

What Parents Want

An Independent Schools Queensland Survey



**Key
Findings**

Survey Report
APRIL 2022



ABOUT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Queensland parents have been exercising their right to school choice for as long as some of the state's oldest independent schools have been serving their local communities – more than 150 years.

Independent schools are autonomous, not-for-profit institutions run and governed at the local level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This survey was commissioned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ).

For more than 50 years ISQ has been a united and powerful voice for Queensland's independent schooling sector and a fierce advocate for parental choice in schooling. ISQ is a representative body for independent schools, not a regulator or governing authority.

Dr Deidre Thian, Principal Consultant (Research) at ISQ is acknowledged for her work in the preparation of the 2021 report findings of the fifth *What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey*.

SCHOOL IMAGES

Moreton Bay College (cover)
Caloundra Christian College
King's Christian College
Moreton Bay Boys' College
St Hilda's School
St Paul's School
Toowoomba Grammar School

School images are not necessarily aligned with the response quotes listed throughout this document. Quotes are a diverse selection from the 2021 survey.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

STUDENTS: 136,000

15.7% of all Queensland students

19.7% of all Queensland high school students

SCHOOLS: 229

SCHOOL TYPES

157 Combined
29 Primary
43 Secondary
4 Special *

SCHOOL GENDER

211 Co-educational
18 Single-gender

FAMILIES

Independent schools serve families from all income levels

* Special schools also included in total primary and secondary school figures.

Source 2021 Non-government School Census (Commonwealth) August collection.

What Parents Want Survey 2021

What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey is the longest running survey in the country exploring why parents choose independent schools.

The survey delves into the decision-making processes of independent school parents relating to the child who had most recently commenced schooling at an independent school. The survey examined the:

- schools considered
- decision-making timeframe
- information sources
- key factors influencing final school choice.

Survey Series

- Five surveys over 15 years: 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2021

2021 Survey

- Statistically a significant number of surveys were completed: 3,961 parents of children at 116 Queensland independent schools reflecting a representative snapshot of the sector by location, school type, parental background and student enrolments
- First analysis of the influence and impact of COVID-19 on school choice

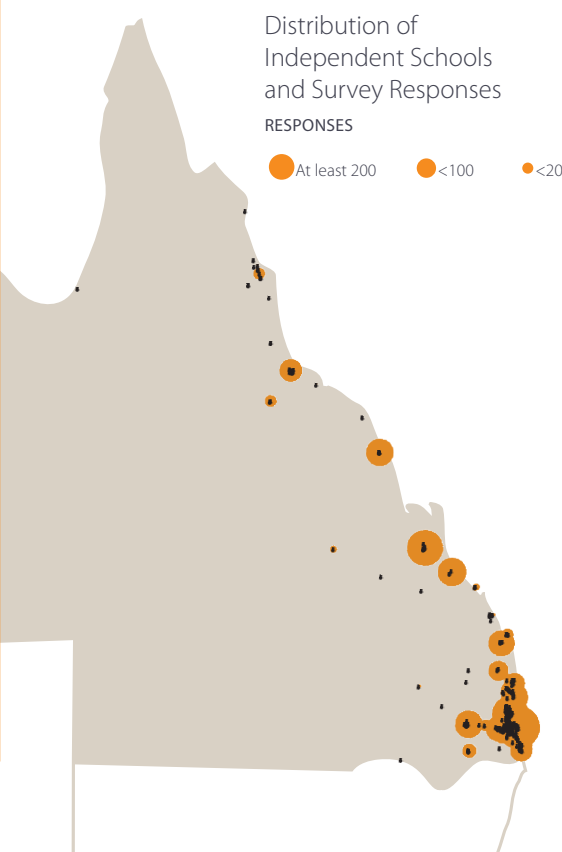
Two broad classifications were used to analyse and report data throughout this report:


- responses classified by student journey (new entrants or continuing students)
- responses classified by school, student and parent demographics (parent income levels, parent/family structure, parent generation, school gender, schooling level, school location and student attendance)

Distribution of Independent Schools and Survey Responses

RESPONSES

- At least 200
- <100
- <20



A photograph of two young boys in school uniforms (light blue shirts and dark ties) sitting at a desk. They are looking at a blue globe on a stand. The boy in the foreground is smiling and pointing at the globe, while the boy behind him looks on with interest. The background is a classroom setting with a bulletin board.

