

# Independent schools and the common good



Independent schools promote values that contribute to the national interest and build social capital.

In comparison with other parents around the world, most Australians have considerable freedom to choose an education for their children that they believe best suits their individual needs and supports the values taught at home. At the same time, all Australian schools and school systems must commit to the National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-first Century, which provide an overarching framework for schooling to ensure education of young Australians is in the national interest. It is a framework that allows individual needs and aspirations to be recognised and accommodated within wider societal purposes.

Independent schools must also satisfy stringent government registration and accountability regulations to ensure they meet all community standards and public goals for education (**see Accountabilities of independent schools, page 14**). As part of their funding arrangements with the Australian Government all independent schools have agreed to participate in the National Assessment Programme, which includes assessment of Civics and Citizenship for students in Years 6 and 10, to demonstrate their commitment to the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools by displaying the *Values for Australian Schooling* poster and to fly the Australian flag.

The National Framework for Values Education encompasses the values of care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; understanding, tolerance and inclusion.

In independent schools values education is an important part of school life and culture, and most often is linked to the religious affiliation of the school. Research on school choice shows that values are important factors in the continued growth of the independent schools sector in Australia. Families are attracted to the strong communities and supportive environments they find in independent schools (**see Diverse school choices by parents across Australia, page 20**).

In independent schools civic and religious values are specifically encouraged and developed in students through social justice and community service programmes. These include fundraising to meet community, national and international need; volunteering in community services such as soup kitchens and opportunity shops, and in earth stewardship projects such as environmental clean ups and heritage protection; helping out at camps for young people with disabilities; assisting with aged and frail people; participation in school inter-faith projects; and linking with community organisations such as Amnesty International.

Research suggests that independent schools are successful in building community and encouraging students to engage with the wider community. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) studies show high levels of commitment to volunteering and school engagement by independent school students. Links between high school engagement and civic engagement later in life have been made by research in the United States of America.

As strong, compassionate communities that engage with society through local, national and international networks of service, independent schools make a significant contribution to Australia's social capital. They also contribute through the development of publicly-spirited individuals who continue to volunteer and positively engage in society in their adult life.



**For further information:**

Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) submission to the Australian Multicultural Foundation study on Religion, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Australia, April 2002 at: [www.isca.edu.au](http://www.isca.edu.au) (Click through About ISCA/ISCA Submissions)

ISCA article 'Religious Schools and Australian Democracy', published in *Independence*, Vol 28, No 2, November 2003, at: [www.isca.edu.au](http://www.isca.edu.au) (Click through Media and Communications/Opinion pieces and articles)

National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools:  
[www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/)

Association of Independent Schools of South Australia publication, *Social Capital and Independent Schools*, at:  
[www.ais.sa.edu.au/resources/Social%20Capital%20and%20Independent%20Schools.pdf](http://www.ais.sa.edu.au/resources/Social%20Capital%20and%20Independent%20Schools.pdf)

Productivity Commission research paper, 'Social Capital: Reviewing the Concept and its Policy Implications', July 2003, at:  
[www.pc.gov.au/research/commres/socialcapital/index.html](http://www.pc.gov.au/research/commres/socialcapital/index.html)

Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) Research Report No. 32, 'Active Citizenship and the Secondary School Experience: Community Participation Rates of Australian Youth', July 2003, Kevin Brown, Carla Lipsig-Mumme and Grazyna Zajdow; and LSAY Report No 27, 'Student Engagement with School: Individual and School Level Influences', July 2002, Sue Fullarton, are available in PDF format from the ACER website at: [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)

Association of Independent Schools of Victoria project, Making Active Connections at:  
[www.ais.vic.edu.au/independent/community/connections.htm](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au/independent/community/connections.htm)

