

Schools for All Report

Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

Quarterly Report – June 2017

Introduction

As an independent governing body representing 18 independent schools that are separate and autonomous entities, AISACT notes all the recommendations and the ACT Government response. As noted in the Preamble of the ACT Government Response to the Expert Panel recommendations, AISACT acknowledges the strong desire to build on existing reforms, improvements and initiatives in so far as it is practical and possible.

An indication of this desire to build on an existing reform, and to respond to the recommendations, is evidenced in the agenda of both AISACT Board and Executive Committee meetings. Further, the Executive Committee has established a Schools for All Subcommittee to provide it with advice on strategies, opportunities and approaches in direct reference to the Schools for All Report, and the responses to the recommendations from the Association. The establishment of this Subcommittee was noted and endorsed by the full Board of AISACT.

Recent consultation with Member Schools determined that the report and the recommendations have:

- facilitated and expanded the conversation on students with challenging behaviours and complex needs
- reaffirmed to staff that many of the practices are already embedded in schools
- affirmed what best practice in supporting students with complex needs and challenging behaviours looks like
- affirmed that a continued shift in culture still needs to occur within all schools, to ensure that all students feel supported in their education.

Consultation noted that the report, in conjunction with the training on the Disability Standards of Education 2005 completed by staff in Independent Schools, has:

- been a vehicle for rapid changes within schools
- given teachers a refresher on the rights of all student to access education on the same basis as their peers
- raised awareness among parents in the Independent School community on their child's rights.

The Association continues to support schools in progressing the cultural shift and to increase the awareness of support to all students in all school irrelevant of if they have challenging behaviours and complex needs.

Progress on the Recommendations specific to Independent Schools and/or to AISACT

Policy and School Governance

Recommendation 4.1
That ETD, CE, and each Independent School, review their policies and procedures with respect to students with complex needs and challenging behaviour to ensure that all schools have a comprehensive suite of relevant policies and procedures.
AISACT Response
The AIS will support member schools to review relevant policies and procedures and will access the ETD resources to provide to ACT Independent Schools.
Key Activities
<p>Member Schools continue the process of reviewing procedures and policies with respect to students with complex needs and challenging behaviours through a whole school approach. The report has been a vehicle for change and development, with schools using the report and its recommendations to reaffirm they are on the correct path, to standardise practice, and to consider what might be best practice. The report has created heightened awareness for the need to constantly refine their practice, and to recognise the report's foundation position that it is a mechanism for whole school approaches.</p> <p>Schools have found where they have had policies in place there is a need to add additional supporting materials, ensure that all staff are aware of the policy (particularly new staff and preservice/graduate teachers), that the policy is a reflection of best practice, current research and evidence; and that staff have a voice in the development of the policy to ensure there is ownership of it.</p> <p>Some schools have found that they are currently needing to develop or refine policies and guidelines to ensure that current and new practices are covered.</p> <p>AISACT has developed two sets of guidelines for Member Schools, Managing NDIS externally funded service providers and Assistance Animals in ACT Independent Schools. The guidelines and any additional guidelines will be made available, along with other relevant resources via the AISACT's website. AISACT will continue to work with schools to develop and evolve guidelines for use in schools, building this with support from the Association's external partners in areas of compliance, legal support and work health and safety.</p> <p>In 2016 the Association signed a MOU with CatholicCare to provide counselling support to schools who had limited or no support from a school counsellor. This has ensured a policy approach can be implemented in supporting students with complex needs and challenging behaviours.</p>

Community and Culture

Recommendation 6.4
That ETD, CE, and AIS, negotiate a partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the Community Services Directorate to better meet the needs of students who live in out of home care, drawing on models such as the Victorian ‘Out of Home Care Education Commitment’.
AISACT Response
CSD will lead the development of the partnership agreement with ETD, CE and AIS. CE and AIS acknowledge that the partnership could be strengthened in this area and welcome the recommendation.
Key Activities
A member of staff from the AISACT office sits on the Improving Educational Outcomes committee (for young people on care and protection and youth justice) (IEOC). Members from the Association sit on the two subcommittees of the IEOC. The IEOC has asked that AISACT request from Member Schools examples of ILP’s for the committee to discuss. Eight schools have currently shared their ILPs with AISACT. The Association continues to support schools in better meeting the needs of students who live in out of home care upon the request of a school.

