

Overview of the sector



Schools in Australia are responding to several major social and political pressures. These include a decline in the number of children being born, an increase in parental and community expectations for choice, breadth and quality of schooling, and a substantial rise in government regulation of schools.

This is impacting on all three school sectors – government, Catholic and independent. Although the pressures are challenging, the independent schools sector is relatively well-placed to meet them, as the following overview of the sector indicates.

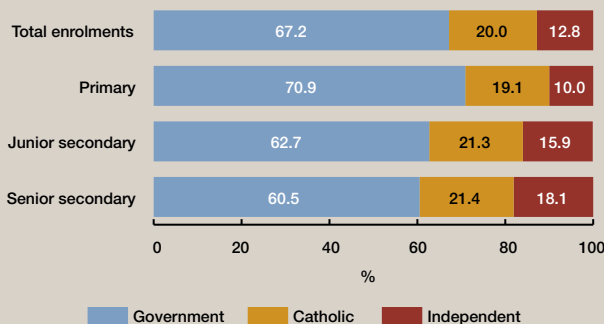
Relative size and growth of the sector

The independent schools sector share of total Australian school enrolments grew from four per cent in 1970 to nearly 13 per cent in 2005. Closer examination of the figures shows that the sector's contribution to senior secondary schooling is now very significant, with more than 18 per cent of all senior students in Australia attending independent schools. Nearly 16 per cent of all junior secondary students and 10 per cent of primary students are also in independent schools.

Government and Catholic sector enrolments in 2005 stood at just over 67 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. Statistics show that the Catholic school enrolment share had risen two percentage points since 1970, while government school enrolments declined steadily over this period by nearly 11 percentage points.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in 2005 there were more than 430,000 students being educated in 996 independent schools across Australia in which more than 41,000 teachers were employed (see **Teachers, page 43**). ABS data do not categorise independent Catholic schools as independent, although these schools are part of the sector. When included, there is a total of 1,069 schools and nearly 480,000 students.

School enrolments by sector and level, 2005



Enrolment trends

Australia's declining birth-rate has started to affect enrolments in all schools, and will mean that the total school population in Australia will start to drop from 2008, and that growth rates in the independent schools sector are expected to continue to slow down (see **Enrolment trends in our schools: past and future, page 63**). Independent schools, however, are expected to cope with the decrease in student numbers relatively well, and by 2010 the sector's share of total school enrolments is projected to increase to 16.6 per cent (including independent Catholic schools).

Affiliations and community links

Independent schools are usually established and developed through community groups to meet particular local schooling needs – most often these groups have a religious affiliation (see **Affiliations of independent schools, page 65**). The schools service communities in diverse locations



throughout Australia – 69 per cent are in metropolitan areas, 28 per cent are in provincial environments, and three per cent are in remote locations (see **Students from rural and remote areas, page 50**). Students in the sector as a whole, come from all socio-economic backgrounds. This mix of factors leads to a great diversity of character amongst independent schools. At the same time, most share a common characteristic of constructive engagement with the wider community which is often demonstrated through student participation in community service and social justice programmes (see **Independent schools and the common good, page 18**).

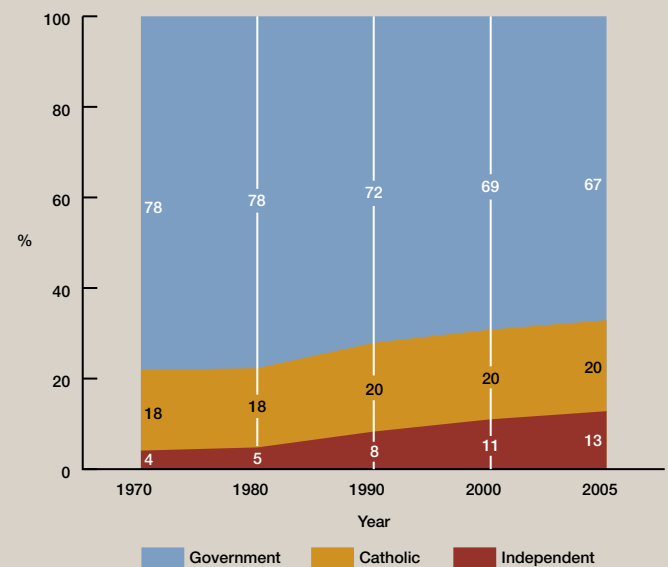
Types of schools

The sector includes day schools, boarding schools (see **Future directions for boarding schools, page 52**), coeducational schools and single-gender schools.

