

Choice and Affordability Fund

2024 Annual Report – The Association of
Independent Schools of South Australia



NGRB Ongoing Compliance Declaration

Section 92 of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act) outlines the basic requirements for approval of a non-government representative body for a non-government school.

As such, the Department of Education is seeking confirmation that – The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia complies with the legislative requirements in relation to monitoring the body's compliance with the Act.

Confirmation you continue to meet basic requirements for approval

Body corporate

The AISSA (ABN: 37 819 228 078) is a registered organisation under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009* (Cth) and a registered charity under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cth).

Not-for-profit (NFP)

The AISSA is a registered charity under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cth) and has a suite of overarching governance and financial policies to ensure its not-for-profit status is maintained. The AISSA Constitution requires all schools which seek membership of the AISSA to not be conducted for profit.

Financial viability

The AISSA has a comprehensive suite of financial and governance policies, including Business Continuity and Risk Management Plans, which ensure the prudent use of government and membership funding and ongoing financial viability. Audited AISSA accounts are provided annually to the AISSA membership along with Fair Work Australia, the Australian Charities and Not-for profits Commission (ACNC) and the State Government as part of financial acquittal processes for management of government funds.

Fit and proper person

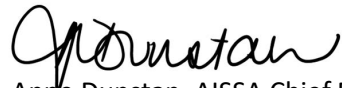
The AISSA has in place a range of organisational mechanisms to ensure fitness and propriety of staff, in addition to proven stability and expertise of AISSA staff in project management and management of Australian Government funds. A range of organisational structures, including screening processes and working with children checks, are in place. The AISSA Board provides governance oversight of the AISSA's operations to ensure staffing arrangements remain fit of purpose.

NGRB Annual Report Sign Off

(Please complete this section when submitting your CAF 2024 Annual Report to the Department – this section can be removed before publishing your CAF 2024 Annual Report)

This annual report is submitted in fulfillment of the annual report requirements in sections 50, 51 and 52 of the CAF Guidelines.

**Name and Position of the person
signing off on behalf of the NGRB¹:**



Anne Dunstan, AISSA Chief Executive

Date: 27 June 2025

¹ Name and position of the person within the NGRB with authority to sign off.

Summary of 2024

This report captures the commitment of the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) to progress national objectives in support of enhancing accessibility of non-government schools for parents, the strengthening of outcomes for schools, provision of transition assistance and the building of safe and supportive environments for all, as funded through the Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF).

The activities outlined in this report have only been made possible through this funding and extend beyond regular service provision. Responsiveness to individual school circumstances and iterative program reflection have underpinned implementation approaches and, as in previous years, mechanisms for funding distribution have varied across priorities, including both centralised and distributed expenditure. A specific systemic governance arrangement has continued for Lutheran schools and once again saw the provision of funds to the Approved Authority, Lutheran Education SA, NT and WA (LESNW), across some priorities. All South Australian Independent schools have been provided with the opportunity to apply for, or be supported through, CAF resourcing.

The Business Development Planning Program, developed to provide support to South Australian Independent schools in responding to the long-term impact on schools of the local global, economic challenges faced by South Australia. Ensuring assistance to progress business development plans was undertaken through a strategy overseen by the AISSA for non-Lutheran schools, and coordinated through the LESNW for Lutheran schools. This latter approach recognises both the size of the Lutheran system, covering 29 schools, and the specific governance and oversight arrangements that apply to systemic schools. The scope of requested services for the non Lutheran school strand exceeded the budgeted funding quantum and consequently saw a budget re-allocation using the allowed program variability allowance to increase funding availability for this priority. Additionally, centralised expenditure was used to facilitate a range of professional support including data analysis, policy support and strategic advice.

The introduction of the DMI methodology and the requirement to transition down to an 80% Commonwealth share over the period 2022-2029 has had a significant negative funding impact for a number of South Australian Independent schools. As in previous years, the Transition Assistance activity incorporated three priority groups – National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAFF) Schools, Other Schools and Regional Assistance Schools. A consistent element of the program since 2022 has been the linkage between the provision of transition assistance grant funding provided to the NAAF and Other schools, with the requirement for schools to use funding to engage external expertise to identify business model adaptations to reduce costs over the long term and successfully transition by 2029.

