



Australian Government  
Department of Education

# Choice and Affordability Fund Work Plan 2026-27

Association of Independent Schools of South  
Australia

**Date agreed** – 21 November 2025





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The document must be attributed as the Choice and Affordability Fund Work Plan 2026-27 – Association of Independent Schools of South Australia.

# Summary of Work Plan 2026-27

This work plan outlines the strategic directions of the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) for the 2026–2027 period, under the continued implementation of the Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF). It builds on the achievements of the 2020–2021 and 2022–2025 work plans, responding to evolving sector needs, economic pressures, and feedback from participating schools. The plan remains focused on fostering parental access to schooling of their choice and means; supporting schools in circumstances where they have been impacted by methodology changes to calculating recurrent funding and in instances of emergency need and priority areas; and strengthening educational outcomes and maximising the wellbeing of students, especially those experiencing educational disadvantage.

Across the five priorities careful consideration has been given to project and initiative design, intentionally supporting schools in regional areas, in addition to working with Approved Authorities and other systemic and non-systemic Independent schools, addressing disadvantage and strategies to enhance student wellbeing. All proposed activities are contingent on CAF funding and are designed to deliver support through both distributed grants and centralised programs. The AISSA continues to prioritise responsiveness, equity and sustainability in its approach, ensuring that Independent schools across South Australia are well-positioned to meet the needs of their communities.

The design of the Choice and Affordability priority will see the Business Development Planning Program continue across both years, enabling schools to streamline operations and improve affordability for families. Centralised expenditure will support application processes, external expertise engagement, and professional learning for leaders and Boards. A separate strand will again be delivered for Lutheran schools via Lutheran Education South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The provision of grant funding for Transition Assistance to schools remains an essential activity. The AISSA will continue to support schools negatively impacted by funding changes under the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) methodology through three targeted streams. Annual grants will assist six identified NAAF schools, in implementing cost-reduction and operational efficiency strategies. Additional schools experiencing real-term funding reductions resulting from transition will also be eligible for grants to improve business efficiency and affordability. Support will also continue for eligible regional schools under a single Approved Authority, with flexibility to include other regional schools subject to eligibility and business case approval. Annual application and accountability processes will ensure transparency and compliance across all streams of Transition Assistance.

As part of the Special Circumstances Priority, the AISSA has provisioned \$1.25 million over the two-year period (notionally \$750,000 in 2026 and \$500,000 in 2027) to support schools facing short-term emergency need or responding to natural disasters such as drought and bushfire. Applications will be assessed based on the criteria outlined by the Australian Government, including the severity of financial difficulty, the unexpected nature of the event, and the school's capacity to recover. The AISSA will also establish specific grant programs in response to emerging priority areas as required, including a potential Drought Assistance program currently under consideration for 2026.

Initiatives funded under Priority D recognise that addressing educational disadvantage requires sustained investment in leadership capability and teacher expertise. This is especially important for the South Australian Independent sector, which is characterised by 70% of schools with a DMI score of less than 100, indicating a significant proportion of schools are from lower socio-economic communities. The AISSA will prioritise distributed leadership models that empower leaders at all levels to collaborate and drive systemic change and will build on the previous work plan's emphasis on evidence-based instructional strategies and curriculum implementation to address disadvantage through high-quality teaching.

The AISSA will continue to support schools to strengthen their understanding and implementation of effective whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing. Through the AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit and targeted professional support, schools will be equipped to examine, develop and consolidate contextually appropriate wellbeing strategies that enhance access, participation and outcomes for all learners.

Work plan design across the 2026–2027 period has been shaped and informed by the Choice and Affordability Fund Guidelines 2020–2029 and incorporates the use of deferred funding, provisioned for activity across the program, in response to uncertainty regarding the longer-term impact of the implementation of the DMI. Where funding has not been deemed to be required to support transition, primarily due to higher than anticipated indexation in the years 2022-2024, it has been applied to support current and future activity across other priorities. The AISSA remains committed to the effective implementation of these funds to support achievement of the objectives of CAF.

## Overarching Risk Management

The AISSA plans to address program management risk as a single work program, to ensure that the CAF Program can be delivered efficiently, effectively and with efficacy.

