Choice and Affordability Fund

2024 Annual Report – The Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory Incorporated

NGRB Ongoing Compliance Declaration

Section 92 of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act) outlines the basic requirements for approval of a non-government representative body for a non-government school.

As such, the Department of Education is seeking confirmation that – The Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory Incorporated complies with the legislative requirements in relation to monitoring the body's compliance with the Act.

Confirmation you continue to meet basic requirements for approval

Body corporate

Independent Schools Northern Territory (ISNT), ABN: 95 830 234 991, is a Company Limited by Guarantee (Trading Name: Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory – AISNT). ISNT is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

Not-for-profit (NFP)

ISNT complies with all Not-for-Profit requirements under ASIC and ACNC. It is governed by a Constitution that ensures the organisation operates for the advancement of education and not for private profit.

Financial viability

ISNT is financially viable. Its income is sufficient to meet current and ongoing operating costs. A risk management plan is in place and a Finance and Audit Committee (including an independent accountant) meets biannually to oversee financial management. Finance reports are provided at each ISNT Board meeting.

Fit and proper person

ISNT complies with subsection 28(2) of the Australian Education Regulations 2023. Directors and staff have the relevant skills and experience to support Northern Territory Independent Schools. All undergo Criminal History Checks and Directors complete a Code of Conduct and Skills Matrix, hold Director Identification Numbers, and adhere to the ISNT Constitution which outlines Director Duties and Interests.

NGRB Annual Report Sign Off

This annual report is submitted in fulfillment of the annual report requirements in sections 50, 51 and 52 of the CAF Guidelines.

Name and Position of the person signing off on behalf of the NGRB[1]:	Cheryl Salter Executive Director
Date:	30 June 2024

Summary of 2024

In 2024, the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT) represented 25 Independent Schools across the Northern Territory, including 10 (Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Schools (MATSIS) and low SES schools. AISNT continued its commitment to strengthening the capacity and sustainability of the Independent School Sector by delivering a suite of programs supported by the Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF). These programs were aligned with national priorities and tailored to the unique geographic, cultural and educational contexts of Independent Schools in the Northern Territory.

AISNT delivered a broad range of initiatives aligned with CAF priorities:

- Strengthened educational outcomes for disadvantaged students and remote schools.
- Supported transition for schools affected by Direct Measure of Income (DMI) funding changes.
- Delivered programs promoting student wellbeing and welfare.
- Provided strategic leadership development and governance support to school leaders.
- Promoted and sustained parental choice in education.

The vast majority of these initiatives were made available to all Member Schools, with the exception of transition assistance funding, which was allocated directly to eligible schools to support them through funding model adjustments.

Key initiatives delivered by AISNT included targeted teaching and learning support, the delivery of professional learning and leadership development programs, and the provision of hands-on governance training aimed at building leadership capacity and improving strategic planning across school communities. Parental choice was further promoted through activities that strengthened school leadership and school planning, contributing to the overall vitality and diversity of the Independent Schools Sector in the northern Territory. The CAF funded work supported by AISNT in 2024 played a significant role in ensuring that students, particularly those in remote, MATSIS and low-SES schools, has access to quality education and holistic support services.

Priority A – Choice and Affordability
Activity – Focus on Parental Choice
AISNT maintained its focus on promoting parental choice in education throughout 2024 by supporting a diverse and sustainable Independent Schools sector that meets the needs of Northern Territory families.

Activity – Informing Effective School Priorities
AISNT remained committed to supporting schools through a suite of initiatives aimed at enhancing effective school governance, management, and leadership. In 2024, these supports were strengthened through targeted engagement with school leaders and boards.

Priority B – Transition Assistance Grants
Activity – Transition Assistance
In 2024, three Member Schools identified by the Department of Education received Transition

Assistance Grants. Two of these schools were eligible under legacy criteria for the National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAAF) and subsequently received NAAF Grant allocations.

