



**Independent Schools  
Queensland**

choice & diversity



# WHAT PARENTS WANT

**An Independent Schools Queensland Survey:  
*Why did you choose an independent school?***

## KEY FINDINGS



**March 2007**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Quotations appearing in this Report are from survey responses.

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Further copies of this Report and a copy of the survey instrument can be obtained at [www.aisq.qld.edu.au](http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au)

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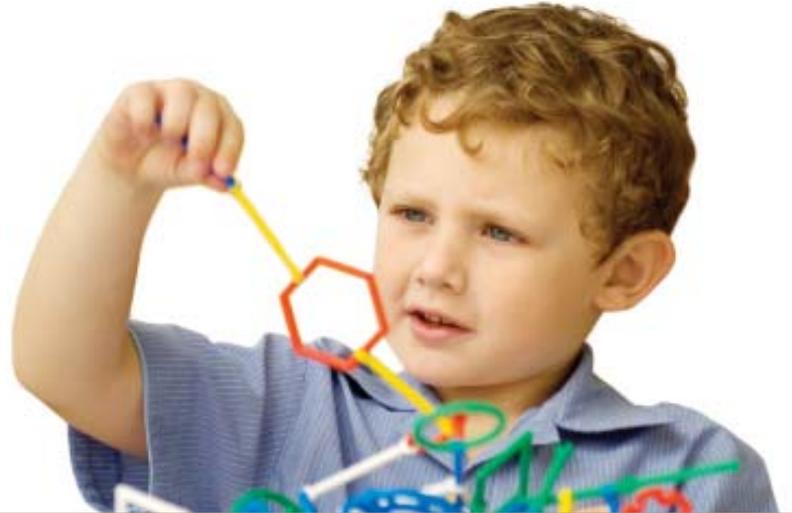
ISQ Centre 1st Floor 96 Warren Street Spring Hill Q 4000 (PO Box 957 Spring Hill Q 4004)

Telephone: 07 3228 1515 Fax: 07 3228 1575 Email: [office@aisq.qld.edu.au](mailto:office@aisq.qld.edu.au)

[www.aisq.qld.edu.au](http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au)



*In August 2006, Independent Schools Queensland conducted a survey to identify the decision-making process parents went through when choosing to send their child/children to an independent school and the factors which influenced their decision. The following report is a summary of the key findings and insights from the survey.*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A total of 4116 parents took part in the Independent Schools Queensland 'What Parents Want' survey which was distributed by 85 independent schools throughout Queensland. The survey asked 31 questions. Parents with children who had recently begun school – preschool or preparatory; first year primary or secondary, or students who had transferred schools – were specifically targeted as it was assumed they had made a recent decision regarding school selection.

The major finding from the research highlights the three most important factors for parents when choosing to send their child to an independent school were:

1. Preparation for students to fulfil their potential in life (72%)
2. Good discipline (68%)
3. Encouragement of a responsible attitude to work (66%)

Other values parents ranked as important offerings by independent schools included:

- A better all-round education for their children
- Access to a Christian education
- Strong reputation of the school
- Better facilities
- Smaller class sizes
- Similar values and beliefs

School choice is one of the most important decisions any parents will make for their children. The results show many parents consider school selection at least two years prior to the child actually starting at the school. Other parents who already have children at the school of interest are heavily relied upon as the most influential source of information for parents in school choice.

Many parents make financial sacrifices to send their child/children to an independent school as they believe it is in their child's long-term best interests. Interestingly, the majority of responding parents (74.5%) did not attend an independent school themselves but recognised the value of an independent school education for their children.

