

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Association of
Independent Schools
of South Australia

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We appreciate the support of our 2025 Priority Partners



**Swanbury
Penglase**

This publication is authorised by AISSA Chief Executive, Anne Dunstan.

For privacy reasons, all images featuring children are stock images.

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The AISSA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, learn and work across South Australia and pays respect to Elders past and present.

We recognise and honour their deep and continuing connection to land, waters, culture and community, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



South Australia's Independent schools continue to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and a deep commitment to student wellbeing and achievement. This year, the AISSA has strengthened its role as a trusted advocate and strategic partner for schools navigating a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

The 2025-2027 Strategic Plan is ambitious, building on the AISSA's culture of, and commitment to, continuous improvement and reflecting and embedding the increasing need for futures thinking in supporting member schools. The Board is thrilled with the outstanding progress made by the AISSA in the Plan's first year, in particular as this relates to deepened engagement with members, expanded high-quality services, and strengthened sector voice in state and national policy discussions.

The Board was delighted by the success of the 2025 AISSA Governance Conference which saw record attendance. The Board was also pleased to see the commencement of the *Pathways2Participation: Implementing MTSS in South Australian Independent Schools* project in conjunction with the University of Melbourne which is funded through a gift from former member school Eynesbury College on its closure. School avoidance is a key issue facing schools in all sectors and the AISSA is proud to be at the forefront of research. Other key highlights for the Board include the AISSA's significant national and state-level advocacy work, the establishment of key partnerships, and enhancing engagement and strategies to strengthen the sector.

The achievements outlined in this report reflect the collective efforts of our member schools, the AISSA team, and our partners across government and industry.

I would like to express, on behalf of the AISSA Board, our thanks to the AISSA Chief Executive, Anne Dunstan, for her leadership and tireless work in support of the AISSA's member schools. I also pay tribute to the commitment and work of the AISSA Board and would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of Michael Potter, Peta St Clair, Paul Weinert, and Helen Finlay who departed the Board in 2025.

As we look ahead, the AISSA remains committed to supporting school autonomy, championing educational excellence, and ensuring that Independent schools continue to thrive as vital contributors to South Australia's social and economic fabric.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Shannon Warren', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Shannon Warren

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



During 2025, we were excited to mark the AISSA's 50th anniversary of leadership, representation and advocacy for Independent schools in South Australia. Throughout this milestone year we acknowledged our beginnings and celebrated the significant and ongoing work of our schools, staff and partners in nurturing the genuine diversity of our sector. We launched our History Timeline on the AISSA website which celebrates the Association's evolution and impact.

Key achievements throughout the year have included strengthened governance support, expanded leadership development pathways, enhanced curriculum and compliance services, and deeper engagement with government on funding, workforce, and regulatory reform.

Our work has been guided by the four pillars of the AISSA Strategic Plan, ensuring that every initiative contributes to long-term sector sustainability and excellence. The AISSA's progress against the Plan is tracked at an executive level and, as this report demonstrates, several activities support more than one priority.

The AISSA partnered closely with Independent Schools Australia (ISA) to ensure member school voices were heard nationally, both in the lead-up to the Federal Election, and in ensuring election commitments are followed through to achieve positive outcomes for member schools.

I extend my sincere thanks to our member schools for their trust and partnership, and to the AISSA team for their expertise, dedication and unwavering commitment to serving our schools and the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Anne Dunstan'. The script is fluid and cursive.

Anne Dunstan



OUR PURPOSE

The AISSA leads, supports, represents, and advocates for South Australia's Independent sector to enhance the success, sustainability, and strength of its member schools. We support schools through advocacy, sector leadership, professional learning, governance and compliance advice.

OUR PRINCIPLES

Across all of its activities, the AISSA is guided by:

- a commitment to the independence of member schools to develop in ways that embody their individual philosophies;
- a belief that the Independent sector offers genuine diversity that ensures parents have real choice in selecting their children's schooling; and
- a commitment to integrity, excellence and expertise.