The availability of the Special Circumstances funding was regularly advised to member schools across the 2024 program year through a range of mechanisms, with centralised expenditure used also to closely monitor the need for funding for short term emergency assistance, as outlined in the CAF Guidelines. While a range of communication mechanisms were in place to ensure connectivity with schools throughout the year, no funding was requested or deemed required in response to priority areas or natural disasters.

In implementing the Strengthening Outcomes for Schools and Educationally Disadvantaged Schools and Students priority, 2024 activity has once again prioritised two pivotal change levers, that of strengthening school leadership and the building of teacher efficacy. A cohesive range of improvement initiatives was open to all schools and included building leadership evaluative capacity and the fostering of professional culture and high quality practice across schools. The use of evidence-based teaching practices as a foundation for building teacher efficacy was deployed through a range of complementary initiatives including continuing implementation of Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum.

Proactive, positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives remained a high priority for school Boards and leadership in 2024 and CAF resourcing supported school leaders to strengthen their approaches to wellbeing through a whole school lens. The principles and actions in the AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit remained a key mechanism in providing a framework for schools to review policies and approaches. Emeritus Professor Donna Cross facilitated a professional learning series for school leaders that consolidated the importance of embedding a whole-school approach to wellbeing. This strategy was complemented by the AISSA wellbeing network and the curation of a comprehensive range of resources on the AISSA website.

The AISSA confirms that it has met its obligation under section 49 of the CAF Guidelines. All Independent school authorities that received distributed funds have certified that distributed funding has been used for the purposes for which it was provided. The detailed and deliberate support for school education, as described in the subsequent full report, has enabled parental choice and the affordability of Independent schools, while also addressing educational disadvantage and promoting student success. These activities would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Australian Government.

Risk Management

Risk category	Identified risks	Management
Stakeholders	Program design fails to meet stakeholder need. Lack of stakeholder engagement. Lack of access to program information.	The CAF workplan Stakeholder Engagement Plan has been a key point of reference. A range of organisational communication structures and approaches to service delivery have been in place, including formal agenda briefings, electronic newsletters, website updates and stakeholder meeting opportunities in various modes.
External catastrophic event / critical incident	The AISSA and/or schools are involved in a critical incident that disrupts normal operational capability. The event leads to postponement of activity or the issuing of grants. School leaders and staff are unable to access AISSA services. Schools face impediments in participating in CAF Priority activity.	The AISSA Business Continuity Plan and suite of policies and procedures were in place. Remote and in-situ processes and procedures were implemented that enable continuation of: - the provision of timely advice responsive to schools' needs during complex times - ability to work with schools using online and remote modes. A range of feedback mechanisms facilitated timely organisational responses to schools' identified needs.
Organizational	Judicious use of funds and validity of program implementation.	Overarching governance oversight has been provided through the AISSA Board. Effective internal and external financial procedures and auditing processes were in place. Regulated by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). Established stakeholder feedback mechanisms.
Technical	Increased threat of cyber-attack. Lack of access by regional and remote schools.	Comprehensive organisational security processes and policies have been in place. Proven ability to work with regional and remote schools using online and remote modes.
Project Management	Lack of continuity.	Proven stability and expertise of AISSA staff in project management and management of Australian Government funds. Shared knowledge across staff, so that key information is held by more than one person.

Activity Report

Activity/Initiative

Business Development Planning Program

Priority

A – Choice and Affordability

Activity Description

The Business Development Planning Program has been developed to provide support to South Australian Independent schools in responding to the long-term impact on schools of the local global, economic challenges that are faced by South Australia and which have consequent implications on choice and affordability for school families. These challenges include, locally, the ongoing impact of the closure of large manufacturing industries, which has impacted employment conditions across a number of areas in South Australia, ongoing implications from unpredictable weather patterns, including drought, bushfires and flooding and the ongoing impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, most specifically in relation to workforce pressures. Global developments and instability have further resulted in unavoidable rising costs for schools and significant pressures placed on families due to increases in the cost of living.

The program incorporates two primary strands. The first strand offers support to non-Lutheran schools with all program delivery, including engagement of the consultancy services, overseen by the AISSA. The second strand provides program support to selected schools in the South Australian Lutheran school system through a grant paid to the Approved Authority, Lutheran Education South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia (LESNW) to oversee the consultancy. This latter strand of the program recognises both the size of the system, covering 29 schools, and the specific governance and oversight arrangements that apply to systemic schools.

