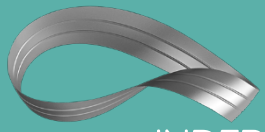
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

ISA SUBMISSION

2 October 2026



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Independent Schools Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present and commit to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

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1. ABOUT ISA 4
2. INTRODUCTION 5
3. RECOMMENDATIONS 6
4. CURRICULUM FIDELITY AND CONTEXTUALISATION 7
5. CURRICULUM COHERENCE AND ALIGNMENT 7
6. EQUITY, INCLUSION AND FIRST NATIONS LEARNERS 8
6.1 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES 8
6.2 STUDENTS EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE OR ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
7. STUDENT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT 9
8. IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEABILITY 9
9. GENERAL CAPABILITIES AND CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES 10
10. CONCLUSION 10

1. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body for Independent schooling in Australia. ISA represents the sector on national issues and engages with the Australian Government, national agencies, media, key stakeholders, and the wider Australian community.

Working with the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs), ISA represents more than 767,000 students, 1,240 schools and a workforce of over 134,000 people.

Independent schools are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools. They make a valuable contribution to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

The Independent school sector is diverse, and schools serve a wide range of communities. The latest available data shows that more than one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school. For secondary students, it is over one in five.

Students at Independent schools reflect the full diversity of Australian society – including those who experience one or multiple forms of disadvantage. These students include:

- high-needs students with disability attending special schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending remote 100 per cent Indigenous schools
- students living in regional and remote locations
- highly disadvantaged and disengaged young people attending Independent special assistance schools.

Most families with children enrolled in Independent schools are middle-to-low-income earners, increasingly from culturally diverse backgrounds, and residing in outer-suburban and inner-suburban communities. Many of these families are currently facing economic stress and are making substantial sacrifices for their children's education.

According to the most recent data, the majority of Independent schools charge annual fees of less than $6,000, and there were a greater number of schools charging less than $1,300 per year than those charging over $20,000. Some Independent schools charge no fees at all. More than half of the sector's recurrent income comes from parents and families.

Many Independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a specific educational philosophy or alternatively recognised curriculum. Some have been established by community groups seeking to meet particular needs or to reflect the religious values of a community. Independent Catholic schools are a significant part of the sector, accounting for eight per cent of the Independent sector's enrolments.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example, Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the sector.

2. INTRODUCTION

Independent Schools Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to ACARA's monitoring and evaluation review for the Australian Curriculum V 9.0 which focuses on curriculum fidelity, coherence and alignment, equity and excellence, implementation and manageability, and stakeholder satisfaction.

This ISA response draws on consultation with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools, including the Association of Independent Schools Australian Capital Territory (AISACT), Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), Independent Schools Tasmania (IST) and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA). These Associations work directly with Independent schools implementing the Australian Curriculum, or state and territory curricula that draw on or align with it. The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), Independent Schools NSW (ISNSW) and Independent Schools Northern Territory (ISNT) were also engaged in the broader review process conducted by ACARA with school leaders and teachers.

The Independent school sector is diverse. It includes large metropolitan schools, small regional and remote schools, faith-based schools, International Baccalaureate, Steiner and Montessori schools, special schools, Special Assistance Schools, trade and industry schools, and schools serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities. This diversity means implementation of the Australian Curriculum varies across independent schools and the sector. It is shaped by jurisdictional requirements, school philosophy, student need, staffing and local community context.

ISA's overall view is that Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum is clearer and more usable than previous versions, particularly in the alignment between content descriptions, achievement standards and elaborations. However, schools continue to need practical support to translate the curriculum into coherent teaching, assessment and reporting. AISACT discussed that a continuing challenge is the translation of curriculum planning into assessment and reporting. They noted that schools appear to understand backward mapping, but some still struggle with what should be assessed and reported.

The clearest message from the consultation was not that the curriculum is inherently unmanageable, but that manageability depends heavily on the quality of implementation support available to teachers.

Schools need clearer sequencing guidance and stronger examples of essential learning. They also value support to unpack the "big ideas" and concepts that are threaded through learning areas. Further guidance is also needed to help teachers teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures respectfully and confidently.

