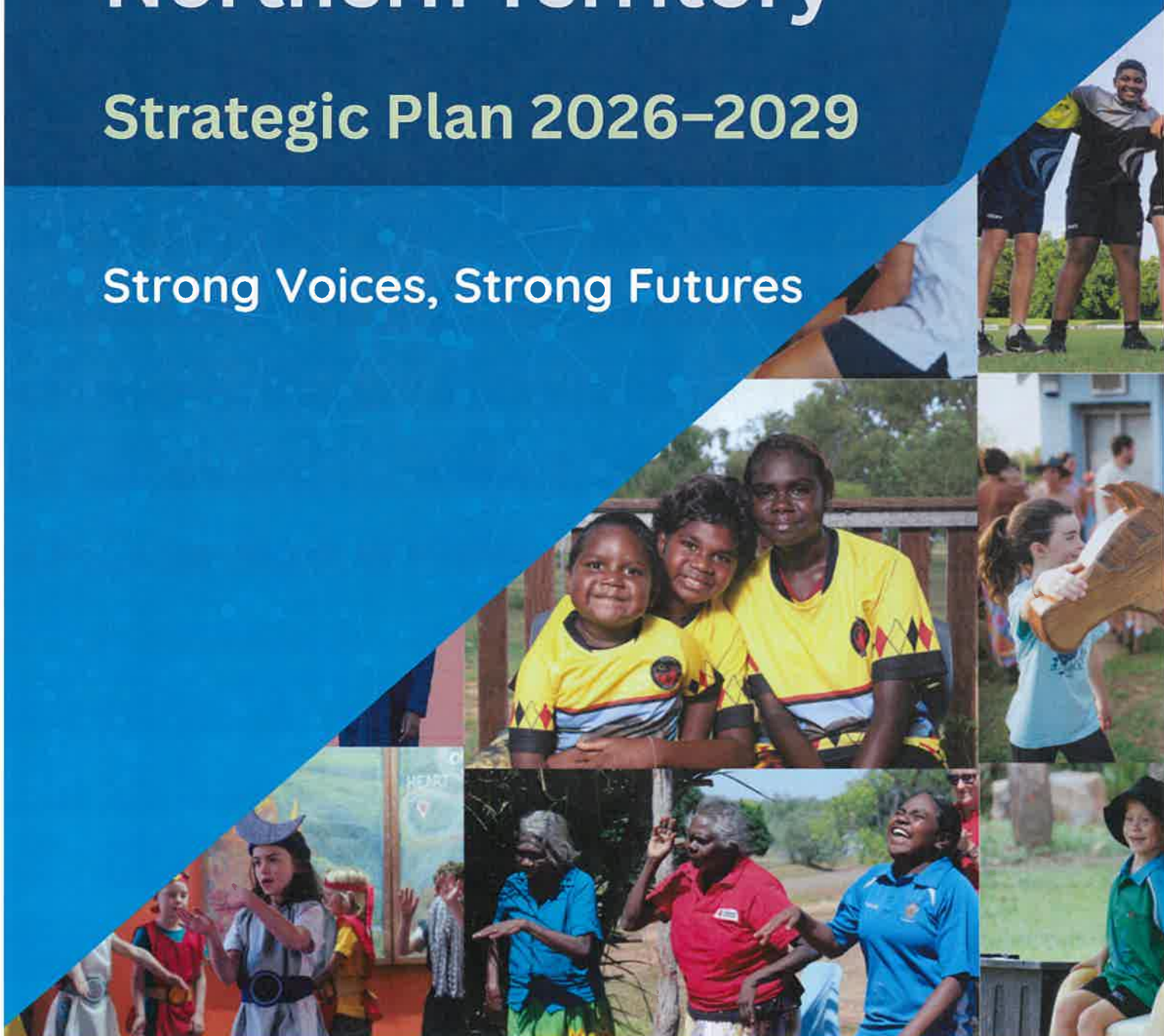




Independent Schools Northern Territory

Strategic Plan 2026–2029

Strong Voices, Strong Futures



Acknowledgement of Country

The staff of AISNT recognise the Traditional Custodians of the land, seas and skies of Larrakia Country and feel privileged to be immersed in its strength and stories.

We pay our respects to the Elders and Traditional Custodians throughout the Northern Territory, where our many schools are located, and honour the enduring connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have with Country and Culture.

We hold a deep sense of shared responsibility to promote understanding and healing to build a more reconciled Australia through education.

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Introduction

In 2025, Independent Schools Northern Territory (ISNT) embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to chart a bold course for the next four years. This Strategic Plan 2026–2029 reflects extensive consultation with member schools and stakeholders, analysis of the Northern Territory’s unique education context, and a commitment to strong, future-focused leadership. It is guided by the motto ‘**Strong Voices, Strong Futures**’, emphasizing our core commitments to equity, inclusion, innovation, and system leadership.

The plan sets out a clear vision and actionable roadmap to strengthen the Independent Schools sector, ensuring that by 2029 our schools are stronger, our voice is louder, and the future for NT children is brighter. Below we outline our vision, mission, purpose and values, followed by the long-term aspirations and immediate strategic priorities that will drive our work.

Our Vision:

Quality, inclusive education for every child in the Northern Territory through a thriving, collaborative Independent school sector.

This vision is encapsulated in the theme ‘Strong Voices, Strong Futures’, highlighting that by raising a powerful collective voice now, we secure strong futures for our students and communities.

Our Mission:

Lead, Advocate, Promote.

ISNT’s mission can be defined through these three interrelated roles:

Lead: Provide vision, direction and capacity to strengthen Independent Schools across the Northern Territory.

Advocate: Champion the interests of Independent Schools in the NT through strong, evidence-based advocacy and representation.

Promote: Enhance the sector’s capacity, partnerships, and collective identity to ensure strong, sustainable schools and continued growth.

Our Purpose:

Provide expert leadership as the recognized and trusted voice for Independent Schools in the Northern Territory.

Through high-quality support and strategic advocacy, ISNT strengthens the capacity of member schools, amplifies their impact, and champions their role in shaping educational excellence.

This purpose statement underscores why ISNT exists – to serve and empower Independent Schools so they can best serve their students.

Our Values:

ISNT is guided by five core values that inform all strategies and decisions:

Equity



We uphold every child's right to quality education, regardless of location, culture, or circumstance. This means a relentless focus on fair opportunities and resources for remote and disadvantaged communities.

Respect



We honor culture, community, and Country, embedding Indigenous perspectives in all that we do. Respect for the Territory's rich cultural diversity and Indigenous peoples is foundational to our work.

Integrity



We lead with honesty, courage, and accountability, earning trust as both a partner and an advocate. Integrity underpins our role as a principled voice for independent schools.

Innovation



We embrace change, spark creativity, and equip schools to thrive in a future shaped by technology, climate, and evolving needs. A forward-looking, innovative mindset ensures our schools are future-ready and resilient.

Collaboration



We foster collective strength through a shared voice and united action, building partnerships across schools, sectors (Independent, Catholic, Government), and communities. We believe strong relationships are key to meeting the needs of all NT students.

These values, together with our purpose and mission, define the spirit in which this Strategic Plan will be implemented. They ensure we remain true to our ethos: 'Leading Together, Thriving Independently' – uniting Independent Schools in the Northern Territory under a common vision while celebrating their autonomy.



The Future We're Building Toward (2035)



This strategic plan is a stepping stone toward an ambitious 10-year vision. Looking ahead to 2035, ISNT aspires to achieve the following outcomes for the Independent School sector in the Northern Territory:

Pillar 1: Advocacy and Influence

ISNT is recognized nationally as the authoritative voice for Independent Schools in the NT, successfully influencing government education policy, legislation, and funding models to reflect the Territory's unique context. Long-term advocacy has resulted in equity-based funding frameworks for capital works and boarding that address disadvantage and need.

Pillar 2: Position and Profile

ISNT is embedded as the undisputed peak authority for Independent Schools in the NT, with a visible profile nationally and even internationally. Our identity as the voice of the sector is reinforced by robust data and research on Independent School performance and growth.

Pillar 3: System Leadership

A fully developed 'Distinctive Northern Territory Model' of schooling and system leadership is in place and recognized as best practice in Australia. This model fosters collaboration across regional, remote and very remote contexts, demonstrating how a small jurisdiction can innovate and lead in education.

Pillar 4: Capacity Building and Sector Support

Independent Schools across the NT are thriving thanks to strong capacity-building networks. ISNT is renowned for equipping school leaders and boards with the tools, training, and support structures to excel in governance and operations.

Schools, no matter how remote, have equitable access to expertise, professional development, and shared services, ensuring none are left behind.

Pillar 5: Financial Resilience and Sustainability

ISNT has secured its long-term viability. A mature endowment fund and diversified income streams (fee-for-service programs, philanthropy, strategic partnerships) provide consistent, independent revenue to support member schools. The Independent Schools sector is less vulnerable to government funding cycles and can invest in strategic priorities sustainably.

Pillar 6: Indigenous Schools Success

Indigenous Independent schools are sustainably funded and flourishing within a tailored ISNT governance framework. Strong Indigenous leadership and culturally responsive governance models are in place, supported by shared service arrangements. These schools serve as exemplars of two-way education excellence, and their students have continuity of access to quality schooling.