The primary purpose of the Business Development Planning Program is to enhance choice and affordability for families by assisting schools to progress business development plans to enable them to streamline business practices reducing and mitigating cost increases. As part of the application process, in the non-Lutheran program strand, schools have an opportunity to request projects within a select range of program offerings with the choice intended to ensure that funded projects best meet the needs of individual schools. Individual program activities which are available include long range financial master-planning, structural review, cost review, financial health check and finance and administrative review. An opportunity is provided for schools to request support outside of the listed offerings and eligibility is determined on a case by case basis. The AISSA is responsible for engaging the consultant firm, which is selected on the basis of having the requisite skills, knowledge and professional expertise in financial planning and, importantly, knowledge of the school sector. An assessment is undertaken each year regarding suitability and no changes to the choice of firm engaged have been deemed necessary over the life of the program. The work undertaken by the firm includes onsite visits to participating schools along with desktop analysis and report production. The AISSA's program oversight has allowed considerable economies of scale in program delivery.

In 2024, an application and assessment process was undertaken in the non-Lutheran strand, through the use of centralised expenditure, to determine eligibility to receive services. The application process required evidence to be provided of meeting the eligibility criteria, with applicant schools required to provide a written submission outlining the challenges faced by the school, including external contributing factors, and to provide a range of supporting demographic and financial data to assist the AISSA in its determination.

Nine applications were received with eight non-Lutheran Independent schools supported under the 2024 program including one school which had received support in the 2022 program. The program design enables schools to receive additional years of funded services where an assessment indicates that this is warranted and an appropriate use of government funds. One application was deemed

outside of program scope and therefore deemed ineligible for service provision, with the school notified of the outcome. The school has received program support in previous years.

The scope of requested services far exceeded the budgeted funding quantum, and the AISSA determined that given the weight of economic challenges facing all schools, that it would use unexpended funds to increase the quantum of funding available. This was undertaken within the 20% program variability allowed under the CAF Agreement. In consultation with the consultant firm engaged to undertake the work, a further determination was made with regard to applicants that requested a range of funded projects as to which projects would provide the most value having regard to the information provided. These schools will be offered further opportunity for program support in 2025.

One school withdrew its application after the program had commenced. A reconciliation of the costs incurred to the point of the withdrawal was undertaken, with payment made to the consultant for the work completed. A thorough assessment of the reasons underpinning the withdrawal was undertaken to enable modifications to be made to the 2025 program to mitigate the risk of recurrence of this situation.

Of the eight supported schools all were located in metropolitan Adelaide. The majority of funded schools were R-12 and included one school providing specialist offerings and one school providing senior-secondary education.

Centralised expenditure was used to manage the program including the development of a contract with the consultancy firm, negotiation with the company regarding the selection of applicants, ensuring that consultants met child safety requirements, processing of payments, ongoing monitoring and the assessment of reports.

At the conclusion of the 2024 program, feedback was sought from participating schools on their satisfaction with the program with all schools indicating satisfaction and the majority of the schools indicating very high satisfaction with the services provided. A number of schools requested further support in the following program year, noting that the program will run across the 2022-2025 workplan. Centralised expenditure facilitated an analysis of the program at the end of 2024, which incorporated the feedback from participating schools and analysis of the reports. As in previous program years, the outcomes of the analysis will further focus the strategic directions of the program in 2025.

The separate program, implemented in the Lutheran school system and overseen by the Approved Authority, LESNW, supported two Lutheran schools both located in the metropolitan area. LESNW engaged external consultants under this part of the program through a grant paid to facilitate the work. Centralised expenditure was used in the development of the agreement which was signed between the AISSA and LESNW and in the acquittal process which was undertaken to ensure that the funds were used for the stated purpose. The agreement specifically requires the funding to be used by LESNW to engage external expertise to assist selected schools to engage in strategic financial planning. In addition to the signed declaration regarding use of funds, the acquittal included the requirement for the receipt of relevant reports produced using CAF funding and required the Approved Authority to provide a breakdown of the proportion of the grant used to support each selected school. As a result of Australian Government feedback on the 2023 CAF Report, a specific declaration was included to confirm that no portion of the grant funding was retained by the Approved Authority.

