AHISA LTD
ASSOCIATION OF HEADS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF AUSTRALIA

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations—References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary,

Inquiry into Teaching and Learning (Maximising Our Investment in Australian Schools)

AHISA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Teaching and Learning.

Because of the breadth of scope of the Inquiry, which covers areas of substantial ongoing academic research, AHISA has confined its contribution to general principles and positions. These are discussed against the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

AHISA's contribution is premised on the position that a high quality schooling system in Australia depends on:

- Parents having the freedom to exercise their rights and responsibilities in regard to the education of their children
- Students and their families having the freedom to choose among diverse schooling options
- Schools having the autonomy to exercise educational leadership as they respond to the emerging needs of their communities in a rapidly changing society.

About AHISA

The membership of AHISA Ltd comprises principals of 410 independent schools with a collective enrolment of some 400,000 students, representing 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments and 20 per cent of Australia's total Year 12 enrolment.

The socio-economic profile of AHISA members' schools is diverse. Over 20 per cent of our members lead schools with an SES score of less than 100.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunity for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

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Response to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference

(a) The effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools

In its research report on Australia's schools workforce, the Productivity Commission noted that 'Overall, Australia's schools deliver good educational outcomes at a reasonable cost'.[1] In other words, current classroom practices in Australia could be deemed to be effective. It is important, however, to recognise that teaching practice is not a static set of skills, and that professional development is not a simple case of linear progression. The learning and teaching experience in schools is in a state of continual change and challenge:

- Each child, each class, each year cohort of students presents unique learning and teaching challenges
- Curriculum development is ongoing and may be affected by federal and state/territory government mandates, parental and community demand as well as internal school imperatives
- Social change affects approaches to behaviour management and pastoral care programs and their manner of delivery
- The rapid development of digital technologies and their use in education is driving pedagogical change
- Brain/mind research is changing our understanding of the way young people learn and is also influencing pedagogy.

While there are core skills and understandings that teachers must acquire, professional learning in pedagogy and classroom management is ongoing. Particularly for secondary teachers, maintaining depth knowledge within the teacher's subject discipline also requires ongoing learning.

The more pressing issue is therefore not whether current classroom practices are effective, but how teaching effectiveness is best sustained. This question is addressed in section (e), below.

(b) The structure and governance of school administration – local and central – and its impact on teaching and learning

While there is a range of systems operating within the independent schools sector, by and large the sector is characterised by the localised or 'independent' nature of the governance of the schools within it and the operational autonomy invested by the school governing body in the principal.

As noted in the *Review of funding for schooling – Final report* (the Gonski Report), among factors cited as contributing to student achievement in high-performing schooling systems are 'using funding where it can make the most difference' and 'increasing school-level autonomy balanced with appropriate accountability'.[2] These two factors meet in the role of the principal, who is uniquely positioned to ensure resources are appropriately targeted within a school – that is, to 'maximise investment in schools'.

This position is supported by the Productivity Commission. In its recent report on the schools workforce, the Commission found:

> Increased school autonomy removes impediments that can prevent principals and other school leaders tailoring school operations to best meet the needs of the local communities they serve. It thus has the potential to improve student outcomes.[3]

AHISA advocates strongly that school effectiveness is supported by autonomous school principalship. If schools are to offer rich learning experiences in an environment conducive to

high levels of student and teacher achievement, principals must have the operational autonomy to positively shape and lead the educational, pastoral, community, financial, spiritual, cultural and managerial practices of their school. All of these elements combine to create a holistic educational environment and all are subject to the primary strategic goal of student development and success.[4]

Supporting AHISA's position is a significant body of research evidence on the critical role of school leadership in quality learning and teaching.

