



**Independent Schools
Queensland**

choice & diversity

What Parents Want

An Independent Schools Queensland Survey

Key Findings

MARCH 2011



Acknowledgements

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Quotations appearing in this document are from survey responses.

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Further copies of this document and a copy of the full Survey Report including the survey instrument can be obtained at www.aisq.qld.edu.au

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In October and November 2010, Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) 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 document is a summary of the key findings and insights from the survey. It also draws some comparisons with a similar survey undertaken in August 2006.



Executive Summary

A total of 2,292 What Parents Want surveys were completed by parents from 84 independent schools in Queensland. The survey asked 31 questions. Parents with children who had recently begun school – preparatory year; 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.

School choice is one of the most critical decisions any parent will make in respect of their children. It is therefore important to understand the factors that influence this choice and which sources of information parents find most valuable.

The research highlights the three most important factors for parents when choosing to send their child to an independent school, based on the percentage of parents that indicated the factor as 'very' important in their decision-making:

1. Preparation for students to fulfil their potential in life
2. Good discipline
3. Encouragement of a responsible attitude to work

Not surprisingly, these are remarkably similar to the three key factors identified in the 2006 survey.

Another key finding was parents are more likely to take note of what other people say than be influenced by websites such as *My School* when deciding where to send their children to school.

Only 8.2% of parents who had recently started their child at an independent school cited the *My School* website among the three sources of information most likely to influence them when choosing a school.

By comparison, friends and colleagues (74%), other parents with children at the school (67.1%) and school open days (48.3%) were listed as the three most influential sources of information for parents who had recently started their child at an independent school.

Despite the internet becoming a more important tool – 85.2% (up from 63% in 2006) of parents with students starting at a new school accessed at least one website - the *My School* website ranked only 8th out of 14 options (refer **Table 3**).

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, two thirds of responding parents (66.4%) did not attend an independent school themselves but recognised the value of an independent school education for their children.

Key Findings

We could not be happier with our decision to choose this school. Neither of us went through an independent school situation and feel that we have really benefited our child by choosing this option. We are more than happy with the education she has received both academically and morally and feel that it will give her a solid foundation in life.

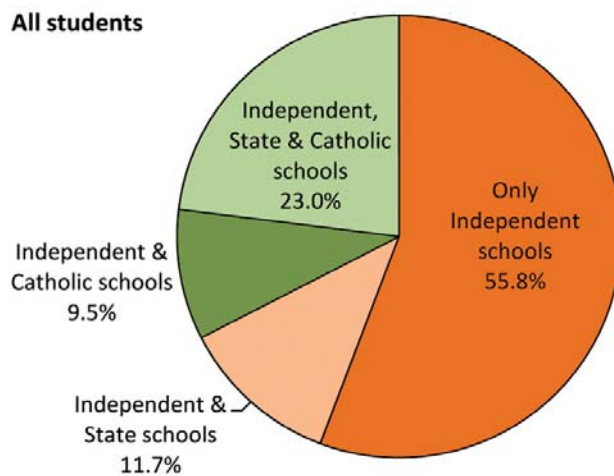
Parent comment

Our children have benefited enormously from being cared for and having their individual needs met.

Parent comment

In 2010 Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) was particularly interested in responses from parents of children at preparatory age and those parents who indicated their child had commenced at the school in the 2010 school year. These parents responded to a series of questions designed to gain information about the decision-making process and were targeted as it was assumed they had made a recent decision regarding school selection.

Figure 1: Sectors considered by parents when selecting 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 (55.8%) only considering independent schools for their children's education.

The rate of satisfied parents is extremely high, with the vast majority (89.3%) satisfied with the quality of service provided by independent schools given they had not thought of changing schools.

