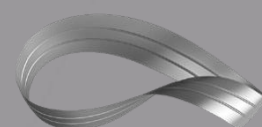

CHARTING AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS: CONSULTATION PAPER

ISA SUBMISSION

March 2026



INDEPENDENT
SCHOOLS
AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Independent Schools Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.



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1. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body for Independent schooling in Australia. ISA represents the sector on national issues and engages with the Australian Government, national agencies, media, key stakeholders, and the wider Australian community.

Working with the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), ISA represents almost 745,000 students, 1,230 schools and a workforce of over 128,600 people.

Independent schools are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools. They make a valuable contribution to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

The Independent school sector is diverse, and schools serve a wide range of communities. The latest available data shows that more than one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school. For secondary students, it is over one in five.

Students at Independent schools reflect the full diversity of Australian society – including those who experience one or multiple forms of disadvantage. These students include:

- high-needs students with disability attending special schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending remote 100 per cent Indigenous schools
- students living in regional, rural and remote locations
- highly disadvantaged and disengaged young people attending Independent special assistance schools.

Most families with children enrolled in Independent schools are middle-to-low-income earners, increasingly from culturally diverse backgrounds, and residing in outer-suburban and inner-suburban communities. Many of these families are currently facing economic stress and are making substantial sacrifices for their children's education.

According to the most recent data, the majority of Independent schools charge annual fees of less than \$6,000, and there was a greater number of schools charging less than \$1,200 per year than those charging over \$20,000. Some Independent schools charge no fees at all. More than half of the sector's recurrent income comes from parents and families.

Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a specific educational philosophy or alternatively recognised curriculum. Some have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs or to reflect the religious values of a community. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example, Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the sector but the majority of schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

2. INTRODUCTION

ISA prepared this submission in response to the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia's (the Academy) and the Australian Association for Research in Education's (AARE) consultation paper on their Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research.

The consultation paper outlines key priorities for education research over the next decade. ISA's response focuses on the identified key areas of advancing justice, quality and equity across the education system, and on strengthening the teacher workforce.

Drawing on Independent school case studies, this submission emphasises the importance of research that is grounded in lived experience, responsive to diverse contexts and capable of informing effective, sustainable policy. ISA's response highlights the need for collaborative, place-based and system-wide research approaches. These approaches should address intersecting forms of disadvantage, workforce pressures, and structural inequities across early childhood education and care, schooling, and post-school pathways.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

ISA recommends that:

- Educational research should be grounded on evidence and lived experience with a strong focus on implementation in diverse school and community contexts, which can scale if required.
- Research should support partnerships between researchers, schools, communities and education systems, particularly in regional, remote and disadvantaged settings. Place based approaches are essential to addressing intersecting forms of disadvantage and ensuring research findings are relevant and actionable.
- Research that affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be developed through sustained consultation, relationship-based engagement and co-design. This work should be supported by adequate funding for longitudinal data and research projects that enable trust-building, cultural safety and meaningful community participation, particularly in regional and remote areas and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Research should focus on identifying effective, whole-of-school approaches to supporting students with disability that integrate learning, wellbeing and behavioural supports to strengthen the evidence base for inclusive education.
- The decadal research agenda should prioritise strategies that improve access, participation and outcomes for learners in regional and remote areas. This includes research into innovative delivery models, digital and community-based solutions, workforce attraction and retention, and the removal of systemic barriers linked to location.
- Workforce research should recognise the interconnected nature of ECEC, schooling, higher education and VET, and examine workforce mobility, shared drivers of attrition and cross-sector competition. Research needs to support coordinated solutions across all education sectors and jurisdictions.
- Research should prioritise strategies that reduce workload pressures, improve staff wellbeing and strengthen induction, mentoring and professional support, particularly for early-career teachers and those working in disadvantaged, regional and remote settings.
- Improved workforce data capability is essential for effective planning and policy development. Research should support the development of consistent, comparable datasets that enable early identification of emerging shortages and better understanding of workforce flows across sectors.

- The Australian and state and territory Governments should support research that identifies how successful local and sector-led initiatives can be adapted and scaled. Aligning research priorities with funding, regulation and reform agendas will be critical to translating evidence into sustained school and system-level improvement
- National education research in the school should be sector-blind, embedding cross sectoral collaboration and understanding, underpinned by an understanding of the diversity of schools and students in all sectors.