OUR VALUES



Integrity



Excellence



Expertise





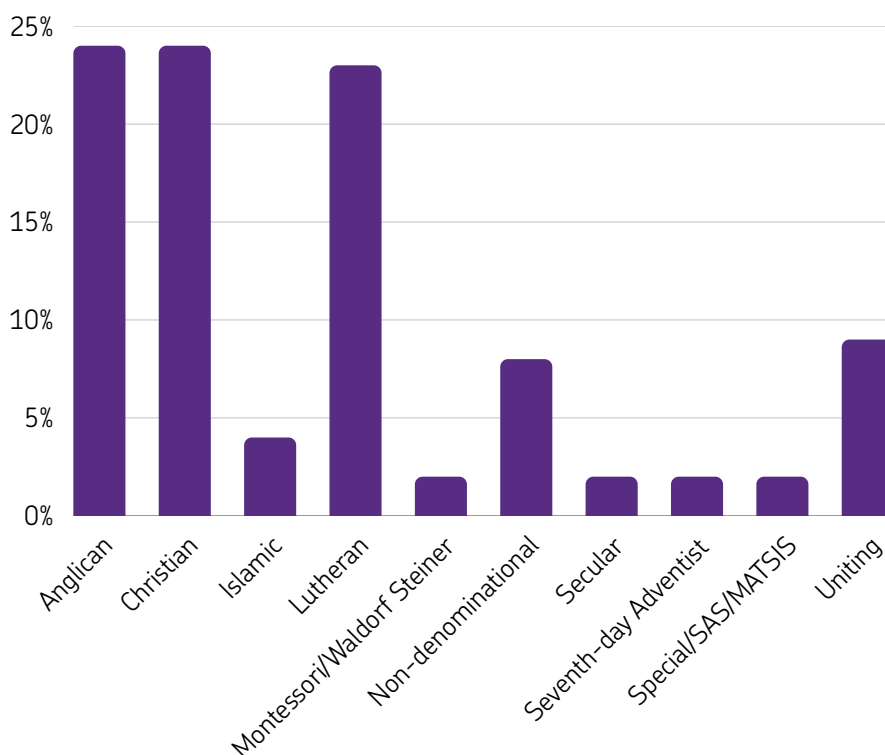
Strategic Plan 2025-2027 - Overview

Purpose	The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) leads, supports, represents and advocates for the Independent sector in South Australia to enhance the success, sustainability and strength of its member schools				
Guiding Principles	The AISSA is committed to - the independence of member schools to develop in ways that embody their individual philosophies - the Independent sector offering genuine diversity that ensures parents have real choice in selecting their children's schooling - integrity, excellence, collaboration and agility				
Strategic Context	- Pressures on member schools are high and increasing - The AISSA's service offering must meet diverse needs - Sustainable sources of revenue must be secured - There are many opportunities				
Strategic Goals	Increase Engagement	Deliver Exceptional Services	Strengthen the Sector	Enhance our Capabilities	
	Increase engagement of our members with our services and with the sector overall	Evolve the mix and quality of our services to meet the current and future needs of the sector	Improve the strength and growth potential of the Independent school sector	Develop our people and systems to meet the needs of our members	
Strategic Initiatives	Track engagement and develop continuous feedback approach	Develop mutually beneficial partnerships	Profile, showcase and celebrate Independent school and sector success	Build a culture of continuous improvement	
	Proactively manage relationships and build networks	Evolve organisation structure around service delivery	Extend conference offerings	Increase networks between staff and schools, utilising expertise from schools where appropriate	
	Implement comprehensive communications strategy	Develop new website	connecting schools, their communities, Independent Schools Australia and political representatives	Invest in ICT infrastructure to enhance hybrid engagement	

MEMBERSHIP SNAPSHOT

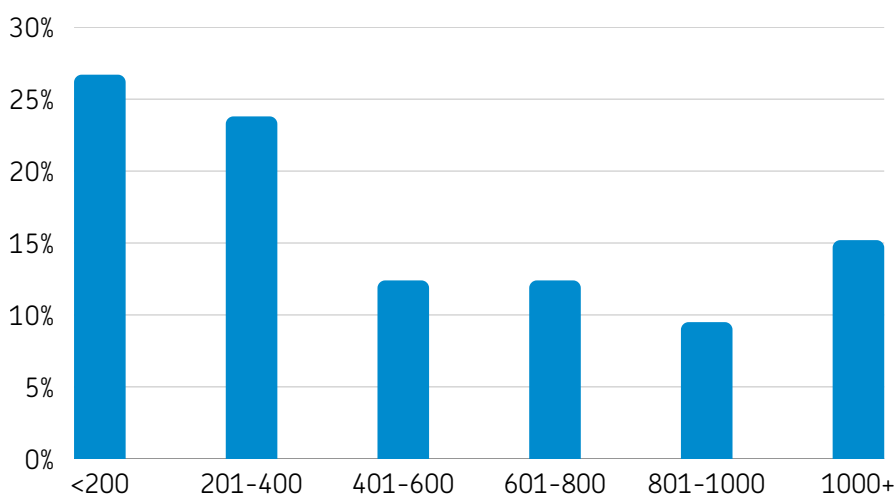
OUR SECTOR IN NUMBERS

Percentage of SA Independent school students by school's religious affiliation or educational philosophy



Source: Department of Education, 2025

Percentage of SA Independent schools by size of school

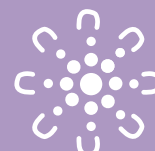


Source: Department of Education, 2025



56,240

TOTAL NUMBER OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
STUDENTS



1,327

ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
STUDENTS



14,363

STUDENTS
LIVING WITH DISABILITY
(ESTIMATED)



976

BOARDING
STUDENTS



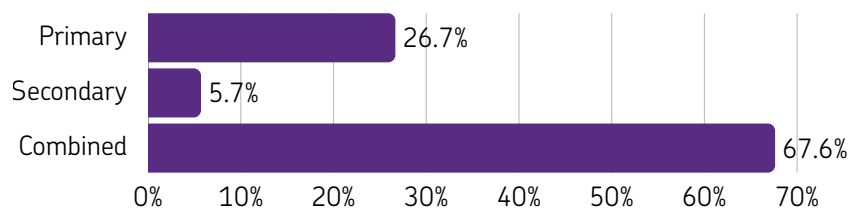
507

FULL-FEE PAYING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

MEMBERSHIP SNAPSHOT

OUR SECTOR IN NUMBERS

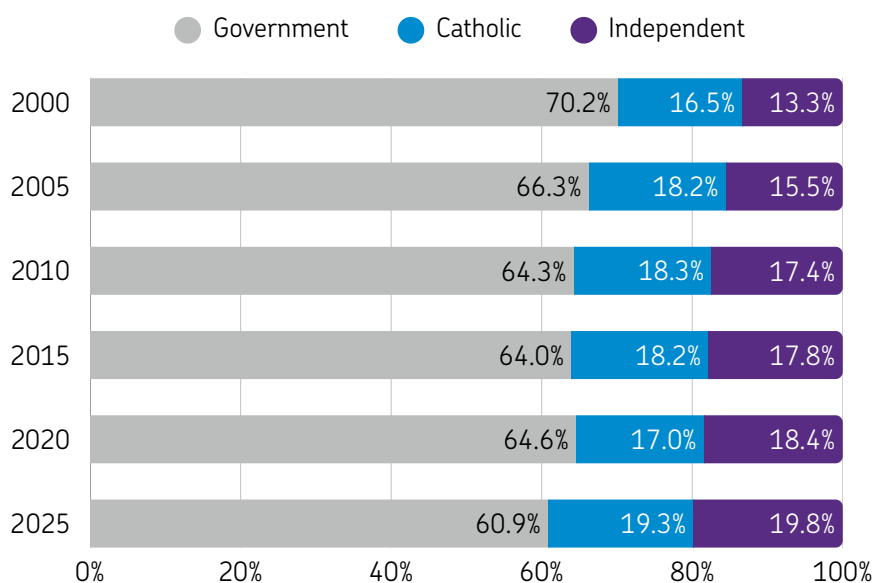
Percentages of primary, secondary and combined SA Independent schools



