

# LEADING ACHIEVING CONTRIBUTING

## Independent Schools in Queensland

Norm Hunter OAM

October 2008



Independent Schools  
Queensland

choice & diversity



# From the Executive Director

Independent schools make a significant contribution to Queensland's diverse and vibrant schooling system. Unfortunately, this contribution is not always well understood with debates around schooling sometimes clouded by ignorance, misunderstanding and distortion of the facts.

Independent Schools Queensland commissioned distinguished educator, Norm Hunter, to present a national and state perspective on independent schools and their contribution to our education system by providing the key facts and essential information.

*Leading Achieving Contributing – Independent Schools in Queensland* outlines how independent schools contribute enormously to the total educational diversity available to school students and their parents, as well as to the wider community.

By presenting the facts about independent schools we can have a higher standard of debate about education reform and policies, and through this act in the best interests of all Australian children in securing their future and that of the nation.

**Dr John Roulston AM**  
**Executive Director**

## About the Author

Norm Hunter is the principal consultant of Thinkit Through, an educational consultancy which has a particular focus on leadership, strategic thinking, mentoring and writing.

Norm recently retired from the principalship of Hillbrook Anglican School after 21 years, during which he was a founding Co-Principal, then Principal. His work in creating an inclusive school culture with a shared vision, along with his contribution to Queensland and Australia's education community, have been recognised through Fellowships of the Australian College of Educators and the Australian Council of Educational Leaders, the awarding of the 2006 Australian College of Educators' Biennial Queensland Medal, and the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2007.

In 1993 Norm undertook study leave in the USA and Canada, exploring the theme of school culture. He visited schools and academics in both countries, and attended the Summer Institute course for school principals at Harvard University. In 2005 he visited Hong Kong, Denmark, Cambridge and Glasgow, focusing on the concept of schools as communities.

Norm has a Certificate of Teaching from Kelvin Grove Teachers' College, a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Queensland, and a Master of Education (Leadership and Management) from the University of Southern Queensland, for which he was awarded the Dean's Commendation for Outstanding Achievement. He has been widely involved in education committees and other bodies at the state and national levels, including two State Government Ministerial Advisory Committees. In 2001 and 2002 Norm was Queensland President of the Australian College of Educators and he currently chairs the Griffith University Centre for Leadership and Management in Education.

In his spare time Norm enjoys time with his family, reading, sport and music. He is an accomplished pianist and plays in a number of bands, including the Allan Brown Big Band and a '60's rock 'n' roll band.



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*We live in a knowledge economy, a knowledge society. Knowledge societies are stimulated and driven by creativity and ingenuity. Knowledge society schools have to create these qualities; otherwise, their people and their nations will be left behind...*

*The knowledge economy primarily serves the private good. The knowledge society also encompasses the public good. Our schools have to prepare young people for both of them.*

(Andy Hargreaves 2003, p.1)



# Independent Schools in Queensland

## 'Private' or 'Independent'?

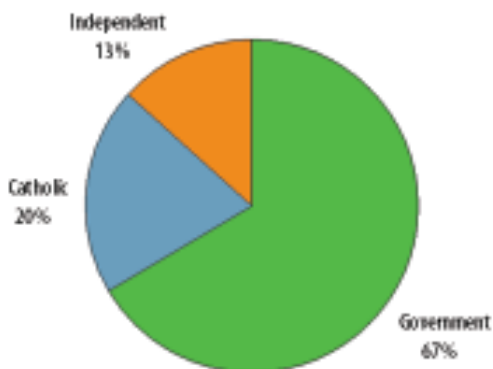
Schools at which parents pay fees are often referred to as 'private' schools as a way of distinguishing them from public or state schools, which do not charge fees. 'Independent' and 'Catholic' are more accurate terms, as the schools in the non-government sector are far from 'private': these schools are accessible to a wide range of families, must comply with an array of Australian and Queensland Government legislation and meet governance, financial and auditing standards, as well as other requirements of corporate and common law. They are not 'private', but they are autonomous in that they are largely self-governing, and take responsibility for their own operations, programs and affairs.

## About Independent Schools Queensland

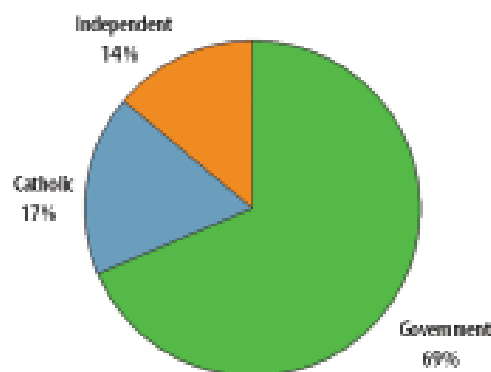
Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body for Queensland's independent school sector. It is not a system or employing authority: independent schools in Queensland are autonomous, either self-governing or members of various systems. ISQ's role is to represent and support its member schools.

In 2008, Independent Schools Queensland's membership comprised 185 schools across the state, operating on 210 sites, serving approximately 103 000 students and their families, and employing approximately 13 000 teaching and support staff: a significant contribution not just to Queensland's education system, but also to the state and national economy.

**Enrolments in Australia by Schooling Sector 2007**



**Enrolments in Queensland by Schooling Sector 2007**



Source: ABS Schools Australia 2007

## The Commitment of Independent Schools Queensland

Along with representing and supporting its member schools, Independent Schools Queensland has consistently made clear that it is strongly committed to Australia's tripartite education system. Strong and thriving state, Catholic and independent schooling sectors are fundamental to what is demonstrably one of the world's most successful education systems, widely admired internationally. It is a unique combination, and independent schools play a unique and important role in it.

## Goals of Schooling

Independent schools are committed to Australia's national goals for education, set out in the Adelaide Declaration of the National Goals of Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which are endorsed by all State and Commonwealth Education Ministers. As well, they subscribe to Queensland's education framework as set down by the Queensland Studies Authority. Within those broad commitments, the independent school sector is a thriving collection of schools, rich in its variety of offerings to Queensland students.



# The Wisdom of Crowds

***Under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them.***

(James Surowiecki 2004, p.xiii)



## 'One size fits all' doesn't fit all

James Surowiecki's ground-breaking and influential 2004 book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, presents a compelling argument against the 'one size fits all' approach to important and complex societal issues. Surowiecki's work is deeply researched, and his major conclusion is that the best solutions to co-operation and co-ordination issues in society are not top-down or centrally imposed.

Rather, he suggests, for complex issues, the best results and the greatest benefits for all members of society occur when three principles - ***diversity, independence*** and ***decentralisation*** - are in place, and are deliberately aggregated in a spirit of co-ordination and collaboration. And so it is with education.



## Diversity, Independence and Decentralisation

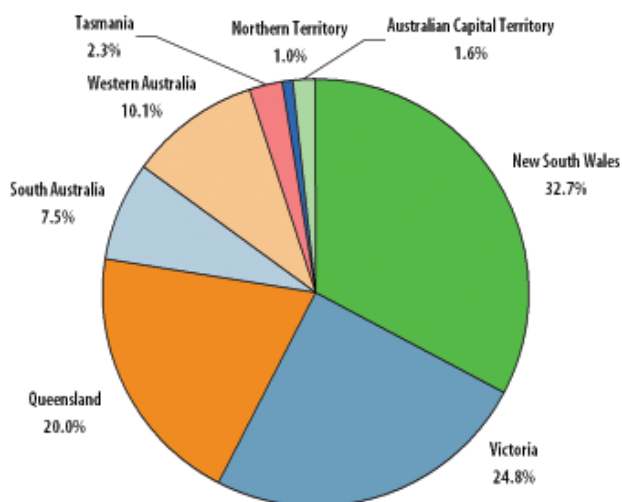
Queensland's independent schools are strongly committed to Surowiecki's three principles - ***diversity, independence*** and ***decentralisation*** - and through this commitment, to quality education for all students in the state, and across the nation.

