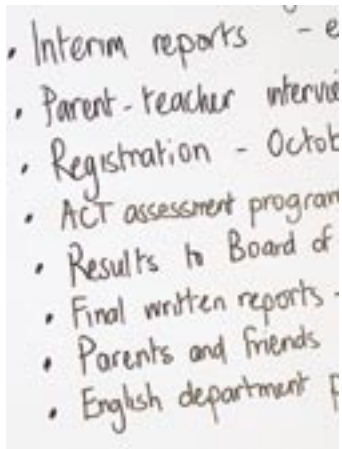


Accountabilities of independent schools

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- Interim reports - e
 - Parent-teacher interview
 - Registration - Octob
 - ACT assessment program
 - Results to Board of
 - Final written reports
 - Parents and friends
 - English department f

In recent years all schools, including independent schools, have been subject to increased regulation and reporting requirements as a condition of receiving funding.

This has further increased the accountability activities of independent schools which were already operating within a comprehensive framework of government regulatory mandates and self-regulatory mechanisms. Through these they are accountable both to their individual school communities and to society as a whole.

Independent schools are individual educational institutions. But they are also either incorporated bodies or the responsibility of incorporated organisations, and they receive government funding.

Independent schools are accountable to their stakeholders, including students, parents – who are also fee-paying partners - founders and other financial supporters, the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and other government authorities.

All stakeholders have a significant interest in how the funds given by them are used, and independent schools are well aware that they survive only with continued stakeholder support. Independent schools therefore maintain a strong focus on accountability and ensure that they have effective mechanisms in place to report to their stakeholders.

Regulatory environment for schools

State and territory government requirements

Independent schools must meet the criteria established by their state or territory government for registration as a school and for their accreditation for credentialing of students. School registration is reviewed on an ongoing basis, which ensures that the school's curriculum complies with state or territory government requirements.

State and territory governments provide some funding support for independent schools, and schools must comply with any related conditions of funding as well as reporting and accountability requirements.

Australian Government requirements

The Australian Government is the source of most of the public funding for independent schools. Comprehensive conditions and accountability requirements apply to this funding.

Independent schools must demonstrate that the funds received under each funding programme have been expended appropriately, and must provide extensive data for the Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia (see below) and the annual Financial Questionnaire for Non-Government Schools.

Data for the Financial Questionnaire are collected directly from independent schools by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and are used to analyse income and expenditure patterns of non-government schools and school systems for both research and accountability purposes.

The Australian Government requires as a condition of funding that schools must commit to the National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-first Century, which were endorsed by all state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education in 1999 at the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).



Through this commitment all Australian schools, including independent schools, are working towards common public goals in education and to the achievement of performance measures as determined by the government, including testing for and reporting against literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

New reporting requirements for 2005-08

With the passage of the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004*, and the related *Schools Assistance Regulations 2005*, the Australian Government introduced a number of new commitments and educational requirements which all schools are required to meet in order to receive funding.

Schools must provide parents with plain English student reports which comply with principles set out in the regulations, and are required to make public information about the performance of the school in relation to key indicators.

Schools must continue to participate in national literacy and numeracy testing and reporting for students in Years 3, 5 and 7, and from 2007, for students in Year 9. There are a number of other conditions and requirements with which schools must also comply under the terms of their funding agreements with the Australian Government.

The *Schools Assistance Regulations 2005* appear on the DEST website, and a detailed summary of the requirements as they affect independent schools is to be found on the Independent Schools Council of Australia's (ISCA) website at: www.isca.edu.au.

Other legal requirements

Independent schools are bound by a number of other legal requirements associated with their operations. For example, as companies limited by guarantee or as incorporated associations, independent schools are accountable to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, or to their state or territory registrar of associations. They must submit audited annual financial statements to these bodies, which are available for public scrutiny. They are also subject to regulation by the Australian Taxation Office.

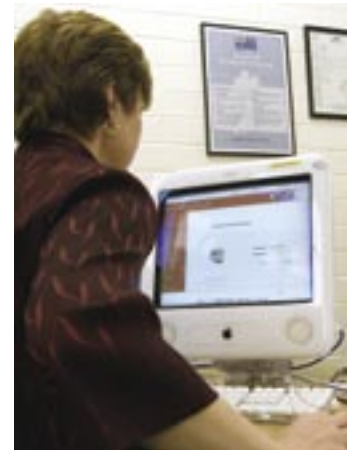
As employers, independent schools must comply with legislation and regulations covering such issues as equal employment opportunity, industrial awards and occupational health and safety. As educational institutions they must comply with health, safety, privacy and child protection requirements as well as regulations relating to building and fire codes.

Contribution to education policies

In addition to being accountable under the stringent regulation and reporting requirements of governments, independent schools also show a high level of responsibility for and responsiveness to accountability issues through participation in policy development.

At a national level, independent schools participate in the development of national education policy through representation by ISCA in a number of forums, including the Curriculum Corporation, The Learning Federation, committees and working groups of DEST, education research bodies and MCEETYA taskforces and sub-groups.





A number of staff from independent schools, as well as curriculum experts from state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), make important contributions to a range of curriculum advisory groups. In all, representatives from the independent schools sector contribute to the work of more than one hundred national education advisory bodies.

Independent schools, through their AISs, provide extensive data to MCEETYA for the Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia. This report is the primary means by which all schools and school systems in Australia satisfy national educational accountability requirements and covers areas such as curriculum, participation of students in schooling, student outcomes, important national and state initiatives in schooling and progress towards achieving the National Goals for Schooling.

The AISs and ISCA liaise closely with the government on behalf of the schools they represent in order to ensure that schools understand and are able to implement their obligations in a way that minimises undue intrusion and demands on their time.

Self regulation

The autonomous governance arrangements of independent schools means that the school board plays a key role in ensuring schools are accountable, particularly in matters of self-regulation (see **The essential elements of school autonomy, page 11**).

The principal of an independent school is accountable to the board for the school's educational programmes in terms of how they relate to the strategic directions and ethos of the school. This is not simply a matter of good governance. Independent schools survive or fail on the merits of their performance – the freedom of students and their families to exercise choice in schooling is one of the most demanding forms of accountability for independent schools.

A balance between accountability and autonomy

The steady growth of the independent sector is evidence of the public confidence in the accountability of independent schools through this mix of contribution to education policies, legislative compliance and self-regulation.

New independent schools continue to be established because many parents and community groups find that self-governing schools are more accountable to their immediate communities than is possible for schools that are part of large centralised systems.

To respond effectively and creatively to the needs of the students and communities they serve, independent schools need a liberal degree of autonomy. With comprehensive regulatory mandates and effective self-regulatory mechanisms already in place, the independent schools sector would argue that any demand for further formalisation of accountability requirements must be balanced by a commitment to the innovation and diversity that characterises independent education.



For further information:

The Australian Government's *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* can be found at: www.austlii.edu.au/databases.html

State and territory legislation relating to non-government schools may be viewed at the following sites (search for Education Act in most instances):

www.legislation.act.gov.au

www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

www.nt.gov.au/dcm/legislation/current.shtml

www.legislation.qld.gov.au/OQPChome.htm

www.parliament.sa.gov.au/dbsearch/legsearch.htm

www.thelaw.tas.gov.au/index.w3p

www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au

www.slp.wa.gov.au/statutes/swans.nsf