By their very nature independent schools make categorising difficult and there are some independent schools that do not fit any of the descriptions below. However, most schools in the sector can be categorised as follows:

- schools affiliated with the larger and smaller Christian denominations, such as Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and independent Catholic schools
- nondenominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- grammar schools incorporated under state Acts of Parliament, for example in Queensland and New South Wales
- community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- special schools.

Enrolment change by sector, 1970-2005



Diversity of school size

There is a great range of sizes of school in the sector, with the average size about 450 students. This compares with an average of 325 students at government schools. At one extreme, the sector contains some of Australia's largest schools – 11 independent schools have more than 2,000 students – while at the other extreme, 17 per cent have less than 50 students. Forty-four per cent have enrolments of less than 200 students, and 41 per cent have between 200-1,000 students.

A range of education for boys and girls

Coeducational schooling is most common in the sector, with 74 per cent of students in the sector attending coeducational schools in 2005. Single-gender schools, however, remain a feature of the sector, with 12 per cent of boys in boys-only schools and 15 per cent of girls in girls-only schools. Single gender schools are a source of expertise for all schools on gender-specific learning styles (see **Boys' education, page 55**).



Another feature of independent schools is the common provision of primary and secondary schooling, with 58 per cent of all independent schools offering both levels of education.

Overall, 55 per cent of enrolments in independent schools are secondary students and 45 per cent are primary students. A number of independent schools, however, offer middle school programmes that provide schooling to meet the specific developmental needs of early adolescence (see **Middle schooling, page 56**).

Governance

The autonomous governance arrangements of independent schools is the single most important factor that underpins the sector's diversity, and greatly enhances the range of schooling choice for Australian families (see **The importance of independence, page 8, and The essential elements of autonomy, page 11**).

Most independent schools are set up and governed on an individual school basis. Some schools with common aims and educational philosophies, however, are governed and administered as systems (see **Independent school systems, page 9**).

Accountabilities of schools

Independent schools have a greater range of accountabilities than any other type of school in Australia due to the complex mix of their responsibilities to stakeholders, governments, authorities, and their legal obligations as incorporated bodies (see **Accountabilities of independent schools, page 14**).

Currently, independent schools are concerned about the effect of greatly increased government regulation and reporting that is now required as a condition of public funding.

Parents

Parents have become increasingly aware of the range of schooling choices available in Australia, and the importance of matching the school with the individual needs of the child and the values of the family. Increased disposable income has also enabled more families to take on the financial commitment of an independent school education.

Australian schools, particularly those in the independent schools sector, are providing a wide range of educational programmes and settings from which parents are very carefully making school choices for their children (see **Diverse choices by parents across Australia, page 20**).

Funding

Overall, the independent schools sector depends mainly on parents to fund schools, with 60 per cent of its income coming from private sources. This willingness and commitment to pay school fees saves governments an estimated \$2.2 billion per annum in schooling costs (see **Private sources of funding, page 27**).

Through fees and donations, parents and donors also provide 90 per cent of capital funding for independent school buildings, grounds and equipment (see **Capital resources, page 38**).

In total, the Australian Government and state and territory governments provide 40 per cent of the funding for independent schools, although this amount varies greatly from school to school. The Australian Government is





the major provider of public funding to independent schools, and currently has funding arrangements in place for all schools for the period 2005-08 (see **Government funding of independent schools, page 32**).

The independent schools sector continues to press for a reasonable basic level of public funding for every school student in Australia, irrespective of the school attended (see **Funding principles for our students, page 25**).

Students with special needs

Students with special needs in independent schools do not receive the same level of additional funding to meet their individual learning needs as their counterparts in government schools. This lack of equity is of considerable concern to the independent schools sector (see **Students with special needs, page 48**).

However, the May 2006 Budget commitment made by the Australian Government to explore alternative arrangements has been welcomed by the sector.

Overseas students

The independent schools sector has considerable involvement in the international education industry, educating more than 9,600 overseas students in Australia in 2005. But high costs for Australian schooling and competitive pressures overseas are causing a decline in the number of overseas students in independent schools (see **Overseas students, page 61**).

Enrolments in independent schools, 2005

	Male	Female	Total
Primary	97,525	96,086	193,611
Secondary	117,788	118,693	236,481
Total	215,313	214,779	430,092

