successful education reform agenda by:

- a. continuing the state's longstanding improvement trajectory, adopting a 'sharp and narrow' focus on actions that have the greatest impact across the system;
- b. adopting strength-based narratives, discourses and programs;
- c. pursuing learning gain alongside social and emotional well-being for students and teachers;
- d. enabling schools to lead their own improvement journey - with strong regional and system support and within frameworks for quality assurance;
- e. continuing a focus on building an evidence base and using it to determine next steps at the micro and macro levels;
- f. engaging with stakeholders to co-design strategies so they have the support of those who will implement and be affected by them;
- g. maintaining high standards across a range of learning options to ensure students can participate in a rapidly changing economy and society; and
- h. working effectively across schooling sectors to improve student learning outcomes.

ISQ specific reform activities as agreed in Schedule E of the NSRA, aligned to the national reform directions and developed and endorsed by representative groups across the sector, will also be implemented through the NGRSF. These include:

Supporting students, student learning and student achievement

- Readiness for NAPLAN Online and Utilising Educational Data for School Improvement
- Improving Student Outcomes through Quality Teaching and Learning
- Supporting the ATSI Educational Strategy
- Achieving Excellence in Curriculum and Assessment
- Excellence in Online Learning for School Staff

- Support Schools to utilise the Early Start screening tool or like-measures.

Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement

- Supporting Good Governance and Financial Management
- Empowering School Self Improvement
- Developing Effective School Leaders
- Supporting Great Teachers in Independent Schools
- Prioritise support for rural and regional schools to access PD on student wellbeing
- Increase support for schools through resources and PD to sustain and improve parent engagement strategies.

Enhancing the national evidence base

- Improving the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
- In addition to the reform priorities identified in the NSRA, the NGRSF activities will also address the priorities nominated by the Minister for Education and Training, namely -
 - Quality assurance and support for Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability;
 - Assisting in the implementation and delivery of NAPLAN Online; and
 - Improving governance and financial management practices in the non-government school sector.

Working with the Queensland Government to implement reforms

The independent sector through Independent Schools Queensland has a collaborative relationship with the Queensland Government and works closely with the Department of Education across all aspects of schooling provision.

Independent Schools Queensland has worked closely with the Department of Education in the identification of priorities as agreed to in Schedule E of the NSRA.

Regular and scheduled meetings will be held with various officers from the department including the Director-General to monitor the implementation of reform initiatives and to promote cross-sector collaboration.

Further, working groups and cross-sector committees will be established as required to progress reform initiatives.

Objectives

The strategic long-term objectives of the NGRSF for ISQ is to support schools to develop:

- a strengths-based improvement agenda that is driven by high-quality teaching and school leadership, supported by ethical and expert governance and enriched through effective partnerships with parents and communities;
- a deliberate focus on evidence-based differentiated teaching and learning to enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for every child;
- capacity across each school to amplify the impact of support and contribute to sustainable improvement; and
- support to collect, manage and utilise educational data to communicate impact and improvement.

The activities ISQ will use to achieve these objectives will be outlined in the annual ISQ NGRSF Action Plan following appropriate consultation with independent schools. Activities will principally include:

- Provision of professional development to expand the capabilities of school leaders and staff in the identified reform areas. This professional development will include a significant proportion of online learning opportunities to cater for the needs of regional and rural schools;
- Individual school reviews and assessments (e.g. readiness for NAPLAN Online, whole school reviews with a focus on educational outcomes, governance reviews);
- School based projects and pilots (e.g. education data projects);
- Consultancy support in relation to implementation of reform initiatives and school improvement strategies;
- Courses and networking opportunities (e.g. Aspiring Principals, Support for Curriculum Leaders); and
- Direct Support services (e.g. ATSI educational strategies).

All activities will be responsive to the needs of independent schools and focused on long-term sustainable reform. They will also ensure that independent schools are meeting the requirements of the *Australian Education Act*.

Measurement and Evaluation

ISQ applies qualitative and quantitative evaluative tools and strategies to measure the impact of all major programs and services that are designed to deliver long-term strategic objectives of the National Agreement and supported by the Reform Support Fund.

Tools used to measure long-term objectives include:

- Triannual, whole of organisation satisfaction surveys
- Surveys assessing satisfaction and impact after every professional learning event, program or service
- Program evaluations delivered by external partners
- Board and governing body evaluations
- School Reviews aligned to the National School improvement Tool
- The Professional Growth Tool – a survey that measures growth in teacher’s confidence across all the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- AITSL’s 360 Survey to measure growth as a result of the Aspiring School Leaders Program
- Program specific evaluative frameworks that gather data about teacher practice, student outcomes and sustainable change in the areas of targeted improvement.

Evidence based theories and standards underpin ISQ’s evaluation of progress and impact towards long-term strategic objectives. For example:

- School improvement programs and school reviews are aligned to the “Good to Great” indicators (McKinsey) and the National School Improvement Tool (ACER)
- Teaching, learning and school leadership use Evaluative Thinking Strategies (Timperley, Earl), Spirals of Inquiry (Timperley, Kaiser and Halbert) and Action Research (Lewin, Stringer)
- The Effective Governance program is aligned to state and national legislation and complies with the governing and reporting standards for the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and the Good Governance Principles and Guidelines for Not-for-Profits developed by the Australian Institute of Company Directors
- The teaching and leadership surveys are based on the Australian Professional Standards for Principals and Teachers (AITSL)

- Key academic and external partners currently supporting ISQ to evaluate program impact in schools include Queensland University of Technology (HALT Certification) and Emeritus Professor Helen Timperley (Great Teachers in Independent Schools Program).

All measurement and evaluation activities undertaken by ISQ align to the NSRA's performance framework.