In a research review titled 'The importance of leadership in high-performing schools', Robyn Collins notes findings in a recent RAND Corporation report that 'nearly 60 per cent of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to leadership and teacher effectiveness, with principals accounting for 25 per cent of a school's total impact on achievement':

> Furthermore the report found that, while effective teachers have a profound effect on student outcomes, this effect soon fades when the student moves on to another teacher, unless the new teacher is equally effective. In order for students to have high-quality learning every year, whole schools must be high functioning, and this means they must be led by effective principals.[5]

Drawing further on the RAND Corporation report, Collins notes:

> Developing human capital for their schools involves leaders in hiring quality teachers, evaluation and professional development, retention, leadership development, providing instructional leadership and, ultimately, dismissing staff members who are not performing.[6]

A research project on school leadership in the United States, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, found that in the six years of the study not one single instance was found 'of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership'.[7] In school improvement, 'leadership is the catalyst'. [8]

It is vital that governments support the autonomy of school leaders. AHISA acknowledges that autonomy must be exercised within an overarching framework of agreed goals and accountabilities. However, AHISA is concerned that moves to greater principal and school autonomy and localised decision making for schools are being challenged by Federal and/or State and Territory mandates covering a range of schooling functions, including aspects of curriculum, student reporting and teacher appraisal.

AHISA is also concerned by unnecessary duplication in government regulation and reporting requirements. For example, the effect of the establishment of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission could be to impose a further compliance burden on non-government schools without a commensurate benefit to students or the wider public.

(c) The influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education

In Australia, the Federal, State and Territory governments have historically recognised the right of parents to choice in the education of their children:

- Parents can apply to educate their child in a government school outside of their zoned school area (parents also exercise choice in the government schools sector by relocating to the enrolment zone of the desired school)
- Parents may also apply for registration to home school their child
- Parents may choose to educate their child in a non-government school.

Governments' support for school choice is consistent with Article 26 (3) of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. [9] Australia provides that choice through its government and non-government schools offerings though the latter parental choice carries a financial cost, in that parents are expected to partially or fully cover the cost of their child's education when choice is exercised outside the government schools sector.

There is evidence to suggest that there is a correlation between parental choice of school and parental engagement in the education of their child, although parental engagement is not necessarily an automatic result of exercising choice.[10]

A meta-analysis of studies of parental involvement in education and students' academic achievement conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education has found that, while parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement, parental expectations have a greater impact on their children's academic achievement than other factors, including reading with children and parental attendance and participation at school functions.[11]

As noted in the Gonski Report, parent and community engagement is an important factor contributing to 'good student outcomes' in high-performing schooling systems.[12] However, the Harvard study makes it clear that the form of parental engagement is critical.

A recent research report on analysis of data collected for the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth and the Youth in Focus survey[13] supports the notion that a more nuanced understanding of family background and the relationship between disadvantage and educational outcomes is required.

Focusing on school completion, the study found:

- The main predictors of Year 12 completion are cultural factors, including students' poor school experiences, their participation in risky activities such as smoking and alcohol consumption, and their aspirations;
- Material factors, as measured through current family income, have only a small effect on Year 12 completion;
- The role of the commonly used indicators of disadvantage associated with school completion, including parental education and occupational status, is less significant than previously indicated.[14]

The study supports the common sense understanding that the expectations of students that parents, schools and students themselves bring to the educational experience are all important factors in student achievement.

Research undertaken by AHISA into leading a networked school community indicates there is a 'relational framework' that supports the education of students in schools. The principal plays a key role in supporting this framework:

> In the schools of members interviewed for AHISA's project, the relational framework that is the ground for building a networked community is a tripartite partnership embracing school, parents and students. While the partnership may change shape over time, as the student matures and progresses, there is a shared common goal: the success and wellbeing of the student. This goal is interpreted through all the different aspects of schooling – curriculum, co-curriculum, pastoral care and the whole climate and culture of the school.
>
> The leader's role is to help everyone in the school community understand the foundational nature of this framework, interpret and describe it within the culture, values and ethos of the school, integrate it within the larger narrative of the school community, uphold it and model it.[15]

While the influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education is critical, this influence will be richer if mediated and supported by the school in a cooperative partnership. In particular, schools must support parents in holding high expectations of their children. As noted in the Gonski Report, 'having high expectations for the achievement of all students' is another factor related to student achievement in high-performing schooling systems.[16]

In considering the issue of parental influence in terms of maximising investment in schools, it is important to note that Australia enjoys a high level of private contribution to education through its dual system of government and non-government schools. At 0.6 per cent of GDP, private contribution to Australian school and post-school non-tertiary education in 2009 was double the OECD average of 0.3 per cent.[17] Students in non-government schools represent a third of total Australian school enrolments; this proportion increases to just over 40 per cent of senior secondary students. In 2009-10, this translated as a private contribution of $6.5 billion to Australian school education. Within the independent sector alone, private contribution was worth $4.4 billion, with estimated savings to governments of $3.9 billion.[18]

To maximise private investment in school education, governments should encourage and support parental contribution to their children's education as well as philanthropic giving by organisations and individuals.