Not only do the principles of diversity, independence and decentralisation particularly characterise the independent school sector; they are also at the core of Australia's three-part education system, and they mirror the unique nature of Australia itself. And this is especially the case in Queensland.

***Independent schools provide for students of all abilities, from all sections of society, across the state.***

They provide quality education for some of Queensland's most remote and disadvantaged families, including indigenous and regional and remote communities: and diversity, independence and decentralisation are at the core of their ability to do this.

**Australian Population Distribution 2007**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



# Diversity



The world of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is a complex global community of enormous cultural, economic and geographical diversity, much of which is reflected in Australian society. The leadership shown by the independent school sector in recognising this, and having the freedom and responsibility to decide how to cater for it, not only benefits those schools: it also contributes to the strength of Queensland and Australian education, directly or indirectly benefiting all families and their children.

## Uniformity or Diversity?

*“Instead of fostering creativity and ingenuity, more and more school systems have become obsessed with imposing and micromanaging curriculum uniformity. In place of ambitious missions of compassion and*

*community, schools and teachers have been squeezed into the tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets, and league tables of accountability...*

*In many parts of the world, the rightful quest for higher educational standards has degenerated into a compulsive obsession with standardisation...*

*Instead of promoting economic invention and social integration, too many schools are becoming mired in the regulations and routines of soulless standardisation.”*

(Andy Hargreaves 2003, pp.1, 2)

## Independent School Affiliations (Australia)

Affiliation	Number of schools	Percentage of students
Anglican	151	25.4%
Non-Denominational	196	13.7%
Roman Catholic	75	10.4%
Uniting Church in Australia	41	9.1%
Christian Schools	130	9.0%
Lutheran	84	6.4%
Inter-Denominational	23	3.3%
Baptist	43	3.3%
Islamic	30	3.1%
Presbyterian	15	2.1%
Seventh Day Adventist	56	2.0%
Jewish	20	1.7%
Steiner School	43	1.4%
Pentecostal	18	1.3%
Assemblies of God	15	1.3%
Greek Orthodox	8	0.8%
Montessori School	36	0.7%
Brethren	8	0.7%



Source: ISCA



Independent schools could never be accused of ‘soulless standardisation’. Indeed, across Queensland, independent schools offer a rich variety of opportunities for young people:

- Schools that are individually autonomous, and schools that belong to systems;
- Day schools and boarding schools;
- Schools based on the values and beliefs of various religions, and schools that are based on secular values and beliefs;
- Schools based on a particular philosophy of education;
- Schools focusing on the needs of indigenous students;
- Single-sex and co-educational schools;
- Schools devoted to students with disabilities and learning difficulties;
- Schools that are primary only, schools that are secondary only, and schools that range from Prep through to Year 12;
- Schools with different structures, some encompassing junior, middle and senior in the one school;
- Schools with a focus on particular programs, such as competitive sport, the arts, or outdoor recreation;
- Schools with varying fee levels, the majority of which are moderate and low-fee schools;
- Large schools (over 2 000 students) and smaller schools (fewer than 200 students); and
- Neighbourhood schools and regional schools.

### **Benefits to all students**

The diversity that characterises the independent school sector in Queensland doesn’t only benefit its own schools. By helping to meet the wide-ranging and contrasting needs of so many of our young people, and by providing a wide range of choices for families, it also contributes strongly to the overall strength of the state’s education system. Indeed, it is only possible to offer these choices through a partnership of major after-tax financial commitment by parents, together with funding support from the State and Australian Governments.

# Independence

The second of James Surowiecki's three key principles, *independence*, characterises the uniqueness of Queensland's independent school sector: it moves beyond the constraints of a 'one size fits all' standardised approach, not only enabling individual schools to move quickly to address the changes and uncertainties constantly thrown up in today's world, but also to be responsive to local and parental initiatives and concerns.

## **Advantages of Independence**

Independence brings many advantages. While schools that are centrally controlled by large systems or bureaucracies receive certain benefits, they can also be restricted in the ability of their school communities to respond to local issues, to innovate, or to make discretionary judgements. Independent schools have both the autonomy and the accompanying responsibility to address issues through their own school communities. In doing so, independent schools often move beyond the conventional, and into more creative and innovative areas.

A case in point: in 1977, the Queensland Government directed that students in state schools were not to receive sex education by classroom teachers, nor were they permitted to use two new social studies resources – SEMP (Social Education Materials Project) which was devised in Australia, and MACOS (Man, A Course of Study), devised in the United States.

Meanwhile, independent and Catholic schools, working with their own communities, had the autonomy to make their own judgements about whether to offer sex education and whether to draw from the ideas of SEMP and MACOS. Many opted to draw selectively from both these resources, and to continue to offer sex education to their students. The autonomy of the independent school sector meant that not only were school communities able to make their own decisions on these important matters, but also that a sharing of experience and development by those in independent schools occurred, enabling teachers in the state school sector to make up for lost time and benefit from the work done in independent and Catholic schools when the bans were eventually lifted.

Though independent schools are not mandated to use the Queensland Studies Authority syllabuses in Years 8 - 10, most do use them because of their acknowledged high quality. It is the discretion to vary from them or enrich them, and the autonomy to take up or not take up certain State and Commonwealth agendas that provide independent schools with the particular benefits their independence brings.

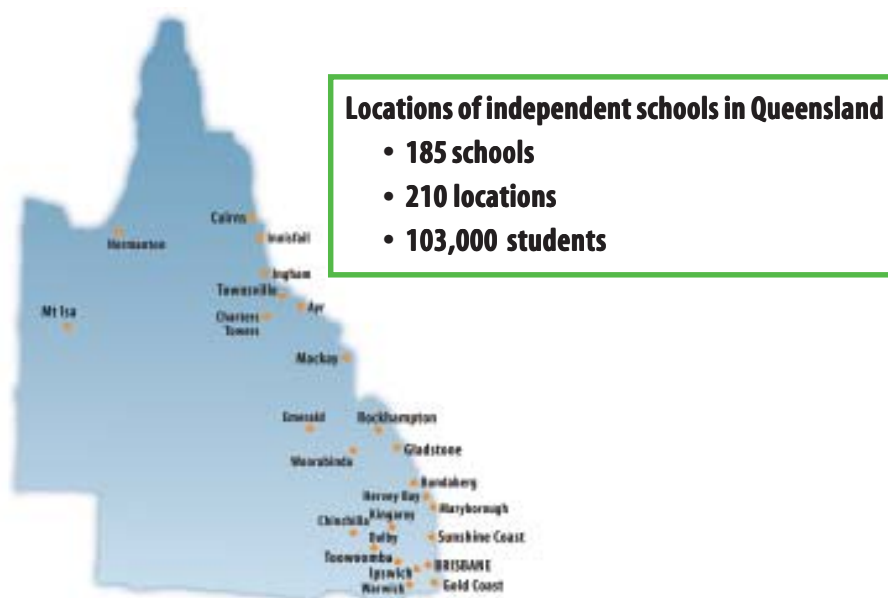
## **Contributing by Collaboration**

Sharing and collaboration are long-held values and practices of independent schools, working collaboratively and constructively with governments and with the state and Catholic school sectors. The particular case above illustrates the value of independence, and how it can ultimately benefit all students in Queensland, not just those in the independent sector. It is also important to acknowledge here that in the spirit of cross-sectoral sharing and collaboration that characterises Queensland education, independent schools benefit from initiatives by the state and Catholic school sectors. This is as it should be, and it enriches the education of every student in the state.