In addition to specific external program delivery, a range of professional support was provided which included, but was not limited to data analysis, policy support and strategic advice, through centralised expenditure to assist all schools in meeting the Choice and Affordability priority. Noting the increasing importance of navigating a challenging and complex operating environment from a

governance perspective, professional expertise was provided in the form of specific professional learning focussed on enhancing financial knowledge.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
- Schools were supported to implement business development plans to enhance long-term financial stability and maintain choice and affordability for South Australian families. - School Boards and leaders were supported to identify key strategic directions to enhance strategic planning.	- Eight non-systemic schools were supported in 2024. - Two systemic schools were supported in 2024. - Project was undertaken by the consultant in a timely manner. 100% of schools which provided feedback reported satisfaction with the work undertaken and success in developing business plans. 24 schools were supported to increase their financial knowledge through professional learning.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$109,464.29	\$20,000.00

Activity/Initiative**Transition Assistance - NAAF**

Priority

B – Transition Assistance

Activity Description

The introduction of the DMI methodology and the requirement to transition down to an 80% Commonwealth share over the period 2022-2029 has had a significant negative funding impact for a number of South Australian Independent schools including the NAAF schools identified by the Australian Government. Transition impact includes losses in actual and real terms, which are compounded by the significant increases in operational costs being experienced by all schools as a result of factors such as staffing pressures, inflation, utility charges and increasing student need. Added layers of complexity in managing the transition to reductions in funding further include the timing of the provision of CTC for the following year and volatility in other data sets which underpin recurrent funding. Recognising the significance in the quantum of the levels of reduction in funding which will be experienced by NAAF schools over the period to 2029, along with the operational environment in which the transition is occurring, the South Australian Independent school transition assistance program is designed to support NAAF schools to make changes to business operations, including streamlining business practices, in a cohesive, manageable and sustainable manner.

To ensure consistency and certainty for the NAAF schools, the 2021 Q4 Funding Estimation Tool (FET) provides the starting point for the calculation underpinning the provision of transition assistance funding across the 2022-25 workplan. Centralised expenditure is used to undertake an analysis of the FET outcomes each year, along with an assessment to determine the continued appropriateness of the criteria for eligibility and the formula for distributing the direct grants to NAAF schools to ensure it remained fair and equitable. The analysis in 2024 determined that the three primary base criteria to determine initial eligibility, these being an increase in DMI, Commonwealth share over 80% and a loss in Australian Government recurrent funding in real terms over the 2022-2025 quadrennium, remain current.

A consistent element of the program across the 2022-2025 Workplan is the linkage between the provision of transition assistance grant funding to NAAF schools and the requirement for schools to use funding to engage external expertise to identify the range of areas where costs can be reduced over the long term with all schools required to identify through the application process how the funding will be used. The focus on the use of external expertise is predicated on the supposition that an objective assessment can enhance the identification of innovative approaches to change, which is required due to the quantum of loss and notes the time pressures on school staff to undertake the significant quantum of work required.

Applications were forwarded to eligible schools in early Term 1. All NAAF schools were eligible to apply, subject to meeting the application criteria and provision of a range of supporting documentation. In addition to the base criteria, NAAF schools were required to demonstrate a need for support, provide underpinning supporting financial and other data and identify how the funding would be used to support the program intent, noting the above requirement for engagement of external expertise. Indicative funding allocations were provided at the time of application to enable schools to tailor the program of support. The formula for distribution incorporated changes in funding levels over the quadrennium due to the DMI impact, along with changes to indexation.

All applications were deemed to meet the eligibility criteria and criteria for the use of funds with final funding amounts determined on the completion of the assessment process. One school, which had received additional assistance in the previous program year, was again deemed eligible for additional assistance due to the quantum of reduction in funding resulting from the increase in the

school's DMI. Higher than anticipated indexation in 2024 resulted in a very minor variance in distributed funding.

Centralised funding was used to support the application process which was run concurrently with the Transition Assistance – Other Schools program to enhance the efficient use of funds. Centralised costs were shared proportionally across the two programs. On completion of the application and assessment process, grants were paid within three weeks of the date of the receipt of the final application. In addition to the application and eligibility assessment process, centralised expenditure was also used to process and pay grants, to undertake the acquittal process and to undertake an analysis of the program to identify key learnings for future professional support.

The acquittal process requires schools to certify that the grant had been used for the funded purpose and to identify how that grant was used to support effective transition to the DMI by 2029. In 2024, as in the two previous years of the workplan, an assessment of the criteria was undertaken to inform the following year's program and identify any areas where change may be required.

Detailed scenario modelling was also undertaken on behalf of individual member schools and funded through centralised expenditure. All schools are advised of the availability of this modelling which is provided to offer insight into the impacts of potential shifts in DMI, along with projected enrolment changes and other parameter elements to enhance long-term planning and budgeting. Updates on Australian Government recurrent funding parameters were provided across 2024 through regular written briefings to meetings of school principals and reference groups. Professional support further assisted schools to plan for the impact of any potential shifts in DMI values.

