

CHOICE AND DIVERSITY

AUGUST 2022

Independent schools are diverse in terms of the communities they serve, their student population, their size and their ethos.

KEY POINTS

Choice matters

Parents or carers are entitled to choose the kind of education their children receive, within the scope and standards of Australia's education system.

Indeed, this right for parents to choose is articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Australia is a signatory to both.

Since the 1970s, Australian governments have supported choice in schooling by providing public funding to non-government schools as a way of ensuring that all schools have at least a minimum level of facilities and resources.

Diverse options for a diverse population

Diversity has long been a major strength of the Independent school sector, serving the needs of a geographically-dispersed, socially-mixed, multicultural and multi-faith population.

The Independent school sector includes schools of diverse faiths (Anglican, Catholic, Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Seventh Day Adventist, non-denominational, etc.), those based on educational philosophies (such as Montessori, Steiner and International Baccalaureate), those that focus on disability (such as autism), schools whose students are almost exclusively Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, boarding schools, and schools that operate in areas of great need often catering for those disengaged from mainstream schooling.

The diversity of Independent schools means families of all religions, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds can choose schools that promote the values, educational philosophies and/or approaches to learning that best suit the needs of their children and their own beliefs.

Independent school fees vary widely. While the sector is often associated with large and expensive Independent schools, many are small and/or charge low fees. Some (in particular, those serving greatest needs) charge no fees at all.

The fact that enrolment numbers are growing faster in the Independent school sector than the Catholic or government school sectors shows that many Australian families value and act on the choice the Independent school sector provides and can find an affordable option.

Priorities of families

Parents are influenced by a variety of factors when choosing an Independent school. The outcome parents seek, above all, is for children to have a well-rounded education with a strong emphasis on learning life skills. Our School Choice Survey 2021 Report shows the factors that most influence parents are (in order) educational excellence; good teachers; a supportive caring environment; good facilities.

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THE FACTS

- Around one in ten Australian schools is an Independent school.
- Independent schools include small and large day schools and boarding schools, co-educational and single-sex schools and Independent Catholic schools.ⁱ
- One in six Australian students is enrolled in an Independent school.
- Australian non-government schools enrol significantly more secondary school students than the OECD average of 18 per cent.
- Independent schools are in every Australian state and territory, with two thirds in major cities and one third in regional cities or remote locations. These include Aboriginal community schools.
- Large, well-known Independent schools charging fees of \$20,000 or more represent only 8 per cent of all Independent schools.
- Half of Independent schools charge less than \$5,000 per annum.
- The Independent school sector has schools serving extremely disadvantaged students, including;
 - o high-needs students with disability attending special schools
 - o Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending remote Indigenous schools
 - o highly-disadvantaged students who are no longer in mainstream school.

RELATED INFORMATION

- ISA [School Choice 2021 Survey Report](#)
- ISA website: [Diversity](#)
- United Nations: [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

ⁱ (The Independent school sector does not include systemic Catholic schools. I.e. Those that are considered part of the Catholic system).

ISA IS THE PEAK BODY REPRESENTING 1,187 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS WITH 667,259 ENROLLED STUDENTS.

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