# Decentralisation

The third principle of Surowiecki's trio, **decentralisation**, is particularly relevant to Queensland. Australia is one of the world's most decentralised countries, and Queensland is perhaps the most decentralised state. Despite the information and communication technology revolution, distance remains a challenge in Queensland, particularly for the education of young people in rural and remote communities. Hence the importance of this third principle.



## Meeting a Diversity of Needs

Regional communities have much local knowledge and understanding, and they need the flexibility to address the issues that they face in their various contexts. They particularly need the discretion to make judgements and decisions that reflect their particular circumstances. Whilst they also need advice and support from outside their communities, a 'one size fits all' top-down system will always struggle to provide the necessary flexibility to address the diversity of needs that these communities face.

## Decentralisation and Independent Schools

Independent schools are located throughout Queensland's regional areas. There are numerous independent boarding schools – single-sex and co-educational – spread through centres such as Charters Towers, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. These schools continue to play an important role in meeting the needs of Queensland's regional communities, and they have done so over many years. Their autonomy has meant that their approaches to issues have been innovative and in some cases cutting edge, such as providing weekly boarding for children where this suits family needs and circumstances, and establishing boarding facilities to cater for international students, bringing the cultural diversity of today's global society into schools in regional Queensland.

Not only does this mean that families in rural or remote areas have a variety of options for their children's schooling; it also takes pressure off the other school sectors in meeting such a wide range of needs. Again, independent schools in regional areas benefit from initiatives by schools in other sectors, and that is the power of James Surowiecki's thesis: it is not all left to government and the public purse to meet these needs, and the sharing of ideas - and at times, resources and facilities - benefits students in all sectors. This brings a richness of opportunity to Queensland's young people that only a system that values and nurtures diversity, independence and decentralisation can deliver.



# Independent Schools Nurture and Develop Leadership

It is well established in the research literature that given the complex and uncertain nature of today's world, new and different approaches to leadership are needed. There is good reason to believe that the combined power of diversity, independence and decentralisation is the most effective way to nurture and develop this.

Queensland's unique and forward-looking system of externally moderated school-based assessment combines these three principles to place Queensland's secondary school system at the forefront of the country. It is internationally admired for the ways it has enriched the opportunities for students, and the professionalism of teachers. For many years now, independent schools have played important leadership roles in this.

## Staff Leadership

Teachers and school leaders in the independent school sector not only play major leadership roles in their own schools, but also in Queensland education in general. They are highly represented on committees and other decision-making bodies in Queensland education such as the state's curriculum body, the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA). The QSA, and before it the Board of Secondary School Studies, are fine examples of tapping the power of diversity, independence and decentralisation as they have undertaken their responsibilities for syllabus development, accreditation and certification of Queensland students.

Furthermore, a significant number of independent school principals and teachers are members of high-level decision-making committees, such as the Queensland College of Teachers, that are an integral part of Queensland's education infrastructure. Indeed, the contribution to Queensland's education system goes well beyond such bodies: independent school teachers and school leaders are consistently highly represented in membership and leadership positions on state and national professional associations such as the Australian Council of Educational Leaders, the Australian College of Educators, and state and national subject associations such as the History Teachers' Association and the Mathematics Teachers' Association.

## Student Leadership

Leadership in independent schools is not focused only on the adults in the school. The dynamic combination of diversity, independence and decentralisation enables Queensland's independent schools to have the flexibility to be at the forefront of preparing our young people to take up the challenges for leadership that today's world presents, and to spread the benefits of this well beyond their schools, into the wider community.



Many of the leaders in Queensland's strong social, political, economic, cultural and sporting organisations were educated in independent schools. That is not surprising, as the opportunities for leadership in independent schools are wide-ranging.

The diversity of Queensland, the vast distances and the great variety in school environments and the autonomy and responsibility that independent schools have in working with their communities to shape their own destinies, have combined to bring forth a myriad of approaches to leadership: from leadership by a few to leadership by all; leadership in sports teams and in cultural activities; leadership in the social life of the school, in the academic life of the school, and in the school's support services. Furthermore, in many independent schools elected Student Representative Councils are expected to play an important role in decision-making, often at a high level in the life of the school.



These young people are experiencing the same kinds of expectations they will face when they take their place in society and the workplace, and experience suggests that when they make their transition into the workplace and the wider community they will move easily into the kinds of leadership that today's world requires.

### **Parent Leadership in Independent Schools**

The autonomy of independent schools and the major responsibility that goes with it leads to high levels of parental involvement, ranging from membership of school boards through to parents' associations and assisting with school functions and activities. This involvement and commitment result in leadership bubbling up in unexpected ways, formal and informal. Parents of students in independent schools often state that their children's school is their main community, and that the opportunities for parents to lead and contribute to the life of the school are very rewarding for them.

As the other school sectors move to devolving more responsibility to the school level, the sharing of experience and wisdom gained by school leaders, teachers, students and parents in independent schools about school leadership, management and accountability will be invaluable to all school communities in Queensland, whatever sector they are part of. Indeed, their contribution to date has already been significant and influential.

# Independent Schools Contribute to Society

## Open and Explicit Values

On examining the recent education policies of governments in the western world, Professor Hedley Beare of the University of Melbourne stated:

***If we judge from school policies internationally, societies appeared to prefer their graduating students to be hard-nosed, earnest and intellectual rather than moral.***

***...Among these policies there was not much enthusiasm for sentiment, human kindness, understanding religious differences, respecting the word of every person, caring for the globe, or being a responsible global citizen.***

(Hedley Beare 2001, p.5)

A distinguishing feature of independent schools is their openness about the values they offer to their students and their school communities. Whether these values are based on religious teachings, or on philosophical bases such as Montessori or Steiner schools, they are explicit, and in their own way they invariably place importance on caring for others, and on participating in and contributing to society. There are many examples of this:

## Community Service

Community service is enshrined in the curriculum of many independent schools, meaning that every student in the school commits to some form of service to the needy or disadvantaged in society. Such activities range through working with elderly people, mentoring younger at-risk students, working for a charity such as the Smith Family or Guide Dogs for the Blind, working with homeless people, and a myriad of other activities. Some independent schools use their international links to sponsor students and even whole schools in developing countries.

When a school places service to the community in its curriculum alongside academic, cultural and recreational activities, students come to see it as a natural part of their lives, and are very likely to carry this forward when they have left school. Further, when students experience the uplifting feeling that comes when they realise they have made a genuine difference in someone else's life, deep and lasting learning occurs, and it is learning that flows on into society, generating a multiplier effect of significant proportion.

**“I’ve learnt that by helping others you are helping yourself too. I completed my required time for the school’s Community Action program, but I still keep on going along and helping out at the Centre... There are so many people who don’t have all the advantages some of us have, and a little help goes a long way. Also it was a great experience, and a great feeling to be able to help out.”**

(Year 11 Student)

### **Engaging with the Community**

Many independent schools invite the wider community to make use of their facilities. These include playing fields, auditoriums, accommodation in boarding facilities for visiting sporting teams or overseas student visitors, theatres, chapels, laboratories, art, drama and music facilities, libraries, and catering facilities. They are often provided at a fee to cover costs only, and at times the schools themselves absorb the costs and offer free use to members of the community.

Furthermore, many schools with religious affiliations serve as spiritual centres to their local communities, with the school chapel providing the venue and focus for worship services, at no cost to the community.

A number of independent schools also make their human resources available to offer the spirit of community to people from outside the school, as well as to those from their own school communities.

One such example is a Brisbane independent school which has established an adult choir which draws from the wider community and has grown to over 80 members, with the conductor and accompanist provided by the school at no cost to the members of the choir. Another school provides a parent outdoor education program where parents can experience identical wilderness expeditions to those their children take part in.