Source: Department of Education, 2025

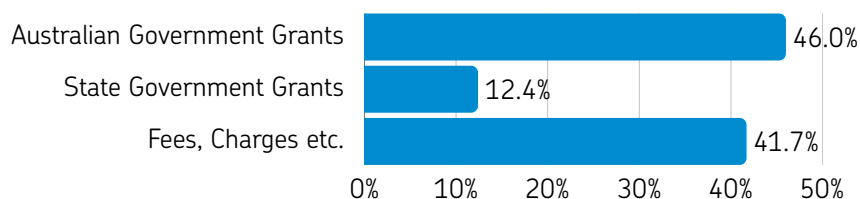
SA enrolment change over time by school sector (%)

Shown as percentage of total enrolments



Source: ABS Schools, Australia, 2025

Funding sources



Source: ACARA, 2024



105

MEMBER SCHOOLS



10,243

TEACHING AND
NON-TEACHING STAFF



\$3.2 BILLION
CONTRIBUTION TO
SA ECONOMY

Figures are derived from data provided by the Australian Government Department of Education, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Independent Schools Australia, and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

PROGRESS AGAINST THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The four pillars of the *AISSA Strategic Plan 2025–2027* guide the work of the AISSA over a three-year period, with 2025 representing the first year of formally reporting on progress. The pillars and consequent initiatives explicitly recognise that schools operate in an increasingly complex environment and pressures on member schools are high.

1. Increase engagement

Targeted strategies implemented throughout 2025 focused on strengthening relationships with member schools, State and Commonwealth governments and key stakeholders, with an emphasis on broadening communication with member schools and meeting their diverse needs, in a continuously changing schooling landscape.

Member engagement

Natalie Jonas was appointed to the new role of Head of Member School Programs and Engagement, with a key remit to develop a comprehensive engagement strategy, based on data obtained through meetings with every Independent school. In addition, regular executive-level pulse checks were conducted to gather ongoing feedback from member schools about the AISSA's service provision and opportunities for improvement. Feedback collected both formally and informally following professional learning events supplemented this activity.

Building on the planning undertaken in 2024, 2025 saw a significant focus placed on engagement with member schools located in regional and remote areas which face specific equity and accessibility challenges. Key strategies included maximising online access for professional learning opportunities where possible, leveraging school visits by AISSA staff and the implementation of a conference series specifically developed for regional schools.

2025 Regional Schools Conferences – Cultivating Wellbeing for Success

Engaging staff from 13 regional schools, three Regional Schools Conferences were delivered across hubs in the Riverland, Mid North, and Inner Southern. Each conference provided a dedicated day of learning tailored to the unique contexts of regional schooling, with a strong and intentional focus on wellbeing throughout. By bringing specialist staff directly to regional locations, the program improved access and equity while offering targeted support in wellbeing, strategies for supporting neurodivergent students, and practice-focused professional learning for teachers and leaders. Conferences opened with a shared keynote followed by role-specific learning strands, and participant feedback highlighted the strong value of this initiative.

In addition to the regular meetings of member school Principals and Business Managers, held in online and hybrid formats respectively, reference groups continued to play a vital role in ensuring responsiveness to key emerging areas impacting Independent schooling across both educational and operational priorities. The School Groups Reference Group and School Resources Reference Group each provided forums for advice across strategic and funding priorities. Concurrently, the four AISSA Education Reference Groups – Early Childhood, Primary Curriculum, Responding to Early Adolescent Learners, and Secondary Curriculum – supported reciprocity in the sharing of research, policy updates and curriculum guidance.

Recognising the value of collegial engagement and the specific pressures placed on school leaders, the 'Talking Heads' series provided opportunities for Principals and Heads of member schools to engage in-person on key topics relevant to school leadership and operations. The AISSA thanks those member school Principals who led critical conversations during these events.

Government, stakeholder and community engagement

Regular meetings were held throughout the year between the Minister for Education, Training and Skills, the Hon Blair Boyer, and the AISSA Chief Executive, and senior staff, with ongoing dialogue also maintained with the Shadow Minister. The AISSA appreciates the Minister's positive engagement with the Independent sector, his willingness to share resources for the benefit of all South Australian schools, and his genuine care for all South Australian students, regardless of sector.



The relationship built between the Minister and the AISSA has been central to ensuring that the specific context in which Independent schools operate was taken into account in government policy changes, in particular the significant legislative amendments to the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* to incorporate the State Government's response to the Disability Royal Commission. The inclusion of Independent school parent voices in forums established by the Minister for Education, to inform actions to address a State-wide strategy on bullying, confirmed the importance of this relationship.

The AISSA is a trusted partner to government for the dissemination of information to member schools regarding critical incidents and other state-wide responses. In support of this work, the three Sector Heads met each term to address critical issues, supported by more regular meetings of sectoral senior staff on key priorities, including in relation to supporting the State Government's negotiations on the Bilateral Agreement under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) and other matters such as responses to the Contaminated Sand recall and Algal Bloom crisis.

Additionally, the AISSA represented member schools on a range of State and Federal cross-sector groups. Strong collaboration between the three South Australian school sectors benefits all schools. Nationally, the AISSA participated in working groups with ISA and its state and territory counterparts to ensure that the unique context of South Australia is recognised in negotiations on policy and government priorities. The AISSA further engaged with Australian Government representatives across a range of issues impacting member schools.

The AISSA increased engagement with community and non-government organisations, including facilitating presentations to member schools by groups such as Carers SA, the Department for Child Protection, and Australians Together. This was supported through direct engagement and communication channels including LinkedIn and the AISSA Bulletin. LinkedIn was a key platform for sharing information about the excellence of Independent schooling, parental choice and the critical role played by Independent schools in South Australia.

Social commitment

The AISSA is committed to fulfilling its social responsibilities and undertakes a range of activities in this regard. In line with its commitments under the AISSA Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-2026, the AISSA has established and exceeded targets for expanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity and promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier directories on its website.

Through the AISSA Social Club, four charities that support South Australians were supported over the year – Catherine House, the Animal Welfare League, Hutt St Centre and Backpacks 4 SA Kids. In addition, AISSA staff donate to a charity of choice and have formed a Lifeblood team with scheduled blood donations throughout the year.