Changing schools

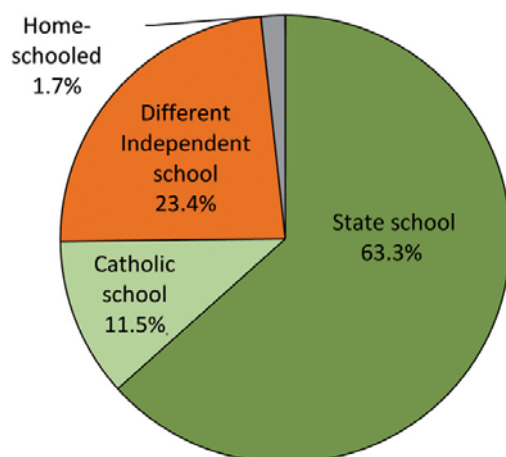
Parents who had transferred children to an independent school were more likely to have transferred from a state school than another independent or catholic school. Almost two thirds of students from years 1-12 had previously attended a state school (63.3%) while 11.5% transferred from a catholic school (refer **Figure 2**).

Relocating the family was the most commonly cited reason (35.2%) for parents changing from one independent school to another.

The most frequently cited reason for moving students from a state or catholic school into an independent school was the belief that 'a better level of education was available elsewhere'.



Figure 2: Parents with children in years 1-12 that commenced at a new independent school – schooling sector attended in the previous year.



There was only one school for my son and that was this independent school. He was on the waiting list from 8 months old and if he had not been accepted into Prep in 2010 we would have waited for a position to become available. It's the best decision we have ever made.

I am very confident that we are giving our son the best start in life.

Parent comment

Nearly a quarter of all parents surveyed (24.9%) cited 'sufficient attention was not being given to their child's individual needs at the previous school' as the reason for changing schools. This was the second most frequently cited reason for parents of students who had moved from a catholic to an independent school and the third most frequently cited reason for parents of students who had moved from a state to an independent school.

By comparison, this was the sixth most commonly cited reason by parents who had transferred their child from one independent school to another.

Occurrences of bullying at the previous school ranked as either the ninth or 10th most commonly cited reason across all sub-groups of parents.

Table 1: Reasons for Changing Schools – Ranking by Year and Schooling Sector Previously Attended

Reasons	ALL	Year			Previous Sector Attended		
		Year 1-7	Year 8	Year 12	CATH.	INDEP.	STATE
Better level of education available elsewhere	1	1	2	6	1	3	1
Unhappy with school management	2	2	6	1	4	2	3
No choice - previous school did not offer grade level required (e.g. year 7 student moving to year 8)	3	12	1	12	6	12	2
Sufficient attention not given to individual student needs	4	3	4	3	2	6	3
Poor discipline/behaviour management	5	4	7	4	11	7	5
Greater subject choice/flexibility in learning pathways available elsewhere	6	8	3	8	4	4	7
Family relocating	7	7	5	7	8	1	10
Child was not achieving academically	8	5	9	5	2	8	6
Child unhappy	9	6	12	2	6	4	8
Bullying occurring	10	9	10	10	9	9	9
Disagreed with teaching methods/philosophy	11	10	10	9	9	9	11
Middle schooling offered at current school	12	11	8	13	12	13	12
Financial reasons (e.g. fee increases)	13	13	12	11	13	11	13

Note: 1=most frequently cited reason



The decision making process

Parents with a child who had recently started attending an independent school were asked to respond to a series of questions focused on the decision-making process.