These are typical of the community outreach work that independent schools engage in, and their contribution to society, especially to the development of communities, is important and even necessary as western societies continue to struggle to retain the spirit of community that is so important in people's lives.

### **Teachers-in-training**

Independent schools also have a commitment to working with universities to provide large numbers of places for students studying to be teachers. In offering these students guidance in teaching practice and experience in the wider lives of schools, independent schools make an important contribution to the future of Queensland education.

## Overseas Students

More than 2000 overseas students attend Queensland independent schools, constituting a multi-million dollar contribution to Australia's export income.

Independent schools have been at the forefront of inviting international students to study in Australia, providing both residential accommodation and home-stay arrangements. International students attract no government funding to the schools, so they come at no cost to governments and taxpayers. Rather, the enrolment of overseas students in independent schools enriches all students' cultural understanding: a public benefit for all in the age of the global community.



## Financial Contribution to Australia's Education System

Parents who choose to send their children to an independent school make an important after-tax financial contribution to Australia's state and national education budgets, often at significant sacrifice to themselves. By paying State and Commonwealth taxes, then in addition paying school fees, parents of students in independent schools save Australian taxpayers an estimated \$2.6 billion per annum: a financial commitment that would have had to be met by taxpayers if independent schools did not exist (ISCA *Snapshot 2008*). Not included in this figure is the fact that parents and their schools in the independent sector contribute 82% of their schools' capital works costs – buildings, grounds, facilities, etc. – with only 18% coming from government assistance. With capital works included, the saving to taxpayers is nearer \$3 billion per annum.

This is an after-tax contribution parents make in order to exercise their choice of schooling for their children, but through its very significant combined savings to State and Australian Governments, and therefore to Australian taxpayers, it is also a major contribution to the nation's education budget, to the greater good of all Queensland and Australian students and their families. It is important that this be widely understood and acknowledged, as it is so often submerged in the destructive 'public versus private' arguments that particularly arise during state and commonwealth elections.

# Independent Schools are Responsible and Accountable

## Responsibility

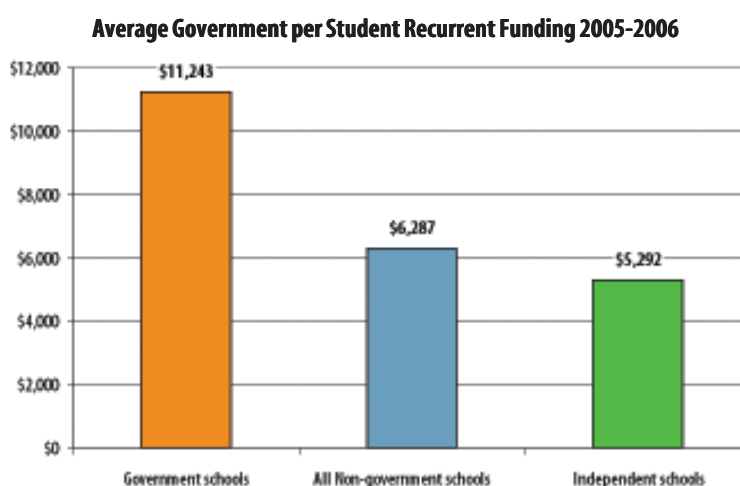
While it is widely known that independent schools receive Australian and State Government funding, it is not always recognised that independent schools are also responsible and highly accountable, both to governments and to their own school communities.

## School Funding

Funding support by governments for non-government schools is common practice in a number of countries. A particular example is Finland, where public and independent schools alike are fully funded by government. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Finnish students top the world's two most recognised international testing programs: PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and that Australian students are also in the highest achieving group. Another example is Charter Schools in the USA, which are funded similarly to non-government schools in Australia, with the schools having a good deal of autonomy. So it is not unusual for schools in the non-government sector to receive funding assistance from government. The more difficult issue is how much funding, and how it is administered.

## State Schools Receive the Bulk of Government Funding

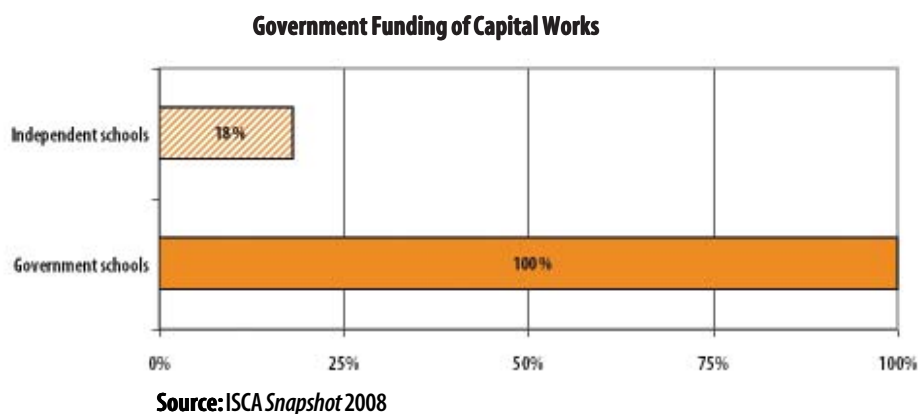
***State school students receive significantly more combined State and Australian Government funding than do students in independent and Catholic schools.*** The average combined State and Australian Government funding per state school student in Australia in 2005-2006 (latest available figures) was \$11,243. This represented the approximate average cost of educating a student in an Australian school for that year (though not the full cost). For independent school students, the average amount of combined government funding per student was \$5,292 (I.S.C.A. *Snapshot 2008*), leaving the balance - \$5,951 per student - to be made up by parents and their school communities; and this figure does not include the cost of capital works such as buildings, grounds and other facilities.



**Source: Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2006**

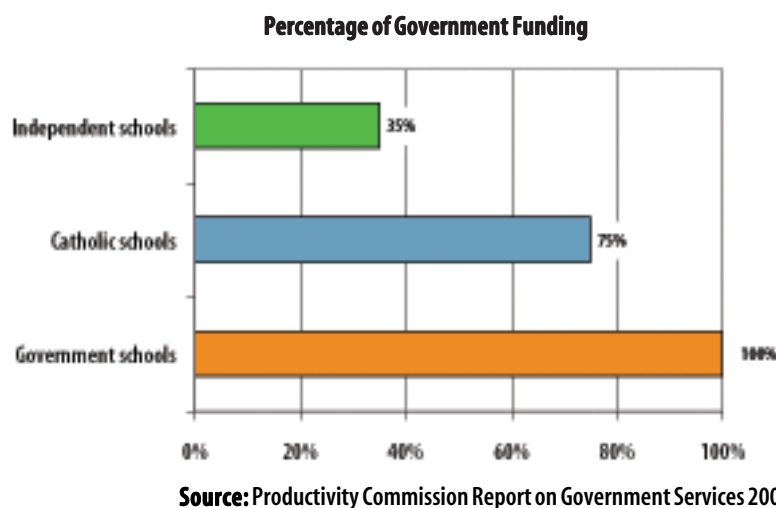
Whilst independent schools receive valuable Australian and State Government funding for each student (see graph above), the amount is less than half of what the state school sector receives for each student from government. In addition to this, 82% of capital works funding for independent schools – buildings,

facilities, and other infrastructure – is paid for by the schools and their communities, with on average only 18% coming from governments; for state schools, capital works are fully funded by government (ISCA *Snapshot* 2008).



Furthermore, nearly 10,000 students with disabilities and learning difficulties attend independent schools. Students with disabilities in independent schools are eligible for significantly less public support for their special education needs than if they were educated in a government school. The funding differential is greater for students with high-level support needs who may require full-time assistance. The gap in funding for these students can be over \$40,000 per student per year. Again, this funding differential is met by parents and their schools.