This activity is anticipated to be required over the life of the CAF Agreement.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
Eligible schools will be supported to adapt current business models to enable them to transition to the DMI funding arrangements by 2029.	- An equitable and fair formula was used to distribute direct grants to eligible schools in 2024. - Grant funding was distributed within three weeks of the return of all application forms. - An acquittal process was undertaken at the end of 2024 requiring schools to certify that they had used the funds for the specified grant purpose and identifying how the grant was used. - Schools reported success in identifying measures that will enable them to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$38,928.46	\$937,119.00

Activity/Initiative

Priority

Transition Assistance - Other

B – Transition Assistance

Activity Description

Analysis undertaken to support program delivery under the 2022-2025 workplan identified that, in addition to the Australian Government identified NAAF schools, the transition to the DMI will have a significant negative long term funding impact on a number of other South Australian Independent schools. Transition to the 80% share over the 2022-2029 period for these schools will be achieved through low growth or no growth in funding, leading to a loss of funding in real terms given the significant and ongoing rise in the cost of delivering school education. As identified in the previous activity report, rising educational costs include but are not limited to staffing pressures, inflation, utility charges and increasing student need. The rising cost of living pressures on school families considerably limits the ability of families to absorb fee increases, necessitating that adaption to reductions in funding is underpinned by identification of business cost savings.

The 2021 Q4 Funding Estimation Tool (FET) provided the starting point for program delivery ensuring consistency in application of the transition assistance provisions for the two activities NAAF and Other. An assessment of the criteria underpinning Transition Assistance-Other, originally established in 2022, was undertaken, using centralised expenditure, to ensure that it remained fit for purpose. Centralised expenditure was also used to assess the continued application of the funding formula, underpinning the provision of grant funding, to ensure it remained fair and appropriate. Consistent with the 2022 and 2023 program years, the eligibility criteria for receipt of funds incorporated both an increase in DMI, transition pathway starting point above the 80% share and a loss in funding in real terms due to no growth or low growth in Australian Government recurrent funding over the 2022-2025 quadrennium. No changes to the eligible schools were identified for the 2024 program year.

The Transition Assistance - Other program delivery is broadly consistent with the program design of the Transition Assistance NAAF program, as outlined in the previous activity report, with schools eligible for funding supported to undertake a systematic analysis of school business operations to assist in streamlining business practices and supporting the schools to counter cost pressures which may result in higher fees. The engagement of external expertise is a program requirement to enable an objective assessment of school operations to be made in order to identify a range of areas where long term cost savings can be made.

Eligible schools are required to meet the base criteria and to demonstrate a need for support. It is a program requirement that underpinning financial and other data is provided in support of the application along with an outline of how the funding would be used.

In alignment with the work undertaken as part of the NAAF Transition Assistance activity, centralised expenditure was used to develop an application form, assess applications for eligibility, process and pay grants and undertake the acquittal process. Undertaking the application process concurrently with the Transition Assistance – NAAF Schools program, with applications forwarded to eligible Other schools at the same time as the NAAF program, resulted in economies of scale with centralised expenditure to cover these costs shared proportionally across the two activities.

To assist eligible schools in identifying how the grant would be used in support of the program's intent, an indicative funding grant was provided at the time of application with clarity also provided to participating schools regarding the types of initiatives which could be funded in 2024. Professional advice was also provided to individual schools prior to applications being submitted. Final allocations were determined on the completion of the application assessment process. Four non-systemic schools were supported under this part of the program.

On completion of the application and assessment process grants were paid within three weeks of the final application date.

Consistent with the previous activity, centralised expenditure further supported analysis of the acquittal reports to identify key learnings and areas of future professional support outside the Transition Assistance Program. An assessment of the criteria was also undertaken to inform the 2025 Transition Assistance – Other program.

In addition to the four non-systemic schools, five schools which sit under one Approved Authority, LESNW, were identified as eligible to receive support having regard to eligibility criteria which further incorporated negative and low funding growth and the specific impact of transition share on schools which are part of a system authority. Noting the specific governance arrangements of systemic schools an agreement was developed and signed with LESNW to govern the use of funding and process the grant payment, which was paid within one week of receipt of the signed agreement. The Agreement required that funding would be used to engage external expertise to assist selected schools to engage in strategic financial planning.

