

Enrolment trends in independent schools: past and future

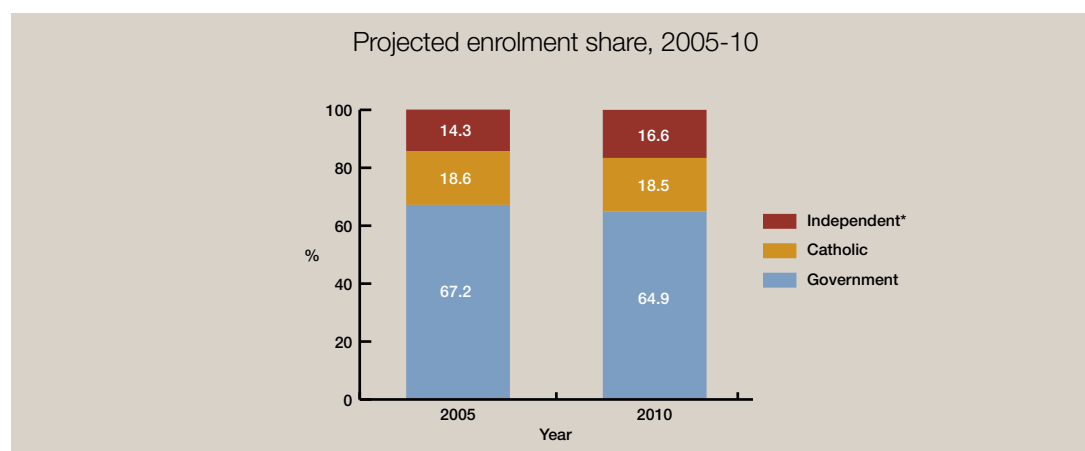
As a result of Australia's declining birth-rate, growth in the independent schools sector will continue, but at a slower rate over the period to 2010. Projections by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that the Australian school population as a whole will start to decline from 2008. This contraction will be in contrast to the past decade, which witnessed stronger growth of independent schools.

In fact, rates of enrolment growth have already started to slow, with a slight drop in the growth rate of the independent schools sector in the last two years.

As growth in the school population slows, and then declines, it is projected that by 2010 the sector's enrolment growth rate will be 1.7 per cent, with an annual average growth rate over the period 2005-10 of 2.3 per cent.

Despite this trend, it is projected that there could be an increase in the sector's share of total school enrolments in 2010 to about 16.6 per cent, compared to 14.3 per cent in 2005 (this figure includes enrolments at independent Catholic schools).

The Independent Schools Council of Australia expects the decline in total school population will increase competitive pressures between schools and school sectors. However, a number of factors will influence how this is experienced and managed, including local community support for particular affiliations of schools, the education policies of governments, regional patterns of growth or decline in population, and economic conditions.



*Includes independent Catholic schools.

Growth amongst independent schools: 1996-2005

Looking back, the average annual enrolment growth in the independent schools sector in full-time enrolments (excluding independent Catholic schools) from 1996-2005 was a robust 3.8 per cent. This growth occurred in all states and territories, with the strongest rates of growth in Western Australia (5.3 per cent), Northern Territory (4.5), New South Wales (4.4 per cent) and Queensland (4.1 per cent).

