

Choosing a school: A strong online presence vs face-to-face contact



In choosing which type of school to send their children, parents are influenced by a variety of factors, including academic outcomes, religious affiliation, quality teaching, a supportive caring environment, quality leadership and the range of extra-curricular opportunities. However, the research shows that when it comes to choosing a specific school, factors influencing choice appear to become more about how a school informs the surrounding community about its individual characteristics and strengths.

With today's world seemingly dominated by the online realm it would make sense for schools to embrace modern channels such as social media, school websites, MySchool, and NAPLAN to build or maintain community awareness. But it is worth examining just how significant these types of online influences have become. Are they the main game today, or is there still a place for tried and true approaches such as physical community engagement and face-to-face contact?

However, the 2016 research clearly shows that parents with children across all types of schools recorded word of mouth from friends or other parents as the most influential information source (53% Independent, 49% Government, 44% Catholic). This is similar to the 2006 result where the same portion (53%) of Independent School parents indicated the same.

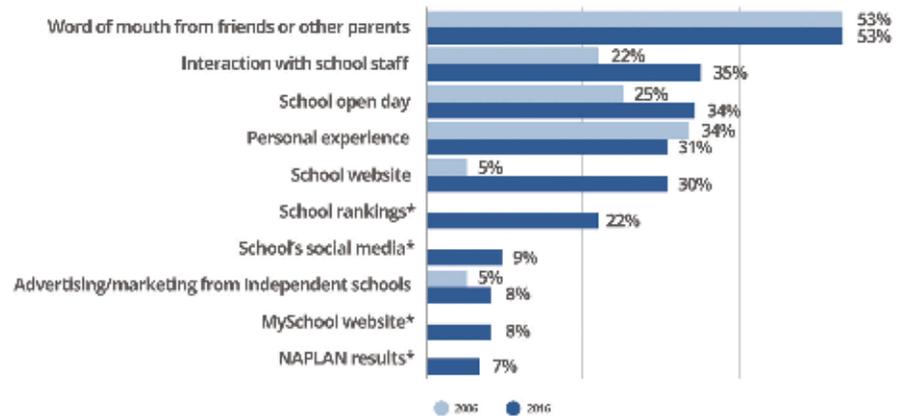
ISCA RECENTLY UNDERTOOK RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT AFFECT SCHOOL CHOICE ACROSS THE INDEPENDENT, CATHOLIC AND GOVERNMENT SCHOOL SECTORS, AND COMPARED THEM TO SIMILAR RESEARCH ISCA UNDERTOOK 10 YEARS EARLIER. THE RESULTS SHOWED LESS CHANGE THAN SOME MIGHT EXPECT.



The next two most prominent influences for Independent school parents were also face-to-face in nature: Interaction with school staff had actually risen in prominence from 22% in 2006 to 35% in 2016; while the school open day had risen in prominence from 24% in 2006 to 34% in 2016.

By comparison, in 2016, a school's website was 30%, a school's social media 9%, the MySchool website 8% and a school's NAPLAN results 7%.

TOP THREE INFLUENCERS OR INFORMATION SOURCES MOST CRITICAL IN CHOOSING A SCHOOL

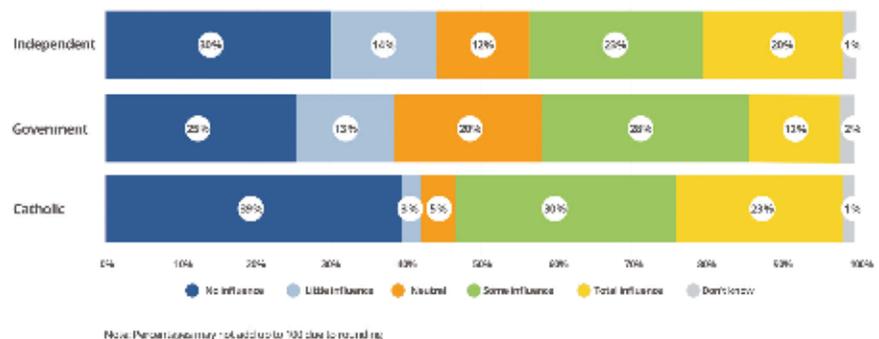


* Question was not asked in 2006

Looking across all three sectors (Independent, Catholic and government), while there is some variation, the picture is largely similar, with face-to-face types of engagement being by far the biggest influence on school choice.

Interestingly, the influence of the child in the choice of their primary school has grown significantly. In 2006, 18% of Independent School parents said the child had at least some influence, by 2016 that figure had risen to 43%. It is a similar case with a child's degree of influence in the choice of secondary, which was 36% in 2006 and has risen to 55% in 2016. Across sectors results were similar, with Catholic school parents the most likely to be influenced by their child in the choice of their primary and secondary school.

INFLUENCE OF CHILD IN CHOICE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding

The research would indicate that times are slowly changing. Online influences will likely continue to grow in significance, as may the increase of the child's influence. But it also clearly shows that it is not yet the time to cancel the open days or cease school visits.