AISs have also reported a need for more consistent implementation of the general capabilities. Literacy, numeracy, and critical and creative thinking were reported as relatively well embedded. However, personal and social capability and digital literacy are often addressed mainly through Health and Physical Education and Technologies. Ethical understanding and intercultural understanding appear to be less consistently embedded.

In addition, schools would benefit from support to address contemporary and sensitive issues, including social cohesion and the responsible use of artificial intelligence.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

ISA recommends that ACARA

1. develop clearer sequencing guidance and exemplification similar to the F–2 Mathematics work for other learning areas
2. identify the essential or more elements of the learning areas, common misconceptions and conceptual connections across year levels
3. add a layer of “big ideas” or conceptual understandings above sets of content knowledge to foster deeper learning.
4. strengthen support for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures through quality-assured, locally adaptable and curriculum-aligned resources
5. provide clearer guidance on the practical use of general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities, including how they can support differentiation, student engagement and coherent curriculum planning.
6. review the contemporary relevance and visibility of Digital Literacy, including artificial intelligence, data literacy, cyber safety and responsible technology use
7. develop practical classroom guidance for contemporary and sensitive issues, including social cohesion, antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, respectful relationships that may arise from national policy directions and require careful, age-appropriate curriculum implementation

4. CURRICULUM FIDELITY AND CONTEXTUALISATION

Across AISs, there was broad agreement that achievement standards and content descriptions are the elements of the Australian Curriculum most consistently used by schools. Schools commonly start by backward mapping from the achievement standards. They then identify the evidence students need to demonstrate and align teaching, learning and assessment to the relevant content descriptions across the year. AISSA mentioned that achievement standards and content descriptions are being used consistently across their schools, but elaborations are used more variably. AISSA commented that despite greater clarity with Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum teachers still need stronger support to understand the big ideas and conceptual foundations of learning areas. They argued that teachers often focus on content standards without always understanding the disciplinary concepts or the purpose behind the learning. AISSA noted that primary schools are increasingly asking for help with conceptual mapping across the year.

Implementation differs by jurisdiction. In Queensland, Independent schools operate within the requirements of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board. These requirements shape what must be taught, assessed and reported, and provide some flexibility in relation to learning areas in the Australian Curriculum. Queensland schools tend to focus heavily on learning areas, with less consistent attention to general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

In Victoria, Independent schools can choose between the Australian Curriculum or the Victorian Curriculum. Consultation feedback suggested that about 60 per cent of Independent schools use the Australian Curriculum, while approximately 40% of schools use the Victorian Curriculum because of its closer connection to senior secondary pathways.

In Tasmania, South Australia and the ACT, Independent schools generally implement the Australian Curriculum within local registration and curriculum assurance requirement. IST mentioned that schools implementing Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum are generally in a stronger position than they were before Version 9. Schools have reported improved understanding of assessment against achievement standards and use of content descriptions There has also been an increase in use of the numeracy progressions, particularly for students with lower literacy or numeracy levels.

Independent schools also contextualise the curriculum while maintaining fidelity to the national intent. Steiner, Montessori and International Baccalaureate programs, adapt implementation to align with their educational philosophies while still ensuring alignment with curriculum expectations. Christian, Islamic and Jewish schools may apply a faith-informed lens to curriculum planning while still addressing required content and achievement standards.

Special Assistance Schools, trade and industry schools often use flexibility in what is assessed and how evidence is gathered so that students who have experienced disengagement, trauma, disrupted schooling or complex learning needs can access meaningful learning. It was noted that these schools often select particular curriculum elements according to year levels and reporting requirements, which is more about flexibility than adaptation.

IST noted that small Independent schools In Tasmania with composite classes often plan learning across year levels. This is particularly common in English and Mathematics. Teachers may plan across bands to meet curriculum requirements while avoiding disconnected year-level units. This approach can support deeper learning and make better use of limited staffing. However, it requires clear curriculum maps and practical examples that show how concepts develop over time.

