



ASSOCIATED CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

life through Christian education

2015 Queensland Election Statement

Introduction

Education is a key driver in securing Australia's Future in the global market and in shaping the future nation of Australia. Members of Associated Christian Schools are partners in the education of Australians, based on their long-espoused ethics and values.

Associated Christian schools have distinguishing features that are influenced by their spiritual traditions as well as the policies and processes used to employ staff and enrol students. Whatever the affiliation, parents choose a Christian school to give their children a clear moral and ethical educational framework for life as responsible citizens.

Associated Christian Schools acknowledges and appreciates the support provided by the Queensland Government of its 29 member schools. In the lead up to the State Election on 31 January 2015, we are seeking continued support from the major political parties, for faith based schools to be autonomous and independent with the ability to teach within their own educational and faith based interpretation, while remaining compliant with accountability requirements to the state government.

Associated Christian Schools have recognized five key priority areas for the next period of Government in Queensland:

1. *Public and political recognition and support for Independent faith-based school communities.*
2. *Recurrent funding to be increased in line with real costs and State department funding.*
3. *Increased support for Disadvantaged Students; removing onerous or unnecessary bureaucratisation in identifying such students; Capital Assistance and Infrastructure planning.*
4. *Capital funding Assistance for schools; equitable funding for professional development across sectors.*
5. *Ongoing discussion around the core business of education*

1. Public and political recognition and support for Independent faith-based school communities.

Associated Christian Schools seeks the support from the State Government to acknowledge and guarantee continued support for their members, based on the following principles:

1) In accord with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

2) The Queensland government respects the unique contribution to education in Australia, by Independent faith-based education, and will continue to make, to the development of values systems in Australian society.

2. Recurrent funding to be increased in line with real costs and State department funding.

Members of Associated Christian Schools currently receive funding for everyday operating costs, from the Australian government, the State government, and parents of enrolled students. Under the current funding provisions, this support is linked to the ‘basket nexus’, which is the average cost of educating a state school student. Associated Christian Schools is seeking additional funding, for their members, to help close the gap in resourcing levels between the level of funding received by state schools and that received by independent faith-based schools. This funding assists in relieving pressure on schools fees and also assists more families to choose faith-based schools, therefore saving government money.

Associated Christian Schools is seeking to work with the next Queensland Government to achieve:

1) Consistent financial outcomes that will help keep pace with increased costs of managing schools, including teacher salaries, technological developments and physical resources that will support our schools in being innovative and achieving outstanding student outcomes.

2) We also seek the support of the next Queensland Government to guarantee that the gap in resourcing between member schools and state schools, particularly those located in regional and remote areas, does not widen.

3. Increased support for Disadvantaged Students; removing onerous or unnecessary bureaucratisation in identifying such students; Capital Assistance and Infrastructure planning.

In accordance with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Given all educational bodies are obliged to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (and equivalent State Anti-Discrimination Acts) with regards to the education of disabled students, appropriate levels of State Government funding need to be provided to individual schools to assist them in properly assessing students, with additional ongoing funding provided to schools to ensure appropriate standards of education are delivered to disabled students during the course of their enrolment.

Students with disabilities and their families are entitled to the same freedom of choice for education that supports and reflect their religious beliefs and values. In addition, students with disabilities are entitled to equal access to specialised services and resources, irrespective of the school sector, with funding portability.

Accordingly, members of Associated Christian Schools seek a significant injection of funding to support the needs of students with identified learning difficulties, with priority given to early intervention locations, such as kindergartens and early childhood centres.

(2) Indigenous Students

Associated Christian Schools respect and value Indigenous people as the original custodians and acknowledge their contribution to Australia’s past, present and future heritage. Indigenous students need to feel safe and secure in their school community and know that they are respected and loved as God’s children.

Associated Christian Schools seek a significant injection of funding in member schools to

support the needs of Indigenous students within their school communities, to achieve identified educational targets in State Government Agreements.

We also seek the support of the next Queensland Government to support member schools with enrolled indigenous students so that opportunities can be created for these students through quality education, founded on Christian values and cultural heritage in partnership with staff, parents and the community.

Associated Christian Schools also seeks the support of the next Queensland Government as their members seek to work in partnership with local Indigenous communities and elders to

1) Increase the literacy and numeracy standards across the College, through analysis of test results, and directing teaching in areas of concern.

2) Ensure that all students are engaged in regular learning by increasing attendance especially before and after holidays.

3) Ensure that the learning outcomes of Indigenous students improve in line with other students.

