



Independent Schools Queensland Submission to the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs

Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students



Introduction

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak representative body for the independent schooling sector in Queensland. ISQ provides leadership and support to member schools and represents and promotes the interests of independent schools to government and the community.

Our 196 member schools are a vital part of the state's education system. Together, these schools educate nearly 120,000 students, or 15 per cent of Queensland's school enrolments. More than 100 independent schools offer early childhood care and learning programs, with this number increasing annually.

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. Independent schools are, therefore, a diverse group and include:

- Non-denominational schools
- Schools with church or ethnic affiliations. For example, 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

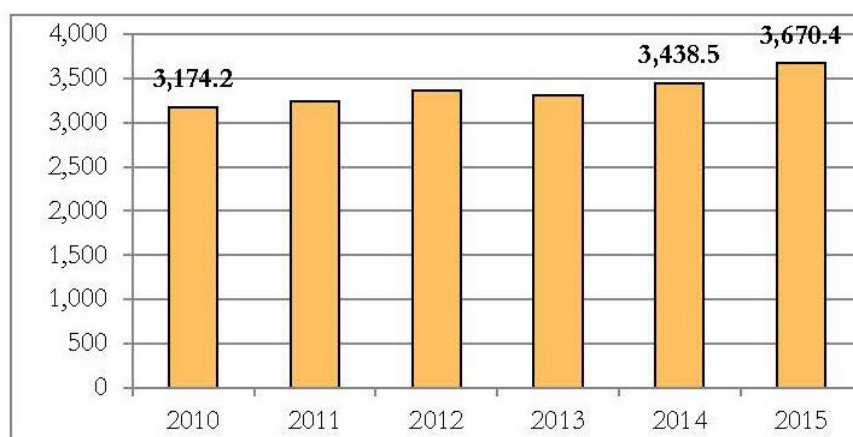
Queensland independent schools and Indigenous education

More than 3,600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend independent schools in Queensland.

Indigenous enrolments at independent schools increased from 3,438 students in 2014 to 3,670 in 2015. This is equivalent to a 6.7 per cent increase.

Over the five year period from 2010 to 2015, Indigenous enrolments increased by 496 students; equivalent to an average annual growth rate of 2.9 per cent. (Refer Figure 1).

Figure 1: Indigenous Student Enrolments, 2010-15



Approximately 94 per cent of Queensland’s 196 independent schools have Indigenous enrolments. Some schools are almost entirely Indigenous; nearly a quarter of Indigenous students are enrolled in four independent schools that cater predominantly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Urban and regional boarding schools also enrol Indigenous students, many of whom come from remote communities.

Indigenous students represent 3.1 per cent of all enrolments at independent schools in 2015, up from 3.0 percent in 2014 and 2.9 per cent in 2013.

ISQ commitment to Indigenous education

ISQ respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander past and present traditional owners. ISQ also acknowledges the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians to the education of all children.

ISQ supports member schools to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve the best possible educational outcomes. We also support schools to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their education programs and curriculum.

ISQ services are focussed on supporting member schools to achieve the aims of the Commonwealth Government’s *Closing the Gap* education initiatives and the goals of the new *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy*.

Targeted ISQ support includes:

- Student Learning
- Guidance to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into education programs
- School leadership and whole-school planning
- Cultural awareness
- STEM education
- Online learning resources
- Networking events
- Representation on local, state and federal committees

Submission process

ISQ approached Queensland independent schools with significant numbers of Indigenous enrolments for this submission. Independent schools were asked to provide feedback regarding what is working well in their contexts, why, and provide recommendations for the future against each of the inquiry's seven terms of reference.

A summary of feedback from member schools is in [Attachment A](#).

ISQ views on the Terms of Reference

Below is a summary of views against each terms of reference. For more detailed information, please refer to Attachment A.

Access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling

A number of approaches are supporting access to, and effective participation in, pre-schools, playgroups and kindergartens.

Providers offer flexible enrolment procedures and engage attendance officers to encourage parents and carers to send their children to pre-school and early learning programs. Given that government education funding does not specifically cover this service, schools divert funds from learning to cover attendance officer salaries.

