

Sound principles for schools funding

Good public policy demands that government funding models have sound foundations. The independent schools sector advocates four guiding principles for the public funding of its schools.

The independent schools sector believes that governments should base public funding of independent schools on four key principles:

- stability
- reasonable basic entitlement
- needs-based funding
- annual indexation

Stability helps families and schools

Schools need stable and predictable funding over a number of years to plan and deliver their education programs to students consistently. Parents intending to send their children to independent schools also need to plan their finances in advance to pay school fees.

The level of fees paid by parents in an independent school is determined by:

- the cost of the particular education the school provides
- the level of government funding provided to the school

Independent schools can only be low-fee if they receive substantial funding from governments.

Stability in government funding allows schools to predict the private contribution required to sustain the quality and range of education programs offered. Frequent or hastily introduced changes to government funding schemes undermine school planning, and can cause financial hardship for parents or disrupt the continuity of students' education.

The independent sector strongly endorses the Australian Government's established policy of providing legislated quadrennial funding for government and non-government schools, adjusted annually to meet cost increases.

All young Australians deserve reasonable public support for their school education, no matter which school they attend.

A reasonable basic entitlement

Governments have a responsibility to provide each Australian child – no matter what their family background or what school they attend – with reasonable basic funding for their schooling.

For more than 30 years, governments have recognised the value of public funding for all school students. Public funding acknowledges that schooling is an important public good and vital to our future as a nation. All students are members of the wider community and all schools, including independent schools, bring benefits to society through the provision of education to our young people.

Public funding of students in independent schools also provides incentive and support for families who make a significant private contribution to the education of their children.

Public funding models for independent schools must therefore have as their foundation **a reasonable level of funding support for every student.**

Needs-based support

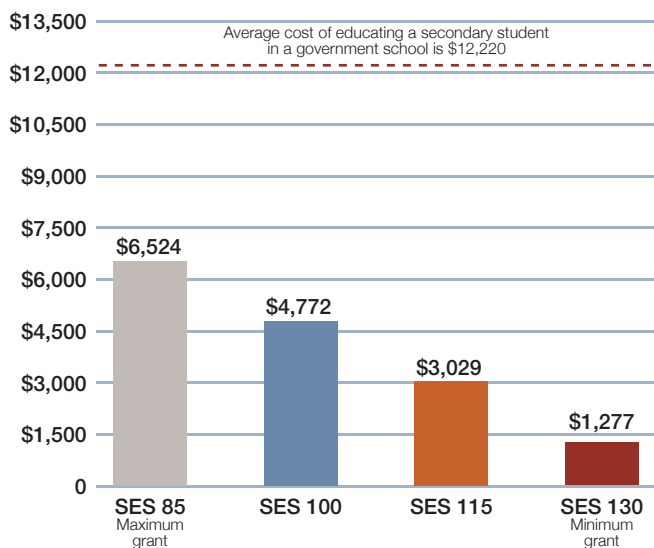
A basic per student grant for students in non-government schools should be supplemented by a **needs-based approach** to funding to recognise the relative educational disadvantage of students.

Socio-economic status is a commonly used measure of relative educational disadvantage. Currently, the Australian Government uses a funding model that measures the socio-economic status (SES) of individual school communities to assess the level of funding eligibility of students in independent schools.

The higher a school's SES score, the less public funding its students receive. Students attending schools with a lower socio-economic profile receive more public funding.

An important feature of the SES funding system is that, while students at high-SES schools receive very limited public support, **parents are not penalised if they contribute to their children's education from their own after-tax income.**

Australian Government SES grants for secondary students in independent schools



For primary students in independent schools, the minimum SES grant is \$989 and the maximum is \$5,052. The average cost of educating a primary student in a government school is \$9,750 per year.

Students in independent schools receive most of their public funding through Australian Government SES grants for non-government schools. These grants are allocated according to relative need. How much a student receives depends on the school they attend. The higher a school's SES score, the less public funding its students receive. Students in independent school communities that have the least capacity to raise funds are eligible for more public funding. Students in government schools are eligible for the highest level of government funding, irrespective of their family background.

Students with special needs

As well as SES grants for students at independent schools, the Australian Government provides some targeted funding to support students with special needs, including:

- students with disability
- students from non English speaking backgrounds
- indigenous students
- students from regional and remote areas

Students with disability can have very high-level needs for classroom support, specialist help and facilities. These needs are met with substantial funding and services if a student attends a government school. However, students enrolled in independent schools can lose eligibility for a substantial amount of this public support.

The independent sector believes that if all students with disability are to achieve their educational goals, government funding and services should be accessible no matter which school these students attend.

Students with disability should have access to the public funding and services they need no matter which school they attend.

Keeping up with cost increases

Continual improvement in education programs, compliance costs for increasing government regulation and movements in salaries and conditions for staff all contribute to the rising cost of schooling.

To avoid any decrease in the quality of education offered by schools it is important that public funding for students keeps pace with increased costs through annual indexation of grants based on a specific schools index.

The independent schools sector strongly endorses the Australian Government's established policy on indexation for schools funding.

In the independent schools sector, parents also contribute to rising school costs through fee increases.

More information about independent schools is available at www.isca.edu.au