| Risk category  | Risk  | Treatment: How the risk will be managed   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Stakeholder</b>                                     | Program design fails to meet stakeholder need   | Stakeholder engagement plan documented<br>A range of organisational communication structures and approaches to service delivery are in place, including formal agenda briefings, electronic newsletters, website updates and stakeholder meeting opportunities  |
|  | Lack of stakeholder engagement  |   |
|  | Lack of access to program information   |   |
| <b>External catastrophic event / critical incident</b> | The AISSA and/or schools are involved in a critical incident that disrupts normal operational capability. | AISSA Business Continuity Plan and suite of policies and procedures are in place.<br><br>Remote and in-situ processes and procedures have been established and implemented that enable continuation of:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the provision of timely advice responsiveness to schools' needs during complex times</li> <li>- ability to work with schools using online and remote modes.</li> </ul> A range of feedback mechanisms will facilitate timely organisational responses to schools' identified needs. |
|  | 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.                                       |   |
|  |   |   |
| <b>Organizational</b>                                  | Judicious use of funds and validity of program implementation.  | Overarching governance oversight provided through the AISSA Board.  |
|  |   | Effective internal and external financial procedures and auditing processes<br>Regulated by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).   |
|  |   | Established stakeholder feedback mechanisms.  |
| <b>Technical</b>                                       | Increased threat of cyber attack  | Comprehensive organisational security processes and policies exist.   |
|  | Lack of access by regional and remote schools   | Proven ability to work with regional and remote schools using online and remote modes.  |
| <b>Project Management</b>                              | Lack of continuity  | Proven stability and expertise of AISSA staff in project management and management of Australian Government funds.  |
|  |   | Australian Government assurance that broad strategies will continue for the complete funding period.  |

## **Stakeholder Engagement Plan**

Across the two-year work plan, the AISSA Stakeholder Engagement Plan is responsive four broad audiences: Principals; leadership teams and Teachers; cross sector colleagues, and other external stakeholders.

| <b>Stakeholder &amp; Interest/Impact</b>   | <b>Engagement Strategy</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Principals</b><br>So that <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the design within each priority meets the needs of schools, students and stakeholders</li><li>- leaders are kept abreast of planned and future initiatives to help strengthen leadership capability and build teacher efficacy</li><li>- modes of delivery enable equitable access for schools.</li></ul>   | The AISSA will ensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- CAF updates and educational reports are formally documented and shared with school Principals during scheduled Heads of Schools meetings, diarised for each term.</li><li>- Meeting modes include face-to-face and video conference meetings to maximise participation.</li><li>- School principals are formally consulted and invited to provide feedback about annual program design, via electronic means, in addition to a specific focus group opportunity, to ensure best-fit initiatives are designed.</li><li>- The AISSA electronic Bulletin publication provides regular updates to schools about related CAF activity and updates are housed on the AISSA website.</li></ul> |
| <b>School Leadership Teams and Teachers</b><br>So that <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Leadership Teams within schools are kept abreast of planned and future initiatives and are supported to critically reflect on current practice</li><li>- communities of practice are in place across the sector</li><li>- best-practice initiatives and resources are shared</li><li>- modes of delivery enable equitable access for schools.</li></ul> | The AISSA will ensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Reference Group meetings are scheduled regularly each term for the following key sector stakeholder groups: Business Managers, Curriculum Reference Groups, VET Leaders in schools.</li><li>- The AISSA website is an integral repository for information, resources and artefacts.</li><li>- Meeting modes include face-to-face and video conference meetings to maximise participation.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Cross-sector Colleagues</b><br>So that <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- initiatives build on state-wide priorities</li><li>- senior state education leaders are kept abreast of planned and future initiatives</li><li>- potential partnership opportunities can be maximised</li></ul>  | The AISSA will ensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Formalised cross-sector Senior Officer and Sector Heads meetings provide the conduit for the sharing of educational initiatives and resources, for the benefit of all South Australian students.</li><li>- Education initiatives are shared with professional associations biennially at formalised meetings.</li></ul>   |

**Other External Stakeholders**

So that

- other external stakeholders, such as recognised authorities, parents and the wider community are kept abreast of planned and future initiatives
- open and transparent processes are in place.

The AISSA will ensure

- Standing groups, such as those representing sector approved authorities, are scheduled regularly and table CAF priority information and updates.
- The AISSA website is an integral repository for information, resources and artefacts, including publication of this work plan and annual reports.

## Budget for 2026-2027

| Priority  | Activities/Initiatives                                     | 2026        |             | 2027        |             |
|---|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|   |  | Centralised | Distributed | Centralised | Distributed |
| A – Choice and Affordability  | Business Development Planning Program                      | \$129,432   | \$20,000    | \$130,462   | \$20,000    |
| B – Transition Assistance   | Transition Assistance – NAAF                               | \$42,998    | \$1,200,000 | \$44,503    | \$1,500,000 |
|   | Transition Assistance – Other                              | \$40,166    | \$272,500   | \$41,572    | \$272,500   |
|   | Transition Assistance – Regional                           | \$2,017     | \$171,409   | \$2,087     | \$176,551   |
| C – Special Circumstances Funding   | Special Circumstances Funding                              | \$8,614     | \$750,000   | \$8,916     | \$500,000   |
| D – Strengthening outcomes for schools and educationally disadvantaged schools and students | Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation | \$569,137   | -           | \$585,032   | -           |
|   | Building Quality Teaching, Expertise and Efficacy          | \$882,944   | -           | \$904,222   | -           |
| E – Student wellbeing and support   | Effective Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing     | \$134,581   | -           | \$138,522   | -           |
| Administrative costs  |  | \$61,889    | -           | \$63,745    | -           |
| Total   |  | \$1,871,778 | \$2,413,909 | \$1,919,061 | \$2,469,051 |