Our decision for choosing a school was made many years ago, well before our children could even walk. Although academics was obviously an important factor, our decision was based on our general impression of the school from talking to other friends with children at the school, talking to children we knew at the school, the school open day and most importantly, our final decision was based on our interview with the school principal. It was her passion about encouraging girls that they could achieve anything, that the school would be a supportive and nurturing environment to help them do so as well as highly disciplined.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 1179

”

Moreton Bay Boys' School

Executive Summary

These are the top line findings from 3,961 parents with children at 116 independent schools who participated in the 2021 survey.

Top Line Findings

Schooling options

Queensland families are well served by schools in three schooling sectors – independent, State and Catholic.

When parents weighed up their schooling options:

- About 40% of parents with children entering a new school in Years 1–12 only considered independent schools, while almost one in three (32%) looked at schools from all three sectors.

COVID-19 Response

Parents felt independent schools have handled the COVID-19 pandemic well.

- Nearly nine in every 10 parents (86%) indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied by the school's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Nearly two in three new entrant parents (65%) were influenced by the level of school support during COVID-19.

Decision timeframe

School selection can be top of mind for some parents, in some cases even before their children are born.

- Nearly two in three parents (66%) indicated the start of the process of school selection commenced at least two years before the child started school, while one in four (26%) started before or from their child's birth.

Parent sources of information

The most influential information sources parents rely on are:

- family, friends and colleagues (22%)
- school open days/formal school visit (20%)
- other parents with children at the school (17%)

- school website and social media (14%)
- family members already attending the school (8%).

Meeting school representatives

Parents value the opportunity to meet school staff.

The staff parents most want to meet, in order of importance, are:

1. Classroom teachers
2. Principal
3. Students
4. Deputy Principal
5. Parents of current students

Not surprisingly, parents of boarding students nominated the Head of Boarding as the most critical staff member to meet face-to-face.

School facilities

First impressions of a school count.

- Seven in 10 parents (70%) said their choice of school was totally or highly influenced by the look of the school and facilities on offer.

Child's opinion

Children are having a greater say in their future school.

- Five in 10 parents (53%) said their choice of school was totally or highly influenced by their child's opinion.

Parent generations

Analysis of survey responses by generation, revealed a range of insights about parents in their early 30s (Millennial's) and younger Generation Y parents.

Compared with other generations these parents of primarily Prep and primary students are more likely to:

- consider all three schooling sectors
- rely on friends, family and colleagues as an influential source of information
- be heavily influenced by a school's external appearance and facilities
- rate school-generated social media as very or extremely useful.

The final decision

School choice is a very personal decision for families.

However, there are common factors parents identify. The top 10 reasons why parents choose independent schools:

1. Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life
2. School seemed right for child's individual needs
3. The high-quality of teachers
4. Encouragement of responsible attitude to school-work
5. Teaching methods/philosophy
6. Reputation of school
7. Good discipline
8. Emphasis placed by school on developing student's sense of community responsibility
9. Range of subjects offered
10. Prospects for school leavers

Applying for enrolment


The final school a child attends may ultimately come down to whether there is a place available.

- Three in four parents (76%) put their child's name on a waiting list. Of these families, 55% only put their child's name down at the independent school they subsequently enrolled in.

Paying fees

Parents often make significant financial sacrifices in other areas of their lives to send their child to an independent school. The overwhelming majority of parents pay for their child's education from their after-tax income.

- Nine in 10 (91%) parents rely on their salaries, either wholly, or in combination with other sources such as part scholarship/bursary, or other family members, to meet schooling costs.



We chose an independent school based on their academic reputation, learning structure/choices and facilities, their behavioural management and wellbeing programs for the students, their support of students with additional disability needs and especially the school values that align with our family's core values. The school has surpassed all our expectations at the highest level. The learning, support and dedication of the staff throughout the school has been outstanding.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 3500

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St Paul's School

Survey Trends

What Parents Want provides telling insights into parent decision-making trends over time. However, it's important that changes in school decision-making are put in context by examining them alongside policy, economic and social changes over the same period. These societal milestones can also have an impact on the school choices families make.

