

Curriculum initiatives



A number of independent schools excel in programmes for particular aspects of schooling and in so doing, provide leadership and innovation within the schools sector. Approaches to boys' education, middle schooling and vocational and technical education (VTE) are just three examples of this strength within the independent schools sector.

Boys' education

While Australian students perform well by international standards, research has revealed an increasing gap in the educational achievement of girls and boys. Boys have higher rates of school exclusion than girls, lower levels of school engagement and lower levels of participation in higher education.

The Australian Government has committed almost \$27 million for the period 2005-08 to improve the educational and social outcomes for boys through projects such as the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools and Success for Boys. Independent schools have continued to demonstrate their leadership in boys' education through participation in these and other projects. Some schools are coordinating information networks and professional development for teachers in boys' education.

The independent schools sector has significant breadth of expertise and experience in the provision of gender-specific schooling for students. Although 87 per cent of independent schools are coeducational, a significant number of students in the sector attend boys-only schools. In 2005, 12 per cent were in boys-only schools, 14 per cent were in girls-only schools, and 74 per cent were in coeducational schools.

Individual independent schools are also initiating within-school innovations to address the specific needs of boys, both through curriculum and pastoral care programmes. Some coeducational schools are providing parallel classes for boys in specific subject areas such as maths, science and English. Other schools are taking a 'rich task' or differentiated curriculum approach to engage boys, especially at upper primary and junior secondary levels. Other strategies to ease the transition of boys into secondary schooling include 'no homework' policies. There has also been a rapid growth in the provision of vocational education and training courses in independent schools to promote retention of boys through to matriculation.

Pastoral care initiatives include mentoring through student 'home' groups that are organised across year groups rather than drawing on students from one year level only, leadership and 'boys into men' programmes, and the engagement of parents in research projects on boys' education and student mentoring.

For further information:

Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) boys' education main page:

www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/boys_education/

DEST boys' education research and website links page: www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/boys_education/boys_education_research_and_websites.htm

Australian Government Success for Boys initiative: www.successforboys.edu.au/





Middle schooling

In its broadest sense, middle schooling refers to a targeted approach to meet the educational needs of students in early adolescence. The increasing interest in middle schooling reflects an awareness that the traditional division of schooling into primary and secondary levels does not necessarily match the developmental stages of young people.

Fifty-eight per cent of independent schools offer both primary and secondary level schooling and it is not surprising that the sector has shown a particular interest in drawing on middle schooling philosophies and practices to achieve the best outcomes for students. One independent school in Queensland has been operating a middle school for more than 20 years, and many independent schools are considered 'showcase' schools for middle schooling.

Independent schools have adopted diverse approaches to middle schooling. Some schools have responded structurally, for example by creating a 'school within a school', with a dedicated building or buildings for students in Years 4 or 5 to 8 and specially trained staff. Other schools have adopted middle schooling practices such as a differentiated curriculum or rich task approach for Years 7 and 8.

Other typical middle school practices that have been taken up by independent schools include a focus on transition arrangements for primary students, the pedagogical orientations of teachers or pastoral care support for students. Some schools have grouped subject areas such as the humanities or science, mathematics and technology to reduce the number of teachers and class changes that students face in Years 7 and 8.

Many independent schools have been supported in curriculum development for middle schooling by Australian Government funding or projects targeted at improving the literacy and numeracy achievement of students in the middle years.

For further information:

Middle Years of Schooling Association: www.mysa.org.au

Middle Schooling Association of Western Australia: www.msawa.asn.au

Victorian Department of Education Middle Years of Schooling information site: www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/