# Business Development Planning Program

|                     |                                       |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Activity/Initiative | Business Development Planning Program |
| Priority            | A – Choice and Affordability          |

## Description

The AISSA has funded a Business Development Planning Program under each of the previous two work plans, 2020-2021 and 2022-2025. The program was initially developed in response to key economic challenges which were facing South Australia and which placed cost pressures on school communities. These challenges included the closure of large manufacturing industries, with consequent implications for employment, ongoing drought conditions, bushfires and COVID-19.

An assessment of current conditions has identified that while there is an expected strengthening in the South Australian economy, key challenges and financial pressures on schools and their communities persist. The management of COVID-19, and other infectious diseases, continues to place cost imposts on schools, particularly as this relates to staffing and maintaining safe environments for students and staff, and, while inflation is moderating, families continue to face higher cost of living pressures with consequent impacts on choice and affordability. Schools are also operating within higher-cost environments and global uncertainty continues to be of concern.

In light of the above context, and on the basis of feedback from schools which have received services under previous activity, the AISSA intends to fund a Business Planning Program across both years of the 2026-2027 work plan. The AISSA has received significant positive feedback from participating schools regarding the support received and the program analysis undertaken at the end of each year of activity has indicated demonstrable value.

The intent of the program across the 2026-2027 work plan will again focus on enabling participating schools to progress business development plans to enable them to streamline business practices, in order to enhance choice and affordability for families. The program will again be responsive to the needs of schools and will therefore retain a degree of flexibility in terms of the number of schools targeted and the type/s of expertise which is engaged. An analysis of the program will be conducted at the end of 2026 which will further focus the strategic directions of the 2027 program.

Centralised expenditure will be used to conduct the application and assessment process and engage the external professional expertise to oversee the program. The use of external expertise enables an independent assessment to be undertaken with subsequent recommendations underpinned by external professional knowledge and experience regarding best practice and benchmarking. The AISSA's facilitation of the engagement provides economies of scale in program costs and ensures that the expertise engaged matches the program intent. The AISSA has a well-established application and assessment program and does not propose changes to the criteria for eligibility.

Recognising the specific governance arrangements in the Lutheran school system, and the size of Lutheran school the system, representing 27% of schools in the South Australian Independent school sector, a separate strand of the program will again be run in the Lutheran school sector with funding provided directly to the Approved Authority – Lutheran Education South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia (LESNW). Centralised expenditure will be used to develop an agreement between the AISSA and LESNW. Consistent with previous years, no distributed funding will be able to be retained by the Approved Authority with all funding to be expended on services for schools.

Centralised expenditure will be used to provide a range of professional support to schools which will be available to all schools to assist schools in meeting the Choice and Affordability priority. This includes, but is not limited to data analysis, policy support and strategic advice. Professional expertise will again be provided in the form of specific professional learning to support school leaders and school Boards to strategically navigate what are increasingly challenging times. Centralised expenditure will also be used to manage the application and acquittal process along with payment processing and the assessment of the program at the end of each year of the program years.

### **Eligible schools**

All South Australian Independent schools will be able to apply for support subject to meeting the specified criteria.

### **Timeframes**

The Business Development program will be offered in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| Objectives/expected outcomes   | Indicators of success   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools will be supported to implement business development plans to enhance long-term financial stability and maintain choice and affordability for South Australian families.</li> <li>School Boards and leaders will be supported to identify key strategic directions which will enhance strategic planning.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A minimum of five schools are supported each year.</li> <li>Applications are assessed for approval and schools notified of the outcome within three weeks of closure of the application process.</li> <li>80% of schools which receive support under the program report success in progressing business planning which will meet the long-term financial and strategic needs of their school.</li> </ul> |

# Transition Assistance – NAAF

|                            |                                     |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | <b>Transition Assistance – NAAF</b> |
| <b>Priority</b>            | B – Transition Assistance           |

## Description

Six schools have been identified by the Australian Government as eligible for assistance under the National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAAF) for the period 2022-2028, with a further one school eligible in 2028.