Early learning screening and developmental checks are helping ensure that learning issues such as disability and barriers to learning such as social and emotional wellbeing issues are identified early. Early detection enables schools to respond appropriately to children's needs before they start school. In many cases, the screening services are funded by the school itself. In addition, the number of services is limited and many are not located on school grounds, resulting in access issues for parents and carers.

Additional government funding is required for schools to provide attendance officers, screening services and other ancillary but necessary support such as transition days, to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are school-ready.

The provision of boarding school education and its outcomes

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities, independent boarding schools are often the only option to complete their education given the lack of suitable educational facilities in home communities.

These students often require extensive and multi-faceted support to make the challenging transition from remote communities to intensive educational environments. Independent school staff facilitate this transition by establishing strong links with families, assisting with transport, providing advice to students on clothing, health and hygiene and addressing mental health issues. Transition support is not always part of standard government education funding. As such, many schools divert funding from learning to provide this support.

It is also necessary for teaching staff to undertake professional development to ensure teachers have an adequate understanding of Indigenous boarding students, their communities and home languages. Current government resourcing is often not sufficient to cover these additional costs to improve teacher cultural awareness.

Targeted funding for school-community partnerships and student wellbeing services is required to encourage attendance and retention of Indigenous boarding students. Funding for professional learning would also ensure teaching staff have sufficient understanding and skills to cater for Indigenous students' needs.

Access to, participation in, and benefits of different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia

Many independent schools face funding challenges to effectively support Indigenous students with particular barriers to education. Many students live in remote communities that do not have access to medical services that can address health issues such as hearing loss. Other Indigenous students use English as a second, third or fourth language or dialect, and require support to access the curriculum. Making the challenging cultural transition to mainstream educational environments can also result in engagement or attendance issues.

A number of schools offer flexible learning options for disengaged or 'at-risk' Indigenous students including Year 13 for young mothers and the provision of hands-on educational programs, e.g., vocational education and training on rural sites.

Schools also embed Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum and school life through links with elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Schools assess and profile Indigenous students' literacy and provide specific EAL/D strategies to strengthen student English language proficiency and support learning.

Targeted government funding is required to support the provision of flexible learning options and workforce development to ensure Indigenous students' access to, and full participation in, school life.

Engagement and achievement of students in remote areas

In many cases, students from remote areas are more likely to achieve if educational programs are linked to employment opportunities in their home communities.

Queensland independent schools in regional and remote areas seek to offer study options to Indigenous students that are relevant to remote community and industry needs. Current government funding limits the range of programs schools can provide.

Government funding for schools servicing students from remote areas is required to provide broad education offerings including minor certificate courses, vocational education and training and Authority subjects.

Impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience different models of educational services

Many Queensland Indigenous students begin their education in remote community schools that offer more traditional ways of learning. Frequently, these students make the switch to mainstream secondary schools during adolescence and are exposed to different cultural and educational expectations at a vulnerable time in their lives.

To support students, independent schools encourage families to visit the school and meet staff before the school year commences. These ‘transition days’ are essential for staff to get to know the student, their educational background and cultural and language considerations. Schools fund these student support events in addition to travel and accommodation costs for families.

Targeted government funding is required to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from remote communities make a smooth transition to mainstream schools, and lay the foundation for regular attendance and retention necessary for positive student outcomes.

Best practice models, both domestically and internationally

Queensland independent schools are implementing a range of strategies to improve literacy, numeracy and general educational outcomes for Indigenous students including:

- Queensland Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners to support ESL and EAL/D learners to improve English language proficiency
- School-based coaching and mentoring for teachers
- Personalised Learning Plans for each students
- Transition support classes on literacy and numeracy for Years 7 and 8

Many schools lack staff with the specialist skills and experience to implement effective strategies such as these. Targeted government support for workforce development will ensure more schools and more teaching staff can provide culturally-appropriate strategies to boost Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes.

Comparisons of school models in the transition to further education and employment outcomes.

Due to language and cultural differences, Indigenous students regularly require additional support to transition to further education and employment. Independent secondary schools provide specialised career guidance and counselling and links with registered training organisations that specialise in servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Schools also work with industry and universities to support student post-school pathways.

These activities come at a significant financial cost to schools. Due to financial constraints at home, Indigenous students also face logistical challenges such as transport costs to access further education and training.

Government support for school-based vocational education and training is required to boost transition and pathways options to post-schooling.