(d) The adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment

The adaptation of Australian schools to the impact of rapid advances in digital technologies is variable, due to differences in capacity to access or support infrastructure (eg bandwidth, wireless networks), hardware (including computers, laptops, whiteboards and other digital devices), software (including e-book licences), digital content or ongoing professional development for teachers. The Australian Government's significant funding under its Digital Education Revolution program was welcomed by independent schools. However, the short life of digital devices means many schools across all sectors are experiencing deterioration of their digital technologies, which they cannot afford to replace without further government support.[19]

Non-government schools are also bearing an increasing copyright cost as individual student access to the internet becomes common classroom practice.

A largely ignored cost of the 'digital revolution' is the need for adaptation of school buildings as the learning environment responds to the needs of 21st century students and their engagement in collaborative learning. Criteria for government capital funding programs should be expanded so that schools – irrespective of sector – can apply for funding to cover these costs.

Almost entirely ignored is the innovation and entrepreneurial cost related to the introduction of new technologies and other aspects of schooling, including the integration of brain/mind research in classroom practice and new research on teacher effectiveness into professional learning programs. The role of autonomous school leadership in fostering innovation and educational entrepreneurship is especially important in times of radical educational change and many AHISA members are highly regarded for leading their schools in and sharing innovative practice. The cost of innovation in the independent sector, however, is largely borne by parents through school fees.

Governments have a role to play in providing seed funding for and otherwise assisting entrepreneurial school effort irrespective of school sector. It is not enough to know if teachers have the tools they need to be effective today; governments must be prepared 'to be investing ahead of the curve'.[20]

(e) Factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system

AHISA supports the view that teaching quality is of first importance in improving student achievement. Effective classroom practice depends on sustained professional learning.

A significant proportion of teacher professional learning occurs within schools, first in pre-service practicum placement and then through coaching and mentoring of graduate teachers, peer-to-peer learning and through the delivery of targeted courses.

Schools are also the crucible of innovation and development of best practice in effective teaching. Many AHISA members' schools are conducting innovative professional learning programs, including working with overseas and Australian academics, undertaking action research projects within their schools, trialling professional learning innovations such as instructional rounds and learning walks and supporting professional learning scholarships for teaching staff.

Some AHISA members report National Partnerships funding has been critical in underwriting ongoing professional learning programs in their schools, for example through provision for training of staff as mentors and coaches. Governments clearly have a role to play in making available funding to support both established and innovative professional learning programs in schools, irrespective of sector.

AHISA advocates that the principal's discretion to exercise authority over professional learning of staff is vital to support effective classroom practice. This position is supported by recent research commissioned by the NZ Ministry of Education, which indicates that the most significant dimension of school leadership affecting student outcomes is school leaders' practice in relation to teacher learning and development. [21] School leaders are best positioned to adopt appraisal methods and provide professional development most suited to their staff at any given point in time.

AHISA's qualitative research undertaken for ongoing development of its Model of Autonomous School Principalship showed that the autonomy of the principal to recruit and deploy staff, to shape staffing structures and develop targeted professional development programs suited to the school context and the needs of staff is also key to successful change management in schools.[22]

AHISA is concerned that the principal's professional agency over the professional learning of staff may be undermined by mandated government programs such as that proposed under the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework. While the intention of governments to improve teacher effectiveness is laudable, school improvement should be viewed as a continuous cycle of development, involving complex dimensions such as school culture, including professional learning cultures.