***Overall, in Australia the state school sector receives 100% of its funding from government, the Catholic sector receives 75% of its funding from government, and the independent school sector receives 35% from government*** (Prasser 2008, p.27).



Independent schools acknowledge and appreciate the funding support they receive from the Australian and State Governments. At the same time, it is important to place it in context, and recognise the major after-tax financial responsibility taken up by independent school parents in order to exercise their right of choice. In so doing, they are not only exercising choice; they are also making a significant direct financial contribution to the nation’s education budget: a benefit to all Australian school students and their families. It is a major contribution which should be recognised and acknowledged by all stakeholders in Australia’s education system.

# Accountability

Though independent schools have a good deal of autonomy, they are at the same time subject to high levels of accountability.

## **Accountability through Commonwealth and State Legislation**

Independent schools must meet the requirements of Queensland and Australian legislation such as the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act, the Education (General Provisions) Act, and other legislation specifically requiring accountability. Schools must account for any government funding received, as well as submitting annual financial statements to both Australian and State Governments. Independent schools are further required to provide extensive information to the Australian and State Governments which includes an annual census of students, test results, child protection policies, attendance data and other information.

## **Accountability through Corporate Law**

In addition to their accountability to government, independent schools are subject to corporate law. Many Queensland independent schools are companies limited by guarantee, and as such are accountable to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, submitting audited annual financial statements, providing annual reports and other information, all transparent and available for public scrutiny.

## **Accountability through Common Law**

Independent schools are further subject to common law, which particularly applies to the school's duty of care to its students.

These are wide-reaching accountability requirements, and while the independent school sector acknowledges the need for accountability measures, there are significant costs associated with meeting them. While the Australian and State Governments require these measures, they do not offer any specific financial assistance in the cost of meeting them. The costs and associated administrative functions are borne by individual schools and their communities: a further example of the significant responsibilities accepted by the independent school sector. In his book *Schools Must Speak for Themselves*, Professor John MacBeath of Cambridge University states:

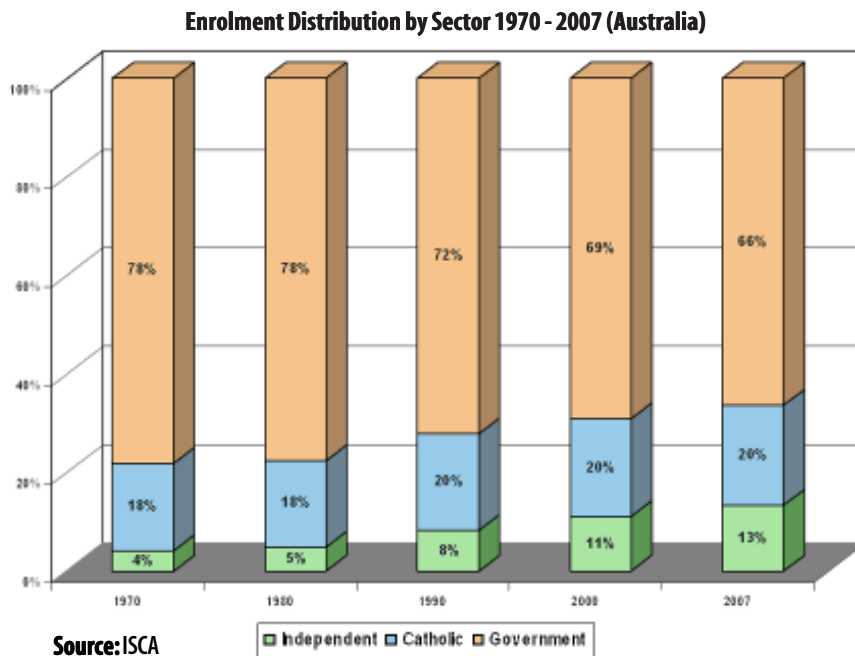
***It is an index of a nation's educational health when its school communities have a high level of intelligence and know how to use the tools of self-evaluation and self-improvement. In healthy systems there is sharing and networking of good practice within and among schools on a collegial basis. It is an unhealthy system which relies on the constant routine attentions of an external body to police its schools.***

(John MacBeath 1997, p.1)

Independent Schools Queensland endorses MacBeath's view on school accountability. Queensland's Non-State Schools Accreditation Board is responsible for accountability measures that are specific to its legislated criteria: in particular, a comprehensive five-year cyclical review. The independent school sector accepts that this is appropriate, complementing the already-mentioned high levels of accountability required of independent schools. There are now strong accountability measures in place, and any further accountability requirements would not only be superfluous and wasteful, they would also place unreasonable administrative burdens on schools and result in duplication – with related extra costs to schools and taxpayers – as well as over-regulation of a sector that is able to contribute significantly to Queensland and Australian education largely because of its diverse, independent, and decentralised nature.

## Accountability to Students and Parents

The accountability measures listed above are significant, but perhaps the most powerful accountability facing independent schools is to their own communities. Since 1970 there has been a trend of increasing enrolments in the independent school sector across Australia, and especially in Queensland. Given the investment this requires of families, independent schools must be meeting a significant need in the eyes of the parents. This is borne out in the graph below, showing trends in the growth of the three schooling sectors in Australia over the last 38 years.



Parents make a significant investment, both financially and through other parental input, to send their children to an independent school, and they have every right to expect to have a voice in the way their school nurtures and develops their children. It is a characteristic of independent schools that teachers and school leaders have close relationships with their communities, and if a school does not meet expectations, parents can – and do – exercise their power of choice and look elsewhere. This is a very powerful accountability measure, and places major expectations and responsibilities on the school.

In relation to this, it is helpful to examine the state-wide Parent Survey of March 2007 conducted by Independent Schools Queensland, which offers important data on what parents value, and how well they believe these expectations and responsibilities are being met. That survey, titled *What Parents Want* (2007), revealed a clear picture. Of twelve broad criteria, by far the highest rated was ‘Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life’. The next, some distance behind, were ‘School seemed right for student’s individual needs’, and ‘Religious affiliation’. Among a group rated a little further behind was ‘Teaching methods/philosophy’. The survey also indicated that 93% of the parents expressed satisfaction with the independent school their children attended.