Recommendation 12.1
That ETD, CE, and each Independent School (a) develop and implement a case management framework for students with complex needs and challenging behaviour; and (b) support all schools to identify or recruit suitably qualified staff to act as case managers, including, for example, social workers, welfare officers, and/or community development workers.
AISACT Response
AIS notes that if schools are interested in exploring this recommendation it would be necessary to verify the resource support available for implementation.
Key Activities
The Association has a partnership with CatholicCare to provide counselling and psychology support to schools who require it. With two schools increasing their allocated counselling hours on their own merit. Schools and parents can also access psychology assessments and speech therapy assessments through CatholicCare at reduced rates.

Additionally, through the Students with Disability Network, Member Schools share recommended health specialists including, paediatricians, speech pathologists and occupational therapists, for referral.

The Association supports the Pastoral Care Co-ordinators network through attending meetings and providing key information, community connections and resources to assist pastoral care staff in their roles.

Professional Learning

Recommendation 10.7

That ETD, CE, and each Independent School, commit to the professionalisation of LSAs and ensure that by 2018 (a) all LSAs hold, or are in the process of obtaining, at least a Certificate IV in School Age Education & Care or equivalent; and (b) all LSAs working in a Learning Support Unit or specialist school hold, or are in the process of obtaining, at least a Certificate IV in Education Support or equivalent.

AISACT Response

AISACT notes the recommendation and will work with the other sectors to explore strategic options for workforce planning.

Key Activities

The role of an LSA within Independent schools has evolved from the more conventional practice of one LSA per student with additional needs, towards one LSA supporting a teacher with a class of students. In some schools the LSA is still supporting the students with the highest needs while in other schools Teachers are supporting the students with the highest needs while the LSA supports the rest of the class.

AISACT previously has provided opportunities for LSAs to gain higher qualifications through the More Support for Students program. Further discussion will occur through the AISACT Schools for All Executive Subcommittee.

The Association recently asked schools to provide information on the number of LSA's (full time, part time, casual), their highest qualification awarded and the area in which the qualification was awarded. Through this and in consultation with schools the Association has identified key areas in which both LSA's and teachers require upskilling, these include:

- Behaviour Management
- How students learn
- Working collaboratively
- Understanding of learning across age groups

- Understand of key characteristics of different disabilities, challenging behaviours and complex needs
- How best to engage students
- Relationship building

Schools and Learning Support Staff noted that teachers and executives of schools should also increase their knowledge and understanding of how to best work with LSAs, and what is best practice informing the work of an LSA in a classroom. It was noted that more schools are moving away from the LSA position title to titles including Learning Development Staff. Schools hope that this will reduce the perception of LSAs being 'just support staff' rather than trained/experienced professional teaching staff.

Additionally, there were a number of areas where schools need to develop or refine policies and guidelines in relation to LSA's in their schools, these include:

- a clear definition of an LSA role within schools (early childhood, primary school, secondary specific)
 - o Including involvement in meetings, professional learning and other whole school activities
- when is it appropriate for an LSA to be in a class and when is it not?
- level of qualification required by an LSA (when recruiting for an LSA position)
- how to facilitate professional collaboration between teachers and the LSA working in their classrooms
- how to upskill LSAs in areas of need

The Association notes that a number of LSAs in Member Schools have a wide range experience and knowledge which must be recognised. Additionally, within Member Schools there are a number of pre service teachers or graduate teachers employed as LSAs, who are gaining experience and knowledge for future employment opportunities.

AISACT recognises the commitment to the professionalisation of LSAs and will continue to work with Member Schools.

Recommendation 13.5

That ETD, CE and AIS, (a) develop, and liaise with the Teacher Quality Institute to accredit, a suite of professional learning options relevant to teaching students with complex needs and challenging behaviour. This would include, but not be limited to, modules on: de-escalation and safe use of restraint; trauma; autism spectrum disorder; mental health; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and/or learning difficulties; and (b) establish mechanisms to monitor staff and school participation in these programs.

AISACT Response

ETD, CE and AIS will develop a suite of professional learning programs for staff in schools, which will explicitly address teaching students with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

Key Activities

AISACT has provided a TQI accredited (5 hours) PL titled *Managing Challenging Behaviours in Schools* presented by Education Psychologist Tim Dansie. All Member Schools had representatives attend this PL.