(f) Other related matters

AHISA is concerned that a view of schooling that assumes as a starting point that an optimal learning environment and quality teaching can only be achieved through regimes of regulation, monitoring and measurement ignores the widespread recognition that teachers are driven by altruism, as are principals. A recent McKinsey & Company report on high-performing school leaders, for instance, found that 'All principals, and particularly high performers, are motivated mainly by their ability to make a difference'.[23]

Research undertaken for the International Successful Schools Principalship Project (ISSPP) found the principals studied shared common attributes, including:

- The principal was passionate and genuine in his/her commitment to educating the students and for the school community

- There was a strong moral, ethical imperative underpinning the passion and genuine commitment of principals in their role that emanated from their values and beliefs.[24]

In AHISA's view, governments should acknowledge the expertise and altruism of Australia's principals and teachers and the role these attributes already play in demonstrating school improvement. As Dr Ben Jensen recently wrote concerning school improvement, it is our best schools that are 'showing us the way forward'.[25]

If schools are to continue to 'show the way forward', the policy environment must support and encourage them to be resilient, agile and adaptive organisations.

In her background paper for the development of a draft Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Professor Helen Timperley described the concepts of 'adaptive expertise' and 'organisational adaptive capacity' in relation to professional teaching practice. She describes adaptive capacity as more than adjusting organisation strategies and structures to fit contextual conditions:

> Adaptive capacity […] is a dynamic process of continuous learning and adjustment that allows for ambiguity and complexity. It is particularly relevant in loosely coupled organisations that have complex interconnections both internally and with the external environment in times of change […] These organisational conditions apply to schools at any time, and more particularly to schools of the 21st century. [26]

Professor Timperley adds that 'schools with high adaptive capacity recognise the changing world in which they operate, recognise the need to learn, and act accordingly'.

AHISA's qualitative research into leading a networked school community supports Professor Timperley's position. Our research showed that schools require 'agility' if they are to respond to opportunities in a rapidly evolving education landscape. Governments can maximise their investment in schools if they support them to become agile organisations with the adaptive capacity to meet changing learning and teaching demands.

In order to preserve the best of what independent schools offer in the context of government reform, I regard it as very important that organisations such as AHISA are actively engaged in the development and implementation of the reform framework in Australian schooling.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barr
AHISA National Chair

Notes

[1] Productivity Commission (2012) *Schools workforce*. Research Report. Canberra; page 39. Accessed at http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/116651/schools-workforce.pdf

[2] Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, W. and Tannock, P. (2011) *Review of funding for schooling – Final report.* Canberra: DEEWR; page 23. Accessed at http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf

[3] Productivity Commission, page 34 (Finding 8.2).

[4] The inter-relationship of the multiple aspects of schools leadership is described in AHISA's *Model of Autonomous School Principalship* (2011). Available at http://www.ahisa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Principalship-Model-Oct2011-Final1.pdf

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[6] Collins, page 3.

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[8] Leithwood, K., Louis, K., Anderson, S. and Wahlstrom, K. (2004) *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

[9] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December, 1948. Accessed at http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

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[12] Gonski et al, page 23.

[13] Homel, J., Mavisakalyan, A., Nguyen, H.T. and Ryan, C. (2012) *School completion: what we learn from different measures of family background*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 59. Adelaide: NCVER. Accessed at http://www.lsay.edu.au/publications/2503.html

[14] Homel et al, page 3.

[15] Shaw, A. (2011) Autonomous school leadership and relationship building. *Independence*, 36(2):28-33. Available at http://independence.realviewdigital.com/?iid=62520#folio=28

[16] Gonski et al, page 23.

[17] OECD (2012) *Education at a glance 2012: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD; page 246.

[18] Independent Schools Council of Australia (2012) *Independent Schooling in Australia Snapshot 2012*. Canberra: ISCA.

[19] AHISA NSW Branch (2012) Submission to the NSW Government's 'Great Teaching, Inspired Learning' discussion paper. Available at http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/news/greatteaching/submissions/nsw-ahisa.pdf

[20] Comment attributed to the head of research of Nokia as recalled by Tony Mackay and included in Caldwell, B.J. (2010) Strategies and outcomes of school innovation. Keynote address to the International Conference on the Challenges and Prospects of School Improvement in the New Era,

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[21] Robinson, V., Hohepa, M. and Lloyd, C. (2009) *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.

[22] Shaw, page 30.

[23] Barber, M., Whelan, F. and Clark, M. (2010) Capturing the leadership premium. McKinsey & Company; page 7. Available at http://mckinseyonsociety.com/capturing-the-leadership-premium/

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