What Parents Want Survey Trends 2006–2021

Independent school parents are more likely to weigh up all available schooling options in Queensland's three schooling sectors – 40% in 2021 compared with 17% in 2006.

Parents are now more likely to plan ahead to pay for school fees – 70% in 2021 compared with 55% in 2006.

More parents are thinking ahead about school choice and researching schools for at least two years before their child starts school – 66% in 2021 compared with 58% in 2006.

The overwhelming majority of children now entering Prep at Queensland independent schools have already attended kindergarten – 90% in 2021 compared with 66% in 2010. This is slightly lower than the last survey in 2018 when 92% attended a kindergarten program, ceasing a trend of increasing proportions of Prep students attending kindergarten programs over time.

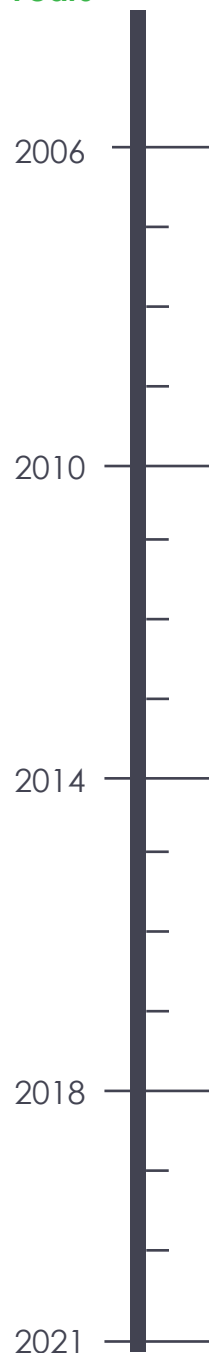
Parents are more likely to base their decisions, wholly or to a significant degree, on the appearance of a school and its facilities – 72% in 2021 compared with 42% in 2006.

The influence of a child's opinion on school choice in 2021 remains consistent with the last 2018 survey at 53%.

Family, friends and colleagues have been the most turned to and influential source of information on school choice for parents across all five surveys since 2006.

Parents have consistently nominated "preparing students to fulfil their potential in later life" as their top reason for choosing an independent school in every survey.

Survey Years



Social, Economic and Policy Change 2006–2021

2005 Year 12 outcomes data by school, including OP results, published for first time

2006 Facebook launched to the public; Twitter commenced

2007 First Apple iPhone released

2007 Full-time Prep Year introduced

2007 Global Financial Crisis

2007 National agreement delivers 15 hours of Kindergarten to all children

2010 My School launched with school NAPLAN results

2010 First subjects in the P-10 Australian Curriculum rolled out

2015 Year 7 becomes first year of high school in Queensland

2018 New senior schooling and tertiary entrance system commences in Queensland

2018 Choice and Affordability Fund established

2020 Global COVID-19 pandemic begins

Figure 1: Schooling Sectors Considered

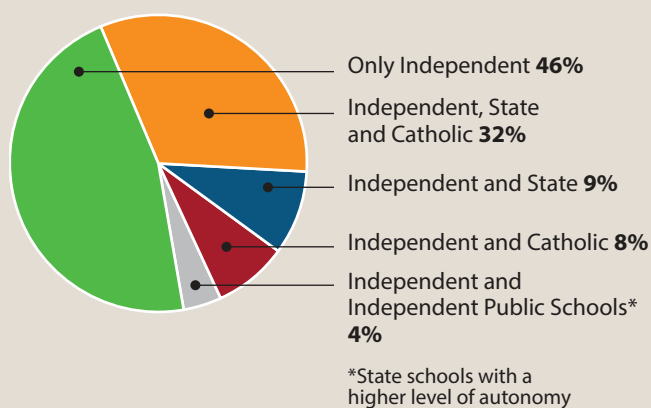
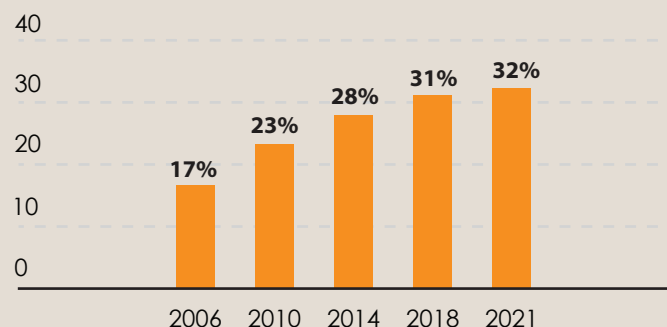