5. CURRICULUM CLARITY AND COHERENCE

AISs reported generally positive feedback on the clarity and coherence of Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum. The stronger connection between content descriptions and achievement standards was particularly valued. ISV feedback noted that teachers are using achievement standards to bring greater clarity to assessment and reporting, while AISSA feedback highlighted the usefulness of the interactive website, including the related content links and connections and

capacity to compare learning areas across year levels have improved coherence for schools that use them. Several AISs also noted that glossaries and elaborations are helpful where schools actively use them.

However, schools continue to seek clearer guidance about the sequence of learning. IST feedback called for the return of visible sequence of achievement standards, noting that teachers valued being able to see progression which improves clarity and coherence for schools that use them. ISQ feedback similarly emphasised the value of sequences and progressions that help teachers map learning across schooling and reduce uncertainty about the expected depth of learning.

The F–2 Mathematics exemplification work was repeatedly identified as a useful model. AISs suggested that similar exemplification would be valuable in other learning areas, particularly where teachers are unsure about depth, sequencing, prioritisation or conceptual links across year levels.

6. EQUITY, INCLUSION AND FIRST NATIONS LEARNERS

6.1 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES

Consultation feedback strongly supported the increased visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in Version 9.0. However, AISs also reported that teachers need more practical support to teach this content confidently, accurately and respectfully. AISSA feedback emphasised the need to build teacher capacity so that teachers can present the cross-curriculum priority in ways that enable First Nations students to see themselves in the curriculum. This support would also help all students learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives in culturally sensitive ways.

ISQ notes that teachers need more practical support to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content confidently, accurately and respectfully, particularly where they are concerned about "getting it wrong" or being culturally insensitive.

IST and ISV feedback similarly indicated that teachers need greater confidence to document, communicate and evidence their work in this area, including for registration and professional standards purposes. AISs also noted that ACARA's Science elaborations and accompanying teacher background information have been well received. These resources provide useful examples of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge can be incorporated into the teaching of science concepts, particularly when they are actively showcased to school leaders and early career teachers.

ISA notes that the emerging national policy agenda on First Nations education, including cultural safety, anti-racism and stronger support for First Nations teachers and school leaders, should be addressed within the curriculum. ISA observed that racism may not yet be dealt with explicitly enough in the curriculum and that future policy expectations may create a gap unless teachers are provided with practical, curriculum-aligned support. ISA suggested ACARA should monitor alignment between emerging First Nations education policy work and the Australian Curriculum.

6.2 EQUITY, INCLUSION AND DIVERSE LEARNERS

AISSA emphasised that curriculum alone cannot meet the needs of all students. Effective implementation depends on teacher knowledge, pedagogy, differentiation, resourcing and school-level support. ISQ identified the literacy, numeracy and personal and social capability progressions as particularly useful for students experiencing disadvantage or additional learning needs when schools use them to identify next steps and target support. These tools were also seen as valuable for providing fine- grained detail for teaching and monitoring progress.

AISSA also noted that the cognitive verbs have helped teachers clarify the level of learning expected and improve student access. They also observed that diversity resources are often used by inclusion staff rather than classroom teachers, even though they are intended for all teachers.

AISSA reported that using a Universal Design for Learning workshops alongside curriculum planning has helped some schools view accessibility, differentiation and conceptual depth as part of core teaching practice rather than an additional compliance task.

ISQ feedback also highlighted the need to ensure assessment focuses on what the achievement standard actually requires, rather than adding extra requirements that may prevent students from demonstrating their learning. This could create inequity or prevent students from showing what they know and can do.

AISs noted that issues often relate to pedagogy and teacher content knowledge rather than the curriculum alone. They noted that teachers can sometimes overcomplicate differentiation or fail to use available supports, and that increasing numbers of students on learning plans require better guidance around goals, tiers of support and classroom adjustment.

7. STUDENT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

AISs were cautious about making direct claims about the impact of Version 9.0 on student outcomes because evidence is largely anecdotal and based on what a school reports. Additionally, some jurisdictions such as Queensland haven't fully implemented Version 9.