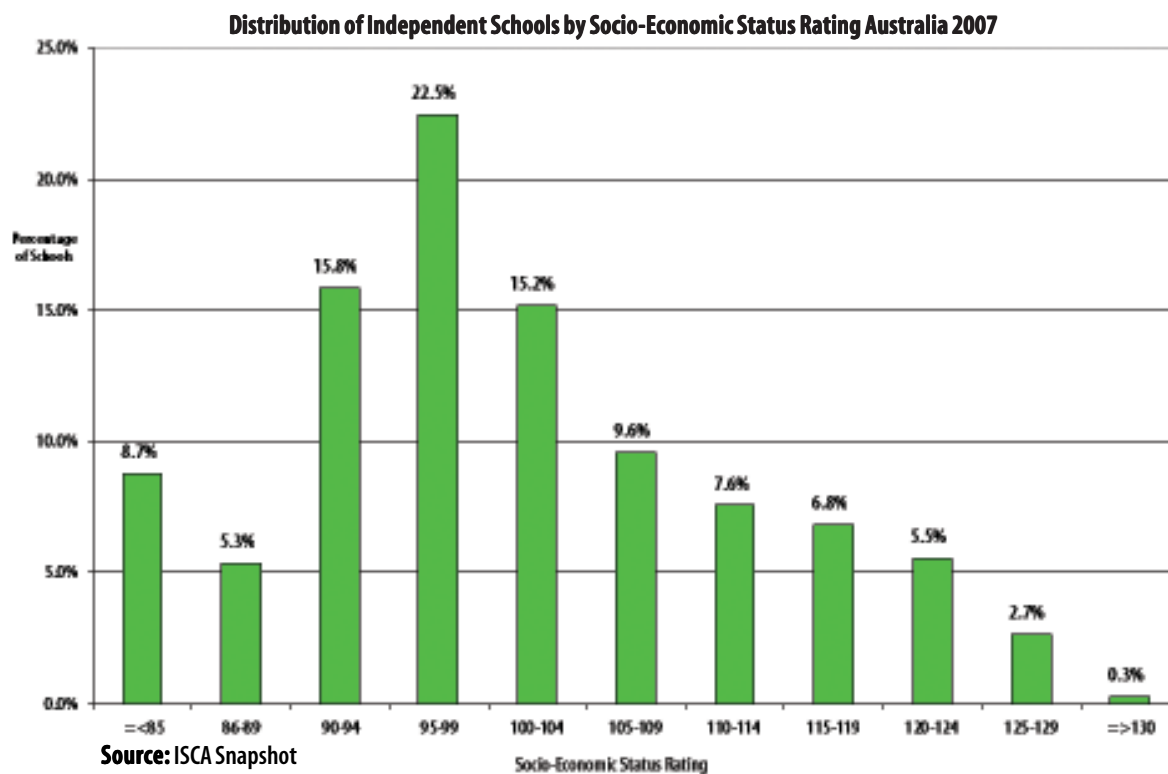
Clearly these criteria rate at the top of parents’ aspirations for their children, and it indicates how well parents believe independent schools are accepting and meeting the responsibility to be accountable to their communities. It must be said that it would be extremely difficult for this to be achieved in a ‘one size fits all’ education system: it can only be achieved through the creativity and flexibility made possible by the combination of diversity, independence and decentralisation. It is a credit to Queensland and Australia’s education system that it is able to provide for such aspirations through the combined commitment of parents, school communities, and Australian and State Governments; and the encouraging results of the PISA and TIMSS international testing suggest that it is a winning formula for the great majority of Australian students.



# Independent Schools are Inclusive

## Where Do Independent School Students Come From?

The perception that independent schools are separate from the real world and divisive of society, or that they are the exclusive province of the wealthy, is simply not true. There were 1025 independent schools in Australia in 2007, and of those approximately 800 (79%) catered for students in the low to middle income bracket as recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Fewer than fifty schools (5%) are in the highest socio-economic bracket, and one in six students in independent schools is from a low-income family (ISCA *Snapshot* 2008).



Further, it is a fact that Queensland independent schools cater for nearly 4,000 students from non-English speaking backgrounds, perhaps indicating a judgement by these communities about how they see the value of independent school education.

## Students with Special Needs

Importantly, and again contrary to general public perception, there are 29 independent schools in Australia that specifically cater for students with disabilities, and all independent schools in Queensland, and Australia, accept the responsibility of catering for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, even though they receive significantly less funding support for their special education needs than if they were educated in a government school. In 2007, there were 9,961 students with disabilities attending independent schools in Australia (ISCA *Snapshot* 2008).

## Indigenous Students

Also, there were nearly 8,000 indigenous students attending independent schools in Australia in 2007, with Queensland having the highest percentage of all states (33%). In 2007 there were 38 independent schools in Australia with indigenous enrolments of over 50%. This is only possible through a commitment to fee assistance by the schools, which is then supported by government subsidies.

### Independent School Sector Diversity (Australia)

Indigenous students	7,446
Independent schools with over 50% indigenous enrolment	38
Students with disabilities	9,961
Special schools	29
Overseas students	9,932
Boarding students	16,926
Boarding schools	147
Schools with less than 200 students	43%
Schools with 200 - 1000 students	42%
Schools with 1000 - 2000 students	14%
Combined schools (primary & secondary)	60%
Single sex schools	12%

Source: ISCA (2008)

### Independent School Enrolments

Independent schools are to a very great degree non-selective. Some offer academic scholarships, but there are no independent schools in Queensland that cater only to a select academic clientele, as, for example, do the recently established state school senior academies in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, or the New South Wales selective state high schools.

Many independent schools that provide scholarships offer a number each year specifically to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, a number of independent schools provide scholarships for boarding places to indigenous students who would otherwise not have the opportunity to attend those schools.



***The picture painted here is of a school sector that is not only highly inclusive; it is also a picture of a sector clearly prepared to accept the responsibility of meeting the needs of a diverse cross-section of Australian society: a major contribution not just to its own students and their families, but to the public good.***



# Independent Schools Provide Choice

***Central to the combination of diversity, independence and decentralisation underpinning Australia's three-part education system, is the principle of choice.*** This principle is internationally recognised in Article 26 (3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states: *Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.* Australia's education system is able to offer this fundamental right to the majority of families, due largely to the historical commitment of the Australian and State Governments to their partnership with the state, independent and Catholic school sectors.

The power of choice, with the widespread benefits it brings to all Australian students, would not be possible without the combination of parents investing in the non-government school sectors, State and Australian Government support, and the creativity and innovation that independent schools have been able to generate over many years.

## **Choice: the Tide that Lifts all Boats**

A recent research paper by Gabriela Schütz and colleagues, published in 2007, examined the results of over 180 000 students from 27 OECD countries, including Australia, in the 2003 international PISA tests. The study concluded that:

***Choice created by government funding for private (sic) schools is associated with a strong reduction in the dependence of student achievement on socio-economic status.***

(Gabriela Schütz et al 2007, p.10)

Further, an often repeated criticism of independent education is that it is inequitable because it is perceived that schools in this sector select the 'cream' of students, increase segregation and disadvantage further those students whose families cannot afford alternatives to public education. The OECD study found the opposite. Schütz and her colleagues summed up their findings thus:

***Rather than harming disadvantaged students, accountability, autonomy and choice appear to be tides that lift all boats.***

(Gabriela Schütz et al 2007, p.34)

Nationally, it has been consistently demonstrated in the PISA and TIMSS tests that Australian students perform in the top bracket of schools in the OECD countries. While it must be acknowledged that the results reveal important shortcomings that need to be addressed, it is a credit to Australia's education system that those strong achievements are spread across students in all three sectors – state, independent and Catholic – and it is in keeping with the research findings above.

This is a powerful affirmation of the partnership of the Australian and State Governments with the state, independent and Catholic school sectors. It also mirrors the conclusion reached by James Surowiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds*: ***the combined power of diversity, independence and decentralisation brings the best solutions for the majority, not just the few.***



# Independent School Students are Achievers

On most recognised benchmarks of achievement, students in Queensland independent schools perform particularly well.

At the state level, in April each year *The Courier-Mail* publishes the Year 12 statistics for the previous Queensland school year, as released by the Queensland Studies Authority. A student who receives an Overall Position between 1 and 15 is generally acknowledged as being eligible for a variety of university courses, so this becomes the unofficial benchmark for schools. On the release of the 2007 statistics, the Executive Director of Independent Schools Queensland, Dr John Roulston, stated in a media release:



***The release of the Queensland Studies Authority's Student and School Achievement Data has highlighted the tremendous diversity of schooling options across Queensland.***

***I was particularly pleased to see that of the seven schools recording outcomes where 90% or more of their eligible students achieved an OP of 1 through 15, four were independent schools.***

(ISQ Media Release April 2008)

Students from independent schools consistently figure strongly in the OP 1 to 15 bracket, and have done so since these statistics have been published. State and Catholic school students are also well represented in the OP 1 to 15 bracket, though proportionately not as strongly as those from the independent sector. Further, many students across all three sectors achieve vocational accreditation, giving them credit toward a trade qualification or future university courses.

All this suggests that strong student achievement is occurring across diverse backgrounds and environments, not only in the independent school sector, but also in the state and Catholic sectors. This is something all Queenslanders can be proud of, and which has an important flow-on benefit for Queensland and Australia as these young people move on to take their place in society and contribute to the strength of Australian society and the national economy.