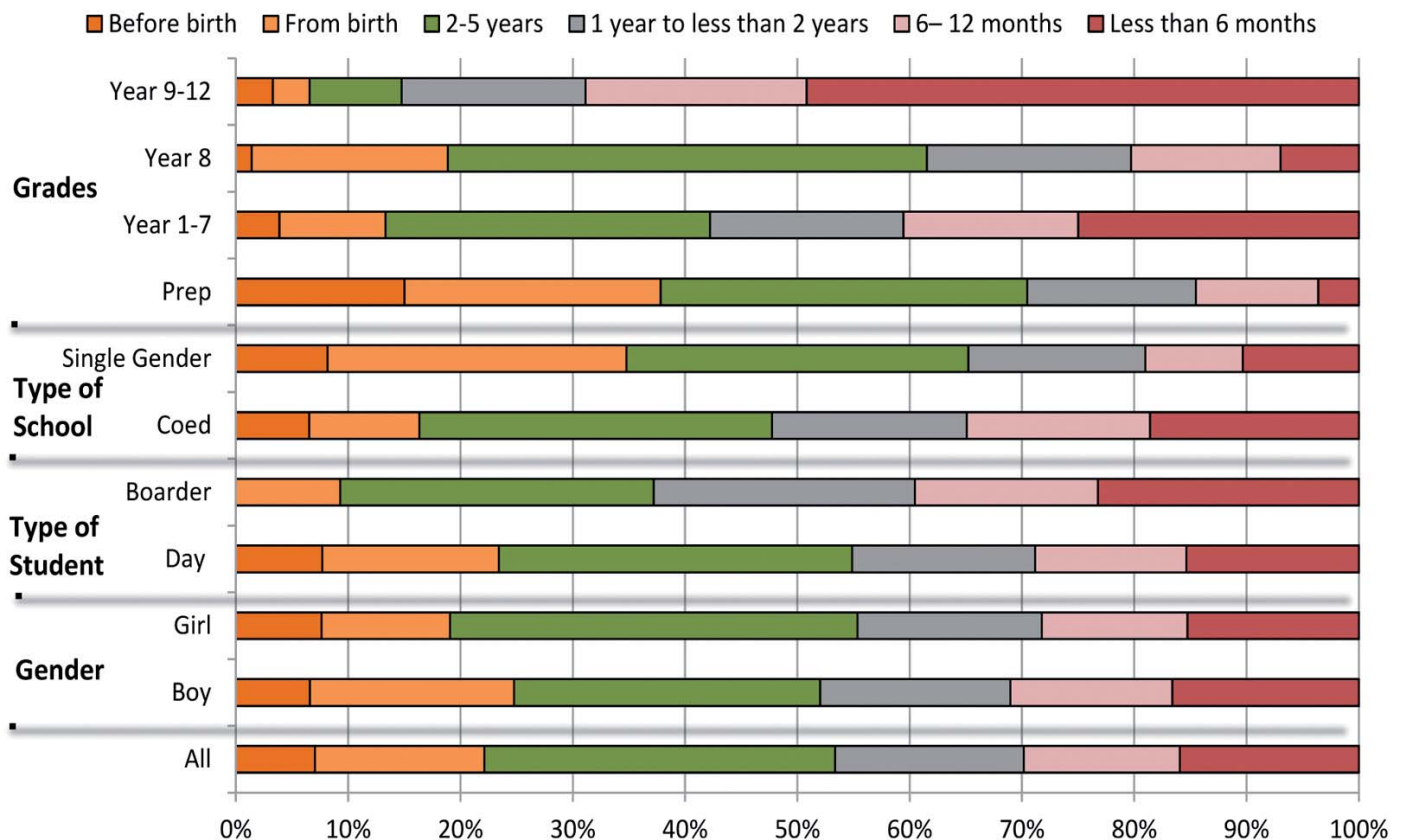
Advance planning

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

The parents of children who had recently started in the preparatory year were the most likely to have begun thinking about the best school for their child more than two years prior to them starting school. 15% of parents indicated they started thinking about it before the child was born while 22.8% of parents indicated they started thinking about it after the child was born.

Interestingly, parents with children commencing at a single gender school were much more likely to consider school choice earlier than parents with children attending a co-educational school. 65.2% of parents with children at single gender schools started thinking about school choice at least two years in advance of the child commencing school in 2010.

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



Accessing information

Parents were requested to identify where they went to for information about schools.

Other people clearly had more influence on parents than brochures, websites and other material. By far, the most frequent sources of information accessed by parents were 'friends and colleagues' (69.3%), closely followed by 'other parents with children at the school' (61.6%).

