INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA COULD NEED 191 NEW INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AS THE GREAT EDUCATION SHIFT CONTINUES

Australia could need the equivalent of 191 new Independent schools or campuses over the next decade as more families choose Independent education, according to new national research.

Independent Schools Australia's new report, Independent Schooling 2026 – Enrolment Trends, Characteristics and Projections, projects around 87,700 additional Independent school students by 2035.

On the current average school size, that represents around *191 schools. Around nine in ten of those additional places are projected to be needed in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

The report also projects that Independent schooling could become Australia's second-largest school sector by enrolments from 2027.

Independent Schools Australia Chief Executive Officer Graham Catt said the figures showed that The Great Education Shift was already well underway.

"Parents are choosing. Policy settings need to catch up," Mr Catt said.

"The data says that almost 88,000 students' families will choose an Independent school over the next decade, and governments need to start planning for those children now. A school place doesn't appear overnight – it needs classrooms, teachers, land and long-term planning."

Independent schools enrolled 767,712 students in 2025, reaching a record 18.5 per cent share of Australian school enrolments. Enrolments grew by 3.0 per cent during the year, compared with overall student growth of 0.7 per cent.

Over the past five years, Independent school enrolments have grown by an average 3.5 per cent a year, compared with 0.8 per cent across Australian schooling overall.

"The Great Education Shift is already well underway. Australian families are making it happen, one school choice for one student at a time," Mr Catt said.

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“The question is whether our education policy and infrastructure planning reflects where students are actually going to school.”

The growth is also much broader than many Australians realise.

Schools with average annual fees below $8,000 account for 44 per cent of Independent enrolments but 65 per cent of the sector’s enrolment growth since 2020. Schools charging $20,000 or more account for 22 per cent of enrolments but only 10 per cent of the five-year growth.

Regional Australia is an important part of the shift, as regional and remote areas accounted for about 22 per cent of Independent school enrolment growth over the past five years.

Mr Catt said future planning needs to recognise demand across all three school sectors.

“Planning for the children who will actually arrive at school gates in the future shouldn’t be derailed by sectoral battles.”

“Properly resourcing public schools matters. So does supporting those who choose a non-government school. Australia needs both, and governments should plan accordingly.”

“Parents are choosing. Families are contributing. Policy should reflect reality.”

*The 191-school figure is a national planning equivalent, based on the current average Independent school campus size of 459 students and an assumption that existing schools are at capacity. In practice, future demand could be met through a combination of new schools, new campuses and expansion of existing schools.

Full report: https://schoolchoicecounts.isa.edu.au/research/independent-schooling-2026-enrolment-trends-characteristics-and-projections

ABOUT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

Independent schooling is one of the most diverse parts of Australia's education system. Independent schools include faith-based schools from many traditions, non-denominational and community schools, Montessori and Steiner schools, specialist schools, Special Assistance Schools, boarding schools, schools providing First Nations and on-Country education, and schools serving students with a wide range of educational needs. From low-fee community schools in regional and remote Australia to some of the nation's oldest schools, Independent schools educate almost 768,000 students in 1,240 schools across the country.

Families and school communities make a substantial additional contribution to the education of their children, providing more than half of the sector’s recurrent and capital income.

ISA advocates for needs-based funding, meaningful school choice and policies that recognise the diverse ways Australian families choose to educate their children.

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