Figure 2: Consideration by Parents of All Three Schooling Sectors in Survey Years



Key Findings

Schooling Options

School choice is important to Queensland families as evidenced by the numbers of children educated in the independent, State and Catholic schooling sectors.

Parents are savvy education consumers who have online access to more comparative local school information than ever before.

According to the 2021 What Parents Want Survey, while the largest proportion of parents (46%) had their sights firmly set on an independent school for their child, almost one third of parents (32%) weighed up schools in all three sectors (refer Figure 1).

Parents of new Prep students (34%) and new Year 7 students (33%) – the main transition and school intake years – were only slightly more likely to consider all three schooling sectors than parents overall (32%).

Parents who moved their children to new independent schools for Years 8-12 were more likely than any other parents of new students to only consider independent schools (40%).

Parents are more likely today, than 15 years ago, to explore all available schooling options before making an informed decision about their child's future (refer Figure 2).

Despite this increased level of competition in the early decision-making stage, independent schools continue to be the school of choice for families of almost 16% of all Queensland school children, and almost 20% of families with children in secondary school.

Moving Schools

Each year some families move their children to different schools for various reasons.

The majority (60%) of new students in Years 1-12 who transferred to an independent school in 2021 had previously attended a State school – the two main other school sources were independent (24%) and Catholic (15%). One percent (1%) were previously home-schooled.

In the important Year 7 intake year, this figure is higher. Nearly three quarters (73%) of new students who commenced high school at an independent school in 2021 had previously attended a state school. The majority of these parents (65%) said they had no choice but to move schools because secondary education was not offered.

Parents with children in different year levels identified different reasons for changing schools.

Perhaps due to the impact of COVID-19 and a large amount of people relocating to Queensland from southern states, the most common reason parents of new students in Years 1-6 gave was that "the family was relocating" (36%).

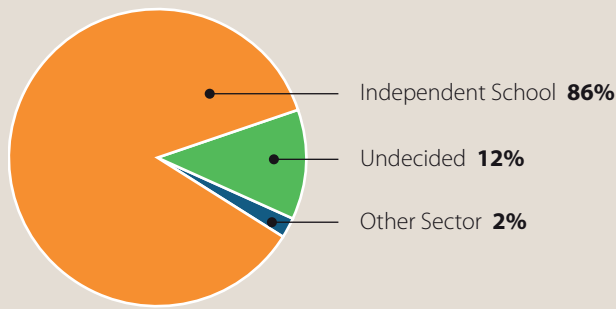
For parents of new students in Years 8-12 the dominant reason was that their child was "unhappy" (49%).

Siblings

Parent satisfaction with the independent sector is reflected by survey findings showing 86% of parents with more than one school-aged child also sent these children to independent schools.

Of those parents who had children under school-age, the majority were intending to send these children to independent schools (86%) (refer Figure 4).

Figure 4: Destination of Siblings, Parents with Children Under School Age

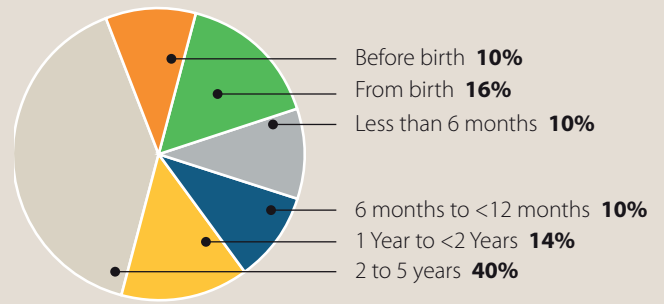


Since the What Parents Want Survey commenced in 2006, the proportion of parents that indicated their children would not attend an independent school has remained stable at 1% to 2%.