Priority C – Special Circumstances Grants
Activity – Special Circumstances Funding
No applications were received from schools in 2024 for Special Circumstances Funding Grants. AISNT continued to provide advice and support to schools in assessing their eligibility and preparing submissions where appropriate.

Priority D – Strengthening Outcomes for Independent Schools in the Northern Territory
Activity – Strong Curriculum and Pedagogy Support in Schools
In 2024, AISNT continued to engage a Teaching and Learning Coordinator who provided tailored in-school and remote support to teachers and support staff. This work focused on improving student engagement and outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The Coordinator also worked to ensure schools' curriculum practices aligned with the latest version of the Australian Curriculum (Version 9).

Activity – Supporting Indigenous Schools
AISNT continued to prioritise support for Indigenous Schools in 2024. Two Indigenous Leaders Forums were held—in Alice Springs and Darwin—bringing together leaders from Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Schools to share best practices and engage in strategic dialogue.

Activity – INSPIRE – Maximising Identification and Reporting NCCD
AISNT continued to promote the effective use of the INSPIRE platform across Member Schools. In 2024, teachers participated in targeted professional learning sessions to improve the accuracy and consistency of NCCD data entry and reporting through INSPIRE.

Activity – Developing Pathways and School Industry Partnerships
Throughout 2024, the VET and Pathways Officer supported eight Member Schools in developing and expanding Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs and school–industry partnerships. The role facilitated collaboration across schools to broaden post-school opportunities for secondary students.

Priority E – Supporting Positive Wellbeing for Independent School Students in the Northern Territory
Activity – Student Wellbeing and Support
In 2024, AISNT delivered a series of professional learning opportunities focused on student and staff wellbeing. Workshops and network meetings addressed current wellbeing challenges, including mental health, trauma-informed practice, and creating safe and inclusive school environments.

Risk Management

Risk	How the risk will be managed
Substantial carry-forward of transition funds into later years of the program, as expenditure is directly linked to actual funding impacts of the CTC policy change.	Required to mitigate future CTC impacts. Regular monitoring and communication with affected schools.
Limited uptake of INSPIRE platform by schools	Ongoing promotion, training, and direct engagement with schools to highlight the benefits.
A carry-over of Special Circumstances funding may occur, as expenditure is directly linked.	A carry-over of funds may be required to mitigate the future impacts.
A school that receives Special Circumstances funding is still unable to improve the circumstances they have encountered.	AISNT would monitor the school's use of funds and their progress in addressing the circumstances and provide in kind support as needed.
Capacity to meet cultural needs of Indigenous schools	Upskilling staff to be culturally aware ad responsive. Partnerships with cultural experts and external collaborations.
Availability of staff to attend professional learning	Blended delivery models and flexible scheduling of sessions (online and in-person).

Activity Report

Activity/Initiative Priority	Name A – Choice and Affordability

Activity Description

In 2024, the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory (AISNT) strengthened its commitment to enhancing school governance, leadership, and management capacity through a range of strategically targeted initiatives. Delivered under the "Informing Effective School Priorities" activity, these initiatives were designed to support school leaders in fostering sustainable improvement aligned with community aspirations, contemporary educational practice, and compliance obligations.

Central to this effort was the **Leadership Collective Program**, facilitated by AISNT's Deputy Director. This program engaged both emerging and experienced leaders across the Northern Territory Independent School Sector in collaborative learning environments. Participants were supported to undertake and implement school-based leadership projects, with outcomes spanning four key domains:

- **Curriculum Innovation**: Two projects focused on designing dynamic and contextually relevant curricula that enhance teaching and learning.
- **Staff and Student Wellbeing**: Four projects centred on building positive school cultures and systems of holistic support.
- **Instructional Practice**: One project applied evidence-based approaches to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.
- **Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion**: One project embedded First Nations perspectives across the curriculum and daily school life.

