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2. RECOMMENDATIONS

ISA makes the following recommendations in response to the Strategy:

2.1 That a sixth Priority Focus Area:

be included in the Strategy.

2.2 That the Strategy provides a clear overview of the purpose and form of the proposed Outcomes Framework. The overview could include a visual representation of key relationships between early childhood services, agencies and policy.

2.3 That Action Plans are developed in consultation with the early childhood education and care sector and other key stakeholders. ISA strongly recommends that Action Plans articulate a clear approach to ensure consistency and accessibility of agency supports and the important role of early childhood education and care services within an integrated approach.

2.4 That existing policies, programs, frameworks and agency supports are identified and mapped to show integrated relationships between the Australian Government and states and territories to provide greater understanding for all stakeholders. These relationships should be clearly recognised in the Strategy and Action Plans to realise the Vision.

2.5 That Priority Focus Area 2.3 provides greater detail to support equity and inclusion, in particular to be more specific about:

— inclusion and support for children with disability

Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other factors.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the Independent school sector. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

4. INTRODUCTION

ISA prepared this submission in response to the Australian Government's Draft Early Years Strategy 2024-2034. ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

ISA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Strategy to help shape the

5. VISION

The Vision reflects the nature of young children being life-long learn

Evidence-informed

ISA acknowledges the Strategy's stated commitment to activities required to realise these principles and ensure accessible, collaborative, and integrated service provision, including:

- commitment to equity and inclusion
- building and improving an improved national evidence base to support development and implementation of supports and services
- ensuring culturally safe and appropriate supports and services.

Due to the essential nature of a robust early childhood workforce to support the Vision, ISA recommends that this area is made explicit as a sixth Priority Focus Area to grow, strengthen and maintain the early childhood education and care workforce. This would align with the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy.¹²

8. OUTCOMES

Children have the right to the best start in life and a healthy and safe childhood that supports them to be life-long learners. ISA supports the reduction of systemic and multi-generational disadvantage through a multi-

ISA welcomes the Strategy's approach to protecting childhood by recognising the right of children to learn through play, to imagine and to express themselves creatively. It is important to ensure that early childhood education and care remains developmentally appropriate and protects childhood, especially in the early years.

ISA looks forward to further collaboration to provide input into strategies to achieve the above outcomes.

9. PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

9.1 Priority Focus Area 1 - Value the early years

9.1.1 Raise awareness about why early childhood matters

ISA supports the Strategy's strong focus on building a shared community understanding of the critical importance of the early years in terms of child development and wellbeing. Children thrive when individuals, families, communities, and services around them experience collective efficacy, and as a result are equipped and empowered to play a positive, informed and enabled role in their lives.²⁴

9.1.2 Embed the voices of children and their families

The Independent school sector supports the Strategy's approach to active consultation with children and families. In response to the National Quality Framework, Independent schools plan and deliver

INDEPENDENT

10. CONCLUSION

Research has clearly established the first five years of life as critical for building the foundations of brain development, life-long learning, wellbeing and health.²⁸ It is also clear that participation in high quality early childhood education and care builds strong foundations for learning and has a positive influence on the development of independence, life skills, a sense of belonging and school readiness.

Providers of early childhood education and care operate in a complex sector where arrangements differ according to jurisdictions, sector and types of early childhood service. National investment in early learning is an ongoing priority for the Australian Government and state and territory governments and is essential if the Strategy's Vision is to be realised.

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