Decision Timeframe

School selection can be top of mind for some parents even before they have had children, while others, depending on their personal circumstances or the schooling choices available, spend less time researching options.

Figure 5: School Selection Process Timeframe



Parents were asked when they first started thinking about schools for their child. Nearly two-thirds of parents (66%) indicated the start of the process of school selection commenced at least two years before the child started school. A similar proportion of parents (70%) also indicated they planned ahead to pay school fees.

The 2021 survey found 26% of parents started considering schools well in advance (before birth 10% or from their child's birth 16%) (refer Figure 5) – a similar proportion as in 2006.

COVID-19 Response

From early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted schools, students and their families. Lockdowns resulted in schools, teaching staff and students transitioning to online learning from home. Schools assisted parents ensuring their children were able to continue learning at home.

The 2021 What Parents Want survey provided the first opportunity to see how parents viewed the response of schools during this period, as well as how the level of support provided by schools to COVID-19 may have influenced parental decisions regarding the school selected.

Responses of parents supports the view that, overall, independent schools could be considered to have well-met the challenges presented by COVID-19. Nearly nine in every 10 parents (86%) indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied by the school's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (39% and 47% respectively) (Figure 3).

Two thirds of new entrant parents indicated their decision to enrol their child in an independent school was influenced by the level of school support during COVID-19 when making their decision (65%). Just under one-third of parents (32%) considered the level of support provided by schools as "highly" or "totally influential" to their school choice (24% and 8% respectively).

Figure 3: Satisfaction with School Response to COVID

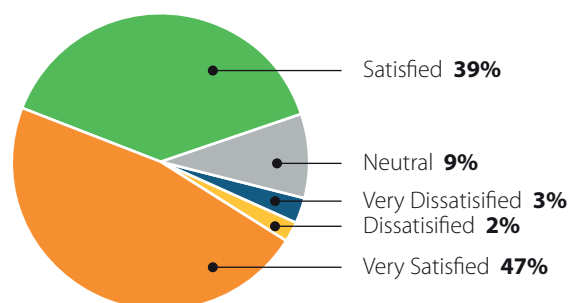
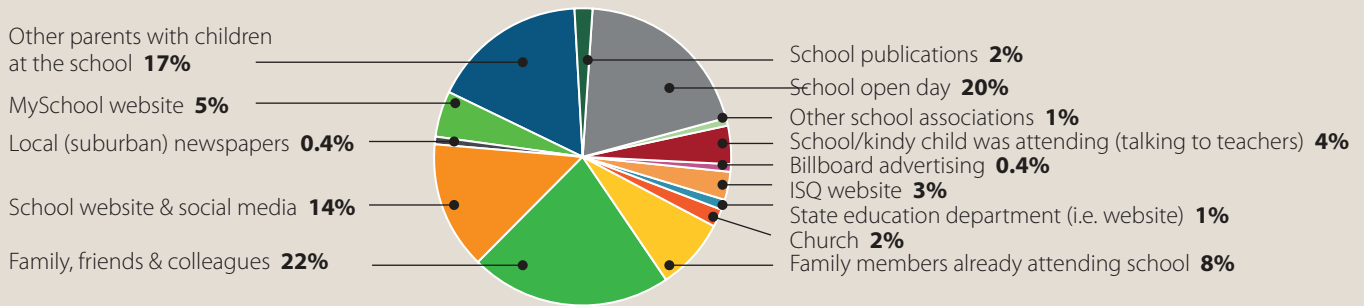


Figure 6: Parent Sources of Information



Parent Sources of Information

Parents were asked to identify the range of sources, including both people and places, they rely on to research their school choices. Parents most frequently cited “family, friends and colleagues” (22%) for information. This group has been the top trusted source in all five parent surveys since 2006 (refer Figure 6).

When parents were asked to short-list their top three most influential information sources, the following made the top five.

1. Family, friends and colleagues (65%)
2. School open day/formal visit (61%)
3. Other parents with children at school (50%)
4. School website and social media (42%)
5. Family members already attending the school (23%)

At least 10% of parents also identified the following sources in their top three: “MySchool website”(16%) and the “School/kindy child was attending” (12%).