Pillar 7: Professional Development

The Independent Schools sector boasts strong leadership pipelines, 'home-grown' leaders who rise through the ranks thanks to robust professional learning pathways. Succession is assured at all levels of school staffing. Independent Schools are celebrated nationally for innovative leadership development and

collaboration that improves teaching and learning outcomes.

Pillar 8: Technology, Innovation and Equity

ISNT is positioned as a national leader in equitable digital transformation. Despite geographic challenges, our schools are at the forefront of responsible use of emerging technologies (including AI) and innovative practices. All Independent Schools, regardless of remoteness, enjoy affordable, reliable access to modern technology, ensuring no student is digitally left behind.

Pillar 9: Climate and Environmental Resilience

All Independent Schools are climate-ready by 2035. Sustainable infrastructure and energy solutions have been implemented across the sector, supported by funding mechanisms embedded in policy. Schools report measurable reductions in environmental footprint and are equipped to handle the challenges of a changing climate (eg: extreme weather), serving as hubs of sustainability in their communities.

Pillar 10: Organisational Governance and Capability

ISNT itself is a high-performing, future-focused organisation led by an expert, skills-based board with strong governance succession in place. Our internal governance and capabilities set the benchmark for peak bodies. We operate efficiently and strategically, leveraging partnerships and technology to support member schools. In essence, ISNT is both a strong voice and a trusted backbone for the Independent Schools sector.

These long-term aspirations, inform the focus of our 2026–2029 plan. They ensure we are not only addressing immediate needs but also building toward a visionary future for education in the Northern Territory.



Strategic Priorities 2026–2029



Over the next four years, ISNT will concentrate on a set of strategic priorities that serve as milestones toward our 10-year vision. These are the key goals we aim to accomplish by 2029, within each strategic pillar area:

Advocacy and Influence

- Build a strong parent and school advocacy voice across the Independent Schools sector.
- Influence NT and Australian government education policy and legislation to provide greater clarity and certainty for schools.
- Advocate for reforms to establish equitable capital funding allocations based on need, not just enrolment numbers.
- Secure sustainable, long-term boarding funding to ensure remote and very remote Indigenous students can continue their education without disruption.
- Champion tailored schooling models that reflect Northern Territory realities (eg: flexible governance and funding arrangements for remote schools).
- Serve as a credible partner to government, collaborating constructively on initiatives, and as a vigilant watchdog, ready to hold governments accountable if the Independent Schools sector interests are at risk.

Position and Profile

- Lift ISNT's public profile through strong branding, strategic communications, and active representation of the sector's achievements.

- Embed direct advocacy pathways with government, ensuring regular high-level engagement between ISNT and NT/Federal decision-makers.
- Build influence by strengthening our evidence base, collect and leverage sector-wide data on enrolment trends, student outcomes, and growth to amplify ISNT's voice.
- Formalise ongoing structures for government engagement (eg: advisory councils, forums) so that Independent Schools are consistently heard in policy development.

System Leadership

- Develop a distinctive NT schooling model that addresses our geography, demographics, and remoteness – providing a blueprint for quality education delivery in every community.
- Take stakeholders (school leaders, communities, and partner sectors) on the journey of reimagining system leadership, building understanding and buy-in for the changes ahead.
- Build collective efficacy across Independent Schools through peer support networks and shared leadership initiatives, so schools work together rather than in isolation.
- Undertake and share research on the enablers of effective system leadership in the NT context, using evidence to drive innovation.



- Engage member school boards and communities in ISNT's transformation, fostering a sense of shared mission and co-ownership of sector goals.
- Coordinate with the Catholic and Government education sectors to plan for the future provision of schooling across the NT in a strategic, equitable, and sustainable way. This includes exploring collaborations or agreements to ensure all communities have access to schooling without unnecessary duplication or gaps.

Capacity Building and Sector Support

- Educate and empower member schools in advocacy by providing training, data, and guidance on effective engagement with governments and stakeholders. By 2029, every member school should have staff or parent representatives confident in voicing their needs to policymakers.
- Provide high-quality support in governance, compliance, and leadership development tailored to the NT context. This includes regular workshops, mentoring for Independent School boards, and on-call advisory services that strengthen school operations.
- Enable sustainable growth for all Independent Schools by working to ensure equitable access to funding, facilities, and professional expertise across the NT. Smaller and remote schools will particularly benefit from pooled resources or shared services (eg: in procurement, IT, HR) facilitated by ISNT.

Financial Resilience and Sustainability:

- Establish an ISNT Endowment Fund to create a stable financial base, reducing over-reliance on government funding cycles.
- The goal is to seed this fund and grow it through targeted campaigns by 2029.
- Develop a targeted investment strategy to grow reserves and ensure resources are available for strategic priorities and sector support. Investment policies will be developed to balance growth with prudent risk management.
- Expand fee-for-service offerings to generate additional revenue, focusing on high-value services that member schools need and are willing to invest in. Examples include professional development programs, management and operational support services, governance training packages, etc.
- Leverage philanthropy and partnerships by cultivating long-term corporate and community partners and seeking grants aligned with ISNT's mission. A structured partnership strategy will aim to bring in external funding for key initiatives (eg: Indigenous schooling support, technology upgrades).
- Commercialise ISNT expertise by developing and marketing tailored programs (eg: leadership institutes, strategic planning facilitation, school improvement consulting) to schools and possibly external clients. This will not only diversify income but also showcase the sector's expertise.



Indigenous Schools Success

- Secure assured, ongoing funding streams for Indigenous Independent Schools, advocating for dedicated government support so these schools are not subject to year-by-year uncertainty. By 2029, we aim to have new funding agreements or models in place that guarantee stability for Indigenous schools.
- Provide targeted governance training and support for Indigenous school boards and leaders. This includes culturally responsive training programs, mentorship, and potentially an Indigenous Schools Governance Network for peer support.
- Develop an Indigenous Governance System Model within ISNT's structure. This model will embed a system-wide approach to supporting Indigenous schools, integrating cultural context with sound business practices, to ensure these schools thrive while reflecting their communities' values.
- Facilitate collaboration and shared learning among Indigenous Independent Schools. ISNT will create dedicated spaces (forums, conferences, online platforms) for Indigenous school leaders to share challenges and solutions, and to connect with expert advice and each other.
- Deliver shared service models to reduce administrative and operational burdens on Indigenous schools. By centralising or pooling certain functions (financial management, HR, procurement, etc), school leaders can focus more on teaching and community engagement.

- Centralise expertise in recruitment and training for Indigenous school directors and staff. ISNT will establish a hub to support these schools in finding, training, and retaining qualified staff and board members who are often in short supply in remote areas.
- Position ISNT to deliver coordinated, business-oriented support services tailored specifically to Indigenous schools' needs.
- Ultimately, ISNT will act as a 'system manager' ensuring Indigenous Independent Schools receive the same back-office support and advocacy as a cohesive network.

Professional Development & Collective Advocacy

- Develop a strategic Professional Learning (PL) Framework outlining clear development pathways and priorities for the next 3–5 years. This framework (to be completed by 2026) will ensure professional development offerings are aligned to strategic goals and are regularly reviewed for relevance.
- Deliver place-based and needs-responsive programs that address the unique challenges of Independent Schools in the NT. For example, bring training to remote communities and tailor content to local cultural contexts and small-school environments.
- Foster leadership growth and succession planning through structured pathways. By 2029, establish programs for emerging leaders (eg: aspiring principals, business managers, middle leaders) to ensure a pipeline of qualified leaders for every region.



- Provide a blend of home-grown and external professional learning. ISNT will both develop its own workshops and bring in external experts to ensure a variety of high-quality learning experiences that are culturally responsive and relevant.
- Strengthen collective advocacy through collaboration with Independent Schools Australia (ISA) and other state Associations. By uniting with the broader Independent Schools sector on national issues, NT schools will have a louder voice on matters like funding and policy.
- Build partnerships with government, universities, and professional providers to enhance learning opportunities and amplify ISNT's voice. This might include co-developing leadership programs with a university or working with the Department of Education on joint initiatives in remote teacher training.
- Offer a comprehensive Annual PL Calendar covering governance, leadership, pedagogy, and finance, which draws on both internal ISNT expertise and external providers. By 2029, member schools will have a predictable, well-communicated schedule of development opportunities each year.
- Deliver training for specialist leaders in learning support and inclusive education. By developing 'inclusion champions' at our schools, we ensure every school has expertise to lead equity-focused practices.
- Advocate for digital equity across the NT so that all Independent Schools have reliable internet connectivity and access to modern e-learning platforms. We will work with governments and IT providers to address infrastructure gaps and cost barriers.
- Secure corporate sponsorships or partnerships to fund technology upgrades. We will pursue agreements with technology companies or philanthropists to bring in devices, software, and connectivity solutions for schools that need them.
- Lead sector engagement with emerging technologies. ISNT will position itself at the forefront of educational innovation, helping Independent Schools pilot new tools and pedagogies and sharing best practices. This includes ensuring staff and students are prepared for the opportunities and risks of digital transformation.
- Monitor AI developments and translate their relevance for Independent Schools. Through research briefs and updates, we'll keep schools informed on how global trends in AI and EdTech could impact teaching, assessment, and administration in our context.
- Build capacity for responsible AI use by developing guidelines, policies, and training for schools on ethical technology use. We will help schools navigate issues like data privacy, academic integrity, and digital wellbeing in an AI-enabled education landscape.