4. JUSTICE, QUALITY AND EQUITY FOR ALL

While this section of ISA's submission explores equity issues affecting specific groups or cohorts, these issues are not experienced in isolation. Many students and families are members of multiple equity groups (such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families living in remote communities) and as such experience both amplified and intersecting forms of disadvantage. More research is required to better understand how those experiencing complex and multifaceted disadvantages can be supported to improve outcomes in education, health and wellbeing.

ISA recommends that education research draws on real world practice and considers how the groundbreaking innovations occurring in Independent schools across Australia can be leveraged and shared across education sectors. ISA's 2024 publication 'Improving outcomes for all: Leading reform through innovation' showcased ten schools who have implemented innovative approaches in the areas of equity, wellbeing and workforce.¹ These schools offer lived experience and practical insights that can inform and strengthen the development of education research.

4.1 FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

To ensure research and policy development which is likely to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has the intended outcomes, genuine consultation and co-design with First Nations peoples is required. Effective engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is fundamentally relationship-based, not transactional. Trust, respect and cultural safety are built over time through sustained presence. Effective educational research projects need to be adequately funded to enable relationship building, as one-off interviews and surveys risk missing key context or understanding which could be gained through a longer-term relational approach.

The following two case studies illustrate effective initiatives within the Independent sector aimed at reducing inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These examples provide valuable insights that can inform future educational research and practice.

4.1.1 Independent Schools Case Study – Future Footprints

The Future Footprints program was established in 2004 and is an initiative of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA). It is designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 18 participating Independent schools in Perth. The program aims to enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and broaden their post school opportunities through further education, training pathways and meaningful employment.

The program seeks to strengthen students' sense of belonging, cultural identity, and self-worth within their school communities, while equipping them with the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to thrive professionally, academically and personally. Future Footprints is grounded in an Aboriginal Family Model, built on the core principles of peer support, cultural connectedness, and leadership development. Over time, it has evolved into a well-established and collaborative partnership involving students, schools, parents, families, communities, and corporate sponsors.

¹ Improving Outcomes for All: Leading Reform Through Innovation, ISA, 2024, <https://isa.edu.au/documents/improving-outcomes-for-all-leading-reform-through-innovation-2/>

4.1.2 Independent Schools Case Study – Waratah Project

The Waratah Project Framework, developed by Independent Schools NSW through action research, is another exemplary model for embedding culturally responsive curriculum and student welfare policies. Implemented in more than 45 day and boarding schools across NSW and the ACT, the Waratah Outcomes Framework provides a holistic approach to creating culturally inclusive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It prioritises improved academic and wellbeing outcomes, fosters culturally informed relationships, builds culturally competent staff leadership, and embeds Indigenous culture and perspectives across the curriculum. The program is reinforced by updated NSW Education Standards Authority registration requirements mandating culturally responsive curriculum and welfare policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.1.3 Indigenous Boarding Schools

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities are the most educationally disadvantaged students in Australia. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in remote communities, there is limited or no access to school education, particularly at the secondary level. An Independent boarding school is often the only option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and regional communities who must board away from home to access education.

The Independent sector is the largest provider of boarding school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are educated across a range of settings and in different types of schools in the Independent sector. Some Independent boarding schools provide education to significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and some schools have entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts.

In 2023, twenty-five Independent boarding schools had more than 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. Of these schools, nine had 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, totaling 606 enrolments. Of the 2,335 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders in the Independent sector, close to half attend schools with either very large numbers or a high concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarders.

Many of these students come from remote communities where primary-level education is the only schooling locally available, and they must leave their communities to undertake secondary studies.

Often these schools serve students and families with limited or no capacity to contribute to the costs of their children's educational and boarding needs. Government funding, including ABSTUDY payments, play a central role in funding these services.

Educational research has a vital role to play in advancing the interests of Indigenous boarding schools and the communities they serve. By engaging directly with students, families, and school staff, research can illuminate the unique challenges and strengths present within boarding environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such research can:

- inform the development of culturally responsive practices
- support models that foster student wellbeing and academic success
- identify strategies that strengthen connections to culture and community while students are living away from home.