Usefulness of school-provided information

Schools use a range of communication-related tools and platforms to promote their school’s education offerings and points of difference to prospective parents.

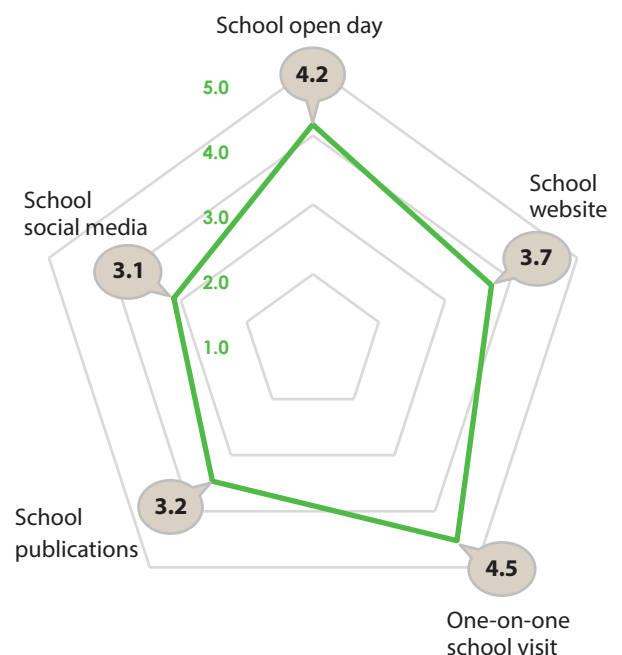
Parents were asked to rate how useful these sources of information were by rating them on a five-point Likert scale with a score of five being the highest rating.

The survey found parents put a high value on their face-to-face contact with schools and their staff, with one-on-one school visits the most useful (refer Figure 7).

The majority of parents access a range of information through a variety of channels to make their decision.

- 90% visited school websites, with 78% visiting two or more
- 93% attended a one-on-one school visit or open day
- 83% read school publications, such as school prospectuses and brochures.

Figure 7 : Usefulness of School Marketing, All Responses (Likert scale scores)





This school has changed her life for the better and I hear stories every single day from other parents at this school who say the same thing.

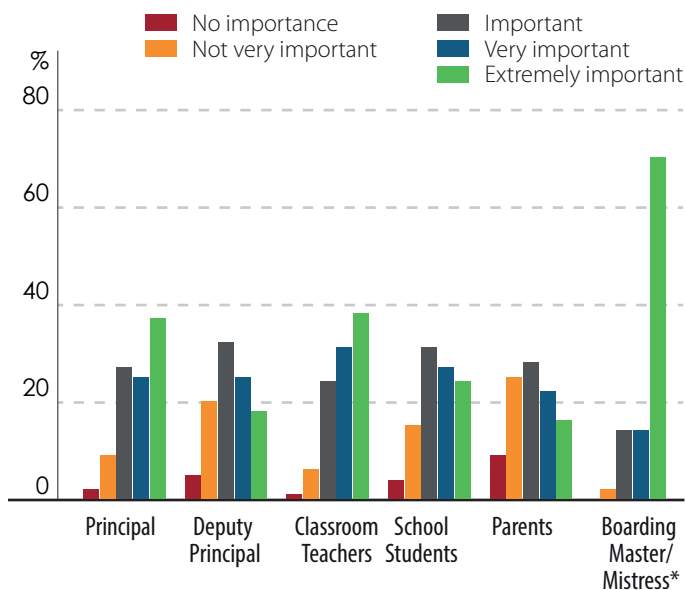
PARENT RESPONSE ID 407

Meeting School Representatives

Personal contact with future members of a school community is important to parents. According to the survey, independent school parents most value meeting "classroom teachers" (38%) and the "principal" (37%).

For parents of boarding students, the boarding master or mistress is the staff member they most want to meet, with 70% of these parents rating this contact as "extremely important" (refer Figure 8).

