



Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
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Dear Commissioners

Issues Paper 9 - Addressing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Primary and Secondary Schools

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to Issues Paper 9. The Independent school sector acknowledges the important work of the Commission in seeking to prevent or alleviate the impact of past and future child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. Independent schools are committed to child safety as a matter of the highest priority.

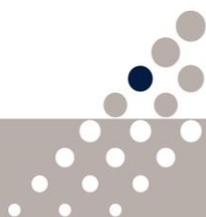
ISCA is the peak national body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools. Through these Associations, ISCA represents a sector with 1,080 schools and 576,000 students, accounting for approximately 16 per cent of Australian school enrolments. ISCA's major role is to bring the unique needs of Independent schools to the attention of the Australian Government and to represent the sector on national issues.

Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions that are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. Independent schools are registered by the relevant state or territory education authority. Boards of governors or committees of management are the key decision-making bodies for most Independent schools and are responsible for issues such as a school's educational provision, student safety and welfare, current and future development and staffing.

Unlike other sectors, the majority of Independent schools operate autonomously. These schools do not rely on central bureaucracies or bodies but are separately responsible to their parent and school communities.

As recognised in the Issues Paper, under Australia's constitutional federation, principal responsibility for the regulation of school education, for both government and non-government providers, sits with state and territory governments. As part of their regulatory responsibility for school education, each state and territory currently has an existing legislative framework for all registered schools to implement and follow with regard to child safety, student welfare and child protection.

The Association of Independent Schools in each state and territory works with the relevant state or territory government authority to support the development and implementation of effective and appropriate child protection frameworks, policies and processes in Independent schools.



The Associations of Independent Schools work cross-sectorally with the other (government and non-government) education sectors in their jurisdiction to develop, establish and implement child protection programs for the training of school staff. Programs cover appropriate staff conduct, reporting and responding to allegations and complaints within the school context, and exchange of information about persons of concern.

Associations of Independent Schools play a significant role in providing advice and professional learning to Independent schools concerning their obligations for establishing strong child safe principles, policies and procedures with regard to child protection and mandatory reporting.

State and territory Associations of Independent Schools work with their member schools to assist them in proactively creating strong processes and procedures for realizing and sustaining safe and supportive school cultures and environments. Regulatory frameworks for schools need to provide support and guidance to schools to create a culture where staff and students feel confident to raise issues of concern in a safe and supportive environment with the knowledge that information will be responded to professionally and appropriately. The strongest approaches will be those in which all members of the school community, including the school board and leadership, influence each other in ensuring appropriate professional expectations, boundaries and standards.

Independent school communities strive to create and embed cultures which make schools safe for all students. However, whilst acknowledging the critical role of schools, the role of the wider child protection community is also significant, particularly in providing the necessary expertise and advice to supporting those who have suffered abuse.

The Issues Paper highlights the current lack of consistency between the states and territories regarding legislation to prevent, identify and appropriately respond to child sexual abuse. In recognition that the existing regulatory responsibility for school education and child protection rests with the states and territories, ISCA sees that the focus should be on working to align the level of child protection across jurisdictions. There is scope for the development of nationally consistent 'principles' or 'benchmarks' which could be utilised by state and territory governments to achieve broadly consistent regulation whilst retaining the flexibility and accountability that is required for implementation at the local state and territory level.

For example, the approach for aligning state, territory and Australian Government schemes to introduce consistent national standards for Working With Children Checks (WWCC) and establish a centralised WWCC database to facilitate cross-border information sharing suggested in the Commission's recent *Working With Children Checks* Report is a model which ISCA would strongly support.

ISCA appreciates the opportunity to submit this letter in support of the Commission's work.

Yours faithfully

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