Conclusion

ISQ is committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and to increasing the capacity of independent schools to enhance the educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

ISQ requests that the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs takes into account the feedback from Queensland independent schools in its current considerations.

Independent Schools Queensland

30 October 2015

Attachment A - Responses from Queensland Independent Schooling Sector

The aims of the inquiry are to identify the best opportunities and pathways we can give to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to assist them to succeed in school, regardless of whether they live in a remote community or in a regional or urban centre. This inquiry will identify the strategies and educational models that have been most successful in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to reach their full potential from pre-school to further and higher education.

Aspect of Inquiry		
Item 1: Access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling		
What is working	Reasons 'Why' it is working	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mums, Dad's and Bubs Playgroups assisting young parents and carers to make the transition to the school environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> engaging more families in the education of their children earlier educating young families to support their children's early learning increase in young Indigenous Dad's being involved in their children's early learning retaining more pre-schoolers in early learning programs to make them 'school ready' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should be addressed in the action plan for national collaboration related to the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i> More support required to staff and facilitate school-based early learning activities and programs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early learning screening and developmental checks for pre-schoolers: e.g. ear health, eyesight, and developmental checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures young pre-schoolers have learning issues and barriers to learning identified earlier to ensure they are 'school ready' Ensures that when formal schooling commences, teachers are fully aware of the student's individual needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should be addressed in the action plan for national collaboration related to the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i> Improved access to services for families and pre-schoolers in metro, regional and remote locations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible enrolment procedures in Prep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows families to gradually be introduced to formal schooling when and as they are ready and ensures continued attendance and retention of the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support to schools to provide flexible local action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment of a Home-School Liaison / Attendance Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This role has proven to assist schools to establish positive relationships with families in the early years of schooling increasing attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more financial support for 'Workforce Development' in schools to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home/school liaison / attendance officers:

Aspect of Inquiry Item 2: the provision of boarding school education and its outcomes		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of boarding for students in remote and regional country areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By providing a cultural support, broad education choices and health care support independent boarding schools have a positive impact for students who come from communities where education is not a strong focus and where community issues often impact on students' long term outcomes and well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent schools offering boarding use much of the schools funds to support boarding students from remote locations; independent schools have recently found that family choice of which independent school to attend has excluded students from vital financial transition support funds impacting on families, schools and adversely affecting student retention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School- Community Liaison Officers to establish good community links and relationships between the feeder remote communities and the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This assists smooth transition of students from remote communities to school • This provides on-going communication for students and teachers with families in remote communities to support continued attendance, long-term retention of students and has positive effects on pathways for post compulsory education choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are currently funding this activity which is a burden to the overall finances of the school. • This should be addressed under the "Partnerships" area of the <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular visitation program where school staff visit remote communities to meet family and to address any issues of the boarding students and their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This maintains positive relationships between the student, the family and the school • Students are happier at school and tend to attend regularly including returning to school promptly after school holiday periods • Arising issues are addressed immediately allowing students to focus on learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boarding schools would relish additional support funds to assist with this important activity • This should be addressed under the 'Partnerships', 'Attendance' and 'Transitions' areas of the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing professional development for staff to improve cultural awareness and understanding of students, families, communities and home languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where professional learning for staff has been provided for teaching and ancillary staff the school becomes a more 'culturally safe' learning environment, students and families experience more of a sense of belonging and teachers have a greater understanding of the importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National support for 'Workforce Development' should be addressed under areas for national collaboration in the action plan of the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i> • Targeted funding for this purpose would be recommended

Aspect of Inquiry		
Item 3: access to, participation in, and benefits of different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-engaging students in flexible learning options e.g. Year 13 for young mums; rural sites linking learning with farming activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides basic curriculum targeted at individual student's ability levels, rather than chronological age. Provides flexible learning environments with a variety of learning options across a variety of interests and training opportunities linked with post-schooling; Gives students an opportunity for success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended government support would be valued to maintain these flexible options • This should be addressed under the 'Partnerships', 'Attendance' and 'Transitions' areas of the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning in curriculum and school life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' home background, culture and language is valued having a positive effect on student well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage schools to address this at the local level • National support for engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and community members to deliver professional learning should be a focus under 'Workforce Development' in the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Learning on ESL and EAL/D learning assessment and profiling, and teaching strategies using valuable tools such as the Qld. <i>Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers know their students strengths and areas which require learning support, adjustment and differentiated teaching and learning catering for individual student needs across all subject areas • Students' home languages and cultures are recognised and valued and used as a basis for strengthening English language proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage schools to address this at the local level • National support for professional learning for teachers should be a focus under 'Workforce Development' in the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i> with funding to support this area