Collaborative, community-informed research would help to ensure that policy and practice are guided by the voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples, leading to more effective, respectful, and sustainable improvements in boarding education outcomes.

4.2 DISABILITY

Over 175,000 students with a disability attend 1,206 Independent schools in Australia, making up more than 23% of the student population. Nearly all (98%) Independent schools have enrolled students with disability. Additionally, 22,000 students attend 151 Independent special and special assistance schools specifically designed to support students with disability and other special needs.

Due to changing student cohort traits, Independent schools are increasingly required to support students with a diverse range of learning needs.

The increasing prevalence and complexity of disability and developmental vulnerability among school-aged children is driving a sustained growth in demand for disability support services within schools. These disability supports often include adjustments to curriculum and assessment, access to specialist allied health supports, inclusive learning design, and enhanced student wellbeing and behaviour supports.

Due to the increasing need for disability support services to be delivered in schools and classrooms, strengthening our understanding of which models of support are most effective in improving educational, wellbeing and post-school outcomes is a critical priority for education research. This needs to be balanced with the models' feasibility and affordability, as not all schools in all contexts will be able to access staff with the training required to deliver disability supports effectively. Areas of education research which would be of benefit to schools include the efficacy of whole-of-school inclusive practices, targeted interventions, early identification and response, and the integration of learning, wellbeing and behavioural supports.

Education research in this field will also need to contend with the workforce issues discussed below to inform policy settings that support inclusive education while remaining realistic and sustainable for schools over the long term.

4.3 REGIONAL AND REMOTE CHALLENGES

There is a critical opportunity for education research to address and reduce educational injustice in regional and remote areas compared to metropolitan centres. In these settings, students often face compounded disadvantage, including limited access to specialist teachers, fewer subject choices, inadequate infrastructure, and reduced opportunities for enrichment and engagement. Context-sensitive research can identify effective strategies to bridge these gaps, drawing on local knowledge and strengths to inform policy and practice.

Education research should aim to develop and evaluate models that enhance equity of access and outcomes for regional and remote learners. This includes investigating innovative delivery methods such as digital learning, community-based partnerships, and targeted interventions that are responsive to geographical and cultural diversity. By focusing on what works in real-world contexts, research can support the scaling of successful approaches and ensure that resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact.

Furthermore, research should examine how systemic barriers, such as workforce shortages, funding inequities, and policy misalignment, can be overcome to ensure all students receive a high-quality education regardless of postcode. Building evidence around sustainable solutions, including professional development for teachers, flexible curriculum design, and support for student wellbeing, will be essential for driving lasting change. A decadal research agenda grounded in collaboration with regional and remote communities will help to realise a more just and inclusive education system for all Australians.

5. A PREPARED AND WELL-SUPPORTED EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Australia's education workforce across Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), schooling (primary and secondary), higher education (including vocational education and training (VET) is experiencing sustained pressure. While workforce challenges manifest differently across sectors, common issues include shortages, uneven geographic distribution, high workloads, limited career pathways, and difficulties attracting and retaining staff in areas of greatest need. These pressures coincide with significant reform, demographic change, and rising expectations for education systems to deliver equitable outcomes for learners across the full educational continuum, from early childhood through to schooling, VET and higher education.

Importantly, workforce challenges are not confined within sectoral boundaries. ECEC competes directly with schools for qualified teachers; schools rely on higher education for workforce supply

while also contributing to attrition, due in part to workload and wellbeing pressures; and VET faces strong competition from industry for experienced practitioners. Higher education underpins workforce supply across all sectors through initial teacher education and trainer preparation, while also managing its own workforce sustainability challenges.

Addressing workforce issues therefore requires a coordinated, cross-sector approach that recognises these interdependencies, rather than siloed responses.

Both individual Independent schools and the Associations of Independent Schools (AIS) have developed practical and responsive initiatives that demonstrate how targeted investment, partnerships and sustained support can strengthen workforce attraction, retention and capability. These examples provide valuable evidence for future research priorities and policy design.