To complement the Leadership Collective, AISNT hosted a series of high-impact learning events and leadership forums:

- **Learning and Leadership in a Learning System** and **The Power of Networked Learning for Leadership Formation** were presented by education leadership expert Stephen Brown, reinforcing the importance of reflective and adaptive leadership.
- **Industrial Relations Matters**, presented by legal expert Will Snow, provided up-to-date guidance on employment law, compliance, and workforce relations.

AISNT also curated a series of **Leadership Conversations**, aimed at inspiring school executives and providing practical leadership insights. Topics included:

- Mobilising Student Agency in School Improvement
- Creating an Inclusive School Culture of Leadership
- Applying the PERMA Framework to Enhance Staff Wellbeing

- Best Practice in Managing Student Discipline

Recognising the increasing complexity of school operations, AISNT also supported an internal legal advisory initiative. An AISNT Officer attended multiple education-law seminars, focusing on school governance, duty of care, student rights, and recent legislative reforms. The officer synthesised key content into digestible, plain-language summaries for distribution to school leaders, significantly boosting their legal literacy and operational confidence.

These initiatives were funded centrally under the CAF, ensuring equitable access across the Territory, particularly for remote and Majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student (MATSIS) schools.

- School leaders successfully implemented eight school-based improvement projects tailored to local needs and leadership development goals.
- Strengthened school leadership capacity across remote, regional, and urban Independent Schools.
- Facilitated access to current, high-quality legal and industrial relations information, directly enhancing school compliance practices.
- Established collaborative peer learning communities among school leaders, fostering ongoing exchange and professional support.
- Developed a repository of accessible legal summaries to support ongoing school governance decision-making.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
Implementation of leadership development initiatives at the school level	8 school-based projects completed across curriculum, wellbeing, pedagogy and cultural inclusion.
Broader participation and leadership skill development	Leaders from 16 school s participated in collective forums and programs. 95% satisfaction in post-event surveys.
Improved school leader legal literacy and governance capacity	5 legal briefings disseminated; 100% of surveyed principals reported increased clarity in decision making.
Strengthened professional networks and collaborative practice	Inter-school networking and collaboration occurred post-forum events, especially among regional leaders.
Business Managers and School Leaders have a thorough understanding of school funding, good financial management practices and good governance.	70% of schools were represented at the School Leaders and Business Managers Forum.
Principals and Business Managers have a thorough understanding of good workplace practices, school and law and industrial and workplace law.	70% of schools were represented at the School Leaders and Business Managers Forum.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	$85,500	$0

Centralised Funding was utilised to:

- Forums and Presenter Engagement: Facilitated the organisation of forums and contract presenters.
- Professional Learning Opportunities: Enable AISNT Officers to attend professional learning opportunities.
- Salary Component: Enable an AISNT Officer to plan, collaborate and engage in the initiatives.

Activity/Initiative Priority	Name B – Transition Assistance

Activity Description

AISNT continued its commitment to supporting three Member Schools identified by the Department of Education as eligible for Transition Assistance. These schools were deemed to require targeted financial support due to the adverse impacts of the shift to the new Direct Measure of Income (DMI) funding model. The assistance provided was critical to maintaining the financial viability and operational stability of these schools during the transition period. Notably, two of the three schools also met eligibility requirements under the former National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAAF).The criteria used to identify these schools was:

- An ARIA greater than zero,
- A Direct Measure of Income CTC change of 3 or more points from either the 2011 or 2016 SES CTC score,
- Receive less funding in any year from 2020 to 2029 under the DMI arrangements than under 2019 indexed Schooling Resource Standard
- Have an average fee level of less than $20,000.
- To support future-year commitments, a portion of the Transition Assistance allocation was quarantined in 2024 in line with the 2022–2029 CAF Work Plan Expenditure Profile.
- In 2024, Transition Assistance funds were utilised to maintain school access to the INSPIRE platform and provide ongoing professional development for school staff. This platform supports the identification and recording of student adjustments for students with disability, contributing to more accurate and consistent data collection for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD). Teachers at the supported schools received tailored training to strengthen their use of INSPIRE, ensuring data integrity and compliance with national reporting standards. The implementation of the platform has been effective, with schools increasingly using the system to inform inclusive education planning and maximise disability-related funding entitlements.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
Direct Grants to schools that are eligible under the National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAAF)	Two schools were eligible to receive a direct grant under the National Adjustment Assistance Fund (NAAF).
Identified schools by DESE as requiring Transition Assistance.	Three schools were eligible to receive a direct Transition Assistance grant
INSPIRE software platform utilised by identified schools to support the identification and recording of student adjustments.	The three identified schools eligible for Transition Assistance utilised the INSPIRE software platform.
All Independent Schools using the INSPIRE software platform will be provided with professional development on its usage.	All schools using the INSPIRE software platform receive professional development upon request. Six schools regularly attend network meetings to support Inclusion Support Coordinators to work with staff. One day formal professional development training was provided conducted at three schools. Support is offered to individual teachers who contact the office for support.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	$95,000	$520,888

Centralised Funding was utilised to:

- INSPIRE Platform: AISNT purchased the INSPIRE platform in bulk for the three schools that received Transition Assistance funds.
- Salary: AISNT Officer coordinated the rollout of the INSPIRE platform and provided support to staff in schools, ensuring effective utilisation of the software

Activity Report

Activity/Initiative Priority	**Special Circumstances Grants** C – Special Circumstances Funding

Activity Description

The Special Circumstances Grants provide emergency funding for schools who meet the following criteria:

1. Unexpected - Could not have been reasonably foreseen.
2. 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.
3. Short term - Schools should be able to overcome their financial difficulty and resume operations and must provide a five-year business and recovery plan.
4. A special need - Schools have exhausted all other options to remedy the financial situation of the school.

In 2020, $200,000 was set aside for Special Circumstances Grants. A further $200,000 was set aside in 2021. ($400,000 in total).

No applications were received from schools in 2023 for Special Circumstances Funding Grants.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
All eligible applications will be considered for Special Circumstances funding.	There were no applications for Special Circumstances funding in 2023.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	$0	$0

Activity/Initiative Priority	Name D – Strengthening outcomes for schools and educationally disadvantaged schools and students

Activity Description

Teaching and Learning Support Initiatives

In 2024, AISNT continued to build upon the work initiated in 2023 by engaging a dedicated Teaching and Learning Coordinator under the Choice and Affordability Fund (CAF). This Coordinator played a central role in providing personalised support to teachers and support staff in Member Schools. Key areas of focus included strengthening student engagement and supporting the effective delivery of literacy and numeracy programs.

AISNT remained committed to ensuring that schools' curricula remained aligned with the evolving Australian Curriculum (Version 9.0). To support this, the Teaching and Learning Coordinator provided ongoing assistance to schools with curriculum planning, resource development, and professional learning. Curriculum Coordinators across Member Schools completed a comprehensive audit of their progress in implementing Version 9.0 of the curriculum. All schools are on track to complete full implementation by 2026.

In addition to tailored in-school support, AISNT facilitated sector-wide professional learning and engagement opportunities. These included:

- **Cybersecurity and Wellbeing for Leaders Forum (May 2024)** – Aimed at enhancing digital safety and supporting school leaders' capacity to respond to emerging wellbeing challenges.
- **From Policy to Practice: Creating Accessible Learning Environments for Students with Disabilities Workshop** – Focused on practical strategies to support inclusive education and compliance with disability standards.

Professional development also extended to the use of INSPIRE Version 3**,** with teachers continuing to build their skills in using the platform to collect and analyse accurate data for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). This ensured consistency, transparency, and effective allocation of funding and support for students with disability.

Supporting Indigenous Schools and Educational Leadership

AISNT maintained a strong focus on strengthening outcomes for Indigenous students and supporting Indigenous-led schools throughout 2024. Building on the success of 2023, AISNT hosted two Indigenous Leaders Forums, one in Darwin and one in Alice Springs. These forums fostered peer collaboration, shared culturally responsive practices, and addressed common challenges in supporting Indigenous student outcomes.