The pathway to transition to the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) has a significant negative funding impact on five of the identified NAAF schools and a negative funding impact in real terms on one identified NAAF school. Five of the six NAAF schools are boarding schools which provide a significant and critical service to regional communities where access to education in some regions, particularly in the senior secondary years, can be limited. The impact on business operations resulting from the transition to the Australian Government 80% funding share, and reduction in Australian Government recurrent funding, has further been impacted by the high-cost environment within which schools have been operating and which adds complexity to identifying long-term sustainable cost savings.

Transition assistance in the form of distributed funding will be provided, subject to application, to the six identified schools over the period of the 2026-2027 work plan to support the affected schools move to new sustainable business operations in light of the above-mentioned significant reduction in government recurrent funding in both actual and real terms over the transition period. Receipt of funding will again be subject to meeting eligibility criteria and, as in previous years, schools will not be obligated to apply.

NAAF schools will be advised of the availability of transition assistance through the AISSA's well established communication channels. Applications will also be directly sought from schools, in early Term 1 of each of the years 2026 and 2027, with grant amounts determined each year, having regard to the eligibility criteria and in the context of the needs of individual schools.

Centralised expenditure will be used to implement the application process, along with a fair and equitable formula for grant distribution and a transparent assessment process. It is anticipated that the criteria for funding will be consistent with that developed under previous work plans, subject to the outcomes of the assessment of the program implemented under the 2022-2025 work plan. In addition to the base criteria, NAAF schools will be required to demonstrate a need for support, provide underpinning supporting financial and other data and identify how the funding will be used to support the program intent. Use of funding will again be tied to the requirement for undertaking a systematic analysis to assist in streamlining business practices and supporting schools to counter cost pressures which may result in higher fees. All schools in receipt of grant funding will be required to acquit the funding through a formal acquittal process.

The Australian Government 2025 Q2 Australian Government Funding Estimation Tool (FET) has provided the starting point for the transition assistance planning for 2026 and 2027, with indicative amounts for 2026 to be determined after the release of the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) and updated estimated indexation rates and the Q4 FET, once released. Well-established processes are in place to ensure this can be undertaken in an expedient manner. The AISSA notes that determined CTC values informing 2026 funding are established due to the 12-month temporary roll-over of CTC scores. An assessment of the criteria will be undertaken at the end of 2026 as part of the AISSA's standard practice to ensure that the criteria remain fit for purpose for 2027.

Consistent with previous work plans, centralised expenditure will be used to provide professional expertise to support schools in their business operations and in the reduction of costs, and to provide efficiencies in managing the program and processing of grant payments.

### **Eligible schools**

Australian Government identified NAAF schools will be eligible for transition assistance.

### **Timeframes**

Transition assistance will be provided in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| Objectives/expected outcomes  | Indicators of success   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eligible schools will be supported to adapt current business models to enable them to transition to the DMI funding arrangements by 2029.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalisation of eligibility criteria.</li> <li>Development of equitable and fair formula for distributing direct grants to eligible schools.</li> <li>Grant funding to be distributed within three weeks of the return of all application forms.</li> <li>An acquittal process is undertaken at the end of each of the funded years.</li> <li>Schools meeting the eligibility criteria for assistance are being supported to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.</li> <li>Schools report success in identifying measures that will enable them to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.</li> </ul> |

# Transition Assistance – Other

|                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | <b>Transition Assistance – Other</b> |
| <b>Priority</b>            | B – Transition Assistance            |

## Description

In addition to the transition assistance for the identified NAAF schools, the AISSA has over the previous two work plans provided transition assistance to a small number of other schools which are negatively affected by the transition to the DMI methodology by 2029. These schools are transitioning to the 80% Commonwealth share through negative, no and low growth funding meaning that they are experiencing funding reductions in real terms due to the current cost environment in which schools are operating. Included in this cohort of schools is the school identified as eligible for NAAF assistance in 2028.

Transition assistance will be provided to schools which meet eligibility criteria for transition assistance – other in both years of the 2026 and 2027 work plan. Centralised expenditure will be used to develop the application process with applications forwarded to schools early in Term 1 of each year. As with the above activity, schools will be advised of the availability of transition assistance through the AISSA's well established communication channels and schools will be able to forego applying should they consider that assistance is not required.

While the AISSA does not envision significant change to the criteria which has informed the 2022-2025 activity, an assessment will be undertaken of the 2022-2025 program to ensure that the criteria remain fit for purpose. Subject to the assessment, criteria are expected to focus on loss in Australian Government recurrent funding in real terms in each of the years 2026 and 2027 along with the provision of a rationale, as to why support is needed, along with supporting data. A fair and equitable formula for distributing funding will also be finalised early in 2026.