5.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The ECEC workforce faces acute and persistent shortages, particularly in low-socioeconomic, regional, remote and First Nations communities. Although demand for early childhood services has increased significantly due to policy reforms aimed at expanding access and participation, workforce supply has not kept pace. Lower wages, less secure employment conditions and limited career progression opportunities relative to schools continue to drive the loss of qualified early childhood teachers to school settings.

These challenges are compounded by fragmented regulatory and registration arrangements across jurisdictions and service types, as well as declining completions in early childhood initial teacher education programs. As the Charting Australian Education Research and Priorities paper states a “significant proportion of graduates with birth-to-primary qualifications ultimately choose employment in schools, reinforcing structural workforce instability in ECEC²”. Together, these factors mean that workforce shortages in ECEC are not simply a pipeline issue but reflect deeper structural and comparative conditions across the education system.

5.1.1 Independent schools case study - Early childhood education initiatives in Western Australia

AISWA has delivered a suite of early childhood education initiatives designed to strengthen teacher attraction, retention, capability and workforce diversity across Independent schools in Western Australia. These initiatives span early-career development, structured mentoring, leadership development and targeted support for early childhood teachers working across metropolitan, regional and remote contexts. Collectively, they have demonstrated strong levels of engagement and positive impact across diverse school settings.

A particular focus has been placed on Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, where AISWA delivers sustained, hands-on coaching, mentoring and planning support for early childhood teachers. More than 100 Aboriginal educators across multiple remote communities have been supported through these programs, with consistent feedback from educators highlighting increased capability, confidence and reduced professional isolation. Strong demand to expand these programs shows the importance of long-term, place-based approaches that improve pay, conditions, career pathways and professional support to sustain the ECEC workforce.

5.2 SCHOOLING

The schooling workforce is under significant strain, with workload, wellbeing and retention emerging as critical challenges. Teachers and school leaders consistently report high levels of work intensity, administrative burden and emotional load, contributing to declining intentions to remain in the profession. These pressures are particularly acute in disadvantaged schools and in regional and

² Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. (n.d.). Charting Australian education research priorities and future directions: A consultation paper inviting input into a Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025–36. Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia

remote areas, where recruitment difficulties often result in out-of-field teaching and increased inequities in educational provision.

An ageing workforce, combined with a growing cohort of teachers approaching retirement, is intensifying supply pressures. At the same time, early-career teachers are more likely to leave the profession when induction, mentoring and professional support are limited. In regional and remote schools, workforce challenges extend beyond the school gate, with housing availability, access to professional learning, partner employment opportunities and the cost of travel for training all shaping teachers' capacity to take up and remain in roles.

When research and funding mechanisms are not sector-blind, they risk producing inequitable outcomes. The Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships provide a clear example of this. Under the current scheme, scholarships are available only to initial teacher education (ITE) graduates who commit to employment in government schools. Equivalent opportunities should be available to all ITE students, regardless of the school sector in which they choose to teach, to ensure a fair, effective and sustainable national teacher workforce.

5.2.1 Independent schools case study – Program Amplify

The Association of Independent Schools of the ACT has demonstrated a sustained commitment to early-career teacher development through Program Amplify, delivered in partnership with Transformative Schools. Program Amplify is designed to provide high quality induction and onboarding experiences through an evidence-informed, one year program. It is structured to complement individual schools' early career teacher programs by focusing on enhancing teachers' capacity to manage the increasing complexity of their roles. The program includes ongoing micro-coaching alongside face-to-face workshops and aims to support teachers in their progression from provisional to full teacher registration. Since Program Amplify began, 66% of ACT Independent schools (12 of 18) have participated. Ninety five percent of participants report increased confidence in classroom management and instructional strategies, 98% report improved mental health and wellbeing coping strategies, and 91.7% of participating schools (11 of 12) have continued their involvement each year, demonstrating sustained value and positive school level outcomes.

5.2.2 Independent schools case study – Early Career Teacher Programs in Western Australia

AISWA's Early Career Teacher (ECT) Programs support early career teachers through face to face and online professional learning that focuses on evidence-based pedagogy, essential professional skills, and reflective practice. In 2025, the programs reached 113 early career teachers across metropolitan, regional and remote schools. Teachers reported high satisfaction through positive feedback on content relevance, the quality of delivery, and the opportunities for bespoke learning and networking. The program builds confidence and capability and support networks in line with AITSL's Professional Knowledge, Practice, and Engagement domains.

