



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## DIVERSITY AND SACRIFICE BEHIND UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) has today released its *Independent Schooling 2024 - Enrolment Trends, Characteristics and Projections* report, revealing a substantial and ongoing shift towards Independent schools, driven by middle to low-income families who are increasingly making significant sacrifices for their children's education.

Independent schools have seen their strongest growth in more than a decade with enrolments increasing by 3.8% from 2022 to 2023. Projections indicate that this trend will continue, with Independent schools expected to become the largest non-government school sector by 2027, enrolling an additional 121,000 students by 2033.

ISA CEO Graham Catt said the report highlights the true diversity and community role of Independent schools, debunking common misconceptions and highlighting the wide spectrum of students and families they serve.

"This data dismantles outdated stereotypes used to unfairly target Independent schools," Mr. Catt said.

"It shows that these schools are deeply embedded in communities across Australia, supporting students from all walks of life and offering an education that resonates with the values and aspirations of everyday families."

"Contrary to some commentary, most Independent schools are accessible and affordable, with median annual fees of just \$5,537. The growth we're seeing is primarily driven by families in outer and inner suburban areas who, despite economic pressures, are choosing to invest in their children's future."

"Many of these families make significant sacrifices for this choice, and it's distressing for them and for educators to see their decision targeted by those looking to score political points. We need to ensure their choices are supported, not undermined."

Key Findings from the Report:

- Fastest growth in Australia’s schools: Between 2022 and 2023, Independent schools saw a 3.8% increase in enrolments. This growth far outpaces both the Government and Catholic sectors, which grew by 0.3% and 1.4%, respectively.
- Regional and remote growth: Growth in regional areas has been particularly strong, with 24% of new enrolments over the past five years being in regional and remote Australia. This reflects a broader trend of Independent schools meeting the needs of families outside major cities.
- Diverse and inclusive: More than 60% of enrolments in Independent schools come from low- to middle-income families, and 22% of Independent school students are students with disability. The sector also educates over 19,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, reinforcing the sector’s role in supporting Australia’s most vulnerable communities.
- ISA projects that by 2033 Independent schools will enrol 19.7% of all Australian students. This growth will necessitate the establishment of approximately 282 new Independent schools or campuses, with the majority needed in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland.

Mr Catt warned that any reduction in government support for students at Independent schools could lead to an influx into an already over-burdened public system, particularly in outer suburban and regional communities.

"As the number of families choosing an Independent school continues to grow, it’s crucial that the government recognises the important role they play in relieving pressure on the public system.

"Students in Independent schools receive significantly less government funding on average per student compared to government schools (\$12,160 per student from all sources of Government funding compared to \$22,510)."

Mr Catt said Independent schools offer tailored education options that reflect a wide range of cultural, religious, and educational preferences, ensuring that every family can find the right school for their children.

Independent schools are playing a critical role in shaping a modern, inclusive education system. These include faith-based schools, and over 140 schools that support students who are highly disadvantaged and at risk of disengaging from schooling altogether.

"Our special assistance schools serve students who have been unable to thrive in mainstream education due to challenging life circumstances," he said.

"The growth in Independent schools reflects their ability to provide a diverse range of educational options, aligning with the values and aspirations of Australian families. As we head into an election year, it’s more important than ever that politicians understand the

essential role these schools play in creating an inclusive, values-driven educational landscape for students from all backgrounds."

**State by state breakdown 2023:**

State	Total Independent School Enrolments	Growth Rate (%)	Students with Disability (%)	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students	Projected Enrolments by 2033
National	716,848	3.8%	22%	19,299	837,600
NSW	235,492	3.6%	20%	5,894	287,000
Vic.	166,047	4.3%	26%	1,237	197,300
Qld.	147,268	4.1%	18%	6,519	167,700
WA	81,187	4.0%	23%	2,317	91,900
SA	54,353	1.8%	24%	1,187	57,300
Tas.	11,093	3.6%	25%	555	13,400
NT	5,898	0.6%	28%	1,376	5,700
ACT	15,510	4.5%	19%	213	17,200

\*The figures in the Independent Schooling 2024 Report were compiled using comprehensive national enrolment data, sector-specific growth projections, and independent analysis of demographic trends across Australia, ensuring a thorough and accurate representation of the Independent school sector.

ISA is the national peak body representing 1,216 Independent schools with close to 720,000 enrolled students, accounting for 17.6 per cent of Australian school enrolments and a workforce of 122,000 people. Independent schools are diverse, serving a range of different communities across Australia.

For more information or to read the whole report – [www.isa.edu.au](http://www.isa.edu.au)

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