The AISSA continues to prioritise waste reduction and sustainability by minimising use and choosing compostable and recyclable packaging wherever possible.

2. Deliver exceptional services

2025 saw the continuation of a range of advice and services across school operations and education priorities, complemented by the expansion and refinement of service offerings to meet the evolving needs of schools.

Digital transformation

The AISSA's digital transformation project commenced in 2025 and will deliver a new AISSA website, with enhanced functionality for member schools, underpinned by a comprehensive future-focused communication strategy for launch in mid-2026. Ensuring fidelity in the use of membership funds, a competitive tender process was undertaken to determine the successful provider. The new website will enhance access to content and enable increased delivery modes in the longer term, while a new CRM platform will strengthen tracking and reporting to inform strategic and operational planning. Member schools will benefit from improved data insights, including visibility of school staff participation in AISSA professional learning activities.

Organisational structure

To support the initiatives under this priority the AISSA Board and Chief Executive identified opportunities to further strengthen the AISSA's staffing structure in support of member schools. This strategic review led to the creation and recruitment of two new roles, a Senior Accountant, and Head of Member School Programs and Engagement, and the refinement of an existing position, with the Specialist Funding and Compliance Consultant role evolving into Senior Officer – Policy, Compliance and Risk.



Advice and support

Tailored advice was provided to member schools across areas including funding, compliance, child protection, inclusion, industrial relations, human resources, legal, policy, international education, early childhood and curriculum. The AISSA provided intensive support to individual member schools in managing a range of critical incidents and other complex matters, enterprise bargaining, and conduct issues, including acting in a legal capacity when requested.

Information on compliance and school operations was disseminated through targeted briefings including analysis of economic and other trend data. Recurrent funding remained a critical area of advice and advocacy. Bespoke presentations were provided to individual member schools, scenario modelling undertaken, and regular updates and briefings provided. On the AISSA's request representatives from the Australian Government Department of Education provided an online briefing on the use of Australian Government recurrent funding to South Australian Independent schools.

The HR and Legal Series remained a trusted source of contemporary advice for member schools, supporting leaders to navigate increasingly complex workforce and legal environments. Four well-attended sessions addressed performance management, psychosocial workplace risks, managing critical incidents, and navigating parent expectations and behaviours. The series provided practical strategies and contemporary insights that supported effective people leadership, appropriate risk management, and informed guidance on complex workforce and community challenges.

Following the appointment of Alex Williams as Senior Officer – Policy, Compliance and Risk, the AISSA expanded its program of developing and updating policy guidelines and templates for member schools. Resources released in 2025 addressed areas such as family law, psychosocial hazards, and grounds, buildings and equipment maintenance. In addition, a range of new risk register templates were produced. This work will continue in 2026.

Management of government programs

The AISSA highly values the funded support of both the Australian and State governments and their recognition of the AISSA as a trusted expert partner in managing funded programs. This funding, which provides both education services and grants for member schools, including the *State Capital Grants Program* and the Australian Government *Capital Grants Program* (the latter of which is managed by the Block Grant Authority) is critical to the services and support available to South Australian Independent schools.



Current programs managed by the AISSA include the *Australian Government Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF)*, *National Student Wellbeing Program (NSWP)*, *Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE)* and *Initial Teacher Pathway for School Support Staff Pilot Program* the *State Government Regional School Bus Subsidy Grant Program*, *Allied Health Specialist Support Services Program* and *Parent Initiatives in Education (PIE) Grant Program*.

The AISSA is cognisant of its obligations to use taxpayer funds prudently and to ensure that all activity is focused on meeting the diversity of member school need within the context of individual government program priorities. Across 2025, implementing grant programs under the CAF, NSWP, *Regional School Bus Subsidy Grant Program* and PIE was a key activity which included undertaking grant application, assessment, processing, payment and acquittal work, reporting to the respective governments and providing advice on guidelines and use of funding and services. The *Allied Health Specialist Support Services Program* was made available to all Independent schools in 2025 and delivered with a particular focus on schools in rural and/or low socio-economic communities.

Significant activity in relation to the CAF included the submission of a new 2025-2027 workplan to the Australian Government Department of Education, which was approved without amendment. The AISSA liaised closely with the Department on a number of key matters. Two priority programs were implemented under the special circumstances priority, including a regional *Drought Assistance Priority Program* supporting regional, rural and remote Independent school students who were in financial need as a direct result of South Australian drought conditions.

“The *Drought Assistance Priority Program* demonstrated the importance of flexible, needs-based funding. Through this initiative, our school was able to implement targeted support strategies that alleviated the effects of drought on families in our region. Programs of this kind are essential in ensuring educational continuity and support during periods of significant hardship.” - Principal, Recipient School

Leadership

Supporting and developing leadership capability across senior, middle and aspiring leaders is critical to continuous school improvement, workforce stability, and to ensuring that member schools are well positioned to respond to increasing complexity and change. The AISSA supported member school leaders through mentoring, advice and targeted professional learning, including a series for Principals new to the sector and a mentoring program which paired new and experienced Business Managers.



Professional learning focused on building adaptive, collaborative and practice-informed leadership capability. Programs included the *Adaptive Leadership Masterclass*, *The Power of the Network* for Deputy Principals and Heads of Schools, and structured coaching to strengthen leadership practice. Key elements included collaboration, shared learning, reciprocal leadership, school visits, engagement with experienced leaders and structured professional companionship.

The *Empowered Teaching through the 4C Capabilities* program further enhanced leadership practice through experiential learning focused on creativity, critical reflection, communication and collaboration.

Governance

Professional learning opportunities were also facilitated to strengthen the capability and effectiveness of school boards. Tailored presentations and advice supported individual school boards on key governance priorities, while established programs supported current and aspiring board members to deepen their understanding of contemporary governance and strategic leadership, including in the areas of strategic planning, regulatory compliance and financial fidelity. A key highlight of the year was the annual Governance Conference which, in 2025, saw the largest attendance since its inception.

Governance Conference – Tackling the Leadership Crisis

The sold-out 2025 Governance Conference brought together nearly 200 Board Chairs, Principals, school leaders and key decision-makers to explore the growing leadership shortage across the Independent school sector. The program highlighted the critical role of governance in supporting sustainable leadership, with practical insights into contemporary Principal appointment processes, effective induction, mentoring, and strategies to support wellbeing and retention.