5.2.3 Independent schools case study - ISNSW Teaching School Hubs

Independent Schools NSW has developed the Teaching School Hubs model to strengthen workforce supply and readiness through school-embedded initial teacher education. The model provides year-long placements in which trainees are employed one day per week while completing their studies, enabling immersive, practice-based preparation. Many of the participants are career-changers, migrants or from non-traditional pathways.

Delivered in partnership with 26 Independent schools and eight affiliated universities, the program attracts candidates from both metropolitan and regional areas while building practical skills and professional confidence. Structured mentoring and targeted professional learning support trainees to apply theory directly in classroom settings, while mentor teachers benefit from tailored professional learning and pathways towards higher levels of accreditation. By closely aligning teacher preparation with real-world school experience, the Teaching School Hubs model contributes to a more sustainable, confident and classroom-ready teaching workforce across the Independent sector.

5.2.4 Independent Schools case study – Teach Independent QLD

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) has supported workforce attraction through the Teach Independent QLD platform, enabling schools to advertise roles and promote the sector to prospective teachers. Twenty-nine regional schools have registered to advertise roles, and a total of 227 jobs have been listed. In parallel, ISQ has commissioned a state of the Independent sector workforce report to better understand the reasons teachers choose to work in Independent schools, what retention strategies are working and what challenges exist. The data is based on the survey of nearly 3000 staff in 88 ISQ schools. In addition to the whole of sector report each participating school received an individual report and support to unpack their data.

5.3 RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Across ECEC, schooling, higher education and VET, workforce challenges are deeply interconnected and cannot be sufficiently addressed through isolated, sector-specific solutions. Competition for qualified staff, uneven workforce distribution, shared drivers of attrition and common pressures such as staff wellbeing mean that workforce dynamics in one sector inevitably affect the others. Policy and research responses therefore need to adopt a system-wide perspective that recognises workforce mobility across the education continuum and the cumulative impact of reform, regulation and funding settings.

In the short term, stabilising the existing workforce must be a priority. Evidence consistently points to the need to reduce excessive workload, improve staff wellbeing and strengthen day-to-day professional support. Place-based barriers such as access to affordable housing, transport, childcare and professional learning, remain particularly significant in regional and remote communities and require targeted, locally responsive solutions. Addressing these factors is critical not only to retention, but also to ensuring equitable access to quality education for students in all locations.

Long-term workforce sustainability depends on coordinated investment in workforce pipelines, career pathways and data capability across sectors. This includes strengthening initial preparation and induction, creating clearer progression opportunities that do not rely solely on leadership role attainment, and improving recognition of prior learning and experience. Strong, comparable workforce data is also essential to support better planning, enable early identification of emerging shortages, and inform policy decisions that take account of workforce flows between ECEC, schools, higher education and VET.

Experience from the Independent school sector demonstrates that flexible, locally responsive and partnership-based approaches can deliver measurable workforce benefits. School-embedded initial teacher education models, structured mentoring and induction, and partnerships with universities and communities have been particularly effective in supporting early-career teachers, strengthening workforce readiness and improving retention. These approaches have also shown promise in addressing workforce challenges in regional and remote areas and in supporting educators from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. Research and policy settings that recognise and support this diversity of approach can help surface effective practice and avoid one size fits all solutions that may not work across all contexts.

Scaling successful workforce initiatives will require coordinated action by Australian, state and territory governments, in partnership with all education sectors. Aligning funding, regulation and workforce reform agendas offers a practical pathway to strengthening workforce supply, capability and sustainability across the full continuum of learning. A shared commitment to collaboration, evidence-informed policy and place-based implementation will be critical to building a resilient education workforce capable of meeting current and future demands.

6. ENSURING COLLABORATION ACROSS ALL SCHOOL SECTORS TO INFORM SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE

Cross-sectoral collaboration and shared understanding and knowledge are critical to ensuring that education research is grounded in lived experience, responsive to diverse contexts and capable of informing effective, sustainable policy.

