

Choice and diversity need support

The major political parties now agree that governments should support the right of parents to choice in their children's schooling.

School choice recognises the responsibility of parents to educate their children and their right to an active role in determining the kind of education their children receive.

Why school choice is important

School education confers both a public and private benefit. It is vital to the future of our nation, and is key to the development of the individual.

The belief in education as a platform for individual development informs the philosophies of many schools and the classroom practices of many teachers across all school sectors in Australia.

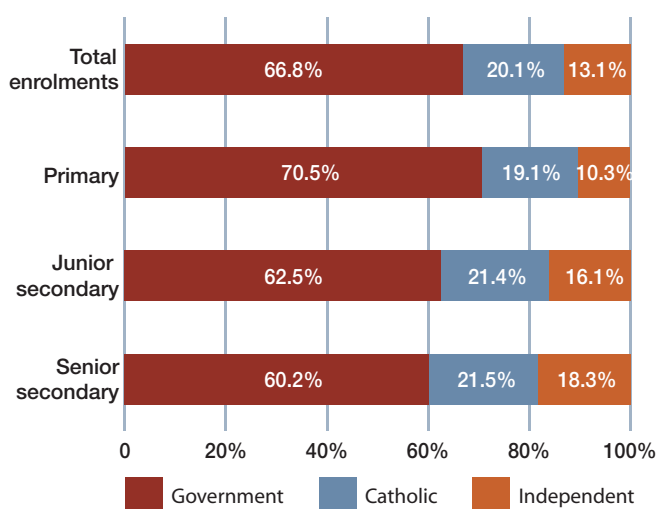
Australian parents also strongly believe that education is important to the development of their children. They expect schools to encourage their children's talents to flourish, and to help their children acquire the skills and attitudes that will equip them for a happy and prosperous future.

No single system, no single school and no single teaching practice will meet the individual needs of every student. If we want young Australians to achieve to the best of their ability then we need diversity in schooling options and parents need the freedom and financial support to choose among them.

Public support for school choice

Growing numbers of Australian families are choosing non-government schools for their children despite the financial cost. Over a third of Australian school children are now educated in non-government schools. The proportion is higher in the secondary years of schooling.

Australian school enrolments by sector and level 2006



Independent schools add to the diversity of education available to Australian children, while sharing national goals and values with other schools.

Community standards and national goals

Independent schools offer the choice for young Australians to be educated in schools that express the cultural and religious plurality of our society, or according to specific educational philosophies.

Most independent schools are affiliated with Christian denominations. There are also Jewish and Islamic schools, schools that promote a particular philosophy of education such as the Montessori and Steiner schools, and schools that serve particular community groups, such as Indigenous community schools.

Some independent schools are large, multi-campus schools that have been established for many years and in that time have built up excellent facilities. Some schools are single sex, others co-educational. Some have boarding facilities to cater to students from regional and remote areas, others serve students with special learning needs.

Some independent schools are very small schools in remote areas serving our poorest and most disadvantaged communities, where education is seen as an important part of the right to be self-determining.

All of these schools contribute to the diversity and quality of Australian schooling.

Affiliation of independent schools

Affiliation	Schools	Students	% of Students in Sector
Anglican	152	128,109	25.6%
Nondenominational	179	64,941	13.0%
Roman Catholic	71	49,997	10.0%
Uniting Church in Australia	43	46,679	9.3%
Christian Schools	125	43,841	8.8%
Lutheran	83	32,133	6.4%
Interdenominational	27	17,779	3.5%
Baptist	43	16,269	3.2%
Islamic	30	15,874	3.2%
Seventh Day Adventist	56	10,110	2.0%
Presbyterian	14	9,572	1.9%
Jewish	19	9,038	1.8%
Steiner	44	7,215	1.4%
Pentecostal	19	6,746	1.3%
Assemblies of God	16	6,370	1.3%
Brethren	10	4,736	0.9%
Greek Orthodox	8	4,112	0.8%
Montessori	36	3,593	0.7%
Other Catholic	7	3,421	0.7%
Other Orthodox	6	1,970	0.4%
Society of Friends (Quaker)	1	1,219	0.2%
Other religious affiliation	11	3,069	0.6%
Other*	85	14,231	2.8%

* Other includes special schools, international schools, Indigenous schools and community schools.

Public accountability

While each independent school is characterised by a unique ethos, each also contributes to the overarching public goals for schooling in Australia. It is a condition of their public funding that independent schools meet community standards in education and commit to the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century.

Along with other Australian schools, independent schools must participate in national benchmark testing, ascribe to national values, and publicly report school and student performance data.

Independent schools are publicly accountable for all their operations. They must submit audited financial data to government and other authorities, and meet all government regulations covering issues such as child protection, health and safety and employment practices.

Governments must be responsible funding partners with parents if families are to have freedom to choose the school they believe best meets the needs of their children.

Financial partnerships support choice

Parents increasingly expect government funding of school education to focus on their child's access to education services rather than on who owns the school.

While parents in independent schools are prepared to make substantial private contribution to their children's education – and by so doing save governments over \$2.4 billion each year – they also expect governments to be responsible funding partners.

The independent sector believes the basis of a good financial partnership between governments and parents is a reasonable level of funding support for each student.

More information about independent schools is available at www.isca.edu.au