# KEY FINDINGS

*“The greatest gift I can give to my son is to prepare him for his journey in life. I cannot express how much my son has come along. In his own words, ‘I will never leave here, Mum.’”*

*“We have been extremely happy with the level of discipline, the level of religious education and the quality of education our children have received at this school.”*

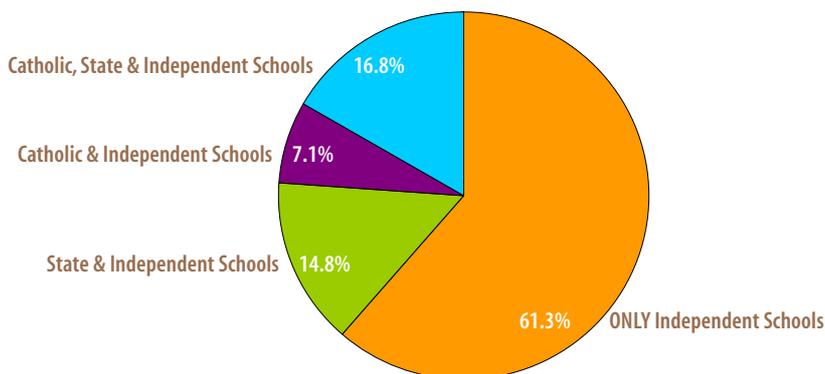
*“I don’t think you can compare the quality of education, discipline, and sports facilities available at an independent school.”*

## SATISFACTION WITH INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Across the state, independent schools are seen to have a strong reputation in the community, with the majority of parents (61%) only considering independent schools for their children’s education. The rate of satisfied parents is extremely high, with the vast majority (92.6%) satisfied with the quality of service provided by independent schools.

Parents with children already at an independent school appear very satisfied, given that most of those parents also with under school-age children have already decided to send these children to an independent school (90.9%), although some were undecided (7.8%). Only 1.3% had decided not to send their under school-aged children to an independent school.

FIGURE 1: Sectors considered by parents when selecting schools.



## PREPARATORY YEAR

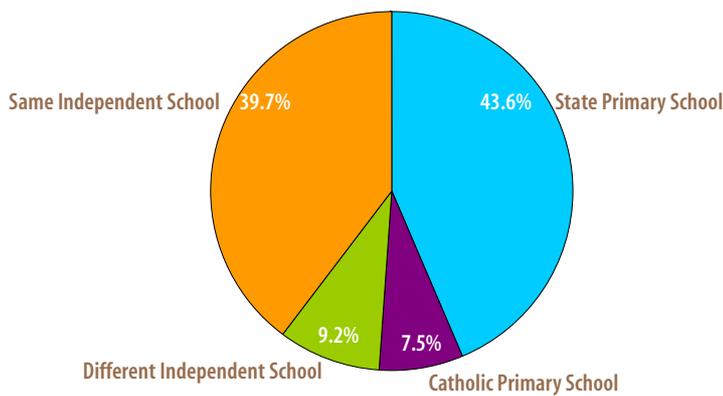
The Queensland Government introduced the universal provision of a preparatory year in 2007 and it is of interest to identify the influence this has had on choice. Of those children in the *first year of primary*, 96.9% had previously attended a preschool/preparatory facility. The majority (68.2%) of these children had attended a preschool/preparatory at the same independent school.

## REASONS FOR SELECTING OTHER SCHOOLS

Parents of students in *the first year of secondary* who had attended a different school for primary education, as well as parents of students who had *transferred into primary or secondary*, were asked to identify the education sector of the previous school the student had attended. They were also asked to identify reasons for changing.

Students *transferring* into an independent school in the *first year of secondary* were most likely to have transferred from the State school sector, which accounted for 44% of these transfers.

FIGURE 2: School attended prior to independent school.



Parents who had *transferred* children into a *primary or secondary* independent school were more likely to have transferred from a State school than another independent or Catholic school. Nearly three quarters of *transferred primary students* had previously attended a State primary school (72.3%) while just over half of students *transferred into secondary* (53.3%) had attended a State secondary school.

There was a range of reasons given by parents on why they had transferred their children into an independent school and this differed depending on the level of schooling of the child. Not surprisingly, the top reason was that the family had 'relocated' (18.4% of *transferred primary students* and 23.4% of *transferred secondary students*). For *transferred primary students*, a 'better level of education' was the second highest reason (12%) followed by 'poor discipline' at the previous school (6.8%). For *transferred secondary students*, an 'unhappy child' was the second reason for transferring into an independent school after relocation (10.5%) followed again by a 'better level of education' (7.7%) and prior 'poor discipline' (7.2%).

