

Media Release

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Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Australian Government shows leadership on support for students with disabilities

The Independent Schools Council of Australia welcomes yesterday's federal Budget announcement that the Australian Government will investigate flexible funding arrangements for students with disabilities.

"Right now families of students with disabilities are at a severe disadvantage if they choose to educate their children in an independent school," said Mr Bill Daniels, ISCA Executive Director. "The additional funding available to students with disabilities from state and territory governments generally does not follow the student if he or she enrolls in a non-government school. Students may also lose access to a range of government services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and Braille if they enrol in a non-government school."

Mr Daniels said that because funding does not follow the student, the gap in general recurrent funding for students with disabilities between the government and independent sector can be over \$20,000 per student per year. He also said that inconsistency in funding arrangements for students with disabilities across the states and territories exacerbates the inequity in support for these students.

"Under the federal *Disabilities Discrimination Act 1992*, independent schools have a legal obligation to provide access to and meet the needs of students with disabilities," said Mr Daniels. "The legislation and its associated education standards place open-ended obligations on schools that potentially involve individual schools in very large resource costs, but currently there is limited public funding to meet these costs."

Mr Daniels said independent schools welcome students with disabilities. There are now almost 9,000 students with disabilities enrolled in independent schools, including independent special schools.

"The number of students with disabilities in independent schools has increased by 180 per cent over the last decade," said Mr Daniels. "Under current funding arrangements, it is a challenge for independent school communities to meet the day-to-day needs of these students and additional capital costs, especially as the proportion of students with high level needs enrolling in the sector is also growing."

Mr Daniels said the independent sector appreciates the general recurrent and targeted funding support already available from the Australian Government. "However the state and territory government shortfall is such that a radically new approach to the funding of students with disabilities is required," he said.

Mr Daniels said that to achieve equity in funding for students with disabilities the federal and state and territory governments need to work co-operatively to develop a new funding model.

"The announcement that the Australian Government will spend up to \$5.8 million to investigate funding options for students with disabilities shows that the federal Minister for Education, Julie Bishop, is willing to take leadership on this issue," said Mr Daniels. "This is a very welcome move to students with disabilities, their families and schools."

ENDS.

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