The conference opened with a Welcome to Country from Jack Buckskin and featured contributions from sector experts and keynote speakers including futures thinker Professor Kai Riemer, co-Director, Sydney Executive Plus+ at the University of Sydney Business School, Christina Franklin, Principal Consultant, AdValore Partners and David Wilksch, Principal Growth Director, Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA. A Principal-led panel shared practical perspectives and strategies drawn from lived experience across the Independent sector.

Teaching, learning and curriculum

Aligned with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, the AISSA continued to partner with schools to support national efforts to promote equity and excellence and support the needs of all students, including those at risk of educational disadvantage. Educational initiatives and professional learning were delivered to strengthen inclusive practice, foundational learning, and the delivery of high quality, evidence-informed curriculum and assessment.

Programs and sector initiatives were designed to strengthen literacy and numeracy capability and improved consistency in assessment practice across Independent schools. Ongoing implementation of the Year 1 Phonics Check supported early and systematic identification of learning needs, while a licensing agreement secured with the South Australian Department for Education positioned the AISSA to build sector capability for the introduction of a Year 1 Numeracy Check from 2026. The English and Mathematics series further supported literacy and numeracy leadership through whole-school, evidence-informed practice.



The *Collecting Evidence of Achievement* project enhanced teacher capability in planning purposeful assessment, collecting evidence of learning and making consistent judgements across Years F–10. The Dylan Wiliam Masterclass, *Leading School Excellence*, brought together over 20 school teams, school and sector leaders to engage with research-driven pillars of school excellence and evidence-based approaches to teaching, learning and leadership.

Throughout 2025, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services were supported through targeted advice and professional learning focused on leadership, quality practice and sustainability. Leaders engaged in network meetings and workshops grounded in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), My Time, Our Place Framework and the National Quality Standard. The *Play in the Early Years* workshop series supported curriculum leaders and teachers to critically examine play-based pedagogy across early learning and primary school contexts.

Targeted vocational education and training (VET) and Workplace Learning (WPL) advice, professional learning, workshops and networking opportunities supported member schools to strengthen practice in embedding pathways within learning programs and supporting effective transitions to further education, training and employment. Particular focus was given to regional schools through online engagement and individualised support.



Inclusion and wellbeing

Diverse professional learning opportunities supported Inclusive Education staff and school leaders to meet legislative and ethical responsibilities and lead inclusive change. Advice focused on reviewing and strengthening Individual Learning Plans, navigating the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), applying evidence-based resources and building professional connections. The long-established AISSA Inclusive Education Network enabled collaboration, policy review

and shared practice, strengthening outcomes for all learners, including neurodivergent students.

Targeted professional learning and sector collaboration supported schools to strengthen staff wellbeing, enhance positive family engagement and respond to the complex demands of contemporary school environments. A wellbeing webinar series led by Emeritus Professor Donna Cross, together with application of the AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit and whole-school approaches, were complemented by professional learning such as *Thrive By Design* workshops led by Meg Durham and *Mental Health First Aid* training. The AISSA Wellbeing Network continued to foster collaboration, share research and resources, and build sector-wide capacity to implement consistent, evidence-based wellbeing approaches.

AISSA / AISNT Consent and Respectful Relationships Education partnership

In 2025, the AISSA strengthened its partnership with the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT) through the delivery of the CRRE Pilot School/Lighthouse Program. Ten schools across South Australia and the Northern Territory participated, representing metropolitan, regional, rural, remote and very remote contexts, including Darwin, Arnhem Land, and Central Australia. A wide range of educational and philosophical approaches were reflected across the project. Structured cycles of action, reflection and evaluation supported pilot schools to identify key implementation barriers and areas requiring further support and knowledge development.



3. Strengthen the sector

The Independent school sector has experienced growth over a sustained period. Ensuring that the sector is well positioned for continued and future success underpins all AISSA activity.

Advocacy

Advocacy and representation, on behalf of member schools, are central to the AISSA's purpose. The AISSA is a trusted partner, with direct lines of communication with the Minister for Education Training and Skills, and Opposition representatives. At the Federal level, the AISSA, through ISA and also directly, engaged with the Federal Minister for Education, Department of Education key personnel and Shadow Minister for Education.

A significant area of focus was the work undertaken by the AISSA Chief Executive and senior staff, in collaboration with ISA and State and Territory Independent school associations, ahead of the Federal Election in May. This included the national *School Choice Counts* campaign which highlighted the importance of protecting family choice amid growing criticism of non- government schools.

The AISSA Chief Executive participated in roundtables with both the Australian Government Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare, and the Shadow Minister, the Hon Sarah Henderson. Meetings were also held with key politicians both in the lead-up to the election and on the return of the Australian Labor Government supplemented by informal advocacy opportunities. This work secured commitments to maintain current funding arrangements, provide a \$22 million temporary funding injection for Mid-year Reception students in South Australian Independent schools and an assurance to work towards securing a sustainable, long-term funding solution, including addressing concerns about the timing of the capacity to contribute score (CTC). Throughout the year the AISSA continued its advocacy for long-term funding for Mid-year Reception in collaboration with Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) and the State Government.

Preparation commenced for the State Election to be held in March 2026 including the development of key election “asks” and a communication strategy. Advocacy was also undertaken on behalf of member schools across a wide range of areas including representations in relation to regional bus safety on routes operated by external providers. A significant body of work also occurred in relation to the aforementioned cross-sector representations, in particular in regard to the response to the Disability Royal Commission.

Written submissions to government, State and Commonwealth, were made on behalf of member schools to a wide range of consultations and inquiries including but not limited to the reviews of *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Disability Standards for Education*, and amendments to the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* related to Addressing Non-Attendance at School and Inclusive Education.

School Avoidance Project – Pathways2Participation (P2P): Implementing MTSS in South Australian Independent Schools

In 2025 the AISSA launched P2P, a project to improve student attendance through proactive, inclusive approaches, funded by a gift from Eynesbury College following its closure. Developed in collaboration with University of Melbourne and Deakin University, P2P provides schools with a practical framework and strategies to improve student attendance. The project will be led by renowned experts, Associate Professor Lisa McKay-Brown and Associate Professor Glenn Melvin.