As per the previous activity, the Australian Government 2025 Q2 FET has provided the starting point for the transition assistance – other planning for 2026 and 2027, with final indicative amounts for 2026 to be determined after the release of the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) and updated estimated indexation rates and the Q4 FET. Processes are in place to ensure this can be undertaken with expediency. The AISSA notes that determined CTC values informing 2026 funding are established due to the 12-month temporary roll-over of CTC scores.

Grants to transition assistance – other schools will be primarily in the form of smaller grant amounts with use of funding tied to identifying the strategies to streamline business practices and counter cost pressures which may result in higher fees and impact choice and affordability for families. Actual grant amounts will be determined each year subject to need and program participation. A focus will again be placed on the engagement of external expertise to enhance the identification of best practice strategies to reduce costs. Using centralised expenditure, an acquittal process will be

undertaken at the end of each year to ensure funding has been used appropriately and in line with program intent.

The AISSA is cognisant that additional schools may meet the eligibility criteria for support once the criteria has been finalised and that updated CTC values in 2027 may impact on the numbers of schools supported under this initiative.

As with previous activity, centralised expenditure will be used to provide professional expertise to support schools in their business operations and therefore reduce costs, along with managing and processing the grant payments. The AISSA intends to implement the transition assistance – other grant process concurrently with the transition assistance – NAAF process to achieve economies of scale in the use of centralised expenditure.

### **Eligible schools**

Negative, no, and low growth schools will be eligible for transition assistance.

### **Timeframes**

Transition assistance will be provided in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| Objectives/expected outcomes  | Indicators of success  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eligible schools will be supported to adapt current business models to enable them to transition to the DMI funding arrangements by 2029.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Finalisation of eligibility criteria.</li><li>Development of equitable and fair formula for distributing direct grants to eligible schools.</li><li>Grant funding to be distributed within three weeks of the return of all application forms.</li><li>An acquittal process is undertaken at the end of each of the funded years.</li><li>Schools meeting the eligibility criteria for assistance are being supported to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.</li><li>Schools report success in identifying measures that will enable them to transition to the Direct Measure of Income funding arrangements by 2029.</li></ul> |

# Transition Assistance – Regional

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | <b>Transition Assistance – Regional</b> |
| <b>Priority</b>            | B – Transition Assistance               |

## Description

Four regional schools have been identified by the Australian Government as eligible for regional transition assistance, all of which sit under one Approved System Authority. The Approved Authority is the majority provider of Independent school education in regional areas and analysis of the program has indicated the potential, after six years of program support, for support to be potentially better targeted through provision to other regional schools which sit under the Authority.

The 2026-2027 work plan will therefore allow flexibility for the Approved Authority to apply to the AISSA to support other regional schools subject to meeting identified eligibility criteria and on the provision to the AISSA of a business case supporting the rationale for each school to receive regional transition assistance support. The AISSA has sought advice from the Australian Government, Department of Education, regarding this program adaption and will ensure that program implementation is consistent with the advice received.

In line with the 2020-2021 and 2022-2025 work plans, and in the context of Approved Authority for more than one school arrangements, funding for 2026-2027, for schools which sit under the Approved Authority, will be processed and paid by the AISSA to the Approved Authority for onward payment to each eligible school. This further enables the AISSA to achieve economies in scale with regard to the program funding. Subject to an assessment process, the Approved Authority will be able to determine the allocation for each eligible school with the funding fully expended in grants to the four schools. No funding will be able to be retained by the Approved Authority.

The AISSA will distribute the entire regional transition assistance allocation as identified by the Australian Government. The AISSA confirms that it is on course to expend the entire quarantined amount by the end of 2029.

Centralised expenditure, funded through efficiencies in other program activity, will be used to assess any application to include additional schools, progress an annual formal agreement between the AISSA and the Approved Authority, process the grant to the Approved Authority, and undertake an annual accountability process. Given the potential for there to be changes in schools over the 2026-2027 work plan an annual agreement is deemed appropriate. The annual accountability process will be implemented by the AISSA to ensure that funds are used in accordance with the Australian Government requirements.

### **Eligible schools**

Regional transition assistance funding will be provided to eligible schools as identified by the Australian Government and additional regional schools by application.

### **Timeframes**

Regional transition assistance will be provided to eligible schools across the entirety of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| Objectives/expected outcomes   | Indicators of success  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eligible regional schools will receive direct transition assistance grants to support their transition to the DMI.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Implementation of application process to enable the Approved Authority to apply for funding to be allocated to other regional schools which sit under the Approved Authority, subject to meeting eligibility criteria.</li><li>A formal agreement will be signed between AISSA and the Approved Authority for each participating school in each of the years 2026 and 2027.</li><li>An acquittal for the use of funds will be provided by the Approved Authority.</li><li>Funding will be processed and paid by the AISSA in a timely matter and no later than within three weeks upon the return of the signed agreement and any outstanding acquittal documentation.</li></ul> |



# Special Circumstances Funding

|                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | <b>Special Circumstances Funding</b> |
| Priority                   | C – Special Circumstances Funding    |

## Description

The AISSA has provisioned \$1,250,000 over the 2026-2027 work plan (notionally \$750,000 in 2026 and \$500,000 in 2027) for the purposes of providing funding for schools which meet the Special Circumstances funding criteria for short term emergency assistance, as outlined in the Choice and Affordability 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. Special Circumstances funding will only be provided on the basis of need and therefore may not be expended or fully expended in every year.