Technology, Innovation and Equity

- Provide guidance and support on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) for students with disabilities, helping all schools strengthen their inclusive practices and meet compliance requirements. This includes training and resources focused on learning support and inclusion.



- Form partnerships with AI and IT experts to provide cutting-edge knowledge and training to our schools.
- Negotiate group purchasing and discount access to key digital platforms and tools.
- Showcase educational innovators by bringing exemplar thought leaders and practitioners to NT (virtually or in person).
- Provide professional learning on climate resilience and sustainable operations. ISNT will facilitate training for school facilities managers, principals, and board members on topics such as energy efficiency, disaster preparedness, and environmental education.
- Advocate for funding equity in capital works, highlighting that low-SES and remote schools often lack capacity to co-contribute to infrastructure and are disadvantaged under current capital grant models. We will lobby for changes so that capital funding considers need and the higher costs of building in remote NT.
- Seek investment in climate-ready infrastructure and energy solutions for schools. This involves pushing for government or private investment to upgrade facilities with solar power, efficient cooling systems, and other adaptations for the NT's harsh climate.
- Champion cost-effective, climate-appropriate building solutions, lobbying governments to address the higher costs and challenges of construction in remote NT (eg: transporting materials, specialized designs for heat and cyclones). By 2029, we aim to have concrete commitments or pilot projects that demonstrate such solutions.

Climate and Environmental Resilience

- Support school leaders and boards to meet Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) responsibilities. This includes providing guidance and tools for reporting on sustainability measures and embedding environmental considerations into school planning and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).
- Embed sustainability and Indigenous knowledge in school planning by integrating Reconciliation Action Plans with environmental initiatives. For example, involve local Indigenous elders and communities in discussions on sustainable land use or cultural approaches to caring for Country in the school curriculum.
- Use data and local knowledge (including input from Traditional Owners) to better understand climate impacts and operational challenges faced by our schools. We will gather information on issues like cooling costs, extreme weather impacts, etc, to inform advocacy and support.
- Provide professional learning on climate resilience and sustainable operations. ISNT will facilitate training for school facilities managers, principals, and board members on topics such as energy efficiency, disaster preparedness, and environmental education.

Organisational Governance and Capability

- Empower our staff by focusing leadership on strategic direction and impact, rather than pulling staff into day-to-day operational minutiae. This cultural shift means delegating appropriately and trusting staff to make operational decisions aligned with the strategic plan.

- Invest in Board development to ensure our Directors are highly skilled and engaged. We will provide training and professional development for AISNT Board members in governance best practices, and actively involve them in strategic leadership.
- Streamline enterprise risk management with an agile risk matrix. We will refine our risk management approach to reduce bureaucracy while still effectively identifying and mitigating risks. Staff will be empowered to act within a clear risk framework tied to strategic objectives.
- Adopt a 'hub-and-spoke' model to extend our capacity through partnerships and outsourcing where appropriate. Rather than building a large central office, ISNT will leverage expertise from member schools, other Associations, or consultants for specialised needs. This ensures we can support schools beyond the limits of a small staff.
- Explore new strategic service and partnership opportunities. We will continually scan for areas where ISNT can expand its role or form alliances to better support schools (for example, mental health services, early childhood support, or shared procurement initiatives).
- Implement a skills-based Board recruitment strategy aligned to a defined governance skills matrix. By 2026, we will identify the key skills and experience needed on the Board (eg: finance, legal, Indigenous education, philanthropy) and use that to guide Director appointments and elections.
- Recruit expert independent Directors to fill skill gaps. Over the plan period, we aim to bring in additional Board members with expertise in critical areas such as finance, law, Indigenous education, and fundraising. These expert directors will deepen the Board's knowledge base.
- Mentor emerging governance leaders from within the sector. ISNT will establish mentorship opportunities for aspiring school governors and future ISNT Board members (eg: shadowing, governance workshops) to build an internal talent pipeline for leadership.

Each of these strategic priorities for 2026–2029 is tied to one of our Pillars and moves us toward the 10-year vision. The next section provides more detail on each Pillar's focus, strategic initiatives, and what success will look like.



Strategic Pillars and Initiatives

To organize our efforts, ISNT has ten Strategic Pillars that form the backbone of this plan. These Pillars correspond to critical domains of impact for the Independent Schools sector. Under each Pillar, we articulate a clear goal and the key strategic initiatives we will undertake by 2029 to achieve that goal. This structure ensures that our broad vision is translated into focused action areas.

Pillar 1: Advocacy and Influence

Goal: To be the trusted, authoritative voice for Independent Schools in the Northern Territory. We aim to ensure that the needs and perspectives of Independent School across NT communities are effectively represented at all levels of government and public discourse.

Strategies:

- Amplify parent and school voices by ensuring families and school communities are represented in all major policy and funding debates. We will coordinate sector-wide advocacy campaigns and support grassroots engagement (eg: parent advocacy networks) so that the voices of those on the ground are heard loud and clear in Darwin and Canberra.
- Shape legislation and policy at both NT and Commonwealth levels by providing expert input and feedback. Our goal is to achieve greater clarity, transparency, and certainty in the regulatory environment that governs schools. This will involve making submissions on proposed laws, participating in advisory committees, and working closely with policymakers.
- Advocate for equitable capital funding reform so that government capital grants are distributed on the basis of disadvantage and need, not simply per-student numbers. This will address the current inequities where small or remote schools miss out on infrastructure funding. Success will be measured by changes to funding formulas.
- Secure sustainable boarding funding to guarantee continuity of access for remote Indigenous students. We will push for dedicated, long-term funding programs (beyond short-term grants) that support boarding programs, facilities and travel for students from remote communities.
- Champion the NT's unique context in all advocacy, promoting tailored models of schooling, governance, and funding that reflect local realities. We will emphasize that one-size-fits-all national policies often do not work in the NT, and advocate for flexibility and innovation in how education is delivered in our region.
- Be a credible partner and watchdog: We will collaborate constructively with governments on shared goals, while also holding them accountable the Independent Schools sector interests are jeopardized. This balanced approach ensures we maintain positive relationships without compromising on core needs of our schools.

Measures of Success: By 2029, Independent Schools will report feeling heard and supported by policymakers. Key policy wins (eg: a revised NT funding formula, a permanent remote boarding fund) will have been achieved or be in progress. ISNT will be regularly consulted by government as the expert voice on NT schooling, reflecting our enhanced influence.



Pillar 2: Position and Profile

Goal: To strengthen ISNT's identity and recognition as the peak body for Independent Schools in the NT. In this role, ISNT must be highly visible and respected, ensuring that the contributions of the Independent Schools sector are understood and valued in the wider community.

Strategies:

- Lift the profile of ISNT through strong branding, strategic communications, and showcasing the success of our schools. We will implement a communications plan to tell the positive stories of Independent Schools education in NT, via media, social media, and community engagement, thereby increasing public awareness of our role.
- Position ISNT as the peak authority with NT and Australian governments on all matters affecting Independent Schools. This involves not only advocacy but also offering solutions and expertise. ISNT will conduct and publish research on the sector, host policy roundtables, and be the go-to source for data and insights on NT Independent Schools education.
- Build influence through data by leveraging sector-wide evidence of growth, outcomes, and needs. We will improve data collection from member schools and create an 'Independent Schools in NT Annual Report'. Having solid facts and figures will amplify our voice in negotiations and public debates.
- Enable direct pathways with government by embedding formal structures for ongoing, high-level advocacy and engagement. For example, we will seek a regular meetings with the Minister for Education and strengthen ties with federal representatives.

Measures of Success: By 2029, ISNT will enjoy high name recognition among stakeholders (government, media, general public) as the authoritative representative of Independent Schools in the NT. We anticipate increased inbound requests for ISNT input on education issues, more frequent mentions of ISNT in media, and positive relationships with key government figures. Additionally, a strong brand identity for ISNT will be visible, including consistent messaging and perhaps a refreshed visual identity, signalling a confident, united sector.

Pillar 3: System Leadership

Goal: To lead with vision and provide collective direction for the Independent Schools sector. ISNT will act as a system leader, guiding and uniting schools around shared goals while respecting their individual autonomy. This is especially important in the NT context, where collaboration can overcome isolation.

Strategies:

- Develop a distinctive NT model of education that acknowledges the Territory's unique geography, demographics, and remote schooling needs. Working with member schools and researchers, we will articulate what an effective 'NT model' looks like, for example, it might emphasize community engagement, flexible delivery (like mixed in-person and distance learning for very remote areas), and culturally responsive curricula.