Reconciliation

The AISSA continued to advance the commitments in its Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) through sustained inward and outward action grounded in reciprocity, truth-telling and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This work included strengthening partnerships with First Nations organisations and Elders, embedding cultural learning across the organisation, and supporting reconciliation in schools through a combination of targeted professional learning, Narragunnawali support and the recognition of outstanding reconciliation practice. Internally, reconciliation was explored through staff focus groups and shared learning, policy refinement, observance of cultural protocols and ongoing reporting and accountability.



Targeted reconciliation-focused professional learning strengthened sector capability through RAP-focused workshops and a complementary cultural safety series. Supported by Kaurna Elders, community leaders and Reconciliation SA, this program helped member schools to build effective RAP teams, embed culturally responsive practice and create culturally safe environments.

The AISSA Indigenous Secondary Student Mentoring Program continued to play a vital role in supporting First Nations students in Independent schools through school-based, culturally affirming mentoring. Led initially by Sara Singapore, a proud Ngarrindjeri woman, and then by Maja Tongerie, a proud Ngarrindjeri, Antakirinja and Yankunytjatjara woman, the program centred on coming alongside students and young people to strengthen cultural identity and foster pride in who they are, individually and collectively. A highlight of the year occurred in Term 4 with a Student Forum hosted at Navigator College in Port Lincoln, which brought together students from across the State and provided an important space for student voice, enabling deeper insight into mentoring experiences and future directions for the program.

Use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

A suite of strategically aligned professional learning supported leaders and teachers to explore the strengths, limitations and ethical considerations of emerging AI technologies, including implications for teaching, learning and assessment design. Hands-on engagement with generative tools built confidence to lead evidence-based conversations and supported informed, ethical practice. Complementary programs across primary and secondary contexts supported teacher capacity to integrate AI into differentiated and inclusive learning designs, critically examine assessment practices, and continue to strengthen pedagogical practice.

At a State level, the AISSA contributed to the development of a shared, cross-sector *Position Statement for Generative Artificial Intelligence in South Australian schools*, reflecting a collective commitment to safe, ethical and purposeful use. The statement provides a coherent resource to support member schools in aligning strategic, pedagogical and governance approaches to AI.

Holistic Learning Recognition Symposium

The *Holistic Learning Recognition Symposium* marked the culmination of the AISSA's three year *Innovative Models of Student Recognition (Learning Impact) Project*, involving ten member schools in collaborative, leading edge research. Established in 2022 as a social research laboratory, the project explored approaches to recognising learning beyond traditional academic assessment.

The symposium brought together school leaders, educators, and sector stakeholders to engage with research developed in partnership with global thought leaders Valerie Hannon, Charles Leadbeater, Anthony Mackay AM and Michael Bunce. The event coincided with the release of an accompanying Centre for Strategic Education paper in the CSE Leading Education Series, extending the reach and influence of the project's findings.



Workforce sustainability

Throughout 2025, the AISSA continued to prioritise initiatives that strengthened teacher supply, workforce capability and long-term sustainability across the Independent sector. Active participation on the cross-sector Workforce Steering Committee, operating under the direction of Education Sector Heads, ensured strong Independent sector representation in state-wide responses to teacher shortages and the broader workforce challenges across South Australia.

Employment-based pathways into teaching were advanced through the UniSA *Teaching Futures Pathway* pilot, with the AISSA coordinating Independent school consultation and participation in a pilot designed to address workforce shortages in hard-to-staff schools. The AISSA also contributed to the design of a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) *Workload Reduction Fund* pilot to support education support staff into teaching through stackable qualifications supported by targeted scholarships, for implementation in 2026. Strong and constructive regulatory engagement with the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia resulted in the extension of the Special Authority to Teach (SAT) Temporary Relief Teacher policy, alongside a revised Employment-Based Pathway SAT, enhancing workforce flexibility for member schools.

Flinders University Education Careers Expo

A highlight of the year was engagement with pre-service teachers and recent graduates at the Flinders University Education Careers Expo. AISSA Chief Executive Anne Dunstan joined a cross-sector panel providing guidance and advice for pre-service teachers, highlighting the diversity of the Independent school sector, the range of opportunities available and the ability for future teachers to find their fit. Natalie Jonas and Libby Worrell provided expert advice to enquiries and supported graduates with information about the employment opportunities in member schools.

The National Teacher Certification program continued to support the recognition and development of teaching excellence across Independent schools. Seventeen teachers from eleven schools achieved national certification as Highly Accomplished or Lead Teachers, supported through a rigorous process of professional reflection, evidence-informed practice and alignment with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Increased participation of school staff in the related AITSL Assessor Training further strengthened sector capacity to support high-quality, rigorous and credible certification processes.

A focus on early career teacher induction and retention was undertaken through a structured program which connected early career teachers with experienced and accomplished practitioners from their schools and embedded mentoring within a coherent, structured framework.

4. Enhance the AISSA's capabilities

Under the *2025-2027 Strategic Plan*, the AISSA introduced initiatives to build capacity to continue to develop current and new services for member schools, including diversifying income streams. These initiatives are focused on strengthening the AISSA's financial sustainability amid a changing political environment and potential shifts in government funding.

The appointment of Renée Canepa as Senior Accountant enabled the AISSA to enter into a fee-for-service accounting arrangement with the AISNT. Recognising ICT as a growing priority, the AISSA also recruited Ben Stratton as Senior Manager, ICT, to commence in 2026, with an initial focus on internal organisational needs, and longer term planning for ICT support and services for member schools.

AISSA staff have engaged in a range of professional growth activities to ensure the Association's knowledge base retained currency and best practice, with reconciliation remaining a key whole staff commitment. This included learning from First Nations Elders and stakeholders and engagement with the knowledge, experience and wisdom of Australians Together and First Nations cultural leaders. Two staff were supported to undertake cultural immersion with Culture College Arnhem Land Aboriginal Corporation, guided by the wisdom and generosity of the Yolŋu people of Arnhem Land.