The AISSA has developed Guidance and an Application Process for the Special Circumstances funding. The Guidance and Application Process requires the provision of significant data to enable a thorough assessment of need to be undertaken and a rigorous assessment process, including the use of external expertise, is in place. Criteria for access is as follows:

- i. Unexpected - Could not have been reasonably foreseen.
- ii. Causing severe financial difficulty - Where a school faces a real prospect of having to cease a large part of its educational activities or significantly lower its educational services.
- iii. Short term - Schools should be able to overcome their financial difficulty and resume operations and must provide a five-year business and recovery plan.
- iv. A special need - Schools have exhausted all other options to remedy the financial situation of the school.

On receipt of an application, the AISSA will assess individual applications in accordance with the above criteria and process.

The AISSA will also 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. The AISSA will develop a grant program specific to the needs of the particular priority area or natural disaster. The AISSA is cognisant of the potential need for a priority program in the area of Drought Assistance in 2026 and has provisioned additional funding accordingly. A determination will be made in early 2026 on the basis of updated rainfall forecasts by the Bureau of Meteorology and other Australian and State government advice.

## Eligible schools

All schools will be eligible for special circumstances funding subject to meeting the criteria.

## Timeframes

Special circumstances funding will be provided to eligible schools across the entirety of the work plan (2026-2027).

## Outcomes

| Objectives/expected outcomes   | Indicators of success   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Schools which apply and are eligible for special circumstances funding are supported to continue operations and remain financially viable.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Applications are assessed for eligibility within two weeks of the application being received.</li><li>Grants are processed within two weeks of an application being approved.</li><li>Schools which receive funding meet all accountability processes.</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Schools which receive funding in response to an identified priority or natural disaster are supported to continue operations.</li></ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Special circumstances grant programs are established in a timely manner.</li><li>Applications are assessed for eligibility within two weeks of the application being received.</li><li>Grants are processed within three weeks of an application being approved.</li><li>Schools which receive funding meet all accountability processes.</li></ul> |

# Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation                                  |
| <b>Priority</b>            | D – Strengthening outcomes for schools and educationally disadvantaged schools and students |

## Description

The AISSA recognises that addressing educational disadvantage requires sustained investment in leadership capability and teacher expertise. This is especially important for the South Australian Independent school sector, which is characterised by 70% of schools with a DMI score of less than 100, indicating a significant proportion of schools are from lower socio-economic communities. Educational disadvantage is evidenced across the state in both regional and metropolitan areas.

The initiatives to follow are designed to equip leaders and teachers with evidence-based strategies, inclusive practices, and future-focused approaches that respond to the complexity of contemporary schooling.

Two key initiatives will guide the work of the Independent sector to strengthen outcomes for schools and educationally disadvantaged schools and students:

- A. Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation – Building leadership capacity through distributed leadership models, inclusive and culturally responsive practices, and evidence-informed decision-making.
- B. Building Quality Teaching, Expertise and Efficacy – Deepening curriculum and pedagogical knowledge, strengthening foundational skills and supporting professional growth through coaching and reflective practice.

Together, these initiatives aim to create sustainable improvement by embedding effective practices within school structures, fostering inclusive environments, and ensuring all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities.

## **Initiative A: Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation**

This initiative focuses on building leadership capacity to address educational disadvantage through whole-of-school approaches. The AISSA will prioritise distributed leadership models, enabling leaders at all levels to collaborate and drive systemic change. Centralised expenditure will support leaders to develop agile, evidence-informed strategies that foster inclusive cultures, strengthen student voice, and create pathways for all learners.

This initiative will develop leadership capability for equity through approaches that include developing coaching mindsets and building confidence in leading improvement in complex contexts. Leaders will be supported to build the capacity of others and lead change that is responsive to local needs. Inclusive and culturally responsive leadership will be a key focus, as will interactions with thought leaders to provoke innovation and future-focused mindsets. The AISSA will provide opportunities for leaders to deepen their understanding of reconciliation, cultural safety, and inclusive practices, with the goal that every learner feels valued and supported. Evidence-informed and reflective leadership will support leaders to use data and inquiry to identify barriers to learning and implement targeted strategies. This approach will support leaders in decision making that is ground in evidence and aligned with the goal of reducing educational disadvantage.