- Build collective efficacy across schools by fostering collaboration, peer support, and shared leadership capacity. Initiatives will include forming communities of practice (eg: principals' networks, teacher subject hubs), sector-wide leadership retreats, and inter-school mentoring programs. The aim is that schools actively help each other improve.
- Undertake and share research on enabling factors for system leadership. ISNT will document case studies of successful collaboration, both within NT and from other contexts, and invest in research partnerships, potentially with universities, to deepen understanding of how a small jurisdiction can punch above its weight in education outcomes. We'll share findings through publications and conferences.
- Take stakeholders on the journey by engaging member schools, their boards, and communities in ISNT's own growth and transformation. Rather than imposing changes from the top, we will consult widely and include school representatives in our strategic initiatives, for instance, in task forces for developing the NT model or new services. This inclusive approach builds ownership and trust.
- Coordinate cross-sector planning by working with the Catholic and Government school sectors to address Territory-wide educational provision in a strategic way. In practice, this might involve joint planning for new schools in growth areas, sharing resources in remote communities, and ensuring that every NT community has access to schooling without unnecessary duplication or gaps.

Measures of Success: By 2029, Independent Schools in the NT will report a stronger sense of unity and shared purpose. Concrete outputs such as an 'NT Independent Education Model' framework will exist. We expect to see increased collaboration, for example, more inter-school programs, shared professional development events, or resource-sharing agreements. Importantly, the Independent Schools sector will be viewed by government and others as an integral partner in system-level educational planning for the Northern Territory (as opposed to a collection of separate schools).

Pillar 4: Capacity Building and Sector Support

Goal: To equip member schools with the tools, knowledge, and structures to thrive. ISNT will serve as a backbone support organization, strengthening each school's capacity in governance, leadership, compliance, and operations, thereby elevating the whole sector.

Strategies:

- Educate and empower schools in advocacy, train school leaders and even parents in how to effectively advocate for their needs. This might include workshops on engaging with politicians, using data in advocacy, and public speaking. An 'Advocacy Toolkit' will be developed for schools.
- Provide high-quality support services in areas like governance, strategic planning, and regulatory compliance. We will expand our support staff or consultant pool to offer hands-on assistance to school boards and principals. For example, if a school needs help updating policies or training a new bursar, ISNT will either provide expertise or connect the school with someone who can.

- Facilitate peer-to-peer support by connecting schools that have particular strengths with those that have corresponding needs, eg: a larger school might help mentor a smaller remote school in administrative processes, while the remote school shares its knowledge in Indigenous education approaches. ISNT will broker and encourage these relationships as part of sector capacity building.
- Enable sustainable growth for schools by ensuring equitable access to resources. We will identify gaps where some schools lack facilities or specialist staff and work to address them through collective initiatives. This could involve group purchasing schemes, mobile specialist teams that travel to schools, or advocating for targeted funding. Ultimately, every independent school should have the essential ingredients for success, regardless of size or location.

Measures of Success: We will track indicators such as school compliance records (showing improvement due to our support), participation rates in ISNT-provided training, and qualitative feedback from schools on their confidence and capacity. By 2029, we expect member schools to report greater self-sufficiency and effectiveness in areas like governance and planning, with ISNT's support cited as a key enabler. New schools or those previously struggling should demonstrate improvement, reflecting a stronger support system across the board.

Pillar 5: Financial Resilience and Sustainability

Goal: To secure ISNT's long-term viability through diversified, sustainable, and values-aligned funding. Financial strength will allow ISNT to continuously support its member schools and strategic initiatives without being overly subject to external funding fluctuations.

Strategies:

- Establish an endowment fund to provide a stable financial base and reduce dependency on short-term government funding cycles. We will develop an investment and fundraising plan for the endowment (for example, seeking initial seed contributions and planning a campaign). The endowment's annual returns, once sufficient, can fund core services or new initiatives.
- Develop a targeted investment strategy for ISNT reserves. This entails professional management of any reserve funds, with clear guidelines to balance growth and risk, ensuring that money set aside for strategic purposes grows over time and is available when needed.
- Expand fee-for-service offerings by delivering high-value programs that schools are willing to purchase. Potential offerings include:
 - Professional learning programs (e.g. an annual governance training series, leadership coaching services).
 - School management and operational services (e.g. finance and HR support, policy development, project management for school initiatives).
 - First Nations governance and capability-building services specifically for schools serving Indigenous communities. These services will not only benefit schools but also generate income that can be reinvested in sector support.
- Leverage philanthropy and partnerships by sourcing philanthropic investments and cultivating long-term partners. ISNT will identify and approach foundations, corporate social responsibility programs, and individual donors who have an interest in NT education, particularly in areas like Indigenous schooling or innovation. We will align their support with flagship ISNT projects and key messages (such as Strong Voices, Strong Futures).

- Reframe the member value proposition to encourage schools to see their membership fees not as a transactional but as an investment in a shared mission. Through improved communication and engagement, we want member schools to feel a sense of partnership and sector stewardship. Satisfied members are more likely to continue their support and even contribute additional resources to joint projects.
- Commercialise ISNT expertise by packaging our know-how into products or services for sale. For example, if ISNT develops an excellent curriculum tool or an IT solution for school management, could it be sold or licensed to other organisations. We will explore such possibilities, ensuring any commercial ventures align with our values and mission.

Measures of Success: A key measure will be the diversification of ISNT's revenue by 2029. We aim to see a growing proportion of income from non-government sources (eg: services, partnerships, endowment earnings). Financial health indicators such as reserve levels, year-on-year surplus, and the size of the endowment will be tracked. Success also means having the financial agility to initiate new projects or respond to member needs without always awaiting external funding. Ultimately, ISNT's financial resilience underpins the sustainability of all other pillars.

Pillar 6: Indigenous Schools Support

Goal: To strengthen Independent Indigenous Schools through assured funding, governance support, and system-level collaboration. Indigenous community-controlled schools are a vital part of the NT education landscape; this pillar ensures they not only survive but truly thrive, with culturally appropriate practices and robust backing.

Strategies:

- Secure ongoing and assured funding for Indigenous boarding schools. We will advocate for funding agreements that guarantee long-term operational and capital support for these schools, recognising their higher needs and often no fee income.
- Provide targeted governance support, including tailored governance training for Indigenous school boards and leaders. Many Indigenous Independent Schools serve remote communities and have unique governance challenges. ISNT will develop specialised training modules that respect cultural contexts, such as incorporating local decision-making traditions, while also building modern governance skills. We may also facilitate placing skilled mentors or advisors with school boards upon request.
- Develop an Indigenous Governance System Model that embeds a system-wide approach to governance within ISNT's structure. In essence, this means creating a framework where Independent Indigenous Schools operate with the support of a centralised governance backbone (through ISNT). For example, ISNT might host a shared financial administration service or a central school board for multiple small community schools. Any model will be co-designed with Indigenous communities to ensure it balances cultural autonomy with the benefits of scale and professional expertise.

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- Facilitate collaboration and shared learning among Indigenous schools. We will convene regular forums, both in-person in communities and via online platforms, for leaders of Indigenous Independent Schools to share best practices, collectively problem-solve, and simply support each other. Topics might include bilingual education approaches, community engagement strategies, or trauma-informed practice, among others.
 - Deliver shared service models to reduce administrative burdens. ISNT will work on implementing or expanding shared services such as bulk procurement, bookkeeping, HR, IT support, or facility maintenance for interested Indigenous Schools. By pooling resources, schools can achieve efficiencies and focus more on teaching and learning.
 - Centralise expertise in recruitment and training by building an ISNT “hub” for Indigenous school governance support. This hub would help recruit qualified school principals, teachers, and business managers willing to work in remote Indigenous schools, and provide them with induction and ongoing development. It could also maintain a roster of relief staff for hard-to-fill positions.
 - Adopt a system approach where ISNT delivers coordinated, business-oriented support services tailored to Indigenous schools’ needs. Instead of each school tackling challenges in isolation, ISNT will function as a mini ‘education department’ for the Independent Indigenous Schools, coordinating efforts like policy development, compliance reporting, and advocacy specifically for this sub-sector.

Measures of Success: The health of Independent Indigenous Schools will be our barometer. By 2029, we expect to see improved stability (less volatility in enrolment or school closures), stronger governance (e.g. trained local board members, compliance requirements met), and positive student outcomes (such as attendance and retention rates improving). Anecdotally, Indigenous community leaders should affirm that they feel more supported and see ISNT as a true partner in their educational aspirations. Also, ideally by 2029, a formalized governance model or agreement will be in place linking Indigenous schools with ISNT support structures.

Pillar 7: Professional Development and Collective Advocacy

Goal: To grow leadership capacity, strengthen governance, and build a united sector voice through high-quality professional learning and collaboration. This pillar recognizes that ongoing development of people is key to school improvement and that a united voice emerges when we learn and speak together.

Strategies:

- Develop a strategic Professional Learning Framework guiding the next 3–5 years of capacity-building efforts. This framework will outline priority areas (for example: instructional leadership, financial management, cultural competence) and ensure professional development offerings are planned, resourced, and evaluated for impact. It will be a living document, reviewed annually to stay responsive.