*"We're very, very happy with our decision to change to an independent school. We feel we are making a path for our children that will help support and teach our kids the correct social and academic skills whilst at school parallel to those which we encompass at home as their parents. The independent school community is a caring, focused and welcoming unit."*

# KEY FINDINGS

*“The difference I see with independent schools is the culture, uniforms, the way students speak and conduct themselves and the general positive approach to their studies and feeling of self worth.”*

Behaviour management is an issue of major concern for parents as highlighted in their responses on why they have changed to an independent school. Of particular note were responses to the issues of ‘poor discipline’, ‘unhappy with school management/discipline policy’ or ‘bullying’. Together, these three reasons comprised 16.3% of comments provided by parents of *transferring primary* students and 17.3% of comments by parents of *transferring secondary* students. As such, behaviour management issues rank as the second most frequently mentioned reason for transferring school.

**TABLE 1: Top 10 Reasons for Changing Schools**

PARENTS OF TRANSFERRING STUDENTS			
PRIMARY STUDENTS		SECONDARY STUDENTS	
Reasons for Changing Schools	Mentions	Reasons for Changing Schools	Mentions
Family relocating	18.4%	Family relocating	23.4%
Better level of education	12.0%	Child unhappy	10.5%
Poor discipline	6.8%	Better level of education	7.7%
Unhappy with school management/discipline policy	6.0%	Poor discipline	7.2%
Child not achieving academically	5.9%	Greater subject choice/flexibility in learning pathways	5.3%
Attention not given to individual student needs	4.1%	Unhappy with school management/discipline policy	5.3%
Disagreed with philosophy/teaching methods	4.0%	Child not achieving academically	4.8%
More resources at new school	3.9%	Bullying	4.8%
Bullying	3.5%	Attention not given to individual student needs	4.8%
Child unhappy	3.3%	Grade levels not offered	3.8%

## THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

### A. Advance planning on which school to choose

The research shows parents often begin thinking about which independent school to send their child/children to well in advance, however, these timeframes vary according to the child's year level of schooling (see Figure 3 below).

Parents of *preschool/preparatory* children were more likely to have been thinking of the child's future school from before the child was born, or at least from when the child was born in comparison to parents with children in the *first year of schooling* (34.6% compared to 31.9% respectively).

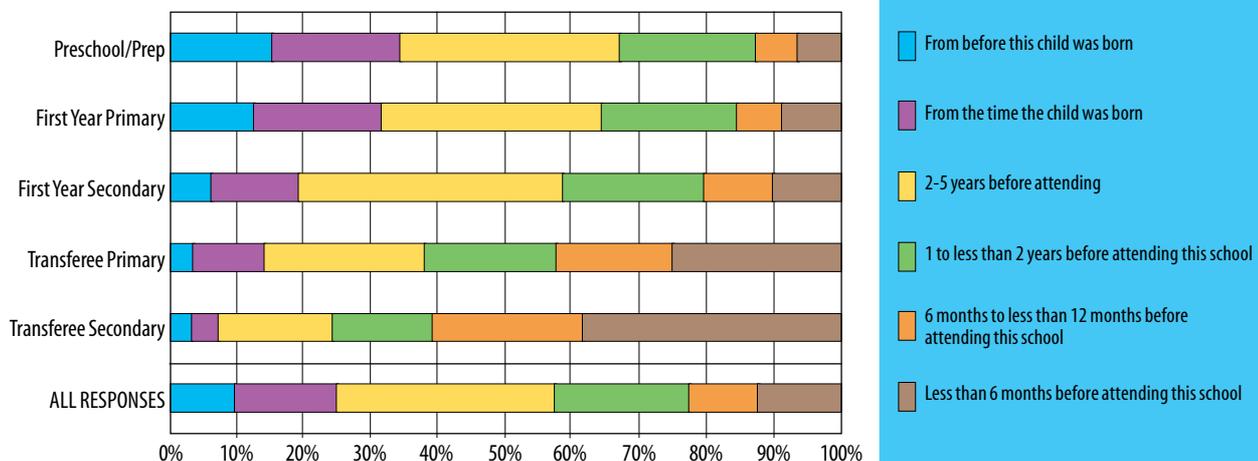
Parents with children in the *first year of schooling* were, however, more likely to have been thinking of the child's future school from before the child was born or at least from when the child was born, compared to parents of children who were in the *first year of secondary* (31.9% compared to 19.4% respectively).

