

## Choice and diversity

**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.**

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

### 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.

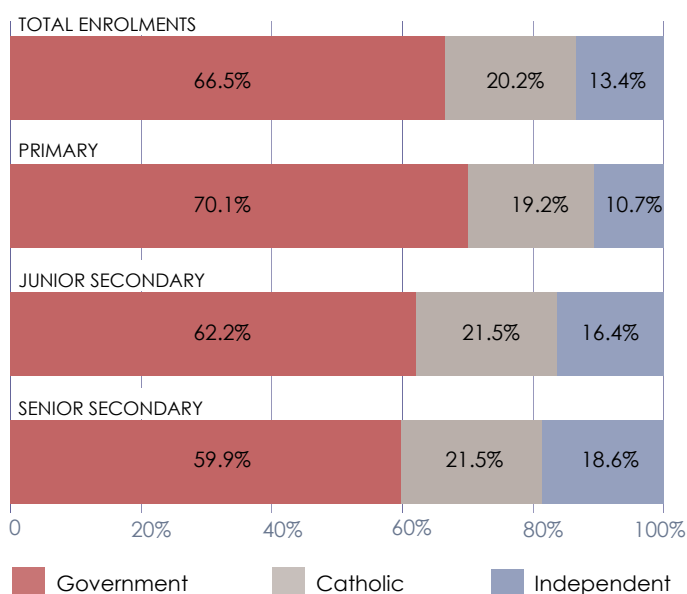
Australian parents also strongly believe that education is important to the development of their children. They expect schools to encourage their children's talents to flourish, and to help their children acquire the skills and attitudes that will equip them for a happy and prosperous future.

No single system, no single school and no single teaching practice will meet the individual needs of every student. If young Australians are 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 2007**



**Independent schools add to the education choices available to Australian children, while sharing common national goals and values with other schools.**

### Diversity in schools reflects Australia's cultural diversity

Independent schools offer the choice for young Australians to be educated in schools that express the cultural and religious plurality of our society or espouse 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 that over time have built up excellent facilities. Some schools are single sex; others co-educational. Some have boarding facilities to cater for students from regional and remote areas; others serve students with special learning needs.

Some independent schools are very small schools in remote areas serving Indigenous communities, where education is seen as an important part of the right to be self-determining and a means to overcome severe disadvantage.

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

**Affiliation of independent schools 2007**

Affiliation	Schools	Students	% of students in sector
Anglican	151	129,763	25.4%
Non-denominational	196	69,861	13.7%
Catholic	75	53,360	10.4%
Uniting Church in Australia	41	46,796	9.1%
Christian Schools	130	46,004	9.0%
Lutheran	84	32,989	6.4%
Inter-denominational	23	16,939	3.3%
Baptist	43	16,784	3.3%
Islamic	30	15,938	3.1%
Presbyterian	15	10,602	2.1%
Seventh Day Adventist	56	10,333	2.0%
Jewish	20	8,901	1.7%
Steiner	43	7,367	1.4%
Pentecostal	18	6,786	1.3%
Assemblies of God	15	6,427	1.3%
Greek Orthodox	8	4,075	0.8%
Montessori	36	3,691	0.7%
Brethren	8	3,604	0.7%
Other Catholic	8	3,553	0.7%
Other Orthodox	6	2,024	0.4%
Other religious affiliation*	11	4,467	0.9%
Other**	83	11,437	2.2%

\* Other religious includes Churches of Christ, Ananda Marga, Hare Krishna and Society of Friends (Quaker).

\*\* 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 the *National Assessment Program*, 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 \$2.6 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 that recognises relative educational need.