- Deliver place-based, needs-responsive programs. We will tailor our professional development to the context of the NT. For instance, workshops in Darwin may not suit educators in very remote areas, instead, we might provide on-site training in those communities or develop self-paced online modules. Content will be shaped by direct input from schools about their needs each year.
- Foster leadership growth and succession by providing structured leadership pathways. This could include a 'Future Principals' program, middle leader development courses, and mentorship pairings. We want to ensure that when leadership vacancies arise in our schools, there are well-prepared candidates ready from within the Territory.
- Blend internal and external expertise. We acknowledge that while ISNT and its member schools have much expertise to share (home-grown solutions), we also benefit from outside perspectives. Our strategy is to curate a mix: e.g., local veteran educators might lead certain workshops, while external experts (national or international) are invited for cutting-edge topics or to spark new thinking. All programs will be quality-checked for cultural relevance to NT's context.
- Strengthen collective advocacy through unity. By learning and working together, our schools will naturally develop a more unified stance on key issues. ISNT will facilitate sector-wide meetings or conferences where common advocacy messages are discussed. We will also collaborate with Independent Schools Australia and other Associations so that when we advocate, we do so as part of a larger national voice when appropriate.
- Build partnerships for professional learning. Partnering with universities, training institutes, and even the Department of Education can broaden what we offer. For example, we could partner with Charles Darwin University to offer accredited courses in school leadership in remote contexts, or with Aboriginal education groups to co-deliver cultural competency training. Such partnerships enhance credibility and resources for our professional development pillar.
- Publish an annual Professional Learning (PL) Calendar. This calendar will list all workshops, courses, conferences, and networking opportunities available through ISNT each year, making it easier for school staff and board members to plan their development. Over 2026–2029, we will refine and expand this calendar, using feedback to add new offerings.

Measures of Success: We will monitor participation rates and feedback from our professional learning activities. Success by 2029 means a high proportion of Independent School staff and board members have engaged in ISNT-facilitated PD, and they report increased confidence and competence in their roles. We also anticipate more cohesion in the sector, eg: schools jointly advocating on issues or sharing resources, as a byproduct of the relationships built through these collective learning experiences. Another indicator will be leadership continuity: fewer instances of schools struggling to fill key roles, thanks to the talent pipeline we've nurtured.

Pillar 8: Technology, Innovation and Equity

Goal: To harness innovation and digital capability to ensure equitable access, contemporary practice, and future-ready Independent Schools across the NT. Technology should be a great equaliser, not a divider, this pillar focuses on using innovation to overcome the challenges of distance and disadvantage, and to prepare students for the future.



Strategies:

- Provide NCCD guidance and support to help schools meet requirements for students with disabilities and learning needs. This is both a compliance matter and an equity issue, proper identification and support of these students is crucial. ISNT will offer training on NCCD processes, share best-practice resources for inclusive education, and possibly coordinate specialist support staff that schools can tap into.
- Deliver training for specialist learning support leaders. We aim for each school (or cluster of small schools) to have at least one staff member with advanced skills in special education/inclusion. Training programs will be established to develop these specialists, who can then train colleagues and ensure inclusive practices in classrooms.
- Advocate for digital equity such that all Independent Schools in the NT have access to affordable, reliable technology infrastructure. This involves lobbying for improved internet connectivity in remote areas, subsidized costs for bandwidth, and inclusion of independent schools in government tech initiatives. We'll bring data on current gaps (eg: slower internet speeds or higher costs faced by bush schools) to the table in negotiations.
- Secure corporate sponsorships for technology to inject much-needed resources for ICT upgrades. We will approach IT providers to support Independent Schools in the NT. The goal is to have programs that provide things like provision of affordable internet services for very remote schools, or grants of laptops/ tablets for students.
- Position ISNT at the forefront of innovation by leading engagement with artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies in education. This means ISNT will pilot new technology initiatives (e.g. an AI tutoring program trial in a school, or implementing adaptive learning software) and share lessons learned. We will create an "Innovation Taskforce" that keeps our schools on the cutting edge despite our small size and distance.
- Stay abreast of AI developments and translate their relevance for NT schools. Each year, we'll produce guidance briefs on major ed-tech trends (like AI, VR, data analytics in education), highlighting practical implications for our teachers and administrators. We will especially focus on how such tools can help solve NT challenges (e.g. AI to assist with limited specialist teachers, or VR for students who cannot travel for excursions).
- Form partnerships with AI and EdTech experts. Collaborations might include tech startups, research institutions, or even other school systems that are leaders in tech. These partners can offer expertise and access to new tools. For instance, partnering with an EdTech incubator to have NT schools beta-test new learning apps, ensuring our students benefit early and our context is considered in product development.
- Ensure NT schools are not left behind in digital reforms. We will actively insert NT independent schools into national conversations about technology in education (through ISA and other channels) so that the Territory's needs (small population, remote locations, high Indigenous demographics) are considered when policies or programs are designed.
- Build capacity for responsible AI use by developing policies and ethical frameworks for schools. ISNT will help draft model policies and provide training to school leaders on how to implement them.
- Negotiate group purchasing and platform access deals. We recognize that cost can be a barrier to innovation. By banding schools together, ISNT will seek bulk discounts on software licenses, e-learning content subscriptions, and even hardware. This will ensure even our smallest schools can afford top-tier digital tools for their students.

- Showcase educational innovators by connecting NT educators with thought leaders and each other. We will host innovation forums (virtually, to include remote teachers) where inspiring educators share new practices. We will also highlight and celebrate when an Independent School does something groundbreaking, thus fostering a culture that values creativity and forward-thinking.

Measures of Success: By 2029, the digital divide between all Independent Schools across the NT should be notably reduced. We aim for every school to report improved tech infrastructure and usage. Another measure will be staff and student proficiency with new tools – we can assess this via surveys or uptake of offered tech training. If this pillar succeeds, Independent Schools in the NT will be known not for lagging behind, but for their innovative approaches to overcoming isolation and disadvantage through technology.

Pillar 9: Climate and Environmental Resilience

Goal: To future-proof Independent Schools in the NT by strengthening environmental responsibility, sustainability practices, and climate-ready infrastructure. The realities of climate change and environmental stewardship are pressing in the NT (from extreme heat to monsoonal events), and our schools must be prepared and proactive.

Strategies:

- Support school leaders and boards on ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting. As expectations rise for schools to account for their sustainability and social impact, ISNT will develop simple guidelines and tools for our schools. This might include templates for sustainability action plans, carbon footprint calculators suited for schools, or inclusion of ESG goals in school strategic plans.
- Embed Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) support that integrates sustainability, culture, and community engagement. Many schools have RAPs to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities. We will dovetail these with environmental initiatives, eg: involving students in caring for Country projects that tie Indigenous ecological knowledge with science. This approach honors culture while advancing sustainability goals.
- Embed Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) support that integrates sustainability, culture, and community engagement. Many schools have RAPs to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities. We will dovetail these with environmental initiatives, eg: involving students in caring for Country projects that tie Indigenous ecological knowledge with science. This approach honors culture while advancing sustainability goals.
- Use data and local knowledge to understand climate impacts and costs on schools. We will gather data on things like rising utility costs, climate-related damage or disruptions and maintenance challenges. Pairing this with insight from local elders and long-time staff will help target our efforts. Possibly, an 'Environmental Audit' of schools will be conducted sector-wide by the end of 2027 to establish baselines.
- Provide professional learning on climate resilience. Workshops for facilities managers on topics like energy-efficient buildings, water conservation, or creating cooler schoolyards will be offered. We'll also include curriculum-focused PD so that teachers can integrate climate and sustainability into their teaching practice, producing environmentally conscious students.

- Advocate for funding equity regarding infrastructure. We will highlight that many independent schools, especially those serving low socio-economic or remote communities, struggle to afford large capital works needed for climate adaptation (like air-conditioned classrooms, solar panels, cyclone-proof structures). ISNT will push for government programs or grants that specifically assist these schools to upgrade their facilities.
- Seek investment in infrastructure and energy solutions. Beyond advocacy, we will proactively seek partnerships (perhaps with renewable energy companies or social impact investors) to implement projects like solar installations, battery systems, or rainwater harvesting at schools. By 2029, our aim is to have pilot projects demonstrating how schools can cut costs and become more sustainable simultaneously.
- Champion climate-appropriate design and maintenance solutions, lobbying for recognition of the higher costs and special requirements of NT conditions. This means ensuring policymakers understand, for instance, that building a classroom in a remote NT community may cost significantly more than in Brisbane, and that designs must handle heat and cyclones. We'll advocate that funding programs adjust for these factors or create dedicated streams for the north.

Measures of Success: Progress indicators will include more schools having sustainability features (e.g. percentage of schools with solar panels, efficient cooling systems, recycling programs), and evidence that schools are prepared for climate impacts (e.g. emergency plans in place, fewer disruptions or quicker recoveries from extreme events). We also aim for policy changes: by 2029, possibly new grants or funds accessible to our schools for climate adaptation. Additionally, success is when our schools not only react to climate issues but are educating students to be environmental stewards, intangible but can be gauged by student-led initiatives or community feedback.



Pillar 10: Organisational Governance and Capability

Goal: To strengthen ISNT's internal governance, leadership, and organisational capacity so it operates as a high-performing, future-focused peak body. Essentially, this pillar is about practicing what we preach, ensuring ISNT's own house is in order, continuously improving, and well-equipped to deliver all other pillars.