About 20% of parents of *first year secondary* students started thinking of the current school in the previous 12 month period compared to 15.6% of parents with children in the *first year of primary* and 12.8% of parents with children in *preparatory/preschool*.

As could be expected, respondents who made the most recent choice were those parents who had transferred their child from another school. Approximately 25% of parents who had *transferred* their child during *primary schooling* appear to have started thinking about choice for the 2006 school in the six month period prior to the school change, compared to approximately 39% of parents who had *transferred* their child during *secondary schooling*.

*"We chose an independent school after much research in the school and what they have to offer. We are very pleased with our choice and our children are very happy - thriving and striving."*

Figure 3: How long in advance parents started thinking about the school for their child.



# KEY FINDINGS

*“We are 100% convinced and are reassured daily of the wisdom of our decision. We have encouraged other families who are unhappy with the state education system to make a worthy investment in their child’s future.”*

*“The recommendation from friends was very important because they have the same values as we do. We were able to question them intensively.”*

## B. Assessing information

Parents ranked ‘friends and colleagues’ as the most frequent information source then ‘other parents with children at the school’ and ‘pamphlets & brochures’.

There were some differences between the sources accessed by parents of children at different year levels. Parents of *preschool/preparatory* students and *first year primary* students were more likely to approach the teacher/s for advice. Parents *transferring* children into both *primary and secondary* were more likely to access information on the internet.

## C. Influential factors

Parents were asked to rate a range of factors considered likely to influence their choice of school, including school type, curriculum, characteristics, service and people. They were also asked to identify the single most important factor.

In terms of the single most important factor, 17.4% of parents identified the ability of the school to prepare a student to fulfil their potential in later life (refer to Figure 4). The next most commonly selected single reason was the school seeming ‘right for the individual needs of the child’ (8.9% of responses); followed by ‘religious affiliation’ (8.3%), ‘appearance/behaviour of existing students’ (8.0%), ‘experience of friends with children at the school’ (7.6%), and ‘teaching methods/philosophy’ (5.9%).

Five of the ten most important single reasons were factors categorised as ‘school characteristics’, whilst a further three of the top ten were ‘people-related’.

School choice is generally based on a range of reasons and based on a ranking by parents of the importance of the various factors (see Table 2), ‘Teaching methods and the school’s philosophy’ rated as the most important factor with regards to the school type. The next top rating factors for school type were ‘small class sizes’ and the ‘size of the school’.

The three most important factors when considering school characteristics were:

- The ability of the school to prepare the student to fulfil their potential in life
- The provision of ‘good discipline’
- The school encouraging a responsible attitude to school work