Websites have become a more important resource over time, with 85.2% of parents with students commencing at a new school in 2010 indicating they had accessed at least one website and only 14.8% of parents indicating they did not. This compares to results of ISQ's 2006 survey which indicated 63% of similar parents accessed at least one website while 37% did not access any websites.

On average, each parent is indicated as viewing around three websites. Irrespective of the grade level of students, more than 80% of parents accessed at least one website for information to assist decision-making.

The **My School website**, providing information regarding school performance on national literacy and numeracy assessments, was identified as a source of information by 11.8% of parents, albeit this site only commenced in early 2010. Of interest is that this site was ranked by only 8.2% of parents as being amongst the three most influential sources of information.

Facilities and appearance of the school grounds also influence parent's decisions, with the majority acknowledging this factor as influencing them to some degree. 6.5% of parents indicated they were influenced totally by the appearance and facilities, 29.8% of parents acknowledged it influenced them to some degree and another 46.1% of parents indicated they were influenced a lot by the facilities and grounds in their decision.

The **child's opinion** was the most important factor for nearly 15% of parents in deciding which school to send them to. A further 41.1% indicated the child's opinion had been a significant factor. Not surprisingly, older students who had transferred into years 9-12 and boarding school students who are predominantly in secondary schooling, were more likely to influence their parents' decision.

The primary consideration for choosing an independent school is the values and ethos it exemplifies.

Parent comment



The school has a wonderful community feel, it is encouraging and supportive. The teachers are very professional and dedicated. The classroom practices and curriculum are diverse and responsive to the needs of the students.

Parent comment

The most important factors

Parents were asked to identify the single most important factor (out of 40 factors) likely to influence their choice of school. Identifying the single most important reason proved difficult for a number of parents who, understandably, said their choice was based on a combination of factors. Over 92% of parents did, however, select one reason.

The top three factors parents identified as being the single most important are outlined in **Figure 4**.

As many parents stated, the decision to choose a school is not based on one reason. To identify the combination of factors that influence decision-making, parents were also asked to rank the importance of each of 40 factors on a scale of importance from “no importance” to “very important”.

As outlined in **Table 2**, the five highest ranking factors were:

- Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life
- Good discipline
- Encourage responsible attitude to school work
- High quality teachers
- Teaching methods/philosophy

Figure 4: Single Most Important Factor (%)