Strategies:

- Be a resource that empowers, focus our team on strategic direction and sector impact, stepping out of operational 'weeds'. This means clarifying roles so that ISNT staff concentrate on high-level coordination and enabling schools, rather than duplicating what schools can do. We will possibly stop or delegate tasks that are not strategically important, freeing capacity for what is.
- Invest in Director development. Our Board of Directors will undertake ongoing training and reflection to model exemplary governance. We will also increase engagement of Directors in advocacy and sector leadership (beyond attending meetings) by assigning them to strategic initiatives where their expertise fits. For example, a Board member with legal background might champion governance training sector-wide.
- Review and refine enterprise risk management by implementing a streamlined risk matrix. We will update our risk register to align with this 2026–2029 plan, focusing on the most critical risks to our strategic goals (see the 'Strategic Risks' section). The process of managing risk will be made more agile, fewer complex reports, more real-time monitoring. Staff will be empowered to make decisions within a clear risk appetite framework endorsed by the Board.
- Adopt a hub-and-spoke model for service delivery. ISNT will identify areas where partnering or outsourcing can extend our reach. For instance, rather than hiring full-time experts in every area, we might contract specialists or collaborate with other Associations to share expertise. Our small core hub can coordinate these relationships. This model will be documented and progressively implemented, especially for initiatives like shared services (IT, HR) or joint advocacy efforts beyond NT.
- Explore new strategic opportunities beyond our traditional remit. We will encourage innovative thinking within the organisation, asking questions like 'What more could ISNT do or offer that would significantly benefit members?' Ideas might range from starting a group insurance scheme for schools, to facilitating student exchanges or events. We will conduct at least one feasibility study per year on a potential new service or partnership, aiming to pilot a couple of these by 2029.
- Implement a skills-based board structure. Concretely, this means using a skills matrix to guide board succession (as noted in Pillar 5 and short-term goals). By 2029, the Board composition should reflect a balance of needed skills (education, finance, law, indigenous engagement, etc), and Board recruitment and elections processes will be aligned to filling those needs.
- Bring in expert directors to deepen board expertise in key domains. We plan to co-opt or encourage nomination of additional Board members with specialized knowledge (eg: a respected Indigenous educator, a philanthropy expert). These experts will broaden our perspective and networks.

- Grow governance leaders from within. Through the mentorship and outreach mentioned earlier, we hope to see emerging leaders from our schools step into ISNT governance roles over time. By 2029, we aim to have a ‘talent pipeline’ where interested individuals from member schools (principals, business managers, etc) are ready and willing to join the ISNT Board or committees, ensuring continuity and fresh insight.

Measures of Success: ISNT’s organisational health will be evaluated via governance reviews, staff surveys, and external accreditation if applicable. We expect to see a highly effective Board, measured by self-assessments and outcomes achieved, low staff turnover coupled with high staff engagement, indicating a motivated team, and positive feedback from member schools about ISNT’s support. If challenges arise during 2026–2029, a mark of success will be how agilely and capably ISNT responds, demonstrating the robustness of our governance and internal processes. By plan’s end, ISNT should be widely regarded as a model peak body: accountable, innovative, and impactful.



Strategic Roadmap 2025-2028



To translate this strategy into action, ISNT will follow a phased implementation roadmap over the four years. This timeline ensures that foundational work is done early, major initiatives are launched and scaled in a logical sequence, and progress is monitored and adjusted along the way. Below is a high-level overview of the roadmap:

Foundation Building: Establish the groundwork for success. In 2026, we will disseminate this Strategic Plan to all stakeholders and set up the structures needed for implementation. Key early actions include launching the Endowment Fund (Pillar 5) and initial fundraising efforts, developing the Professional Learning Framework (Pillar 7) and scheduling the first annual PL calendar, and initiating advocacy on urgent funding issues (boarding and capital funding reforms under Pillar 1). We will also form working groups/taskforces for major projects like the NT model of schooling (Pillar 3) and Indigenous governance model (Pillar 6). Internally, 2026 will see the introduction of the new risk management matrix and hub-and-spoke service approach (Pillar 10), as well as a Board skills audit to guide future appointments. By the end of 2026, all Pillars will have active projects underway, and quick wins (e.g. a sector-wide data report for advocacy, or a new communications strategy boosting ISNT's profile) will demonstrate momentum.

Progress and Pilot Projects: With foundations in place, 2027 focuses on executing and piloting key initiatives. We anticipate this year to include pilot implementations of shared services for schools (Pillar 6 and 4, eg: a cluster of schools using a central business manager), initial training cohorts for leadership pathways (Pillar 7), and perhaps the first technology partnership delivering resources to schools (Pillar 8). Mid-2027 will mark the halfway point of the plan, at which time the Board will commission a mid-term strategic review. This review will assess progress against the 5-year goals, identify any roadblocks, and refine strategies as needed. Also, by 2027 we expect tangible advocacy outcomes, for instance, the Australian government may have signaled changes to the capital funding approach or committed to discussions on our proposed reforms. Another highlight of 2027 is enhancing sector unity, eg: ISNT Leadership Forums, bringing together all member schools to share the 'Distinctive NT Model' draft outcomes (Pillar 3) and celebrate collective achievements.

Scaling Up & Embedding: In 2028, successful pilots and initiatives will be scaled up and embedded across the sector. This could involve expanding shared service offerings to more schools (based on 2027 pilots), rolling out the Indigenous Schools governance system model if developed (Pillar 6), and fully operationalizing the hub-and-spoke model within ISNT (outsourcing partnerships in full swing). We also plan to intensify efforts in areas showing results: for example, if our partnerships for infrastructure (Pillar 9) have yielded some grants or solar projects by 2028, we double down to involve more schools in 2028. Financially, 2028 should see growth in alternative revenue, perhaps the Endowment Fund starts funding a small grant or two for school projects, symbolizing our increased capacity. Throughout 2028, we will maintain strong monitoring; the Board's strategic oversight committee will meet frequently to ensure initiatives are on track.

By late 2028, preparations will begin for transitioning from this strategic plan to the next (post-2028), an environmental scan update and preliminary stakeholder consultations to gauge emerging priorities.

Delivery and Evaluation: The final year of the plan is about delivering any remaining targets and evaluating our success. Many of the 5-year goals outlined earlier should be realized or near realization by 2029. We expect this year to potentially bring some of our biggest advocacy wins to fruition, for example, if a new funding model or major policy change has been in negotiation, 2029 might be the year it's legislated or formally agreed. ISNT will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of each Pillar's progress: measuring outcomes against the benchmarks we set, and compiling a report for the Board and member schools. This will be shared transparently in an 2026–2029 Strategic Plan Outcomes Report. Celebrating successes is also key in 2029 – we will highlight stories like an Indigenous school that, thanks to our support, achieved a milestone, or a cohort of new principals who came up through our leadership program now leading schools. Finally, 2029 is when we craft the 2030+ Strategic Plan, building on the groundwork laid and lessons learned. The achievements and shortfalls of this plan will directly inform the next long-term strategy, keeping us on course toward the 10-year vision goals.

This timeline-style roadmap ensures an organized approach: we start with enabling activities, progress through piloting and scaling, and finish with consolidation and evaluation. Regular checkpoints (annual operational plans and the mid-term review) will allow adjustments to keep the plan responsive to any changes in our environment or circumstances. By pacing initiatives sensibly, we avoid overload and ensure steady progress each year.



Strategic Risks and Mitigations

Implementing an ambitious plan across the NT's diverse and dispersed context comes with risks. ISNT has identified several key risk areas and will proactively manage them to ensure the plan's success. Below we outline the major strategic risks and our mitigation strategies:

Funding and Policy Risk

Risk: Changes in government policy or economic downturns could affect funding for independent schools or for ISNT initiatives (e.g. if a promised grant is cut, or if economic conditions strain school finances).

Mitigation: Diversification of income under Pillar 5 is a direct response to this, by 2029 we aim to be less reliant on any single source. Additionally, strong advocacy (Pillar 1) will be used to navigate policy changes, by maintaining close relationships with policymakers, we can anticipate shifts and respond quickly. We will also maintain a reserve fund that can buffer short-term financial shocks. Regular environmental scanning (part of risk management) will keep the Board informed of upcoming policy or funding changes so we can adjust course as needed.

Workforce and Capacity Risk

Risk: Difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled staff and leaders – both within ISNT and in member schools – could slow down implementation. The NT's small talent pool and competition for qualified educators/administrators is an ongoing challenge.

Mitigation: Pillar 7's focus on leadership development and succession planning is a key long-term mitigation. We are 'growing our own' talented workforce for schools and also enhancing ISNT's appeal as an employer (by creating an innovative, purpose-driven work environment). In the interim, the hub-and-spoke model (Pillar 10) allows us to leverage external expertise if we can't hire full-time. For example, if we struggle to find a specialist in climate education, we might contract an expert for the duration of a project. Finally, we will implement retention strategies, such as professional development opportunities and clear career pathways, to keep excellent staff engaged both at ISNT and in schools.

Geographic and Infrastructure Risk

Risk: The sheer distances and remoteness of many schools could hinder communication, support delivery, and implementation of initiatives (eg: rolling out new tech or shared services might be tougher in very remote locales). Additionally, infrastructure limitations (poor internet, facilities) can slow certain projects.

