

Supported School Transport and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Discussion Paper

Submission by

The Association of Independent Schools of the
ACT (AISACT)

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Introduction

The Association of Independent Schools of the ACT (AISACT) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation process on School Transport and the NDIS.

The ACT independent school sector provides a diverse range of schooling options to families living in the ACT and in the surrounding region, and to families needing boarding school facilities.

Independent schools play an important role in providing educational alternatives to those provided by the government sector. The ACT community is multicultural and diverse and the independent school sector reflects this. It should be a basic premise that parents should have a choice, where possible, about where their child is educated. There are many reasons underpinning parental choice, including pedagogical style, learning environment, faith, values, gender, school culture and pastoral structures.

Independent schools have emerged in direct response to community demand and have a long history of accepting an educational leadership role in the national capital, and a shared role with governments, in setting up schools in the ACT.

In the end, it is about parents finding a school which provides the best 'fit' and, therefore, the best opportunities for success for their child.

All students, irrespective of where they are educated, are entitled to a high quality of education, and it is the responsibility of governments to provide a suitable level of funding for all students to achieve quality outcomes.

The Association represents all eighteen independent schools which together educate 14,514 students, or around 19% of the ACT school population (29% of ACT high school students attend Independent schools). Enrolment in Canberra's Independent schools has historically been very strong, and have seen a 21% increase in student enrolment over the past 10 years.

Independent schools in the ACT have a wide range of student populations, with the smallest school having 27 students and the largest over 1800 students.

Issues

This submission focuses on the current provision of Special Needs Transport (SNT) in the ACT and the lack of equity of access for all students with disabilities. The Association has consistently and routinely raised this issue both before and since the implementation of the NDIS in the ACT.

Under the current scheme, a student with a disability who attends an Independent school is not able to access special needs transport, even though the NDIA has as its premise the notion of *user choice* for planning and services.

For example, under current arrangements, a student with a significant physical disability may receive transport to a government school, but not to an independent school. In this case there is inequity in the capacity for parent and student to exercise their right to choose their educational setting.

In the ACT the current SNT scheme is funded as an “in-kind” process between the ACT Government and the NDIS. The AISACT would support the continuation of the current SNT arrangements provided they were expanded to include students attending independent schools.

If access for students with disabilities in Independent schools could be accommodated, the barriers to user choice are removed, and the ACT government funding of the NDIS would meet the needs of **all students** across the ACT.

The Association strongly believes that the best option for families in the ACT to support their children with a disability, who may need to access transport to school, is for the existing arrangement to be expanded to include those students attending Independent schools.



Andrew Wrigley
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