Partnerships

Identifying innovative ways to support member schools remained a key strategy, with a strong focus on building mutually beneficial partnerships. The AISSA greatly values the continued support of priority partner, NGS Super, and welcomed new priority partnerships with Compass Education and Swanbury Penglase. Through these partnerships, member schools obtained access to a range of opportunities, including a Compass Education wellness competition and a Business Managers' lunch hosted by NGS Super featuring a presentation on investment strategy. In addition, Swanbury Penglase delivered a session in conjunction with the Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Block Grant Authority on sustainable, cost-effective school design. ISQ provided all Independent schools access to a suite of guides and toolkits on capital development.

The AISSA pursued additional partnerships to support member schools, including an arrangement with the South Australian Business Chamber to provide discounted access to Work Health and Safety (WHS) training, including the management of psychosocial risks in the workplace. Additionally, the AISSA hosted a digital transformation event in collaboration with Data#3 and secured an exclusive partnership with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) to expand access to accredited governance professional learning for Independent school leaders and board members.

AISSA and AICD Company Directors Course™

Delivered over five intensive days, the Company Directors Course™ supported participants to navigate complex governance challenges, strengthen accountability, and enhance strategic decision-making. Participants benefited from expert facilitation, peer learning, and exposure to best-practice governance principles that support sustainable organisational performance and integrity. The partnership increased accessibility for AISSA members through a reduced course fee, a complimentary one-year AICD membership, and a waived joining fee.

Collaboration

The AISSA collaborated with ISA and its counterparts in other states and territories on key issues. This collaboration enabled all states and territories to build on each other's work and improve service provision to each association's members. The AISSA hosted the annual ISA/AIS Staff Symposium providing a forum for learning, connection and strengthened sector collaboration. Key sessions showcasing shared insights and strategies from across the country included stakeholder value, inclusive practices for students with disability (facilitated by AISSA Senior Educational Consultant, Alice Duffield), navigating generative AI in schools, and the future of school leadership.



GOVERNANCE

BOARD

Benjamen Stratton (Deputy Chair from 9 July 2025) – Hills Christian Community School
Cain McDonald – Tatachilla Lutheran College
Craig Fielke – Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA
Greg Atterton (appointed on 19 June 2025) – Pulteney Grammar School
Helen Finlay (resigned on 10 December 2025) – St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School
Karen Taylor (appointed on 19 June 2025) – Specialised Assistance School for Youth
Kymberley Lawrence – Annesley Junior School
Marcel Rijken – Temple Christian College
Michael Potter (term ended on 19 June 2025) – Tyndale Christian School
Nancy Johnson – Walford Anglican School for Girls
Paul Weinert (resigned on 17 April 2025) – Concordia College
Peta St Clair (Deputy Chair until term ended on 19 June 2025) – St Andrew's School
Shannon Warren (Chair) – Woodcroft College
Trent Driver – Scotch College
Uncle John Lochowiak – First Nations Cultural Consultant

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Don Grimmett – King's Baptist Grammar School
Kerryn Simpfendorfer – Cornerstone College
Paul Hunter – Woodcroft College
Shannon Warren (Chair) – Woodcroft College
Wendy Wills – Pembroke School

SCHOOL RESOURCES REFERENCE GROUP

Brad Richmond (Chair) – Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA
Hasan Yunich (appointed on 3 April 2025) – IQRA College
Jeff Thorpe – Cedar College
Michael Denholm (appointed on 3 April 2025) – Pilgrim School
Nancy Johnson – Walford Anglican School for Girls
Paul Hunter – Woodcroft College
Sally Staggs (resigned on 4 November 2025) – Concordia College
Tyna Newman – Encounter Lutheran College

NOEL VOLK AWARDS 2025

The Noel Volk Awards for Excellence recognise outstanding service and support to the Independent school sector. The 2025 award winners were:

Carolyn Grantskalns OAM - AISSA history timeline project

Colleen O'Rourke - Leader of Digital Innovation, Hills Christian Community School

Emily Brookes - Principal, Torrens Valley Christian School

Janet Farrall - AISSA history timeline project

Jeff Thorpe - Business Manager, Cedar College

Michelle Benison - Director, National Relations and Policy Directorate, Department for Education

Michael Potter - Chief Executive Officer, Tyndale School Group

Paul Hunter - Director Corporate Services, Woodcroft College

Rebecca Garrett - Head of Teaching and Learning (Year 7-10), Trinity College Blakeview

Uncle John Lochowiak - First Nations Cultural Consultant



Shannon Warren and Anne Dunstan



Michael Potter



Rebecca Garrett



Colleen O'Rourke



Uncle John Lochowiak



Janet Farrall and Carolyn Grantskalns OAM



Paul Hunter and Jeff Thorpe



Michelle Benison



Emily Brookes

SECTOR ADVOCACY, LIAISON AND REPRESENTATION

AISSA staff have provided sector representation, advice and leadership through membership of the following bodies, authorities, committees, networks and groups.

NATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
 - Board Membership
 - Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) Critical Friend Group
 - Technologies Network Group
 - F-6 Curriculum Network
 - First Nations in HPE Group
 - Health and Physical Education Network
 - Languages Network
 - STEM Network
 - Students with Disability Advisory Group
- Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)
 - Early Childhood Continuity of Learning Preschool Advisory Group
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
 - Certifying Authorities Network
 - Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Professional Learning Advisory Group
 - Professional Growth Network
- eSafety Commissioner
 - National Online Safety Education Council (NOSEC)
- Independent Schools Australia (ISA)
 - Board Membership
 - CRRE Consultants Network
 - Digital Technologies Steering Committee
 - Early Childhood Advisory Group
 - Generative AI Advisory Group
 - Inclusion Advisory group
 - ISA/AIS First Nations Education Policy Group
 - National Assessment Program Operational Working Group (NOWG)
 - Teacher Micro Credentials Steering Group
 - Wellbeing Advisory Group
- Reconciliation Australia, Narragunnawali Learn and Connect Workshop Pilot
- University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education, Ngarrngga Project