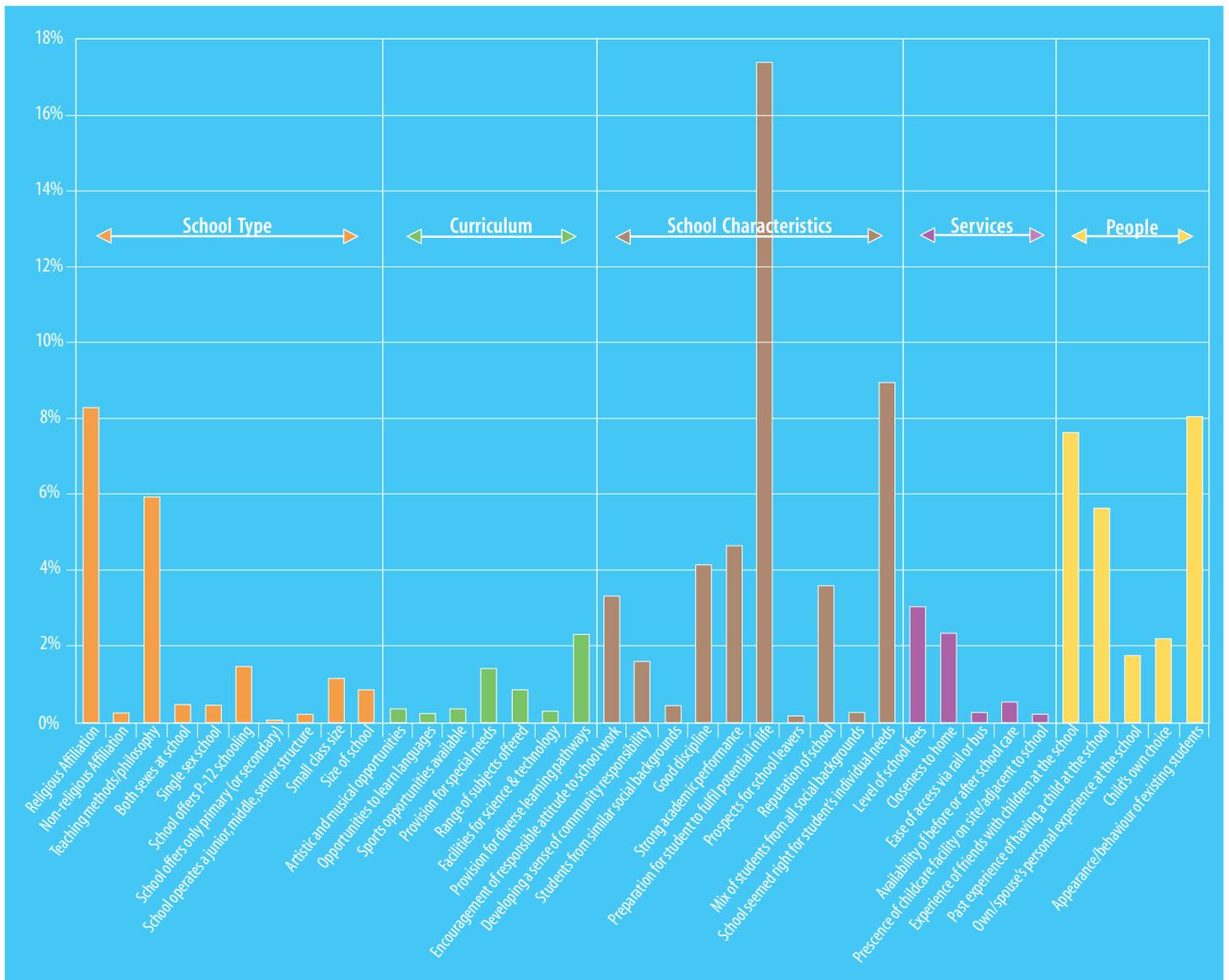
Parents also rated the ‘appearance and behaviour’ of existing students as an important factor in determining where to send their child.

There are some clear differences in the importance placed on factors by parents of preschool, primary and secondary students. ‘Teaching methods and the philosophy’ adopted by the school was a more important consideration for *preschool/preparatory* parents and *first year primary* students. ‘Class size’ is also of more significance in decision-making for parents of *preschool/preparatory* students and *primary* students.

Understandably, schools providing 'diverse learning pathways' was of higher importance to parents of *secondary* students. There were, however, some consistencies across all sub-groups of parents.

- All parents agreed the most important factor is a school being able to prepare their child to fulfil their potential in life.
- Good discipline ranked either as 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> in importance across all parent groups.
- A school's ability to encourage a responsible attitude to school work also ranked either 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> in importance.
- Developing a sense of community responsibility ranked either 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> in importance.