Centralised expenditure was also used to undertake the acquittal process which required the Approved Authority, LESNW, to certify that the grant had been used by each funded school for the intended purpose and to outline how the grant was used by the individual schools to support their effective transition to the DMI by 2029. The acquittal further required the breakdown in funding provided to each school. No funding was retained by the Approved Authority.

This activity is anticipated to be required over the life of the CAF Agreement.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
Eligible schools will be supported to adapt current business models to enable them to transition to the DMI funding arrangements by 2029.	- An equitable and fair formula was used to distribute direct grants to eligible non-systemic schools in 2024. - Grant funding was distributed within three weeks of the return of all application forms. - An Agreement was developed between the AISSA and an Approved Authority for more than one school and the funding paid within one week of the receipt of this agreement. - An acquittal process was undertaken at the end of 2024 requiring individual non-systemic schools and the Approved Authority to certify that the funding had been used for the specified grant purpose and identifying how the grant was used. - Schools reported success in identifying measures that will enable them to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$21,487.64	\$168,103.00

Activity/Initiative	Transition Assistance – Regional Transition Assistance
Priority	B – Transition Assistance

Activity Description

The Australian Government has identified four regional schools as eligible for regional transition assistance. The four schools sit under one Approved Authority, LESNW. Consistent with previous program years, funding was paid directly to LESNW for on-payment to the individual schools. The 2024 payment included an accumulated indexation component.

Centralised expenditure was used to develop the Agreement between LESNW and the AISSA, process the grant and undertake the acquittal process. The Agreement enables LESNW to allocate the funding to the eligible schools on the basis of need. The acquittal process required confirmation from LESNW that the funding was used by the funded regional schools to assist in transitioning down to the DMI methodology by 2029. The acquittal process required a breakdown of funding received by each individual eligible school to be provided and a declaration that full funding had been provided to the schools. No funding was retained by the Approved Authority.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
Eligible regional schools will receive direct transition assistance grants to support their transition to the DMI.	- A formal agreement was signed between the AISSA and the Approved Authority for each participating school in 2024. - Funding was processed and paid by the AISSA within one week upon the return of the signed agreement. - An acquittal for the use of funds was provided by the Approved Authority certifying that the funding was used for the specified grant funded purpose.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$3,031.87	\$167,682.00

Activity/Initiative	Special Circumstances Funding
Priority	C – Special Circumstances Funding

Activity Description

\$2,000,000 has been provisioned under the 2022-2025 Workplan provisioned for the 2022-2025 quadrennium for Special Circumstances funding. The provision, which represents notionally \$500,000 for each of the years 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025, has been made for the purposes of providing funding for schools which meet the Special Circumstances funding criteria for short term emergency assistance, as outlined in the CAF Guidelines, and to meet the requirement to provide Special Circumstances funding to schools in response to priority areas or natural disaster, including drought and bushfire, through establishing specific grant programs as required. Under the Workplan Special Circumstances funding is only provided on the basis of need and therefore may not be expended in every year.

Throughout 2024, centralised expenditure was used to closely monitor the need for special circumstances funding with close attention paid in the early part of the year to the potential need for special circumstances support as a result of the (then) expected extreme bushfire and heatwave conditions for the 2023-2024 bushfire season, noting that uncertain weather patterns have led to an increase in bushfire danger periods. Activity across 2024 included the provision of supporting information and updates to schools along with processes being put in place to maintain connectivity with schools, including emergency contacts over school holiday periods and weekends, and to ensure that grant funding could be paid if required over the period of the closure of the AISSA Office across the Christmas/New Year period.

No special circumstances funding was deemed required in response to priority areas or natural disasters.

The availability of the Special Circumstances funding was regularly advised to member schools across the 2024 program year through a range of mechanisms including written and verbal communications. The Special Circumstances Application form requirements which are in place for the 2022-2025 quadrennium have been developed to ensure consistency and continuity with the previous requirements of the (then) Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE). No applications were received in 2024.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
- Schools are aware of the availability of special circumstances funding. - Schools which receive funding in response to an identified priority or natural disaster are supported to continue operations. - Schools which apply and are eligible for special circumstances funding will be supported to continue operations and remain financially viable.	- An application and assessment process was in place for schools which meet the Special Circumstances funding criteria for short term emergency assistance as outlined in the CAF Guidelines. - Schools were advised of the availability of this funding through regular communications. - The AISSA continued to monitor for the need to implement specific grant programs to address priority areas or natural disaster.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$2,034.84	\$0

Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways offer crucial and diverse opportunities for students and the offering of a well-planned program for VET leaders in schools has contributed to student success. For school staff new to the leadership of VET, a workshop series provided opportunity to build foundational knowledge in VET, Workplace Learning & apprenticeships. Leaders were supported in strategic thinking to implement new ideas and processes with contributions from experienced leaders a highlight. Inclusive of staff from regional and outer metropolitan schools, feedback indicated that this support for leaders new to VET was both valuable and welcomed. Complementing this, VET networking days included visits to tertiary providers and registered training organisations, providing participants with important insights to better support students and their broader school communities.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success						
- School leaders strengthen their knowledge and skills in leading complex communities. - The enhanced skills of distributed leadership teams in schools drive teacher learning and growth. - There will be an increased awareness of high-quality industry partnership opportunities for students. - Schools will be supported to meet their regulatory requirements. - Leaders and leadership teams to explore learning success within contemporary organising frameworks and competencies.	90% of participating leaders and leadership teams have indicated improved understanding of effective strategies and have felt supported to grow in their leadership practice. - The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative are <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Metropolitan</td><td>50</td></tr> <tr> <td>Rural</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr> <td>Remote</td><td>1</td></tr> </table> - Samples of resources, learning plans and micro-projects have been shared across schools.	Metropolitan	50	Rural	12	Remote	1
Metropolitan	50						
Rural	12						
Remote	1						

Activity Description

Initiative B: Building Teacher Efficacy

Building a shared belief among teachers in their ability to positively influence students is one of the most powerful factors in student achievement. The use of evidence-based teaching practices provides a foundation for building teacher efficacy and, in 2024, was deployed through a range of complementary elements. All Independent schools were invited to participate in this initiative, with a significant number of teachers reporting improved understanding and growth in their pedagogical practice. Centralised expenditure supported the delivery of activities across this initiative and, notwithstanding diligent planning, changes in resourcing and project costs during the year have resulted in minor variances to the initial budget projections.

To support schools in their second year of implementation of Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum, workshops and online networking hubs were provided for teachers in each of the Learning Areas and for each stage of schooling, Foundation – year 6 and years 7 – 10. In response to feedback gathered at the end of 2023, workshops focused on strategies for enacting the curriculum through a revision

of school-based teaching and learning approaches. Protocols and templates for mapping curriculum enactment were used to help teachers develop their own action plans. Networking hubs and guest Learning Area specialists provided ongoing support, facilitating rigorous dialogue. An additional focus on the Cross-Curriculum Priorities (CCPs) used modelling, exemplars, and collaborative learning tasks to develop sequences of tasks. Teachers indicated improved clarity about curriculum expectations, with the series illuminating opportunities and strategies for aligning full enactment of the curriculum with school-based learning, teaching, and assessment improvement initiatives.

A focus on creating culturally safe classrooms and schools saw Elders work alongside AISSA staff to share the Aboriginal worldview and guide school teams in reflecting on their contexts. Through collaborative discussions, educators deepened their understanding of cultural competence, enhancing their ability to create inclusive and supportive learning environments.

The University of NSW Sydney, Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre was engaged to deliver the Mini COGE – Certificate in Gifted Education. Inclusive Education leaders, together with educators of highly able learners, were supported to understand current evidence-based research and to grow their pedagogical practice to identify and respond to gifted, high potential and talented students.

A masterclass series for primary and secondary teachers facilitated investigation into research insights about deepening engagement and motivation for learners. Teachers engaged with the mechanics behind motivation and explored the power of effective feedback. They considered the role of emotions, relationships and belonging in schools and the connections with improved learning outcomes. Microprojects provided a vehicle for documenting and sharing learning, with some teachers sharing their findings at broader education networks.

