

MEDIA RELEASE

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AHISA calls for a strengths-based approach to education policymaking to support Australian schools

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) today launched a policy manifesto for school education as a contribution to public debate in the lead up to the federal election.

AHISA's education policy manifesto is [posted on its website](#).

"Australia's recent experience of whole-scale remote learning due to COVID-19 has created curiosity and expectation around the possibilities for re-shaping the way we deliver school education," said AHISA's CEO Ms Beth Blackwood.

"The disruption of COVID-19 may have given us the opportunity to hit the reset button on schooling, but we also need to review and reset approaches to national policymaking in education to ensure support for the successful transformation of school education in Australia."

AHISA's policy manifesto advocates adoption of a strengths-based approach to national policymaking in school education.

"AHISA has been advocating since 2015 for policymakers to drop deficit-model thinking about schools and adopt a strengths-based model of policymaking," said Ms Blackwood.

"Over the last two-and-a-half years, our schools and teachers have conclusively demonstrated their amazing strengths. Now is the time to build on those strengths and accelerate the great work that schools are initiating for the benefit of their students."

Ms Blackwood said that in recent years the federal government had made significant and welcome investment in resources to support teachers' work with students and to assist their professional development.

"Teachers now have access to a range of high quality, government-funded digital resources that are helping to make a difference in curriculum delivery, in addressing student wellbeing issues and in supporting parents to engage with their children's education," said Ms Blackwood.

"These initiatives are helpful and appreciated, but we now need a deeper shift in the underlying principles that policymakers in governments and think tanks bring to policy formation if we are to harness the opportunities now open to us to revision and reshape school education."

Ms Blackwood said that a strengths-based approach to policymaking in school education:

- Recognises the professional expertise of teachers and school leaders
- Recognises that schools are operating strategically within a continuous cycle of development or improvement
- Recognises the value of and supports diversity in educational provision and pathways for students

- Recognises that the continued successful evolution of Australia's schooling system depends on schools having the autonomy to experiment, research and trial or adapt ideas and practices.

AHISA's policy manifesto offers six priority areas where a federal government can help to rapidly strengthen Australia's school system using a strengths-based policy approach:

1. Supporting the digital transformation of Australian education
2. Upskilling the teaching profession
3. Re-establishing and strengthening students' learning journeys
4. Supporting student wellbeing
5. Strengthening all levels of school leadership
6. Engaging parents in their children's education.

"We call on policymakers to seek ways to support and accelerate the progress schools have made in the face of extraordinarily difficult and uncertain conditions," said Ms Blackwood.

"By working with the profession, and building on the strengths of educators and schools, governments can support schools to rebuild and reshape learning pathways to help all students achieve their best possible futures," said Ms Blackwood.

"A strengths-based approach to policymaking is the best way of bringing together the expertise of educators and the resources of governments to realise a new vision for Australia's school system."

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AHISA is a professional association of 450 Heads of independent schools. Its members lead schools that collectively account for over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments and 70 per cent of independent sector enrolments.