FIGURE 4: Single Most Important Factor (%).



# KEY FINDINGS

*“We wanted to give our child the best opportunities in life in a nurturing caring environment in a school with a good reputation.”*

TABLE 2: Factors of Importance.

Category	Factors	Importance of Factors in Decision	
		A Lot	Very
School Type	Religious affiliation	16.9 %	23.3 %
	Non-religious affiliation	6.8 %	7.7 %
	Teaching methods/philosophy	35.4 %	57.4 %
	Both sexes at school	24.9 %	25.9 %
	Single sex school	6.3 %	8.3 %
	School offers P-12 schooling	19.9 %	38.5 %
	School offers only primary (or secondary)	4.2 %	4.3 %
	School operates a junior, middle, senior structure	22.2 %	22.5 %
	Small class size	31.1 %	49.7 %
	Size of school	31.5 %	38.9 %
Curriculum	Artistic & musical opportunities	31.4 %	31.5 %
	Oppunities to learn languages	27.3 %	23.5 %
	Sports opportunities available	33.2 %	26.3 %
	Provision for special needs	18.2 %	21.2 %
	Range of subjects offered	40.1 %	37.4 %
	Facilities for science & technology	37.2 %	35.0 %
	Provision for diverse learning pathways	30.0 %	35.8 %
Characteristics	Encouraging responsible attitude to school work	29.5 %	66.0 %
	Developing a sense of community responsibility	33.7 %	57.2 %
	Students from similar social backgrounds	18.9 %	15.6 %
	Good discipline	26.0 %	68.7 %
	Strong academic performance	35.3 %	44.4 %
	Preparation for student to fulfil potential in life	23.1 %	72.4 %
	Prospects for school leavers	28.9 %	47.6 %
	Reputation of school	29.6 %	59.3 %
	Mix of students from al social backgrounds	25.0 %	22.2 %
School seemed right for student's individual needs	30.5 %	59.9 %	
Service	Level of school fees	31.4 %	22.2 %
	Closeness to home	29.5 %	24.8 %
	Ease of access via rail or bus	14.4 %	11.8 %
	Availability of before or after school care	10.8 %	12.0 %
	Presence of child-care facility on site/adjacent	7.1 %	8.1 %
People	Experience of friends with children at the school	30.5 %	29.3 %
	Past experience of having a child at the school	12.8 %	21.9 %
	Own or spouses personal experience at the school	7.8 %	9.7 %
	Child's own choice	17.3 %	10.7 %
	Appearance/behaviour existing students	36.2 %	43.4 %

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION

The survey shows many parents will make a financial sacrifice to send their child/children to an independent school as they believe it is an investment not only in their child's education but also their future.

Just over half of parents (54.8%) indicated they had planned ahead to afford payment of school fees with the vast majority of parents paying school fees straight out of their salary/wages (86.4%) rather than through assistance or scholarships.

Approximately 28.3% of respondents indicated they had a gross household income of less than \$60,000 per annum, 48.3% had a gross income between \$60,000 and \$120,000 per annum while 23.4% had a gross income of more than \$120,000 per annum. As could be expected, households where both parents were employed full-time had the highest proportion of earnings over \$120,000 per annum (35.1%).

*"We feel that any sacrifices would be made for our children to attend an independent school. We know our children are safe, disciplined and given every advantage for a good school life and beyond."*

## CONCLUSION



The key findings from the research show parents are willing to make sacrifices and plan ahead to ensure their child/children are enrolled in an independent school. Parents value the standard of education, the reputation and level of discipline provided by independent schools. Parents also recognise an independent school will help prepare their child to fulfil their potential not only in school but in future life.



## **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND**

**ISQ Centre 1st Floor 96 Warren Street Spring Hill Q 4000  
(PO Box 957 Spring Hill Q 4004)**

**Telephone: 07 3228 1515**

**Fax: 07 3228 1575**

**Email: [office@aisq.qld.edu.au](mailto:office@aisq.qld.edu.au)**

**[www.aisq.qld.edu.au](http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au)**