

Teachers



Teachers are constantly under pressure, and not just from their daily interaction with students. The introduction of new curricula, and development of new ways of teaching and learning mean that our teachers are working in a state of constant change.

As with all Australian schools, independent schools are experiencing difficulty finding teachers in maths and science, and in particular for higher-level secondary maths, science and English courses.

More than 41,000 teachers were employed in the education of some 430,000 students in independent schools in 2005. This equated to 35,260 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers.

National FTE teacher numbers and student/teacher ratios, 2005

| | Government | Catholic | Independent | Total |
|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| FTE Teacher number | | | | |
| Primary | 85,229 | 20,659 | 13,258 | 119,147 |
| Secondary | 71,334 | 23,312 | 22,002 | 116,648 |
| Total* | 156,564 | 43,971 | 35,260 | 235,794 |
| Ratio of FTE Student/FTE Teacher | | | | |
| Primary | 16.1 | 17.9 | 14.6 | 16.2 |
| Secondary | 12.4 | 13.1 | 10.7 | 12.2 |

*Totals may not add due to rounding

Teachers within the independent sector practise their profession in a diverse range of environments and settings. From the high profile, older and established schools to the smaller and newer schools, located across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations, each school is different and presents its own teaching challenges.

The teaching environment continues to grow in complexity with the increased use of information and communications technologies (ICT) within schools, provision of more cocurricula activities, responding to students with special needs, increasingly complex reporting requirements, heightened measures to ensure the safety of students, and many other activities and initiatives.

In such an environment, it is important that proactive measures are undertaken to support teachers in responding effectively to these changes. The Australian Government has held a number of inquiries and introduced a range of educational initiatives to achieve this. In addition to contributing to these inquiries and initiatives, the independent schools sector makes a considerable investment in its teachers to ensure a quality education for students.





Standards of teaching in the sector

Teachers within the independent schools sector are required to meet the same standards as teachers in the Catholic and government sectors, with certain requirements to be met before they can teach. The arrangements vary between states and territories but these requirements include registration with the relevant authority, being a 'fit and proper' person, agreeing to abide by a Code of Ethics, and proficiency in the English language.

Most states and territories have some provision allowing schools to employ teachers without formal teaching qualifications for certain subjects such as trades, music, art and chaplaincy. Also, most states and territories conduct criminal background checks before registering a teacher and some have, or are developing, professional standards which all teachers working within the jurisdiction will need to meet.

Beyond meeting these requirements, the sector seeks to facilitate and maintain high levels of teacher quality. The quality of teaching within a school affects student learning and results, and the school's reputation.

School expectations of teachers

Many schools have a particular ethos and set of values which teachers are expected to share (see **The essential elements of school autonomy, page 11**). Each independent school or system is an employer, and has staffing policies and guidelines that reflect the school's particular focus and mission. This often means that schools are able to reinforce their school ethos by employing teachers who share the same philosophy, while at the same time bringing in new skills and fresh approaches.

The expectation is that teachers will not only concentrate on teaching their subject but also on the development of individual students. They are also encouraged to contribute to the broader life of the school through pastoral care programmes, sporting commitments, tutor groups, cultural activities, outdoor education and other activities.

Professional development

As an employing authority, schools have a vested interest in choosing wisely and looking after their staff. Schools and the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) place strong emphasis on the value of induction programmes for new teachers and ongoing professional development (PD). Schools invest considerable time and resources in providing, and releasing teachers for, ongoing PD. They also cover the cost of providing teacher relief.

It appears that the sector's emphasis on teacher quality is well placed. Research by consultants Irving Saulwick in 1998¹ revealed that quality of teaching was one of the main reasons parents chose independent schools (see **Diverse school choices by parents across Australia, page 20**). Subsequent research, including a 2003 Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) study² into parent and community member attitudes to schooling, has supported this finding. The emphasis on teacher quality is reflected in the number of awards made to teachers from independent schools at national and state and territory levels.

Teacher shortages

Teacher shortages across the whole schools sector continue to be an issue in some subject areas and in some geographic locations. Schools continue to have difficulty recruiting teachers in maths and science, particularly in the higher level courses, and also in higher level English such as the extended classes of Years 11 and 12. These shortages indicate the importance of recruiting teachers who are competent to teach at all levels of the subject within the school.

¹Irving Saulwick and Associates (1999). *What Parents Want from Their Children's Education in Independent Schools*. Condensed report of a qualitative study undertaken in 1998 for the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA), published by the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria Inc. and available at: www.isca.edu.au and www.ais.vic.edu.au

²DEST (2003). *Parents' and Community Members' Attitudes to Schooling: Report on Scoping Study*. Available at: www.dest.gov.au/research/publications/attitudes_to_schooling/report.pdf



Other subject areas experiencing teacher shortages are economics, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), and technology. Higher salaries within the corporate sector are attracting technology teachers and staff.

The situation is exacerbated for schools in country areas, and even more so for those in remote areas. These schools have greater difficulty attracting staff, and retention is always an issue. Many teachers are unfamiliar with life in a rural or remote setting and are reluctant to take up such employment, or, following recruitment to such locations do not stay long. Living in Australia's remote areas is challenging, and few opportunities for PD create a sense of isolation. Fortunately, the increasing use of ICT for this purpose is reducing the problem.

Teachers in rural and remote areas face additional pressures since relief teachers and casual relief teachers for short term situations are scarce. Schools in these areas tend to be smaller, with fewer staff, so covering staff absences from within is difficult, particularly for senior secondary levels. As a result, the norm is for teachers in these areas to leave after one year's service, although two to three years' service is not unusual.

Impact of new reporting demands

There has been much public discussion about the changes to reporting requirements for schools introduced by the Australian Government in 2005. Due to their high level of accountability to parents, most independent schools already have long-established practices that meet the new requirements. Indeed, independent schools and teachers are committed to communicating with parents through detailed reports, parent-teacher interviews, meeting with parents at other times, and phone and email contact.

The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) and the AISs have been supporting independent schools in adjusting their reporting processes to reflect the particular requirements of the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* (see **Accountabilities of independent schools, page 14**). Support has included briefings, PD sessions, and development of possible reporting formats.

For further information:

For recent sector submissions on teacher issues, visit the ISCA website at: www.isca.edu.au.

The following submissions are included:

1. ISCA submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training: Inquiry into Teacher Education (2005)
2. NCISA submission to The Review of Teaching and Teacher Education in relation to the discussion paper: Young people, schools and innovation: towards an action plan for the schools sector (2003)
3. NCISA submission to The Review of Teaching and Teacher Education in relation to the discussion paper: Strategies to attract and retain teachers of science, technology and mathematics (2002)



The following bodies are responsible for the registration of teachers in their state or territory. They are also involved in the development of professional standards, Codes of Ethics, and promotion of the teaching profession:

The Queensland College of Teachers: www.qct.edu.au

NSW Institute of Teachers: www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au

Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory: www.trb.nt.gov.au

Teachers Registration Board of South Australia: www.trb.sa.edu.au

Teachers Registration Board, Tasmania: <http://trb.tas.gov.au>

Victorian Institute of Teaching: www.vit.vic.edu.au

Western Australian College of Teaching: www.wacot.wa.edu.au

Other related websites:

Education Act 2004, ACT: www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2004-17/

Teaching Australia (formerly the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership):
www.teachingaustralia.edu.au