The Association has provided PL in partnership with Headspace on Suicide postvention. This professional learning consisted of a breakfast for school leaders, providing an opportunity for leaders to discuss the implications of a suicide through a leadership point of view and a policy development day for school teams. Feedback from the day was positive:

- *'A brilliant day, very informative, very detailed and it was great to have so much school specific planning time throughout the day. Thank you!'*
- *'Thank you so very much for sharing your valuable knowledge and expertise to help us to form a plan to keep our students safe (and staff). This was an outstanding professional learning experience, I feel better equipped to deal with it if something happens.'*
- *'Thank you for a highly professional PL. It was presented in an informative manner with extremely useful and practical anecdotal support. The very emotive nature of the topic and material was handled so well.'*

The Association has partnered with Gateways Education to provide a three year PL program on Curriculum Differentiation for Gifted and Talented Learners. The PL is a 'Train the Trainer' model and provides participants with the knowledge and skills to optimise the educational opportunities for gifted and talented students.

The Gifted and Talented program promotes the development, implementation and evaluation of appropriate identification educational programs and effective classroom pedagogies. This includes the identification and teaching strategies for those students who are Twice Exceptional and Underachieving gifted students, the use of ILP's as a program strategy and the development of differentiated curriculum using conceptual frameworks. Currently 15 hours of the program has been TQI accredited.

Through a partnership with Aon (an AISACT Partners) Member Schools can access a free accredited mental health first aid course. The MHFA course teaches attendees how to recognise the symptoms of different illnesses and mental health crises, how to offer and provide initial help and how to guide a person towards appropriate treatments and other supports. The course looks at Mental Health at all ages which ensures school staff are equipped with supporting both students and staff who are experiencing difficulties with mental health.

Two staff members are on the Everyone Everyday PL committee and has had three staff from Member schools trained to deliver the PL which was TQI accredited (6 hours). Additionally, 18 staff from Member Schools took part in the first PL session offered for the year, which was also TQI accredited (6 hours). The Association will continue to advertise the Everyone Everyday program to all schools.

AISACT will continue to support schools and develop PL opportunities for staff. Through discussions with Member Schools, PL will be sought in the following areas:

- How to communicate with students who have challenging behaviours/complex needs
- Seeking further assistance, who should staff refer students and families to for further assistance
- Further developing pastoral care systems in schools
- Further developing ILPs to ensure they are a workable document
- Behavioural techniques for students who have challenging behaviours/complex needs
- Assisting staff and students through those transition stages at school
- Direct and indirect discrimination and staff responsibilities (this is already being provided through the UC e-learning modules)
- Coaching and mentoring new staff to the school and preservice teachers in the education students with challenging behaviours/complex needs.

The Association has a representative on the TQI led working group, which discuss matters in relation to this recommendation and recommendation 13.1.

AISACT continues, in partnership with ED and CE, to explore opportunities that specifically addresses this recommendation.

Recommendation 13.7

That ETD, CE, and each Independent School, (a) prioritise scholarships and sabbaticals for school leaders and teachers to undertake formal study in relation to students with complex needs and challenging behaviour; (b) create opportunities for school leaders and teachers to visit and see in action practices in schools with a reputation for creative and resourceful approaches to teaching students with complex needs and challenging behaviour; and (c) create opportunities for these school leaders and teachers to become mentors and facilitators within networks, sectors, and schools.

AISACT Response

Key Activities

AISACT maintains the Students with Disability network. This network meets once a term at a different Independent School, with the host school providing an overview of the types of programs they have in place for students with disability and students with complex needs and challenging behaviours.

AISACT has engaged the services of Australian Institute of Management to develop a program targeted at Member schools middle management group. The program has been developed in line with the recent report 'Preparing future leaders' released by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Participants are provided opportunities to work with their peers in other Independent Schools on projects, including enhancing boy's engagement in maths, staff wellbeing and increasing the participation from an ATSI perspective. The program requires each participant to have a mentor and a 1 up supervisor, this may be from their own school or another ACT Independent School and for the participant to share their project and their findings at the AISACT Celebrating Teaching and Learning event.

For the past two years AISACT has provided two scholarships for staff from Member Schools to attend the ACEL Disability Summit. AISACT will be providing the same opportunity in 2017 to the Summit.