Mitigation: We address this directly in pillars like Technology and Innovation (Pillar 8) by prioritizing digital equity and remote access. Embracing technology (eg: videoconferencing, online training modules) will mitigate distance, many initiatives are being designed to be deliverable online or through fly-in programs. We'll schedule regional visits and hubs of activity (not everything Darwin-centric) to reach all schools. For critical communications, we won't rely solely on email; we will use multiple channels (phone check-ins, radio if needed, intermediary partners in communities) to stay connected. The risk of remote schools being left out is also mitigated by our explicit commitment that all programs are place-based and needs-responsive – meaning we will adapt delivery to ensure inclusion.



Stakeholder Engagement Risk

Risk: Lack of buy-in or engagement from key stakeholders (be it school leaders, boards, government, or communities) could derail parts of the plan. For example, if member schools don't actively participate in professional learning or shared initiatives, those efforts won't have impact.

Mitigation: Our collaborative approach is the best guard here – throughout the plan, we emphasize involving stakeholders in design and execution (eg: co-designing the NT model with schools, including communities in Indigenous education strategies). Early communication of 'wins' and benefits will help keep people on board; we will publicize success stories to build enthusiasm. We're also aligning the plan's goals with what stakeholders have expressed (many priorities came out of consultation). Regular feedback loops (surveys, forums) will catch waning engagement early so we can adjust. Additionally, aligning our plan with broader NT and national education agendas (where possible) will ensure external stakeholders like government see it as complementary to their aims, not separate – encouraging their support.

Timeline and Delivery Risk

Risk: With a plan of this scope, there's a risk of trying to do too much too quickly, which could overwhelm ISNT's capacity or lead to initiative fatigue among schools. Conversely, unexpected delays (perhaps due to external events like a pandemic resurgence or natural disasters) might push back timelines.

Mitigation: The phased roadmap is designed to pace the work and allow flexibility. We've prioritized foundational tasks in 2026 to avoid bottlenecks later. The mid-term review in 2027 is a crucial mitigation, it gives a chance to re-prioritize or reschedule initiatives if we find we're overstretched. If an external crisis hits, we will pivot to focus on immediate needs of schools (as we did during COVID-19) and may postpone less critical projects, extending timelines if necessary with Board approval. We also plan to maintain a 'strategic plan dashboard' internally, tracking progress on all initiatives; this will highlight early if something is slipping so we can allocate more resources or adjust expectations promptly.

External Environment Risk

Risk: Broader factors, such as changes in the NT population, socio-economic shifts, or another crisis (natural disaster, health emergency), could impact the assumptions of our plan. For instance, if there's a large population movement or economic boom/bust, school needs might change.

Mitigation: Continuous environmental scanning and scenario planning are part of our approach.. We will annually revisit assumptions like enrolment projections or economic outlook and see if our strategy needs tweaking. We will also keep abreast of available data. The diversity and flexibility built into our plan – for example, focusing on innovation and new opportunities (Pillar 10, exploring new services), means we have the mindset to adapt if something major shifts in our environment.

ISNT's refined risk management matrix (introduced under Pillar 10) will track these and other risks, assigning ownership and review cycles for each. The Board will receive regular risk reports as part of governance. By anticipating challenges and preparing mitigations, we increase our likelihood of delivering this plan successfully, even in the face of uncertainty.



Governance and Organisational Structure

Effective delivery of this Strategic Plan requires robust governance and an organisational structure fit for purpose. ISNT will make several deliberate enhancements to its governance model and internal operations to support the plan's objectives:

Board Governance:

The ISNT Board of Directors, as custodians of the organisation's mission, will oversee the strategic plan's implementation closely. We are moving to a skills-based Board model, ensuring that collectively the Board has expertise in education, finance, legal, Indigenous affairs, philanthropy, and other key areas needed to guide the plan. Over 2026–2029, Board composition will be gradually adjusted (through elections or co-option) to fill any skill gaps identified. For example, if financial oversight is an area to strengthen, we will recruit Directors with strong accounting or business backgrounds. Board members will also be more actively engaged in strategy delivery: each Pillar or major initiative may be 'sponsored' by a Board member who can champion progress and provide insight. We will invest in our Directors' development through governance training and annual Board self-reviews, fostering continuous improvement in how the Board operates. Finally, the Board will uphold rigorous accountability by tracking performance indicators for the strategic plan and demanding timely reporting on outcomes.

Leadership and Management:

ISNT's Executive Director and management team are responsible for day-to-day execution of the plan. To align with the strategic priorities, we may realign some staff roles or create temporary project positions. A crucial shift will be adopting the 'hub-and-spoke' operational model: rather than trying to build a large staff base in Darwin to do everything,

ISNT will coordinate and leverage resources from multiple sources (other organisations, consultants, member school secondments). We will outsource or partner for specialised tasks where efficient, such as engaging an external IT firm to set up a new shared platform for schools (Pillar 8) instead of hiring full-time IT staff. Internally, we will maintain a lean core team focused on strategic facilitation, communication, and support rather than duplicating expertise that exists elsewhere. This approach allows flexibility and scalability; we can ramp resources up or down for a project without long-term cost overheads.

Organisational Structure:

The existing structure of ISNT may be adjusted to better reflect strategic pillars. One possibility is creating internal working groups or committees aligned to clusters of Pillars (for example, an Advocacy & Influence Committee, a School Capacity Committee, etc.). These would include staff and relevant board members (and possibly external experts or school representatives) and meet regularly to drive implementation in those areas. Such cross-functional teams break silos and ensure expertise is pooled.

Monitoring and Reporting:

Governance will be strengthened by clear monitoring mechanisms. ISNT will integrate the strategic plan's KPIs into management's regular reports to the Board. We will likely adopt a dashboard approach, a concise set of indicators for each Pillar (e.g. number of advocacy wins, training sessions delivered, funds raised, etc) to track progress at a glance. Annual progress updates will be provided to all member schools and stakeholders, possibly through the ISNT Annual Report. This transparency ensures accountability and keeps everyone informed of how the plan is advancing.

Organisational Culture:

Alongside formal structure, we recognise that a culture aligned to our values (Equity, Integrity, Collaboration, Respect, Innovation) is vital. Leadership will nurture a culture of empowerment and innovation within ISNT, encouraging staff to take initiative, experiment with new ideas (within the risk framework), and focus on making an impact (not just ticking boxes). Internally, we will practice what we advocate to schools: inclusive decision-making, respect for diverse perspectives (including Indigenous representation in our own staff and committees), and a commitment to professional learning for our team.

In summary, ISNT's governance and organisational arrangements will be tuned to deliver this plan efficiently and adaptively. By combining a skilled, engaged Board with a flexible and focused management approach, supported by strong monitoring, we will have the internal strength to match our strategic ambitions.



Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

A broad range of stakeholders will play roles in the success of this Strategic Plan. Ensuring clear communication and active engagement with each group is a priority for ISNT. Below is an overview of our key internal and external stakeholders and how we will involve them over 2026–2029:

Internal Stakeholders



Member Schools (Principals, Boards, Staff)

These are the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries of the plan. We will maintain open channels (regular principal forums, newsletters, visits) to communicate progress and gather feedback. Principals and school boards will be invited to participate in working groups for relevant Pillars (eg: a principal might join the IT Sub-Committee, a business manager on a finance strategy group). Their buy-in is crucial for initiatives like professional development programs or shared services, hence we'll co-design those initiatives with direct input from schools.



Students and Families of Independent Schools

While students and parents are one step removed from ISNT's internal workings, they are ultimately whom the plan is intended to benefit. We consider them internal stakeholders in a broad sense. Through interaction with our member schools, we will engage with parent bodies to ensure our advocacy truly reflects their voice. Key messages like 'Strong Voices, Strong Futures' resonate with parents' desire for a great future for their children. We'll involve parents in advocacy campaigns (Pillar 1) and keep the school communities informed about sector-wide developments via accessible communications.



ISNT Board of Directors

As discussed, the Board is actively steering this plan. Engagement here means the Board will not only receive reports but also engage with schools directly (eg: Board members attending ISNT Leadership Forums). This direct exposure keeps the Board grounded in on-the-ground realities. Board members will also champion the plan within their own school communities, acting as ambassadors.



ISNT Staff and Volunteers

Our staff must be fully onboard and clear on their roles in executing the strategy. We will ensure every team member sees a line of sight from their daily work to the strategic goals. Regular internal meetings will celebrate progress and brainstorm solutions to challenges. Also, any volunteers or contracted partners (like specialist trainers or advisors) become part of our extended internal team for this effort; we will include them in communications and planning as appropriate so that everyone works in concert.

External Stakeholders



Northern Territory Government:

This includes the Department of Education, the Minister for Education, and other relevant agencies.. We will maintain frequent dialogue, formal and informal, with NT Government officials. We seek a partnership approach: eg: collaborating on teacher workforce issues or remote school initiatives, not just lobbying. We will invite government reps to ISNT Leadership Forums and provide data to help them in their policy-making. A critical aspect is pushing for fully and fairly funded Independent Schools, we'll work constructively to achieve commitments in line with public school funding improvements.