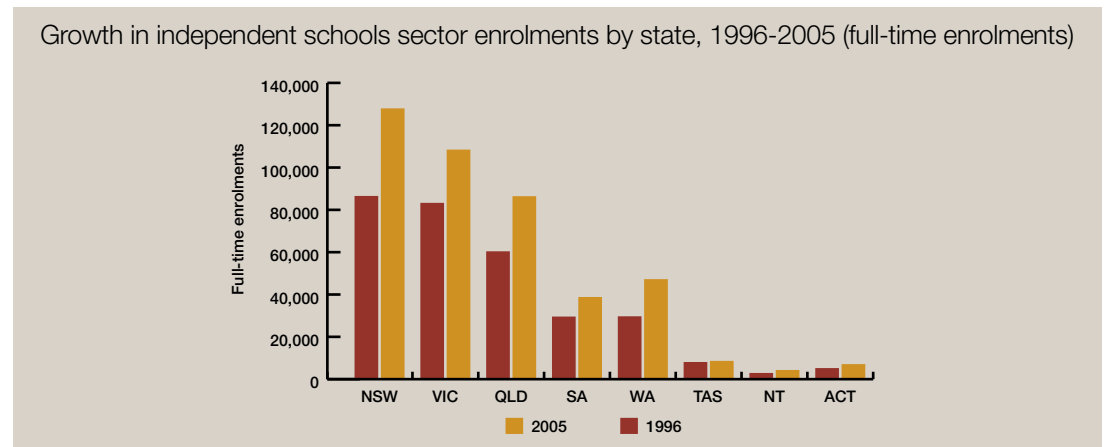


In some previous periods the sector experienced even greater average annual enrolment growth – from 1985-90 the annual growth rate was 4.6 per cent, and from 1980-85 it was 7 per cent. From 1990-96, however, it had a lower annual growth rate of 2.5 per cent.

In the last decade smaller schools – defined as having fewer than 250 students – experienced the highest rates of enrolment growth in the period. The average annual rate of growth for such schools was around 6.7 per cent, with the increase in enrolments at these schools contributing about 20 per cent of the sector’s total growth.

The larger schools, with more than 1,000 students, experienced an average annual rate of enrolment growth of around 1.6 per cent, contributing about 18 per cent of the total growth.

Growth in independent schools sector enrolments by state, 1996-2005 (full-time enrolments)



Growth by affiliation

As a whole, Anglican schools are the largest grouping in the sector and, in 2005, they account for 26 per cent of all enrolments. The group’s average annual rate of enrolment growth from 1996 was about 3.5 per cent.

Christian schools – an Australian Government category that does not correspond to membership of Christian school organisations – account for 9 per cent of all sector enrolments, and had an average annual rate of growth of around 4.7 per cent.

Lutheran schools account for over 6 per cent of all sector enrolments and experienced growth averaging 4.3 per cent annually.

Although enrolments in Islamic schools achieved the fastest rate of growth of all school groupings, at about 14.5 per cent annually, their student number is relatively small, accounting for only 3 per cent of total independent school enrolments.

While there was movement of a number of schools from the independent to the Catholic sector during this period, independent Catholic schools accounted for 10 per cent of the independent sector’s enrolments in 2005.

For further information:

Australian Bureau of Statistics: www.abs.gov.au

Department of Education, Science and Training: www.dest.gov.au



Affiliations of independent schools

85% of all independent schools have a religious affiliation.

Affiliation	Schools	Students	% of Students
Anglican	150	125,837	25.7
Nondenominational	175	62,597	12.8
Roman Catholic	73	50,532	10.3
Uniting Church	43	46,184	9.4
Christian Schools	125	43,351	8.9
Lutheran	82	30,971	6.3
Interdenominational	28	17,313	3.5
Baptist	42	15,665	3.2
Islamic	29	14,415	2.9
Seventh Day Adventist	56	9,686	2.0
Presbyterian	14	9,308	1.9
Jewish	19	9,191	1.9
Steiner	45	7,135	1.5
Assemblies of God	15	5,894	1.2
Pentecostal	18	5,891	1.2
Greek Orthodox	8	4,258	0.9
Brethren	10	3,828	0.8
Montessori	35	3,431	0.7
Other Catholic	7	3,304	0.7
Other Orthodox	6	1,934	0.4
Society of Friends (Quaker)	1	1,188	0.2
Churches of Christ	2	715	0.1
Ananda Marga	3	212	< 0.1
Hare Krishna	1	51	< 0.1
Other religious affiliation	6	1,910	0.4
Other*	83	14,021	2.9

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