# Independent Schools are Places of Stability and Continuity

## The Power of Community

Due to their autonomy, independent schools are responsible for the appointment of staff, and for the recruitment and appointment of members of their school councils and boards. As Peter Block points out, ownership brings with it a spirit of community, which includes a commitment to accountability:

***To belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community. What I consider mine I will build and nurture. The work, then, is to seek in our communities a wider and deeper sense of emotional ownership; it means fostering among all of a community's citizens a sense of ownership and accountability.***

(Peter Block 2008, p.xii)

Staff and board members join independent school communities because they choose to, and this generates a strong commitment to the school's culture, and to the personal and social development of its students. In particular, school boards, teachers and parents have the opportunity to develop and nurture long-term goals with the confidence that there will very likely be future stability and continuity in the staffing of the school, including the leadership, with the accompanying likelihood that these goals will be seen through to fruition. Equally importantly, this autonomy brings with it the acceptance of responsibility for the current and future welfare of the school, rather than leaving this to some external higher authority.



This is an important factor in establishing a community, and it is a fact that schools have now become in many cases people's main communities. Peter Block, quoted above, is only one of many who have noted that a sense of belonging to a community is a fundamental need of human beings, and that this is being lost in our institutions. As churches, neighbourhoods and even families struggle to provide a spirit of community in today's difficult world, both students and their families are increasingly finding it in their schools, and the potential for this to enrich the lives of these students and their families is enormous.

***There is increasing evidence to suggest that students who attend schools that function as communities with 'organic' cultures are more likely to improve their academic results than students whose schools function as bureaucracies with 'clinical' cultures.*** This was observed in the work of the Centre for School Restructuring (Newmann and Wehlage 1995), and further work by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) identified a direct link between schools with high levels of trust and respect – key characteristics of community – and student achievement in reading and maths. A recent work by Julie Kochanek (2005) found that when the school leadership focuses on building a spirit of community, especially reciprocal trust and respect among staff, students and parents, student achievement is likely to improve.



So too is student safety. John McCormick, in reporting on a recent study by Smith and Birney, states:

***The main implication that can be drawn from this study is that bullying is less likely to be occurring in schools where all people respect and trust each other.***

(John McCormick 2006)

Because independent schools have the autonomy to appoint or elect their own school boards and to hire their own staff, including their Principals, they are able to chart their own destinies to a very significant degree and to act quickly when change is needed or a problem is faced. The sense of ownership and commitment that this sense of belonging to a community can generate is very powerful, particularly when trust and respect are at high levels in schools and systems. And it is important not to overlook the observation referred to earlier by Block: that a strong spirit of community generates high levels of accountability.

It is very likely that the sense of belonging to a community, combined with confidence in the stability and continuity of the culture of the school, are major factors in the success of independent school students, and in their increasing appeal to parents. When this appeal is linked with the significant responsibilities they have to their own communities, to the legal system and to Government, it is not hard to see why their independence brings such a deep sense of commitment and ownership to so many schools, with resultant benefits to their students.

This is not to say that independent schools are the only ones that can achieve high levels of parent commitment, student achievement and safety; rather, it is to say that due to the ownership generated by the possibilities and responsibilities that go with independence and autonomy, many independent schools are able to engage staff, students and parents in a dynamic spirit of community that enriches the lives of all of them.



# In Conclusion

Leaders, achievers, contributors. While Independent Schools Queensland represents the independent schools in this state, and acts as their advocate, in reality it is the schools themselves that are their own greatest advocates, as their students continue to thrive, and the parents who have chosen to send their children to independent schools experience the rewards of being members of unique communities, responsible for their own destinies, and contributing to the wider good. At the same time Independent Schools Queensland wishes to affirm its commitment to the strength and potential of Queensland and Australia's tripartite education system: not only for independent schools, but for all schools.

In 1997 Professor David Hargreaves of Cambridge University offered an insightful view of the future of education in an increasingly complex and uncertain world:

***I believe it will become more difficult over the next 25 years to talk about the 'education system' in the sense of a distinctive, coherent and state-managed system...The traditional 'education system' must be replaced by a polymorphic education provision: an infinite variety of multiple forms of teaching and learning.***

(David Hargreaves in Beare 2001, p.3)

In moving beyond a 'one size fits all' mindset, Australia is already very much in tune with Hargreaves' projections, which strongly support the thesis put forward by James Surowiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds*. It is acknowledged that there is a need to continue to build on Australia's already impressive achievements in education, and independent schools are committed to playing a major role in furthering this. At the same time, it is the view of Independent Schools Queensland that Australia's unique tripartite system of a partnership of the state, independent and Catholic sectors of schooling holds the greatest potential of any way forward: combining diversity, independence and decentralisation in a mix that is capable of bringing the greatest good to the greatest number, and which deserves the support of all Australians.



- The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century  
([www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/index.htm](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/index.htm))
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- Surowiecki J. 2004: *The Wisdom of Crowds*; Little, Brown; London.
- United Nations 1948: *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; Paris.

# Appendix 1

## Frequently Asked Questions About Independent Schools

**1. Q: Aren't independent schools only accessible to wealthy families?**

A: The great majority of independent schools are attended by students from families of middle or low income. In 2006 (the latest available statistic), 79% of independent schools catered for students in the middle to low income bracket, and fewer than 5% were in the high income bracket (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). It often requires some sacrifice from families, but independent schools are mainly attended by middle and low-income families and have moderate to low fees (for example up to approximately \$6000 per year in Queensland in 2008). Only a small number are high-fee schools.

**2. Q: Don't independent schools select academically talented students ahead of other applicants for enrolment?**

A: Independent schools are almost completely non-selective. Some independent schools offer academic scholarships, but there are no Queensland independent schools that enrol only a select clientele as, for example, do the recently established state school senior academies in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, or the New South Wales selective academic state high schools. Many parents of academically talented students enrol them at independent schools, but that is by parental choice, not selection by the schools.

**3. Q: Are independent schools better than state schools?**

A: Not necessarily, but they are significantly different. Most independent schools are separately incorporated organisations, responsible for their own affairs. This means they have significant autonomy to chart their own destiny rather than being under external control: hence the diversity of the schools in the independent sector.

**4. Q: Do independent schools have the same curriculum as state schools?**

A: The very great majority of independent schools work within the framework of the Queensland Studies Authority, so their 'formal' curriculums – the subjects offered – are fairly common. Many independent schools have devised their own specialist subjects as well, in areas such as leadership, outdoor education and spirituality. Further differences lie in the 'informal' curriculum, where independent schools offer a huge variety of experiences, and where their values may be drawn from religious or other philosophical sources. These differences are made explicit by the schools, so parents have clear choices based on their own aspirations for their children.

**5. Q: I've been told that independent schools receive more government funding than state schools. Is that true?**

A: No - the opposite is the case. On average, a state school student attracts double the funding that an independent school student attracts from government. For every student who attends an independent school, the average combined State and Australian Government funding to that school is approximately half the amount that goes to a state school. The rest is made up by the independent schools themselves, largely through school fees paid by families.

**6. Q: Don't independent schools cost the taxpayer money that should be going to state schools?**

A: No. The parents of independent school students are actually subsidising Australia's education budget. The parents of students who attend independent schools pay taxes that go toward funding state schools. Those same parents then pay an after-tax amount in school fees to exercise their right to send their children to the school of their choice. By paying State and Commonwealth taxes, then in addition paying school fees, parents of students in independent schools saved Australian taxpayers \$2.6 billion in 2006 (latest statistic available): a financial commitment that would have to be met by government

through taxpayers if independent schools did not exist. Furthermore, not included in that figure is the cost of capital works – buildings, grounds, facilities – 82% of which is paid for by the independent schools and their families, with only 18% coming in assistance from government. With capital works included, the annual saving to taxpayers is closer to \$3 billion per annum.