Aspect of Inquiry		
Item 4: engagement and achievement of students in remote areas		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a variety of study options including minor Certificate Courses, VET, courses work and training, and OP subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study options can cater for links with employment back in community where required or provided pathways to higher education • Study options also cater for the maturation and educational interests and ability of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued focus of the Action Plan in the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i> to support schools to be able to offer a variety of study options rather than a few narrow streams of study and training

Aspect of Inquiry		
Item 5: impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience different models of educational services		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition days involving child and parent /carer interviews prior to school commencement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition days and interviews have insured high success rates of acceptance of enrolment and retention of students compared to families who don't go through this process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to implement 'Readiness for Schooling' strategies through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships and Bursaries offered by independent schools to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based bursaries and scholarships for Indigenous students are few and far between as they draw heavily on individual independent schools' finances. However, where bursaries and scholarships are offered students have an opportunity to be educated where families would otherwise not be able to afford attendance at these schools. Many students who are 'at risk' in communities need this option for educational and personal safety reasons and independent schools often provide this at great expense to the school. Long-term however, students exit school in a stronger position to have an excellent chance of breaking the poverty and social disadvantage cycle in their family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools providing bursaries and scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students require continued government support to provide this option for families for students 'at risk'

Aspect of Inquiry		
Item 6: best practice models, both domestically and internationally		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qld. Bandscales for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Learners and use of the Capability Framework – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These two educational tools provided with professional learning support for teachers is having positive impact on student learning as teachers know their student needs, can differentiate teaching and learning accordingly and track and monitor their own professional journey of knowledge against the National Professional Standards for Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to implement EAL/D teaching and learning strategies under 'Workforce Development' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based mentoring of programs for teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based literacy and numeracy mentoring programs have proved successful and enhanced teacher unit planning and student literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to implement school-based teacher mentoring initiatives under 'Workforce Development' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent schools that have PLPs for every Indigenous student have found that their monitoring of student learning is regular and targeted, giving students every opportunity to succeed • Parent and carers are involved in the educational decision making of their children learning program • Primary and secondary students are engaged in their own milestones of success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to continue implementing personalised learning Plans (PLPs) for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students needs to be an integral part the 'Accountability' aspect of the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition support classes with greater emphasis on helping students with basic literacy and numeracy in Yrs. 7 & 8 including additional tutoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low literacy and numeracy classes for new students entering Years 7 & 8 assist students to gain basic functional literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge to enter mainstream classes; targeted tutoring has also improved students success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent schools often provide (at their own expense) these support structures to aid students' success when transitioning to secondary schooling. Support for schools to provide this support on a continuing basis could be a funded under 'Literacy & Numeracy' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct Instruction (DI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some application of Direct Instruction (DI) is working in limited areas in the independent sector where students have not previously experienced learning success however, it is applied in conjunction with Australian Curriculum subjects; a blended curriculum is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, support for schools to provide DI instruction under 'Literacy & Numeracy' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>

Aspect of Inquiry Item 7: comparisons of school models in the transition to further education and employment outcomes		
What is working	Reasons 'Why'	Recommendations to the Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career guidance and counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing choice to students; matching students with future direction pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to provide school-based career guidance and counselling initiatives under 'Transition Pathways' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with Registered training organisations (RTOs) and Universities and DATSIP officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a variety of options for student support for training and education pathways assists students and their families to make informed decisions on students' future directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to provide school-based career guidance and counselling initiatives under 'Transition Pathways' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools engaging in school-based STEM education activities and projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in school-based STEM education projects are having greater opportunity to experience Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths as a possible pathway into future education and employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for schools to provide school-based STEM initiatives under 'Transition & Pathways to Post Schooling' through the new <i>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy</i>