SECTOR ADVOCACY, LIAISON AND REPRESENTATION

STATE ENGAGEMENT

- Australian Labour and Employment Relations Association SA (ALERA)
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) Coordinating Committee
- BeYou/Headspace Liaison
- Cross-sectoral engagement and initiatives with Department for Education and CESA, including:
 - Countering Extreme Violence
 - Disability Royal Commission Inclusive Reporting Working Group
 - Education Sector Heads
 - Initial Teacher Education Steering Committee
 - NAPLAN Working Group
 - Online Safety Protocol Review
 - Protective Practices Review
 - Senior Officers' Group
 - Sexual Behaviour in Children and Young People Review
 - Workforce Steering Committee
- Education Standards Board
 - Board Membership
 - Schools Regulatory Committee
- Interagency Complex Health Review Committee
- Intersectoral Secondary Principals' Education Consultative Committee
- National Student Wellbeing Program (NSWP) Cross Sector Panel
- Non-government Schools Animal Ethics Committee
- Office of Early Childhood Development – Minister's Early Childhood Advisory Forum
- Reconciliation SA Reconciliation Industry Network Group (RING)
- South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)
 - Modified SACE Panel
 - Monitoring Evaluation Learning Group
 - SACE Operations Group
- South Australian Playgroup Reference Group
- South Australian Teacher Certification Committee (SATCC)
- Teachers Registration Board
 - Future Directions Early Childhood Reference Group

STAFF

Aleida Mabarrack – Senior Educational Consultant
Alex Williams – Senior Officer, Policy, Compliance and Risk (commenced 12 May 2025)
Alison Hollis – Administrative Officer
Alice Duffield – Senior Educational Consultant
Anne Dunstan – Chief Executive
Anthony Doyle – Specialist VET and Workplace Learning Consultant
Bronwyn Donaghey – Head of Policy, Funding and Compliance
Désirée Gilbert – Senior Educational Consultant
Elizabeth Sexton – Head of Workplace and Human Relations
Glen Shipley – Chief Financial Officer
Hollee Graham – Office Manager
Jane Pike – Block Grant Authority (BGA) Executive Officer
Jeanette Kociolek – Finance Officer (BGA)
Julie Tarzia – Senior Educational Consultant
Karen Schoff – Senior Educational Consultant
Keira Brault – Administrative Officer
Libby Worrell – Senior Educational Consultant
Lucinda Pow – Senior Manager, Partnerships and Brand Engagement
Lynda Secombe – Senior Educational Consultant
Lynn Carter – EA to Anne Dunstan and Head of the Executive Office
Maja Tongerie – Indigenous Secondary Student Mentor (commenced 26 May 2025)
Mary Hudson – Director, Leadership Institute / Senior Educational Consultant (concluded 4 July 2025)
Michele Oliphant – Consent and Respectful Relationships Education Consultant / Senior Educational Consultant
Michelle Villanueva – Communications Project Officer (concluded 4 July 2025)
Narelle Brown – Administrative Officer (concluded 22 October 2025)
Natalie Jonas – Head of Member School Programs and Engagement (commenced 9 July 2025)
Rae Dawkins – Administrative Officer
Renée Canepa – Senior Accountant (commenced 12 May 2025)
Sara Bingsapore – Indigenous Secondary Student Mentor (concluded 26 May 2025)
Sonia Albertini – Head of Legal Services
Weiwei Zhang – Finance Officer (AISSA) (concluded 28 April 2025)
Zsófia Szász – Administrative Officer (commenced 3 December 2025)

MEMBER SCHOOLS

Annesley Junior School	Mount Barker Waldorf School	St Peter's College
Aspect Treetop School	Mount Torrens Christian School	St Peter's Girls' School
Australian Islamic College Adelaide	Muirden Senior College	St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School
Bethany Christian School	Navigator College	Suneden Specialist School
Blakes Crossing Christian College	Ngutu College	Sunrise Christian School Fullarton
Calvary Lutheran Primary School	OneSchool Global	Sunrise Christian School Marion
Cedar College	Our Saviour Lutheran School	Sunrise Christian School Morphett Vale
Concordia College	Pedare Christian College	Sunrise Christian School Naracoorte
Cornerstone College	Pembroke School	Sunrise Christian School Paradise
Crossways Lutheran School	Pilgrim School	Sunrise Christian School Whyalla
Dara School	Pinnacle College	Tatachilla Lutheran College
Emmaus Christian College	Playford College	Temple Christian College
Encounter Lutheran College	Portside Christian College	The Hills Christian Community School
Endeavour College	Prescott College	The Hills Montessori School
Faith Lutheran College	Prescott College Southern	Torrens Valley Christian School
Garden College	Prescott Primary Northern	Trinity College Blakeview
Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School	Prince Alfred College	Trinity College Gawler River
Good Shepherd Lutheran School Angaston	Pulteney Grammar School	Trinity College North
Good Shepherd Lutheran School Para Vista	Redeemer Lutheran School	Trinity College Roseworthy
Harvest Christian College	Rivergum Christian College	Trinity College South
Heritage College	Saint Spyridon College	Tyndale Christian School Murray Bridge
Hope Christian College	Scotch College	Tyndale Christian School Salisbury East
Horizon Christian School	Seaview Christian College	Tyndale Christian School Strathalbyn
Immanuel College	Seymour College	Unity College
Immanuel Gawler	Southern Montessori School	University Senior College
Immanuel Primary School	Southern Vales Christian College	Waikerie Lutheran Primary School
Indie School	Specialised Assistance School for Youth (SASY)	Walford Anglican School for Girls
Investigator College	Sports College South Australia	Westminster School
IQRA College	St Andrew's School	Wilderness School
King's Baptist Grammar School	St Benedict School	Willunga Waldorf School
Lobethal Lutheran School	St George College	Woodcroft College
Loxton Lutheran School	St Jakobi Lutheran School	Youth Inc.
Maitland Lutheran School	St John's Grammar School	
Mid North Christian College	St John's Lutheran School*	
	St Mark's Lutheran School	
	St Martins Lutheran College	
	St Michael's Lutheran School	
	St Paul Lutheran School	

*closed on 12 December 2025

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ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Association of
Independent Schools
of South Australia

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