As noted earlier in this submission, contrary to common misconception, the Independent school sector is extremely diverse. This diversity extends to the schools, to the students and to the families that choose Independent school for their child because it best suits the needs of their child.

ISA's latest analysis of enrolment trends shows that most of the growth in the Independent sector is in low – mid fee schools. In 2024 Independent schools with average annual fees below \$7,500 accounted for 44% of all Independent school enrolments yet accounted for 63% of additional enrolments since 2019. Independent schools with average fees less than \$2,500, including schools with no fee income, accounted for 8% of all Independent school enrolments but accounted for 18% of all additional enrolments.³

In the Independent school sector, schools that have no fee income are usually Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Schools (MATSIS) and Special Assistance Schools (SAS). Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Schools are often remote, are often very small and can be the only educational option available in a community. The Independent sector is also the largest provider of boarding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities. Boarding is often the only pathway for these students to access secondary education.

Special assistance schools cater primarily to students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and been growing at an extremely fast rate. These schools enrol students that do not fit into mainstream schooling in any sector, including the government sector.

The increase in the number of students with disability or other social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and the challenge of resourcing the supports needed by students is not a dilemma limited to any one sector of schooling. The majority of Independent schools are not high fee schools and, as stand-alone schools, most Independent schools do not have access to the systemic supports available to Catholic and government schools which can assist in covering the cost of the provision of supports. This means that often that any additional costs are borne by the school community.

Independent sector families are as disparate as the families in either government or Catholic schools. They include families in cities, regions and remote parts of Australia. One fifth of Independent school enrolments are in regional schools. They include families of all faiths, and also those seeking a particular pedagogical approach for their child. They also include families at all income levels.

What this data shows is that the perception of stark differences between the three schooling sectors – government, Catholic and Independent – is just that, a perception. The actual characteristics of the Independent sector are often little understood. Further, focussing only on the government sector, for example, for research would mean that one third of Australia's students are not being considered.

From ISA's perspective, often the biggest barrier to cross-sectoral collaboration in research in the school sector has been reaching agreement across all the jurisdictions, not just across sectors. Many state and territory Departments of Education have their own research programs and differences in jurisdictional approaches can make collaboration more difficult than might be thought.

The establishment of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has been an important step towards a national approach to education research. AERO involves all sectors of schooling in its research program, ensuring consultation and participation at each step. A sector blind approach to

³ ISA, Independent Schooling 2025 - <https://isa.edu.au/documents/independent-schooling-2025-enrolment-trends-characteristics-and-projections/> (accessed 25/02/2026)

research and an acknowledgement that all sectors of schools are diverse in nature, would go a long way to embedding cross sectoral collaboration and understanding.

In terms of approaches that can benefit the education workforce, as noted above, initiatives must be based on research that is not sector specific but rather encompassing of the whole profession. In ISA's submission to the Productivity Commission's *Five Pillars of Productivity Inquiries*, we note that only a cross-sectoral approach to workforce issues can provide a strong evidence base for identifying national trends. Detailed and cross-sectoral research could enable all sectors to have more detailed insights into the teacher workforce examine issues that impact on teacher attraction and retention.⁴

7. CONCLUSION

Building a strong education workforce calls for a coordinated, sector-wide approach that addresses both workforce challenges and educational inequities. Flexible, locally tailored strategies and targeted support are essential not only for retaining educators but also for ensuring students in all communities have access to quality educational and wellbeing outcomes. Investing in staff wellbeing, clear career pathways, and reliable national and cross-sectoral data sources, makes it possible to tackle persistent gaps while strengthening workforce capability across the education continuum.

The decadal plan is an opportunity for the alignment of funding, regulation, and reform, and for identifying and scaling successful initiatives already occurring in schools. By fostering collaboration and evidence-informed practice, the plan can help ensure that all educators no matter which sector they are from are well-supported and learners everywhere benefit from improved outcomes.

ISA would be happy to discuss our submission or be involved in further consultation.

Contact details

Joanna Mackie

Director, Education Policy

Joanna.Mackie@isa.edu.au

⁴ ISA, Five Pillars of Productivity Inquiry - <https://isa.edu.au/documents/isa-submission-to-the-productivity-commission-five-pillars-of-productivity-inquiries/> (accessed 25/02/2026)