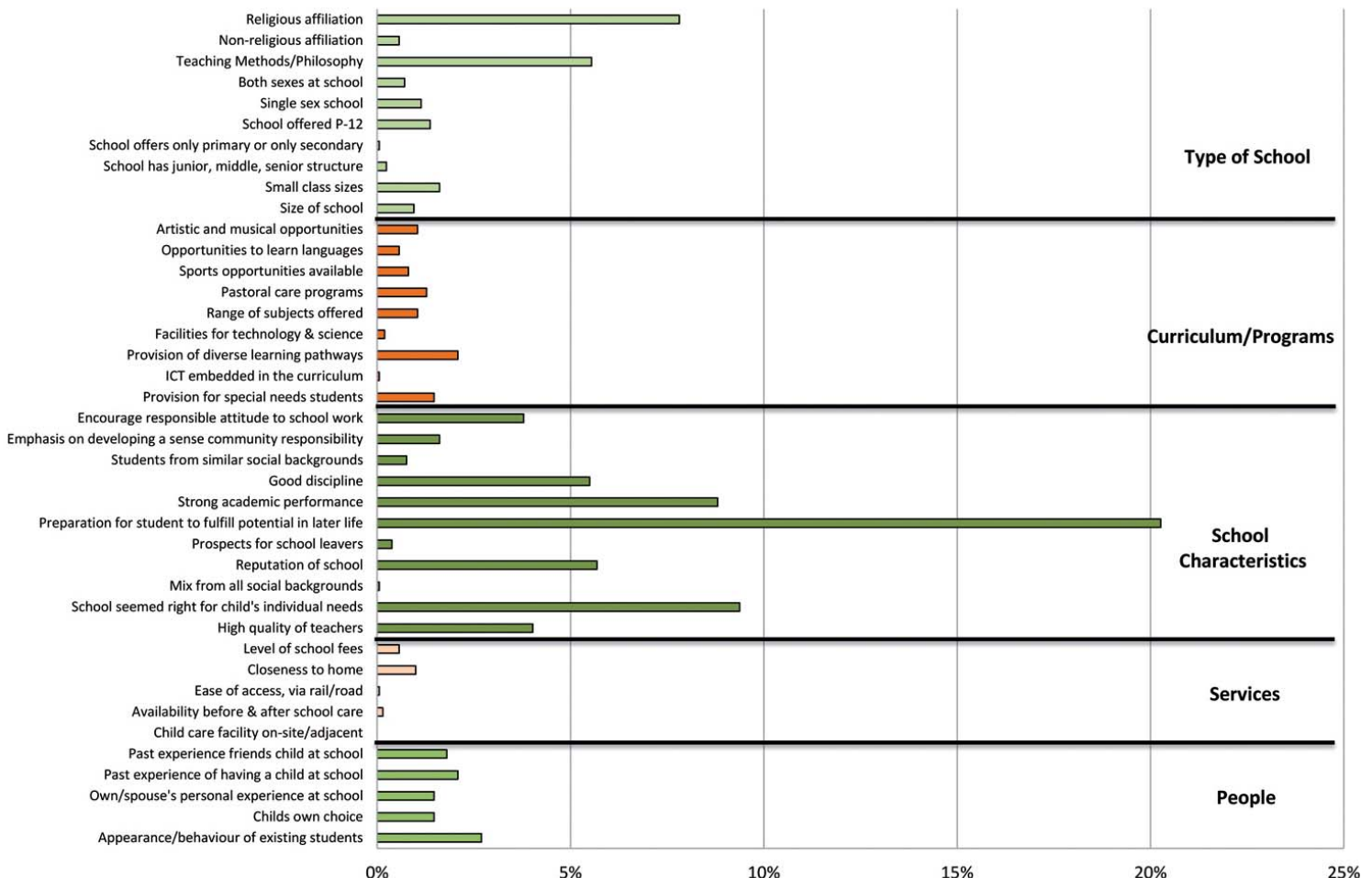


Table 2: Ranking of Factors - by Parent Group (1=Highest ranking)