Forum topics included:

- Upskilling Indigenous Staff

- Reconciliation in Education
- School Governance and Sustainability
- Culturally Competent Reporting
- Cultural Wellbeing and Safety

In May 2024, AISNT also hosted a forum aligned with the AITSL Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Capability Framework**,** supporting school leaders to further embed culturally responsive practices into their leadership and teaching strategies.

The Waratah Project, continued to provide a platform for participating Member Schools schools to collaborate with interstate counterparts and trial innovative, evidence-based strategies to improve Indigenous student outcomes.

Governance Support for Indigenous Education Boards

In 2024, AISNT deepened its support for Indigenous Education Boards through tailored governance facilitation. This included practical guidance in applying key legislative frameworks such as the Education Act and the Associations Act**,** strengthening compliance and operational accountability. The support extended to embedding culturally inclusive governance practices that reflect Indigenous values, perspectives, and identity. A strong emphasis was placed on integrating Indigenous voice into strategic decision-making and policy development, with the long-term aim of fostering self-determined, culturally grounded educational environments.

VET and Pathways

AISNT sustained the VET and Pathways Officer position in 2024 to assist schools in implementing senior secondary VET programs and broader student pathways. The Officer worked closely with national and Territory-based networks to provide up-to-date information and support.

A dedicated VET and Pathways Workshop was hosted in Alice Springs for school leaders, featuring presentations from a range of VET providers. This event enabled schools to explore tailored opportunities to expand student access to meaningful and career-aligned learning options.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
The Teaching and Learning Coordinator will provide teachers and support staff with individualised support through the provision of initiatives to improve engagement of students in their learning and to support teachers in the delivery of strong literacy and numeracy programs to students.	Support and professional development was provided to 11 schools in 2024 (42%).
The Teaching and Learning Coordinator will respond to all requests from schools to assist with matters relating to teaching and learning.	All requests from schools were met in 2024, ranging from advice to professional development in schools. Information was shared as required from ACARA and other sources as it became available.
The Teaching and Learning Coordinator will provide a minimum of one Collaboration Forum per year.	Collaboration offered online through the Curriculum Coordinators portal.
All Independent Schools are responsive in regard to the changes to the Australian Curriculum.	All Independent Schools in the Northern Territory have continued with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum v 9.0. All schools on target to complete implementation by the end of 2026. Monitoring of schools occurs every six months.
All Indigenous Community Schools will be provided with the opportunity to attend a forum with focus on strengthening relational partnerships with their communities.	Two Indigenous Leadership forums offered in 2024, one in Darwin and one in Alice Springs (online access was made available for very remote schools). (9 MATSIS schools sent representatives – 90%)
All Independent Schools have access to the INSPIRE (Version 3) software platform.	All Independent Schools in the Northern Territory have access to the INSPIRE (Version 3) software platform to assist with the data collection for the NCCD.

All Independent Schools using the INSPIRE (Version 3) software platform will be provided with professional development on its usage.	All schools using the INSPIRE (Version 3) software platform receive professional development upon request. Eight schools regularly attend network meetings to support Inclusion Support Coordinators to work with staff. One day formal professional development training was provided conducted at three schools. Support is offered to individual teachers who contact the office for support.
School leadership and staff are aware of VET and Pathway options for secondary students.	10 Independent Schools engaged in this initiative.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	$547,891	$0

Centralised Funding was utilised to:

Strong Curriculum and Pedagogy Support in Schools

- Salary (including on costs): Teaching and Learning Coordinator (0.6 FTE).
- Forums/Meetings/Workshops: Venue and catering.
- Travel and Accommodation: Teaching and Learning Coordinator to provide on site support.

Supporting Indigenous Schools

- Salary (including on costs): AISNT Officer to oversee the initiatives and support Indigenous Schools. (0.2 FTE)
- Travel and Accommodation: AISNT Officer to visit schools to provide on site support and provide travel and accommodation for Waratah Program participants.