Leaders will be equipped to create structures that amplify student perspectives and foster engagement and belonging. Continuing the focus of the previous CAF work plan, a staff member will remain employed part-time, working alongside individual schools, Vocational and Educational Training (VET) leaders and industry to successfully support post-school transitions and quality industry partnership opportunities. The AISSA will provide in-school support through Senior Educational Consultants to embed new practices within school structures, enabling sustainable improvement and innovation across the sector.

### **Eligible schools**

All schools across the sector will have the opportunity to participate in this initiative.

### **Timeframes**

The Strengthening School Leadership, Excellence and Innovation initiative will take place in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| <b>Objectives/expected outcomes</b>   | <b>Indicators of success</b>  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School leaders strengthen their knowledge and skills in leading complex communities.</li><li>• The enhanced skills of distributed leadership teams in schools drive teacher learning and growth.</li><li>• Schools will be supported to meet their regulatory requirements.</li><li>• Leaders and leadership teams facilitate evidence-informed strategies utilising contemporary organising frameworks and competencies.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Each year, at least 80% of participating leaders / leadership teams will indicate improved understanding of effective strategies and will have felt supported to grow in their leadership practice.</li><li>• The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative to be provided in each annual report.</li><li>• Resources and artefacts of effective practice will be shared.</li></ul> |

# Building Quality Teaching, Expertise and Efficacy

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Activity/Initiative</b> | Building Quality Teaching, Expertise and Efficacy   |
| <b>Priority</b>            | D – Strengthening outcomes for schools and educationally disadvantaged schools and students |

## **Description**

This initiative focuses on strengthening teacher expertise and confidence to improve outcomes for all learners, particularly those experiencing educational disadvantage. Building on the previous work plan’s emphasis on evidence-based instructional strategies and curriculum implementation, the AISSA will utilise centralised expenditure to prioritise approaches that amplify student learning and address disadvantage through high-quality teaching.

A key component will be deepening curriculum and pedagogical knowledge. The AISSA will extend the earlier focus on the revised Australian Curriculum by supporting teachers to engage with Version 9 and apply inclusive design principles, aiming to create learning environments that meet the needs of every student. Numeracy and foundational skills will remain a significant priority, continuing the previous emphasis on Mathematics and early intervention. The Year 1 Numeracy Check, identified as a national enabling priority, will be a cornerstone of this work in 2026. The AISSA will provide training and resources to help teachers use this tool with students, in support of the early identification of mathematics misconceptions and learning needs. The AISSA will also build on the prior focus on STEM and digital literacy by supporting teachers and leaders to embed AI and data tools into everyday practice. This work will bridge the gap between policy and classroom application, leveraging technology to enhance meaningful learning.

Aligned with the Strong and Sustainable Workforce national priority, professional growth and efficacy will support induction into the profession, as well as career progression through demonstration of classroom expertise. Teachers will also continue to be supported through coaching and feedback cycles, reflecting the previous work plan’s commitment to communities of practice and sustained cycles of professional learning to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

## **Eligible schools**

As with Initiative A, all Independent Schools are eligible to participate in this initiative. Professional learning will be delivered through a blend of face-to-face and online modes, consistent with the previous plan, to facilitate accessibility for all schools.

## **Timeframes**

The Building Quality Teaching, Expertise and Efficacy initiative will take place in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

## Outcomes

| Objectives/expected outcomes  | Indicators of success  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers demonstrate a deepened curriculum and pedagogical knowledge.</li><li>• Enhanced teacher understanding and expertise to deliver inclusive approaches for teaching and learning.</li><li>• Tools such as the Numeracy Check strengthen teacher practice in meeting student learning needs.</li><li>• Communities of practice across schools contribute to the raising of the quality of learning experiences for students.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Each year, at least 80% of participating teachers will indicate improved understanding of effective strategies and will have felt supported to grow in pedagogical practice.</li><li>• The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative to be provided in each annual report.</li><li>• Resources and artefacts of effective practice will be shared.</li></ul> |

# Effective Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Activity/Initiative | Effective Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing |
| Priority            | E – Student wellbeing and support                      |

## Description

Whole-school wellbeing approaches will remain a key priority for school leaders and Boards within the Independent school sector. This includes a continued focus on student wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of staff and school leaders. Supporting student wellbeing is fundamental to academic achievement and social development. With rising mental health challenges among young people both globally and in Australia, wellbeing will continue to be a central concern for governments, educators, families, and students. Consequently, the role of schools in promoting wellbeing is more critical than ever. The way in which schools define and implement wellbeing initiatives will significantly influence students' sense of safety, agency, connection, and overall wellbeing.