Australian Curriculum Studies Association: www.acsa.edu.au





Vocational and technical education

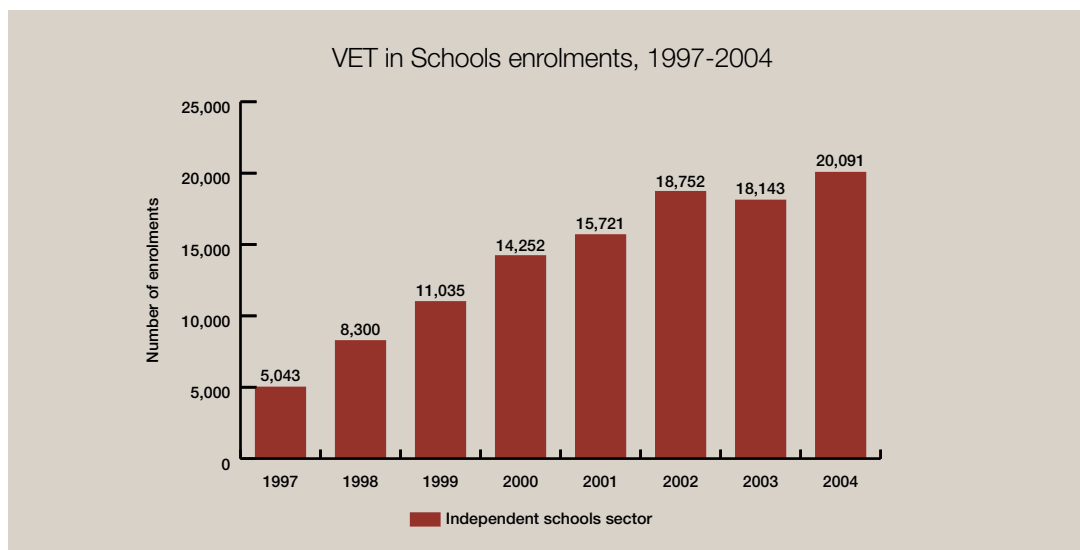
Vocational and technical education (VTE) programmes – previously known as vocational education and training (VET) – in schools offer alternative education through teaching a variety of skills and providing for the aspirations of a broad range of students. They also assist in the retention of students to matriculation. Student participation in vocational and technical education programmes has grown substantially in the sector since the late 1990s.

According to the 2004 Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia, more than 50 per cent of independent schools offered VTE courses to their secondary students in over 40 industry areas. The most common areas offered were tourism and hospitality, information technology, and business services. More unusual courses included aquaculture, real estate, aviation studies and electro-technology. The VTE programmes were usually delivered through school-based new apprenticeships, TAFE courses and work placements.

Schools need to deliver high quality and sustainable programmes so that students gain positive experiences from their participation. They have identified teacher training – including industry placements – and industry participation as important factors in the delivery of quality VTE programmes in schools.

In 2004, there were 20,091 independent school students enrolled in the Australian Government's VET in Schools programmes, which represents a 10.7 per cent increase compared to 2003. Students in the sector represented 9.5 per cent of all Australian students enrolled in VET in Schools programmes in 2004. This participation level was an increase of 300 per cent since 1997, and reflects funding assistance to the sector from Australian Government agencies as well as a commitment by schools to offer these programmes.

It is difficult to predict how the establishment of the new Australian Technical Colleges will affect independent school enrolments. However, the establishment of new colleges, enhancement of existing course offerings, and re-enrolment of students who have already left school suggests that, while there may be a shift in enrolments, these may not necessarily be to institutions outside the sector.





For further information:

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) website provides information on vocational learning, VTE in schools, school-based new apprenticeships and structured workplace learning:
www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education

The following section of the DEST website provides information on federal initiatives and policies, and links to related websites: www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/

The following section of the DEST website provides information previously found on the ANTA website, prior to it becoming part of DEST on 1 July 2005.

www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/nts/default.htm

Access to the annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia from 2000 is available on this website:
www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/anr/

The Australian Technical Colleges have been established to provide high quality tuition in both academic and vocational education for students in Years 11 and 12. The aim is to locate these colleges in regions with skills needs and a high youth population, and where they can be supported by a significant industry base:
www.australiantechnicalcolleges.gov.au

Curriculum Corporation was established to assist education systems in improving student learning outcomes and is a major provider and publisher of high quality print and digital curriculum products:
www.curriculum.edu.au

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research provides vocational education and training research and statistics: www.ncver.edu.au

The Myfuture website provides information about career planning and education and training options:
www.myfuture.edu.au

The following links connect to TAFE or vocational education websites in each state and territory:

www.tafensw.edu.au

www.tafe.qld.gov.au

www.tafe.tas.edu.au

www.tafe.wa.gov.au

www.tafe.vic.gov.au

www.tafe.sa.edu.au

www.cit.act.edu.au

www.vet.nt.gov.au