Australian Federal Government:

Federal funding and policies significantly impact our schools. We'll engage through Independent Schools Australia (ISA) to influence national funding agreements and through direct representation of NT's case in federal reviews or inquiries. Our plan's success on funding equity for capital and indigenous boarding/support, partly relies on federal understanding and action. Thus, ISNT will submit briefs, join delegations, and ensure NT is on the radar in Canberra.



Independent Schools Australia (ISA) and other State/Territory Associations:

ISA is the national federation of which ISNT is a part. We will coordinate with ISA on national advocacy (like the 2027-2030 funding agreements) and share learnings from our strategic initiatives. Other Independent Schools Associations are peers – we will actively seek their input or share resources (for example, partnering with AISSA on a program or contributing our innovation in Indigenous schooling to others). This collaboration strengthens collective advocacy and saves effort through resource-sharing.



Catholic Education and Government School Sector in NT:

As outlined, we plan to coordinate on broader NT education planning. We will keep open communication with Catholic Education NT and the Department of Education (government schools), including potentially joint committees or planning sessions on issues like school capital infrastructure, Indigenous boarding funding, services in remote homeland areas. By 2029, we envision a more integrated approach where, while maintaining distinct identities, all sectors occasionally sit together to solve Territory-wide challenges.



Indigenous Communities and Leaders:

For Pillar 6 especially, local Indigenous community stakeholders (such as Traditional Owners, community councils, Indigenous education experts) are key. ISNT will take guidance from these stakeholders to ensure our support is culturally appropriate and truly meets community needs. We'll establish an Indigenous Education Advisory Group if not already existing, comprising Indigenous leaders from various regions, to advise on strategy implementation. Regular visits to remote Indigenous schools and communities by ISNT leadership will be undertaken to build trust and listen. This culturally responsive engagement is fundamental to achieving 'Strong Futures' for Indigenous students

Environmental Scan and Context

The strategic directions in this plan are grounded in an understanding of the broader environment in which Independent Schools in the NT operate. Key trends, challenges, and opportunities include:

Geographic and Demographic Context

The Northern Territory covers vast distances with a small, widely dispersed population. Schools are spread from urban Darwin to very remote communities. The sector serves a geographically scattered, socially heterogeneous, culturally diverse, and multi-faith populace. This diversity means one-size solutions won't fit all; strategies must be flexible and culturally responsive. Additionally, a significant proportion of students are Indigenous and come from communities with distinct languages and cultural contexts, schooling must integrate these perspectives (reflected in our strong focus on Indigenous support and respect for Country). Population in NT has been relatively stable or growing slowly; however, local shifts (like population growth in some remote hubs or urban drift of families) can impact school enrolments. We are monitoring demographic data to anticipate where new Independent Schools might be needed or where existing ones might face decline.

Educational Needs and Outcomes

Educational outcome gaps persist, especially for remote Indigenous students, in areas like attendance, literacy/numeracy achievement, and Year 12 completion. The NT historically lags national averages on many benchmarks. This context drives our emphasis on equity and targeted support in this plan. There is also a need for a more collaborative approach to ensure every community has access to quality education. In recent years, Independent School enrolments in NT have grown modestly indicating parental demand for

alternatives and the importance of maintaining diversity of school types. The plan addresses quality improvement through capacity building (Pillar 4) and professional development (Pillar 7), aiming to lift outcomes for all schools. Moreover, the notion of system leadership (Pillar 3) partly arises because no single sector can address these challenges alone, cross-sector cooperation is needed for holistic solutions like improving remote education delivery.

Economic and Funding Landscape

The NT's economy can be volatile (influenced by mining, construction projects, public service, etc), which in turn affects government revenue and spending on education. Independent Schools here also have less capacity, on average, to raise private income (many are low-fee or serve low-SES populations). The school funding model remains a critical issue: Independent Schools in the NT want fair funding that based on need, including recognition of capital needs and extra costs in remote and very remote areas. The School Resourcing Standard is under review in 2026/27. This presents an opportunity to advocate for changes that reflect NT needs (eg: funding loadings for very remote students). The economic context also affects teacher recruitment, cost of living and incentives needed for remote postings, etc, which our plan partially addresses through advocacy and partnerships. Finally, philanthropy and corporate investment in NT education have been relatively limited historically, representing an opportunity our plan is



is keen to tap (Pillar 5).

Technological Change

Rapid advancements in technology (eg: digital learning platforms, AI, connectivity) are reshaping education globally. In NT, technology holds promise to mitigate our tyranny of distance, but many schools lack the infrastructure or reliable internet to fully benefit. Trends include the Australian Government's pushes for digital literacy and the inclusion of ACARA's Digital Technologies curriculum, which our remote schools need help to implement. The emergence of AI in education (eg: generative AI tools) has already begun to influence teaching and assessment methods, raising both excitement and concern. Our strategic plan integrates this trend by positioning ISNT to guide schools through these changes (Pillar 8). E-safety and cybersecurity are also part of the tech context; with increasing connectivity comes the need to safeguard students online, a topic for training under Pillar 8.

Social and Cultural Trends

The NT's cultural makeup is unique: nearly 30% of the NT population is Indigenous, and there are dozens of different language groups. There's also a significant proportion of residents who are recent arrivals (interstate or overseas) due to defence, government, or industry jobs. Schools must be prepared to serve transient populations as well as long-rooted communities. A positive trend is growing public awareness of Indigenous knowledge and desire for reconciliation, which our plan leverages (eg: integrating RAPs with sustainability efforts, acknowledging Country in our programs). On the flip side, social challenges such as youth disengagement or community safety issues do affect schools requiring

schools to often play a broader pastoral care and community hub role. Our emphasis on holistic support takes this into account. Parental expectations are also evolving: families increasingly seek 21st-century learning opportunities (STEM, entrepreneurship, global awareness) even in remote settings, and they want their children's education to be relevant to modern times and respectful of culture. Balancing those is part of our distinct NT model approach.

Climate and Environmental Factors:

The NT is experiencing the effects of climate change, more extreme heat days, unpredictable wet seasons, and severe weather events (cyclones, floods) that pose risks to school infrastructure and operations. We've seen schools forced to close temporarily due to severe weather events. These factors inform Pillar 9's strategies, climate resilience isn't optional, it's quickly becoming essential for continuity of education. There's also an increasing youth voice globally (and locally) around climate action, which likely influences our students' expectations of schools' environmental leadership. By being proactive here, Independent Schools can position themselves as forward-thinking and responsible, which may attract environmentally conscious families and staff.

Regulatory and Political Environment

Education regulation is tightening in areas such as child safety (with new standards), data privacy, and governance accountability. Compliance burdens can hit small schools hard. Our plan's governance support and risk management focus help schools navigate these changes. Politically, the NT Government has generally been supportive

of working with Independent Schools, but there are always uncertainties with elections that could shift priorities. We maintain a non-partisan stance but work with all sides to keep education funding and support steady.

The ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) oversight of AISNT as a charity also means we adhere to high

standards of governance; our plan's Pillar 10 aligns with those expectations. In addition, the national education agenda emphasizes equity, inclusion, and excellence, our plan is well-aligned to these national goals, which should aid in securing support as we can frame our initiatives as contributing to broader aims.

In summary, the environment presents both significant challenges and unique opportunities. Independent Schools in the NT operate on the frontier, geographically, technologically, and socially. This plan is crafted to leverage the Independent Schools sector's strengths (agility, community roots, innovative spirit) to address these contextual factors head-on. By being aware of and responsive to our environment, ISNT will ensure that our strategic actions remain relevant and have maximum impact. The environmental scan will be updated periodically during the plan period, allowing us to remain proactive amid any changes in context.



Conclusion

‘Strong Voices, Strong Futures’ – this phrase encapsulates the essence of our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. By empowering strong voices today (whether it be schools advocating for their needs, students speaking up, or ISNT leading with authority), we are laying the foundation for strong futures for every student and community we serve. Over the next four years, Independent Schools Northern Territory will strive to be both bold and collaborative: bold in vision and pursuit of innovation, yet collaborative in bringing everyone along on the journey.

This Strategic Plan is more than a document, it is a commitment. It is our commitment to every member school that ISNT will stand with them, championing their aspirations and providing practical support. It is a commitment to families that their choice of an independent education in the NT will continue to be supported by a high-performing system. It is a commitment to government and partners that we will be constructive, solutions-focused contributors to Territory and national educational goals. And importantly, it is a commitment to the students of the Northern Territory that we will not rest until each one, no matter how remote their hometown or what challenges they face, has access to an excellent, culturally respectful, future-ready education that enables them to thrive.

By 2029, we expect to look back and see tangible progress, stronger schools, new programs blossoming, resources flowing more equitably, and a louder, respected voice for our sector. We also know that the work will not stop; the education landscape will continue to evolve. But with the foundations laid by this plan, ISNT and its schools will be in a stronger position than ever to adapt and lead.

Together, as a united Independent Schooling community, we face the future with confidence. Strong Voices today will indeed shape Strong Futures tomorrow – for our students, for our schools, and for the Northern Territory.





Association of Independent Schools NT