

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 and community development informs the philosophies of many schools and the classroom practices of many teachers across all school sectors in Australia.

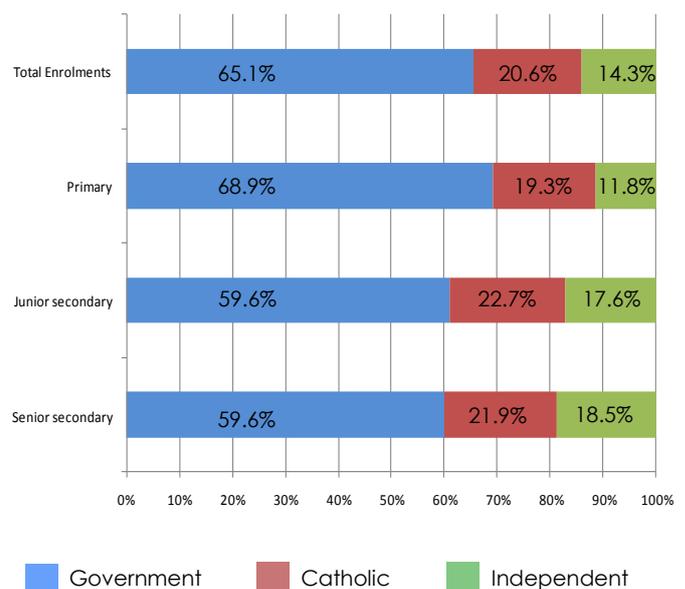
Australian parents also strongly believe that education is important to the development of their children. They expect schools to encourage their children's talents to flourish, and to help their children acquire the skills and attitudes that will equip them for a happy and prosperous future.

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 2013



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 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 2013

Affiliation	Schools	Student FTE	%
Anglican	152	143,163	25.3%
Non-Denominational	192	74,212	13.1%
Christian Schools	132	60,030	10.6%
Uniting Church in Australia	45	50,098	8.8%
Catholic	54	42,628	7.5%
Lutheran	87	39,346	6.9%
Islamic	37	25,844	4.6%
Baptist	43	20,175	3.6%
Inter-Denominational	23	17,887	3.2%
Seventh Day Adventist	47	11,910	2.1%
Presbyterian	14	10,245	1.8%
Jewish	19	8,837	1.6%
Steiner School	45	7,951	1.4%
Pentecostal	17	7,891	1.4%
Assemblies of God	10	6,014	1.1%
Brethren	8	4,527	0.8%
Montessori School	36	4,443	0.8%
Greek Orthodox	8	3,831	0.7%
Other Catholic	7	3,488	0.6%
Other Orthodox	5	1,925	0.3%
Other Religious Affiliation*	13	5,557	1.0%
Other**	82	16,464	2.9%

* 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 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.

Along with other Australian schools, independent schools must participate in the *National Assessment Program*, implement the Australian Curriculum, ascribe to national values, publicly report school and student performance data and fully participate in national education initiatives such as the *MySchool* website and the outcomes and targets set out in the National Education Agreement.

Independent schools are publicly accountable for all their operations. They must meet state or territory registration and curriculum requirements, 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 \$4.6 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, is stable and predictable, and indexed annually to keep pace with the costs of schooling.