INSPIRE (Version 3) – Maximising identification and reporting NCCD

- INSPIRE Platform: AISNT purchased the INSPIRE platform in bulk for the three schools that received Transition Assistance funds (NB: Does not include the Transition Assistance Schools).
- Salary (Including on costs): AISNT Officer to support the rollout (0.2 FTE).

Developing Pathways and School Industry Partnerships

- Salary (Including On Costs): AISNT Pathways Officer (0.4 FTE)
- Forums/Meetings/Workshops: Venue and catering.
- Travel and Accommodation: AISNT Pathways Officer to visit schools to provide on site support.

Activity Report

Activity/Initiative	**Supporting Positive Well Being for Independent School Students in the Northern Territory**
Priority	E – Student wellbeing and support

Activity Description

Student and Staff Wellbeing Initiatives

In 2024, AISNT continued to build on the strong foundation laid in 2023, reinforcing its commitment to fostering safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments across its Member Schools. The AISNT Wellbeing Network remained a vital platform for collaboration among educators, convening four times throughout the year to share best practices, offer peer support, and address common wellbeing challenges.

A suite of professional learning opportunities and sector-wide initiatives was delivered to strengthen the wellbeing of students, staff, and broader school communities. Key highlights included:

- The continued delivery of *Youth Mental Health First Aid* training by Pauline Neil (MH Training), enhancing staff capability to respond effectively to student mental health concerns.
- A *Difficult Conversations Masterclass* led by Dr Stephen Brown (The Brown Collective) and Andrew Fuller, providing participants with practical tools and strategies to navigate challenging interactions with greater confidence and skill.

Several new initiatives were introduced in 2024 to expand AISNT's wellbeing agenda:

- The establishment of the *Wellbeing Coordinators Network*, which met quarterly to provide targeted support and facilitate collaboration among school wellbeing leaders.
- A new partnership with the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) to develop and implement the *Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CREE)* program, tailored specifically for Independent Schools in the NT and SA. AISSA staff introduced the *AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit*, made available to NT schools through this joint initiative.
- A *My Mindcheck Overview Forum* was hosted to familiarise school leaders and wellbeing staff with this proactive self-assessment tool, supporting early identification and response to mental health needs.

Throughout the year, the Wellbeing Network and related initiatives focused on priority areas such as:

- Trauma-informed practice
- Mental health literacy and first aid
- Respectful relationships and consent education

- Positive psychology in education
- Inclusive and culturally safe practices
- Digital and online safety
- Culturally responsive wellbeing strategies

Together, these initiatives enabled schools to embed robust wellbeing frameworks tailored to the unique and diverse needs of their communities—particularly in remote and Indigenous school contexts.

Outcomes Achieved

Outcomes	Indicators of success
AISNT will support schools to create safe and supportive environments.	All Independent Schools have the opportunity to be members of the AISNT Wellbeing Network. 12 Independent Schools are currently active members (50%).
AISNT will provide at least one workshop/forum per year.	Two workshops and one masterclass were held in 2024: • Youth Mental First Aid (15 schools sent representatives) • My Mindcheck Toolkit (15 schools sent representatives) • Difficult Conversations Masterclass (Dr Stephen Brown and Andrew Fuller) (8 schools sent representatives)
Current and relevant information provided through the journal and on the AISNT website.	Information distributed via email and available on the AISNT Wellbeing Portal.
All enquiries from schools regarding wellbeing and mental health will have a timely response.	All enquiries responded to within 48 hours.

Activity Expenditure

	Centralised (Reporting Year Only)	Distributed (Reporting Year Only)
Expenditure	$143,000	$0

Centralised Funding was utilised to:

- Salary and On Costs: AISNT Officer (0.2) to support Well-being initiatives.
- Presenter Fees/Travel and Accommodation: Two, two day workshops.
- Travel and Accommodation: AISNT Officer school visits/attendance at workshops/forums.