

Media Release

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Independent and Catholic schools both serve predominantly middle-income families

The non-government sector's Independent and Catholic schools are becoming demographically more similar in the type of communities they serve, according to analysis of 2016 census data undertaken by the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA).

ISCA Executive Director Colette Colman today said that, "The release of the results of the 2016 Census of Population and Housing has brought significant new data to help understand ongoing demographic trends and changes in the ever-evolving makeup of Australia's education sectors."

ISCA's analysis of the Census data looks at trends across all school sectors in areas including family income, enrolment share and growth, dependent children and religious affiliation.

The Census results show an increasing similarity in income between Independent and Catholic school families, with a continuation in the trend of strong Independent sector growth for medium-income families (\$52,000 to \$155,999). The 2016 results show that both sectors are now predominantly made up of middle income families.

Ms Colman said that, "The perception that all Independent schools are high-SES schools serving only high SES families is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Independent sector. For the last thirty years most of the growth in the Independent sector has been in low to middle-fee schools. Catholic systemic and Independent schools and school communities have more similarities than differences and over time have moved to serve substantially similar populations."

The proportion of low-income families (below \$52,000) in both the Independent and Catholic sectors is identical at 13 per cent. Government schools show a distinctly different pattern, with 26 per cent of their students from low-income families.

Enrolments in the Independent, Catholic and government sectors have all grown since 2011. The Independent sector has been growing the fastest at 10 per cent, the Catholic sector at 8 per cent and government schools at 9 per cent.

Ms Colman said that, "Despite reports of a shift to government schools in recent years, the 2016 Census shows that since 2011 the Independent sector enrolment share has remained unchanged at 15.2 per cent."

Catholic schools have experienced a slight decline from 21.6 per cent to 21.3 per cent, while government schools have increased from 63.3 per cent to 63.5 per cent.

Census results show that the average number of dependent children in an Australian family has remained relatively stable at 2.42 from 2011 to 2016.

Independent schools remain unchanged at an average of 2.40 children, while Catholic schools have had a slight decline in family size, dropping from 2.42 to 2.39 children. Government schools have the largest families with an average of 2.43 children.

When it comes to the religious affiliation of students across the three sectors, probably the most notable trend is the continued growth of the *No Religion* category.

Since the previous Census, students with no religion have increased from 30 per cent to 37 per cent.

Ms Colman said that, "It would be fair to say that all three school sectors are, on average, becoming increasingly non-religious."

In Independent schools the *No Religion* category grew from 24 per cent in 2011 to 31 per cent in 2016. In Catholic schools families selecting *No Religion* went from 10 per cent to 14 per cent, and in the Government sector it grew from 38 per cent to 45 per cent.

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