**7. Q: Are independent schools accountable for the funding they receive?**

A: Independent schools are highly accountable. The Australian and State Governments have significant accountability requirements, schools also have to meet stringent corporate and civil law requirements, and they are further accountable to their own school communities. The latter is especially important, as parents who pay school fees have every right to have a voice in the life of the school, and to have certain expectations of the school. If those expectations are not met, parents may exercise their right of choice and enrol the student at another school.

**8. Q: Some independent schools have significant cash reserves. Why should they receive government funding?**

A: State schools have guaranteed funding from one year to the next. Independent and Catholic schools only have certainty of government funding for four years: called a quadrennium. Governments can change the funding arrangements from one quadrennium to another, and a school that receives significant funding in one quadrennium may receive less in the next. It is simply prudent financial management to provide for such a possibility.

**9. Q: Some people say that independent schools are elitist and divisive in the community.**

A: Independent schools make major contributions to the wider community. Many share their facilities for community use, sometimes at no cost to the public. Some are spiritual centres to their communities through their chapels; almost all independent schools undertake some form of community service, and many have incorporated community service into their curriculum, requiring all students to experience the responsibility of caring for others. A number of independent schools also deliberately involve the wider community through community choirs and participation in other activities. As well as this, staff from independent schools are highly represented on bodies such as the Queensland Studies Authority, often in leadership roles, and this contributes to the quality of education for all students, not just those in independent schools. Independent schools also work with universities to provide large numbers of places for teachers-in-training: an important contribution to the future of Queensland education.

**10. Q: What is the Independent Schools Queensland relationship with state and Catholic schools?**

A: ISQ strongly supports Australia's tripartite (three-part) education system. While there is healthy competition, there is also healthy collaboration and partnership, especially in Queensland. ISQ believes that a partnership of strong and viable state, Catholic and independent school sectors is the best possible way to provide high quality education for all Australian students, and is committed to contributing to this.

**Contact Independent Schools Queensland**

Website: [www.aisq.qld.edu.au](http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au) E-mail: [office@aisq.qld.edu.au](mailto:office@aisq.qld.edu.au)

Telephone: (07) 3228 1515 Facsimile: (07) 3228 1575

First Floor, 96 Warren Street, Spring Hill, Qld, 4000

P O Box 957 Spring Hill Qld 4004

We can also help you to contact particular schools if you want information from them.



# Appendix 2

## Independent Schools Queensland Member Schools

A B Paterson College  
Aboriginal and Islander Independent School  
All Saints Anglican School  
All Souls St Gabriels School  
Ananda Marga River School  
Anglican Church Grammar School  
Annandale Christian College  
Australian International Islamic College  
Australian Technical College - Gold Coast  
Australian Technical College - North Brisbane  
Australian Technical College  
- North Queensland  
Autism Therapy & Education Centre  
Bethania Lutheran Primary School  
Bethany Lutheran Primary School  
Blackall Range Independent School  
Blackheath and Thornburgh College  
Brisbane Adventist College  
Brisbane Boys' College  
Brisbane Girls Grammar School  
Brisbane Grammar School  
Brisbane Independent School  
Brisbane Montessori School  
Bundaberg Christian College  
Burdekin Christian College  
Caboolture Christian School  
Caboolture Christian  
School of Distance Education  
Caboolture Montessori School  
Cairns Adventist School  
Cairns Rudolf Steiner School  
Caloundra Christian College  
Caloundra City School  
Calvary Christian College - Brisbane  
Calvary Christian College - Townsville  
Cannon Hill Anglican College  
Canterbury College  
Carlisle Christian College  
Central Queensland Christian College  
Chinchilla Christian School  
Christian Outreach College - Toowoomba  
Christian Outreach College Brisbane  
Clayfield College  
Concordia Lutheran College, Redlands Campus

Cooloola Christian College  
Coolum Beach Christian College  
Coomera Anglican College  
Coral Coast Christian School  
Dalby Christian School  
Darling Downs Christian School  
Djarragun College  
Emerald Christian College  
Emmanuel College - Carrara  
Fairholme College  
Faith Baptist Christian School  
Faith Lutheran College - Plainland  
Faith Lutheran College - Redlands  
Forest Lake College  
Fraser Coast Anglican College  
Freshwater Christian College  
Genesis Christian College  
Glasshouse Country Christian College  
Glendyne Education & Training Centre  
Glenlee Christian College  
Glenvale Christian School  
Gold Coast Christian College  
Good News Lutheran School  
Good Shepherd Lutheran College  
Grace Lutheran College  
Grace Lutheran Primary School  
Groves Christian College  
Gulf Christian College  
Heights College  
Hervey Bay Christian Academy  
Hillbrook Anglican School  
Hillcrest Christian College  
Hills International College  
Hubbard's School  
Immanuel Lutheran College  
Ipswich Adventist School  
Ipswich Girls' Grammar School  
Ipswich Grammar School  
Islamic College of Brisbane Ltd.  
John Paul College  
Jubilee Christian College  
Kimberley College  
King's Christian College  
Lighthouse Christian School

Living Faith Lutheran Primary School  
Livingstone College  
Mackay Christian College  
Maridahdi Early Childhood Community School  
Matthew Flinders Anglican College  
Montessori International College  
Moreton Bay Boys College  
Moreton Bay College  
Mount Isa Christian College  
Mueller College  
Nambour Christian College  
Noosa Christian College  
Noosa Pengari Steiner School  
Northpine Christian College  
Northside Christian College  
Ormiston College  
Pacific Lutheran College  
Parklands Christian College  
Peace Lutheran College  
Peace Lutheran Primary School  
Peregian Beach College  
Pinbarren Community Christian College  
Prince of Peace Lutheran College  
Redeemer Lutheran College  
Redeemer Lutheran Primary School  
Redlands College  
Rivermount College  
Riverside Adventist Christian School  
Riverside Christian College  
Rockhampton Girls Grammar School  
Saint Philomena School  
Saint Stephen's College  
Samford Valley Steiner School  
Shalom Christian College  
Sheldon College  
Silkwood Steiner School  
Sinai College  
Somerset College  
Somerville House  
Southside Christian College  
Southside Education  
St Aidan's Anglican Girls School  
St Andrew's Anglican College  
St Andrew's Lutheran College

St Hilda's School  
St James Lutheran College  
St John's Lutheran Primary School - Bundaberg  
St John's Lutheran Primary School - Kingaroy  
St Luke's Anglican School  
St Margaret's Anglican Girls School  
St Marks Lutheran Primary School  
St Michael's College  
St Paul's Lutheran Primary School  
St Paul's School  
St Peters Lutheran College  
St Stephens Lutheran College  
Staines Memorial College  
Stuartholme School  
Suncoast Christian College  
Sunshine Coast Grammar School  
Tamborine Mountain College  
The Cathedral School of St Anne & St James  
The Glenleighden School  
The Glennie School  
The Kooralbyn International School  
The Lakes College  
The Rockhampton Grammar School  
The School of Total Education  
The SCOTS PGC College  
The Southport School  
The Springfield College  
The Toogoolawa School  
The Toowoomba Preparatory School  
Toowoomba Christian College  
Toowoomba Grammar School  
Townsville Christian College  
Townsville Grammar School  
Trinity Anglican School  
Trinity College Gladstone  
Trinity Lutheran College  
Victory College  
Wadja Wadja High School  
Warwick Christian College  
West Moreton Anglican College  
Westside Christian College  
Whitsunday Anglican School  
Whitsunday Christian College

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