

# **SUBMISSION BY THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA TO THE INQUIRY BY THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE INTO ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION**

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) is a voluntary organisation of non-government schools in Western Australia.

AISWA, together with its counterpart organisations in other States, is affiliated with the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) located in Canberra. ISCA monitors developments of importance to independent schools and has been successful in influencing Federal policies and legislation which impact on all aspects of independent schools.

AISWA was founded in 1962 and currently has 151 member schools, both non-Catholic and Catholic, with a total enrolment of 52,000 students from kindergarten to Year 12, in metropolitan, country and remote areas of WA. The following table and graph of the SES distribution of member schools provides further information about the sector.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Independent schools are committed to educating their students in a manner which prepares them for continuing education beyond school. Students who attend independent schools represent all sectors of the Western Australian community and have a diversity of aspirations and abilities. It is the challenge for schools whether primary, secondary or combined to provide an education that meets the needs of the individual student, one that is relevant to the stage of schooling and which prepares them for the next stage of their education. Schools achieve this goal in diverse ways depending on their philosophy and the curriculum structure that is deemed most appropriate to the context of the school.

In Western Australia the Education Act (1999) requires schools to base their teaching and learning programme and reporting to parents on the Western Australian Curriculum Framework. In addition they must meet the requirements set by the regulations which accompany the 2005 to 2008 Australian Government funding agreement. These two requirements are not entirely compatible and hence schools find themselves seeking to satisfy the requirements of the State and Australian Governments while at the same time providing a quality education to students and reporting clearly and accurately to parents on achievement.

## **THE WA CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

The Curriculum Framework covers the years K through 12 and defines core knowledge, skills and understandings. These are directly linked to progress maps which demonstrate how these three aspects develop in complexity at each stage of schooling and establishes the link between the stages. The Framework and the Progress Maps provide effective planning documents for curriculum development and mapping student progress. The Progress Maps give a common basis for understanding what constitutes progress in all learning areas across all phases of schooling. Work is currently in progress through the Curriculum Council to ensure that the Nationally Consistent Curriculum Outcomes are incorporated in the Curriculum Framework and its accompanying Curriculum Guides..

The quality of the curriculum and student achievement is assessed through the periodic Re-Registration of independent schools by the Office of Non-Government Education. In addition the results achieved by schools in the literacy and numeracy testing at Years 3,5,7 (and 9) inform schools of their progress in these two core areas which underpin all learning areas. The Association of independent Schools in Western Australia in conjunction with Murdoch University offers a professional learning programme to schools entitled NuLit Data. This programme funded in part through Australian Government Targeted Programmes allows schools to track student achievement overtime in each of the components of the Benchmark Tests and further allows them to compare their results with schools of like SES.

The Association has also worked with schools on reporting to parents so that school assessment of achievement can be aligned to results achieved in benchmark testing where such data exists.

The Association believes that students in Western Australia are well served by the curriculum developed by schools using the Curriculum Framework and Progress Maps as this clearly defines present achievement and the requirements for progress to higher levels.

## **YEARS 11 AND 12**

While there is a degree of turmoil as Western Australia implements its new Senior Secondary Curriculum it is important to note that there exists and will continue to exist an extensive moderation process to ensure comparability of results and for subjects which have an external examination this is augmented through statistical moderation and the scaling and grading process. It should also be noted that the requirement to demonstrate English Language competence through the completion of units in one of the English Courses offered in senior secondary will not change as the new curriculum is implemented.

Students who aspire to tertiary education must apply through the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC). TISC advises students on pre-requisites and is responsible for the calculation of the Tertiary Entrance Ranking which determines eligibility for specific courses. Nationally the calculation of a common tertiary entrance rank ensures comparability of student achievement.

The Association supports the move to a nationally consistent curriculum particularly in those subjects that recent ACER Research identified as having a high degree of commonality.

The funding provided by the Australian Government for VET (now VTE) in schools has led to a significant increase in the number of students opting for this pathway. VTE qualifications are nationally consistent due to the work of ANTA. This uniformity applies to both content and standards. Due to this students are prepared for a pathway with clear articulation from school to TAFE or another Registered Training Organisation regardless of geographic location. The introduction of the Beazley Medal (VET) to complement the Beazley Medal awarded to the highest achieving student in the Tertiary Entrance Examinations has contributed to raising the status of VET and acknowledging its importance as a pathway for students to further study and the workforce.

Year 10 students from 2007 will be required to complete 20 hours of community service in order to qualify for a Western Australian Certificate of Education when they graduate from school. It is anticipated that this requirement will add to the employability skills that are demanded of young people by employers.

The Association believes that it is essential that courses in the senior secondary years should be structured to permit a variety of pathways for students but that no matter what the pathway the courses should be challenging and meet the standards needed for progress to the next stage of education.

## **CONCLUSION**

AISWA believes that Australia has much to be proud of in the education that is provided to students during their schooling. However, there is a need to ensure that standards are maintained and that curricula are set in an efficient and effective manner which bears in mind the needs of all young Australians. In this context it is obvious that there is still much to be done to improve the standard of achievement by indigenous students beginning in the earliest years of education and continuing through to the conclusion of schooling.

While government policy will dictate the direction that education takes it is essential that all sectors of education are consulted and that haste does not create more problems as the policy seeks to remove others.