

**Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

**Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth**

**Department of Education Question No. ED0202\_15**

**Senator O'Neill provided in writing.**

**Question**

**Government's Independent Public Schools program**

In relation to the Government's Independent Public Schools program:

- a) How was the funding distribution between states/territories outlined in the Budget papers decided?
- b) Has there been correspondence on this program between the Minister and state/territory ministers, between departments or between other representatives of the states/territories and the Commonwealth? Can the Department provide copies?
- c) Can the department provide the date of any meetings either the Minister of the Department has conducted with state/territories on this issue?
- d) For each state/territory, what position on the program has been expressed to the Minister or Department? i.e. do individual jurisdictions support the program, or not?
- e) What Guidelines will be put in place for the program? How are they being developed? When will they be released? Will there be consultation on them?
- f) How will the success of the program be measured?
- g) What reporting requirements will be in place?
- h) What empirical, peer reviewed evidence is the Department aware of to link programs like the Government's particular Independent Public Schools policy with improved outcomes, higher productivity and better quality education for students?
- i) Will the program have any guidelines or requirements relating to how independent public schools should meet the needs of all students – including students with disability?

**Answer**

a) The notional funding distribution for states and territories under the Independent Public Schools initiative was calculated according to each state and territory's proportionate share of government schools.

b) The Minister for Education wrote to state and territory education ministers about the Independent Public Schools initiative on 12 December 2013 inviting them to participate in the initiative. The key text from this letter is included below:

Dear Minister

Further to our discussion at the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) meeting on 29 November 2013, I am pleased to invite [xxx jurisdiction] to participate in the Australian Government's Independent Public Schools initiative.

The Government believes that parents and school communities should have a greater say in how their schools are run and is committed to working with states and territories to encourage public schools to become Independent Public Schools. We have established a \$70 million Independent Public Schools Fund (the Fund) to support this goal.

The Government has determined the following broad objectives for the Fund:

- increased local governance and parental involvement
- greater accountability to parents and the local community
- implementing streamlined or one-line budgets
- increased local management of school facilities and infrastructure
- increased delegation over staffing for school principals to maximise student learning outcomes and student support services.

I recognise that there are different levels of school independence across Australia and that schools in all states and territories have been moving towards a more autonomous and independent model to varying degrees.

As the system manager, you are best placed to determine how the move to more independence can be achieved in your schools. Should you choose to participate, it is intended that this initiative will provide you flexibility to implement strategies and activities that meet the needs of your schools in line with the Australian Government's principles.

If you wish to participate in the initiative, I ask that you respond to this invitation and nominate a key departmental contact by **20 December 2013**. This timeframe will enable sufficient time for the development of a joint approach for the initiative to be agreed by the end of April 2014 and the first payments under the Fund to be made this financial year.

I look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

Yours sincerely

Following receipt of positive responses to this letter, the Department wrote to jurisdictions on 25 March 2014 regarding their interest in the initiative. The key text from this letter is included below:

Dear Colleague

Thank you for meeting with [the Department] to discuss the Australian Government's Independent Public Schools initiative.

I appreciate the willingness to engage with this important initiative shown by you and your colleagues. The conversation gave us a greater appreciation of your current priorities for government schools and an understanding of how the system in [state/territory] supports principals, school leaders and teachers.

At the meeting we discussed draft guidelines and a template for proposals together with our planned implementation arrangements. Given the tight

timeframes including approval by both ministers a draft proposal in early April would be appreciated.

As discussed, a Commonwealth Grant Agreement template and revised guidelines will also be provided to you this week, for your information.

I look forward to receiving a draft proposal from [state/territory] and to working together to establish how this initiative can support the current priorities of [state/territory] and the Australian Government around increased autonomy and school independence over the next four years.

Yours sincerely

The Department further corresponded with jurisdictions on 1 April 2014. The key text from this email is included below:

Dear Colleague

In the letter of 25 March, the Department undertook to send you the Independent Public Schools guidelines and proposal template together with the draft Commonwealth Grant Agreement template.

Please find both documents attached for your information. The guidelines document has been revised in light of discussions held with jurisdictions and may assist as you further develop your draft proposal for participation in the initiative.

If you have any questions about either document, please don't hesitate to contact me. I look forward to working with you to finalise your proposal and the agreement.

c) The following table provides information about official meetings the Minister for Education and the department have conducted with states and territories on the Independent Public Schools initiative.

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Nature of Meeting</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
3/2/14	Launch of Independent Public Schools initiative, Ringwood Secondary College, VIC	The Hon Christopher Pyne MP The Hon Martin Dixon MP Mr Michael Sukkar MP
5/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with NSW	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and NSW Department of Education and Communities
11/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with Victoria	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and VIC Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
12/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with Western Australia	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and WA Department of Education
13/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with Queensland	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and Education Queensland

19/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with Northern Territory	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and NT Department of Education
21/3/14	Bilateral Meeting with Australian Capital Territory	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and ACT Department of Education and Training
4/4/14	Bilateral Meeting with South Australia	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and SA Department for Education and Child Development
9/4/14	Bilateral Meeting with Tasmania	Representatives from Australian Government Department of Education and Department of Education Tasmania

d) All states and territories, except South Australia, indicated their interest in participating in the Independent Public Schools initiative in response to the Minister for Education's letter of 12 December 2013. In subsequent discussions, South Australia also expressed an interest in participating in the initiative.

e) At the 30 November 2013 meeting of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, members discussed five guiding principles for the Independent Public Schools initiative. States and territories were provided further guidance on the development of their implementation proposals as part of the implementation proposal template used to detail activities to be undertaken by each jurisdiction.

f) Annual reports from each state and territory will demonstrate the progress made under the initiative, against a baseline determined by the states and territories.

g) Annual reports are required from each state and territory by 30 April each year (2015–2017), with a final report due within 90 days of completion of 2017 activity.

h) This question mirrors question number ED0323\_15. A full response has been provided to this question. Please refer to this response.

i) States and territories are responsible for implementation of the Independent Public Schools initiative in their jurisdictions, including how to best address local needs and priorities.