However, several AISs raised practices that schools are reporting are making an impact in schools. These include:

- activating students' prior knowledge before introducing new content,
- explicitly checking whether students understand key terms before teaching
- using literacy and numeracy progressions to identify gaps in students learning to allow intervention and adjustment of teaching to take place.

Daily review was also identified as effective when it revisits important concepts, supports consolidation and uses differentiated entry points for students working at different levels.

Curriculum connections were stated as being valued by schools as they help teachers identify essential conceptual threads within and across learning areas. AISs reported that these resources can reduce fragmentation and assist teachers to design units that connect learning rather than simply move through content lists. ACARA could further strengthen these resources by providing more visible year-level or band-level maps showing conceptual links across learning areas.

8. IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEABILITY

AISs did not generally describe the curriculum itself as overcrowded. It was seen as manageable when it is planned and implemented well. The stronger concern was that teachers need clear guidance on how to do this effectively. All AISs agreed that teachers still struggle to see connections within and across learning areas, strands and sub-strands. They said the issue is not necessarily that the curriculum should be cut further, but that teachers need help identifying essential learning, connecting it to achievement standards, and teaching it conceptually rather than in fragments. IST stated that teachers often need a roadmap, including guidance on sequencing, expected progress points and key concepts. For example, in Mathematics, some teachers may spend too much time on chance and data at the expense of number, place value and fractions. Teachers need greater support to build their own content knowledge and translate the curriculum into classroom practice.

Manageability was seen as closely linked to teacher content knowledge, especially in primary schools. Primary teachers may be expected to teach across English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Physical Education, Technologies and the Arts while differentiating for a wide range of student needs. Consultation feedback suggested that teachers can become overloaded when they cannot easily identify the big ideas, essential learning and likely misconceptions within each learning area.

AISSA described a small primary school in the Barossa that had reimagined mathematics through careful curriculum mapping. The school uses multi-age "village communities" and has mapped mathematics conceptually across the year, creating more time and deeper student engagement with content. CET described the Mind Project in Tasmania, including the use of screeners, data, daily review and progressions. They said the project has given teachers clearer information about where students are, how to sequence learning and how to deepen year-level learning rather than automatically moving students to content from higher year levels.

ACARA should consider developing practical roadmaps, checkpoints or planning examples that support professional judgement without becoming overly prescriptive. ISQ suggested that term-by-term checkpoints in Mathematics or English could identify the core knowledge and skills students should have consolidated by that point, while still allowing schools to design units that reflect their context. These resources would be especially useful for small schools, early career teachers and teachers working outside their specialist areas.

9. GENERAL CAPABILITIES AND CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

AISs reported variable implementation of elaborations, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. AISSA stated that critical and creative thinking appears to be one of the more effectively embedded general capabilities. However, there remains uncertainty about how deeply general capabilities should be taught, assessed or reported, and how schools should use the learning continua in a practical way.

Digital literacy requires particular attention. The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence, data-informed tools and algorithmic systems means that students need explicit teaching about responsible use of technology, data literacy, cyber safety, academic integrity and the limits of automated tools. Monitoring should consider whether Digital Literacy remains sufficiently contemporary and visible within the curriculum, rather than assuming it is being consistently addressed through existing Technologies content.

Cross-curriculum priorities also vary in visibility. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures are strongly supported but need practical implementation support, as outlined above. Sustainability is often visible in Science, Geography and Technologies, but schools would benefit from clearer examples of progression. Australia's Engagement with Asia appears less consistently implemented and may require renewed attention if it is to remain meaningful in classroom practice.

10. CONCLUSION

Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum is generally viewed by Independent school representatives as clearer and more coherent than previous versions. The achievement standards, content descriptions and online resources provide a stronger foundation for planning. However, implementation remains inconsistent across jurisdictions and school contexts, and teachers need more practical support to translate curriculum intent into classroom practice.

For Independent schools, it is important that teachers have the guidance, examples and flexibility needed to implement it in ways that are coherent, inclusive and manageable. ACARA's monitoring process should therefore focus on the lived experience of implementation in schools, including teacher workload, student diversity, local context and the support needed for high-quality teaching.

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