Research indicates a strong correlation between staff wellbeing and student wellbeing. AITSL's *Wellbeing in Australian Schools Spotlight* highlights the vital role educators and school communities play in supporting and fostering learner wellbeing (AITSL, 2022). Additionally, the Black Dog Institute affirms that workplace wellbeing contributes to a strong and sustainable workforce: "Workplace wellbeing creates a positive and productive environment where people want to come to work... Businesses that invest in mental health are more likely to attract and retain the best and brightest" (Black Dog Institute, 2024).

Throughout the duration of this work plan, support will be provided to assist schools in navigating the breadth of wellbeing policies, frameworks, resources, and advice available nationally, to develop appropriate and culturally responsive actions from a whole school perspective. A healthy, supportive, and inclusive learning environment can only be achieved through sustained commitment to a contextually appropriate whole-school approach, underpinned by a strong evidence base (Quinlan & Hone, 2020).

Building on the achievements of previous work plans, Independent schools will be supported to critically engage with best practice research and evidence to design and implement contextual, whole-of-school approaches that promote individual and collective wellbeing. This will be achieved through a strategy that brings together schools and recognised specialists to formulate advice and action plans, and will include high-quality professional learning opportunities for staff and wellbeing leaders. The development of leadership capacity to drive implementation and ensure sustainability

will remain a central strategy within this initiative. Support will also be provided to schools through professional learning opportunities that focus on student mental health and wellbeing.

A reimagined network will facilitate enhanced collaboration among schools, enabling the exchange of approaches, programs, and practices. This includes the articulation of each school's wellbeing vision, the principles underpinning their whole-school approach, and the ways in which these have been informed by data and evidence. Through this process, examples of effective practice will be identified, documented, and disseminated. A central repository of contemporary advice and resources will support ongoing improvement and knowledge sharing.

### **Eligible schools**

This initiative is open to all schools across the Independent sector. Multi-modal forms of meeting, including face-to-face and videoconferencing professional learning and discussions will support access for all schools.

### **Timeframes**

The Effective Whole School Approaches to Student Wellbeing initiative will take place in each of the years of the work plan (2026-2027).

### **Outcomes**

| Objectives/expected outcomes   | Indicators of success   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit will support schools to grow in expertise to understand the characteristics and elements of effective whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing.</li><li>• Schools will be supported to better examine and implement contextually appropriate approaches and programs to improve access and participation.</li><li>• Schools will be supported to develop and consolidate whole-of-school approaches to wellbeing.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 80% of participating schools indicate a deeper understanding of the characteristics and elements of effective whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing.</li><li>• The number and geo locations of schools who have engaged in the professional learning from within this initiative to be provided in each annual report.</li><li>• Examples of effective practice will be refined, documented and shared.</li></ul> |



### **2026-27 CAF Work Plan NGRB Sign Off**

This 2026-27 CAF Work Plan is submitted in fulfillment of the work plan requirement in part 4 of the CAF Agreement and I understand that, once approved, the work plan forms Attachment A to the CAF Agreement.

**Name and Position of the person**  
**signing off on behalf of the NGRB:** Anne Dunstan, Chief Executive, AISSA  
**Date:** 28/10/2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Dunstan', is written below the printed name.

# Schedule 1 – Indicative school-level distributions 2026-2027

*Transition Assistance* distributed actual funding amounts for eligible schools will be subject to an annual application and assessment process against established criteria in each year of the 2026-2027 work plan. As outlined in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan the AISSA has a comprehensive communication strategy which ensures that eligible schools are aware that assistance will be provided. Schools which meet eligibility criteria are not obligated to apply for funding. Amounts below reflect distributed funding for system schools under one approved authority. Consistent with the previous work plan, final allocations of Regional transition assistance will be determined by the Approved Authority for the four eligible schools having regard to need. As indicated in the work plan the Approved Authority will be provided with opportunity to include additional regional schools subject to meeting eligibility criteria and the provision of a business case. Systemic schools will be eligible for other CAF priority support. No funding is able to be retained by the Approved Authority under either priority.

## Priority A – Choice and Affordability

| AGEID | School Name  | 2026     | 2027     |
|-------|--|----------|----------|
|       | Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA (Approved Authority: 22343) | \$20,000 | \$20,000 |

## Priority B – Transition Assistance (Transition Assistance – Regional)

| AGEID | School Name  | 2026      | 2027      |
|-------|--|-----------|-----------|
|       | Lutheran Education SA, NT & WA (Approved Authority: 22343) | \$171,409 | \$176,551 |
| 266   | Redeemer Lutheran School                                   |           |           |
| 14290 | Tatachilla Lutheran College                                |           |           |
| 17261 | Faith Lutheran College Incorporated                        |           |           |
| 28557 | Navigator College  |           |           |