The First Association for Families of Independent Schooling Launches to Give Parents a Voice

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The Association for Families of Independent Schooling (AFIS), a newly established not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC), has formally launched to bring together parents, carers, alumni, and extended family members who support independent education. For the first time, families will have access to a dedicated national community offering representation, reliable information, and opportunities to participate in innovative research shaping public understanding of independent schooling.

Against a backdrop of increasing pressures on schools and families, ranging from VAT on school fees to heightened public debate, AFIS aims to champion parental choice, widen access to independent education, and contribute to a more balanced national conversation by commissioning robust, independent research that will close long-standing gaps in evidence about independent schooling families. The research studies, being designed and facilitated by the University of Chichester, will survey the diverse range of families who choose independent schooling, their demographic profiles and their motivations for sending their children to independent schools, to provide robust data, greater clarity and balance to public and policy debate.

AFIS is also carrying out regular “parent polls” to obtain snapshots of its member families’ views and experiences on topical issues affecting them. The current poll asks about the impact of VAT on families. January’s topic is “should independent schools operate more like commercial businesses?”

AFIS membership is free and open to all supporters of independent schooling, including current and prospective parents, past parents, carers, alumni, and extended family members such as grandparents. The organisation also welcomes families involved in home-schooling, online and hybrid schooling provisions.

As part of its community model, AFIS is developing a national network of Partner Schools who are collaborating with AFIS on research, outreach to school communities and providing benefits and support to members. Participation is free. Many independent schools from all parts of the UK have already joined AFIS as Foundation Partner Schools, and parents and other supporters are becoming AFIS members as they are made aware of this new association that has been created for them.

AFIS offers a growing range of practical benefits for families, including access to a resource and information centre, signposting to useful services, expert-led webinars, events, and an online shopping centre featuring exclusive offers from sponsors and partner brands. These initiatives help build a collaborative, supportive community while also generating revenue for AFIS’s wider mission.

AFIS is establishing two grant funding programmes for its members and partner schools: the Schooling Costs fund will provide financial support to eligible member families struggling with school fees, helping to keep children in the schools they love. It will also provide targeted assistance for schooling-related expenses such as uniform and school trips. The AFIS bursary fund will provide means-tested support with school fees, widening access for children who would not otherwise be able to benefit from the opportunities offered by independent schools.

During the recent debates surrounding VAT on school fees, many parents struggled to find a credible, unified platform to express their perspectives. Communication was often fragmented across informal online groups and lost amid the noise of social media. AFIS was founded to provide clarity, constructive dialogue, a co-ordinated national approach and a respected, evidence-led space for families to be informed and heard.

AFIS Founder, Michelle Daniells, commented: “Across the UK, families who choose independent education are facing rising costs, increasing uncertainty, and a public conversation that often misrepresents them. AFIS exists to provide a national platform that brings truth, balance and understanding to the debate, while supporting families and the schools that serve them. Our work is centred on community, research, and shared values that place our member families at the heart of everything we do.”

AFIS operates as a Community Interest Company with no shareholders, ensuring all income is reinvested into its mission. The organisation is non-partisan and independent, with no political affiliation or lobbying agenda. Its funding model is built on member engagement and revenue raised via the AFIS

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Online Shopping Centre and retail partnerships, as well as grants and donations. ensuring a sustainable approach that benefits families directly and supports the wider community.

AFIS has three core aims:

1. To provide families with a national platform to connect, share experiences, and access trusted information, research, and other member benefits.

2. To commission robust, independent research that brings evidence and balance to the national discussion about independent education.

3. To develop responsible, member-funded initiatives that strengthen accessibility and help support families with rising education-related costs.

Michelle Daniells added: “Our pre-launch surveys highlighted a clear demand for a constructive, national space where families can contribute to the conversation about independent education. Parents make deeply personal decisions, often with significant commitment, sacrifices and financial support from grandparents and from schools. They deserve accurate representation. AFIS will help schools and families work together, informed by evidence, to safeguard choice and strengthen the sector for the future.”

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About AFIS

The Association for Families of Independent Schooling (AFIS) is the UK’s only membership organisation dedicated to families who choose and value independent education. As a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC), AFIS brings together schools, parents, carers, alumni and extended family members to champion choice, fair representation and accessibility within a diverse national education landscape.

AFIS provides families with a national community, trusted information and opportunities to participate in independent research that strengthens public understanding of independent schooling families. Through resources, events and community engagement, AFIS highlights the vital role its member families play in sustaining schools and contributing to society.

AFIS is independent of political parties and lobbying groups and is committed to promoting a balanced, evidence-led national conversation about independent education.

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