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has impacted various sectors of human life, with enormous implications for teaching and student learning. In response, the AISSA curated a series of workshops that supported cohesive and ethical approaches for Generative AI in learning. Focuses included exploring implications of Generative AI for assessment, academic integrity and empowering learners through creating new learning pathways enhanced by technology. The series addressed fundamental considerations for integrating AI into teaching, offering insights, case studies, commentary and evidence of achievements in different contexts. Complementing this, exploring the role of STEM in education brought together educators, researchers, and industry professionals to provide a platform for teachers to reflect on and refine pedagogical practices in implementing innovative STEM learning. Both of these elements challenged educators to rethink the design and engagement of students in an education that prepares them not only for today but also for the future.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success						
- Teachers effectively access and use contemporary evidence to design learning and implement pedagogical practices to increase student engagement and achievement. - Teachers demonstrate a deepened understanding about expectations for learning success, evidence of learning and quality program development. - Communities of practice across schools contribute to the raising of the quality of learning experiences for students. - Schools have access to a range of resources and case studies of best practice.	92% of participating teachers have indicated improved understanding of effective strategies and have felt supported to grow in pedagogical practice. - The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative are <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Metropolitan</td><td>53</td></tr> <tr> <td>Rural</td><td>15</td></tr> <tr> <td>Remote</td><td>0</td></tr> </table> - Samples of resources, workshop presentations and learning plans have been shared across schools.	Metropolitan	53	Rural	15	Remote	0
Metropolitan	53						
Rural	15						
Remote	0						

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$917,022.40	\$0

Activity/Initiative

Priority

Effective Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing

E – Student wellbeing and support

Activity Description

Proactive, positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives remained a high priority for school Boards and leadership in 2024. As such, CAF funding continued to support school leaders to strengthen their approaches to wellbeing through a whole school lens. The AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit, promoting a focus on universal wellbeing and early intervention, was the key mechanism that underpinned this support. The flexibility of entry points in the Toolkit allowed school leaders to engage with its principles and actions to review and refine practices. Professional learning opportunities supported navigating the Toolkit's structure and resources, allowing school leaders to engage in a way that best suited their needs.

In 2024, the AISSA re-engaged wellbeing expert, Emeritus Professor Donna Cross to lead and deliver a professional learning series for school leaders to consolidate the importance of embedding a whole-school approach to wellbeing. The first day of this work addressed concepts of school readiness, reviewing practices, principles and actions, and planning and prioritising for implementation. The second day focussed on assisting schools to review their physical environments, school climate, tier mapping, staff readiness to implement, engaging in difficult conversations, and the importance of family partnerships. The workshops also explored bullying prevention strategies and participants engaged with activities, tools and resources to proactively address the importance of bullying prevention for whole school communities. This has supported staff to understand and explore the essential characteristics of effective whole school wellbeing approaches and review how these key elements related to their everyday practices, policies and procedures. The suite of resources developed in 2023 to support schools with bullying prevention continued to be a key resource. This included the AISSA Policy Guidelines: Bullying Prevention 2023, and the AISSA Policy Template: Bullying Prevention 2023, designed to support schools to develop their own Bullying Prevention policy.

The wellbeing network remained as an important initiative throughout the year, strengthening leaders' ability to share practice, review evidence-based research and explore tools and resources for staff, parents, children and young people. Building on last year's curation of material, the AISSA website continues to be a key repository of wellbeing advice and resources, including:

- AISSA Wellbeing
- Whole School Approaches to Wellbeing
- Student Wellbeing and Mental Health
- Staff and Leader Wellbeing
- Bullying Prevention
- Respectful Relationships/ Consent Education
- Suicide and Self Harm Prevention and Response.

Mental Health First Aid training was provided as an early intervention program, teaching school staff to recognise the signs and symptoms of a potential mental health problem and the related referral processes. Secondary leaders and teachers were supported to understand specific categories of mental ill-health such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance misuse and psychosis. This assisted educators to build foundational skills to deal with crises in young people, including how to develop a practical, evidence-based action plan and navigate positive responses.

Centralised expenditure supported the delivery of activities across this initiative and, notwithstanding diligent planning, changes in resourcing and project costs during the year have resulted in minor variances to the initial budget projections.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success						
- Schools will grow in expertise to understand the characteristics and elements of effective whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing. - Schools will be supported to better examine and implement contextually appropriate approaches and programs. - Whole-of-school approaches to wellbeing will be developed across the sector.	100% of participating schools have indicated a deeper understanding of the characteristics and elements of effective whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing. - The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative are <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Metropolitan</td><td>36</td></tr> <tr> <td>Rural</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr> <td>Remote</td><td>1</td></tr> </table> - The Wellbeing Toolkit continues to be a key resource for schools, with the AISSA website providing a repository for contemporary advice and resources.	Metropolitan	36	Rural	7	Remote	1
Metropolitan	36						
Rural	7						
Remote	1						

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	\$214,375.11	\$0