4) We also seek the support of the next Queensland Government to support member schools as we seek to improving outcomes for Indigenous students in the following priorities:

- Readiness for school
- Engagement and connection
- Attendance and retention
- Literacy and numeracy
- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
- Pathways to meaningful post-school options.

(3) Disengaged Students

Associated Christian Schools has members that specifically cater for students disengaged from mainstream schooling, as well as a growing number of disengaged students enrolled in mainstream member schools. Current recurrent Government funding levels are inadequate to support the programs, specialist services and resources required in educating these students.

Associated Christian Schools therefore seek a significant increase in levels of funding and support, for member schools educating disengaged students, equal to that provided to Queensland state schools. This increase would enable the focus and resources to remain on educating these disengaged youth, rather than introducing projects needed to attract grants

for extra funding.

(4) Rural and Remote Students

Associated Christian Schools has twenty-nine of its member schools in Queensland, of which nineteen are located in regional or remote locations in Queensland. Tyranny of distance and other problems faced by these schools create the following issues:

- 1) Difficulty in attracting and retaining quality teachers
- 2) Limited access to services provided by non-government school authorities
- 3) Difficulty in accessing quality professional development due to distance and travel costs
- 4) High costs associated with the development, application delivery and management of information technology
- 5) High costs of obtaining specialist services and programs such as languages, music programs and vocational education due to costs and, difficulty in attracting appropriately qualified staff and relative small numbers of students

Associated Christian Schools seek a significant increase in all levels of support through the recognition of distance and isolation challenges experienced by these schools.

Further, we seek an increase in the resources and support provided to rural and remote schools, through existing and future programs, in order for them to address the problems they face in the delivery of quality education programs to their communities.

4. Capital funding assistance for schools; equitable funding for professional development across sectors.

The Queensland population is projected to grow from 7.1 million in 2011 to 10.0 million in 2061. Over the next fifty years, Queensland population is projected to increase by an average rate of 1.6%. The largest contributor to Queensland population growth is projected to be net overseas migration between 2011 and 2061 (46%), followed by natural increase (births less deaths) (40%) and net interstate migration (14%) (Queensland Government population projections – 2013 edition).

The projected impact of this growth on Queensland schools is that enrolments in all Queensland schools are projected to increase by 303,000 students between 2011 - 2031. (Queensland Schools Planning Commission - School infrastructure demand maps, 2013 edition).

Member schools of Associated Christian Schools have been established by local churches or parent communities. In establishing these schools, their governing bodies have had to overcome local and government restrictions to establish their schools, as well as injecting significant financial capital, sometimes from members' own personal expense. The Global Financial Crisis, as well as the current European economic debt emergency, and changes in Queensland job markets, have exacerbated current and potential situations for establishing new schools.

Associated Christian Schools therefore request the State Government to consult with local councils to review and improve regulatory processes and procedures, land use, building certification requirements and organisational health safety requirements, to support schools undertaking of building programs, and continue progress in red tap reduction.

Furthermore, we seek the State Governments' support of local communities who want to establish new schools, by offering incentives and securities regarding relevant finance with loans and grant assistance.

In addition, we seek the support of the next Queensland Government in ensuring equitable funding and access is provided across all sectors, for professional development, especially in rural and remote areas of the state.

5. Ongoing discussion around the core business of education

The question of the primary purposes of education has become much more important in recent years. One of the most important of the questions to be asked in this discussion is: – should it be more than merely utilitarian, serving employment and economic interests?

Discussion in the media as well as policy and public statements from a wide range of government sources have moved increasingly to the position where it seems that it has become a given that the main reason to go to school is to be able to find a good job upon graduation. Of course, we all acknowledge that this is an important outcome – nothing in this comment should be allowed to suggest otherwise – but our argument is that it ought not be the only, or even the most important outcome.

Mere utilitarianism will ultimately see the demise of the study of literature, of history and of all kinds of learning for its own sake. Even the learning of languages other than English is currently being promoted purely on economic grounds. Mutual human understanding and the development of community are surely at least as important as manufacturing and trade.

The development of character traits and human virtues such as compassion, courage, self-control, integrity and justice are often not only sidelined by a focus on utilitarian employment and economic thinking, but often actively discouraged. If anything can be learned from the global financial crisis, surely the need to place human interests before profits, to place general welfare above personal gain has become painfully apparent.

Clearly, the potential depth and breadth of this discussion has only been slightly hinted at in these few comments. It is our view that the community would welcome a debate of this nature, and would welcome politicians who were prepared to engage in it.