Category	Factors	Likert Rating			Rank (1=Highest Importance)		
		All parents (2,292)	Parents of students continuing at the school (1,631)	Parents of students that commenced in 2010 (611)	All parents (2,292)	Parents of students continuing at the school (1,631)	Parents of students that commenced in 2010 (611)
Type of School	Religious affiliation	2.89	2.91	2.85	26	27	26
	Non-religious affiliation	2.04	2.02	2.12	36	36	34
	Teaching Methods/Philosophy	4.04	4.09	4.09	5	6	5
	Both sexes at school	2.62	2.63	2.74	28	29	27
	Single sex school	2.10	2.15	2.02	35	34	35
	School offered P-12	2.83	2.96	2.64	27	25	29
	School offers only primary or only secondary	1.43	1.45	1.43	40	40	40
	School has junior, middle, senior structure	2.54	2.60	2.51	30	30	31
	Small class sizes	3.64	3.66	3.74	13	13	12
	Size of school	3.39	3.41	3.48	16	16	16
Curriculum/Programs	Artistic and musical opportunities	3.32	3.34	3.38	18	18	18
	Opportunities to learn languages	3.06	3.07	3.17	22	23	21
	Sports opportunities available	3.28	3.30	3.37	19	19	19
	Pastoral care programs	3.20	3.28	3.11	20	20	23
	Range of subjects offered	3.75	3.81	3.75	11	11	11
	Facilities for technology & science	3.64	3.68	3.68	12	12	14
	Provision of diverse learning pathways	3.36	3.38	3.43	17	17	17
	ICT embedded in the curriculum	3.43	3.46	3.52	15	15	15
	Provision for special needs students	2.35	2.34	2.49	31	31	32
School Characteristics/Qualities	Encourage responsible attitude to school work	4.17	4.25	4.14	3	3	3
	Emphasis on developing a sense community responsibility	4.02	4.09	4.00	8	7	8
	Students from similar social backgrounds	2.61	2.67	2.56	29	28	30
	Good discipline	4.17	4.26	4.14	2	2	2
	Strong academic performance	3.87	3.94	3.86	9	10	9
	Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life	4.29	4.36	4.29	1	1	1
	Prospects for school leavers	3.85	3.94	3.77	10	9	10
	Reputation of school	4.02	4.09	4.01	6	5	7
	Mix from all social backgrounds	2.96	2.99	3.01	25	24	25
	School seemed right for child's individual needs	4.02	4.07	4.08	7	8	6
High quality of teachers	4.07	4.12	4.12	4	4	4	
Services	Level of school fees	3.09	3.13	3.16	21	21	22
	Closeness to home	3.05	3.11	3.02	23	22	24
	Ease of access, via rail/road	2.29	2.31	2.35	32	32	33
	Availability before & after school care	1.79	1.83	1.77	37	37	37
	Child care facility on-site/adjacent	1.51	1.54	1.49	39	39	39
People	Past experience friends child at school	2.97	2.93	3.18	24	26	20
	Past experience of having a child at school	2.13	2.26	1.86	34	33	36
	Own/spouse's personal experience at school	1.59	1.61	1.62	38	38	38
	Childs own choice	2.24	2.10	2.71	33	35	28
	Appearance/behaviour of existing students	3.58	3.59	3.69	14	14	13



The most influential sources

Parents were requested to identify where they went for information about schools when they first started thinking about ‘which school?’ and which of these sources they considered amongst the three most influential. In this regard, people, rather than other mechanisms of distributing information used by schools, were clearly the most influential resource for schools in terms of letting people know about their school.

Table 3: Comparative Table of Most Influential Sources of Information

Rank	2010 What Parent’s Want Survey Most Influential Sources	2006 What Parent’s Want Survey Most Influential Sources
1	Friends and colleagues	Other parents with children at the school
2	Other parents with children at the school	Friends and colleagues
3	School open day	School open day
4	Internet	Pamphlets/brochures/prospectuses
5	Family member(s) already at school	Family member(s) already at school
6	Pamphlets/brochures/prospectuses	Church
7	Church	Internet (web pages)
8	<i>My School</i> website	School/Preschool child attending
9	Independent Schools Queensland	Independent Schools Expo
10	School/Kindergarten child was attending (talking to teachers)	Local (suburban) newspapers
11	Other school associations/organisations	Other school associations/organisations
12	Local (suburban) newspapers	Independent Schools Queensland
13	Telephone Book	Education Queensland
14	State Education Department	Telephone Book

We are extremely happy with our choice of school. Our aim is for our children to be well disciplined as they would be at home and for them to enter the outside world as well prepared, very well behaved teenagers in years to come.

Parent comment

Financial consideration

The responses indicate 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.

Three out of five parents (60.5%) indicated they had planned ahead to take account of payment of school fees. The vast majority of parents (81.7%) pay school fees from salary/wages only.



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 a school that can prepare their child for later life, exercise good discipline and encourage a responsible attitude to their school work.

The internet is becoming increasingly more influential in the way parents gather information about schools. However, the majority of parents still make friends, family and the parents of other students their first port of call when making the all important decision where to send their children to school.



All staff at the school treat each student as an individual, and take as much time as is needed to assist students to reach their goals. I have noticed a huge positive change in my son's attitude and behaviour since he started at this school.

Parent comment

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