Figure 8: Distribution of Importance of Meeting School Representatives



* Only responses from parents of boarding students

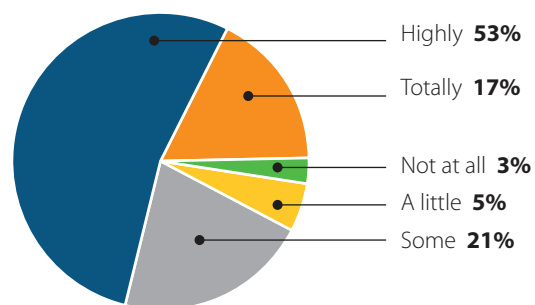
School Facilities

A school's physical environment often plays an important role in a parent's first impressions of a school. Independent schools invest significant time and money into upgrading and maintaining their facilities as part of their commitment to delivering a high-quality, holistic and contemporary education.

Parents with children in Queensland independent schools contribute on average 75% of the funds for independent school facilities.

According to the survey, 70% of parents say their choice of school was totally or highly influenced by the look of the school and facilities on offer (refer Figure 9).

Figure 9: Degree of Influence of School Facilities





Our chosen independent school has been a breath of fresh air. They recognise that each child learns differently and they provide for that in their classrooms. Teaching staff have a high level of respect for the students which shows every time we step onto school grounds. Most importantly, our children love their school.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 133



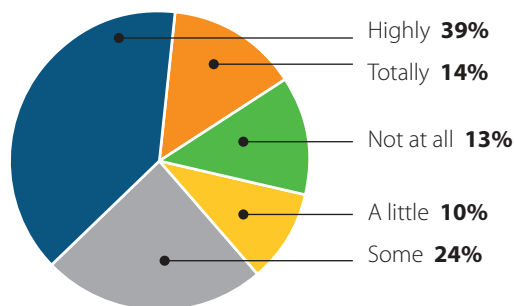
Child's Opinion

Many parents don't make decisions about their child's schooling on their own. Often children have a say in their future school.

According to the survey findings, 53% of parents said their selection of school was "totally or highly" influenced by their child's opinion (14% and 39% respectively) (refer Figure 10).

Parents of boarding students were more likely to be influenced by their child's opinion with 65% of these families "totally or highly influenced".

Figure 10: Degree Influenced by Child's Opinion, Distribution of Responses (%)

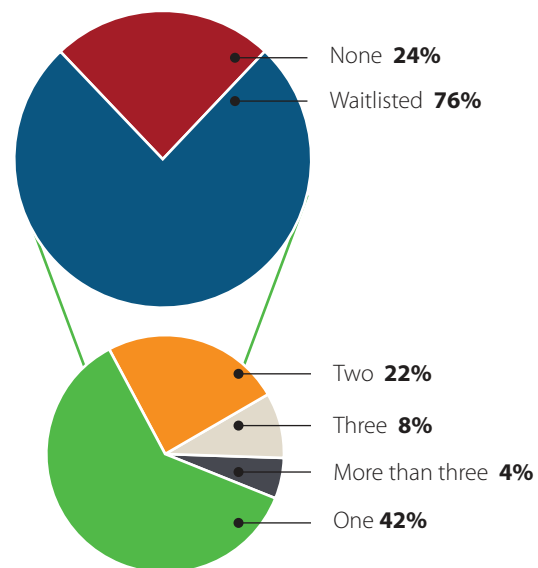


Applying for Enrolment

Deciding which school a child attends may ultimately come down to whether there is a place available. Many independent schools operate waiting lists to manage enrolment interest from families.

According to the survey, 76% of parents put their child's name on a waiting list. Of these families, 55% only put their child's name down at the independent school they subsequently enrolled in (refer figure 11).

Figure 11: Waitlist Registration Numbers and Waiting Lists Students Registered on





The teachers are skilled, the children enjoy going to school and they feel safe and secure. I have a great relationship with all the staff including the principal and both deputy principals.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 54

The Final Decision

When it comes to the final decision on school selection, parents are influenced by a multitude of factors, including less tangible reasons related to the environment they believe is the best fit for their child or will bring out their best.

Top influencing factors

In the survey, parents were asked to identify the extent to which 43 factors, categorised by school type, curriculum programs, school characteristics, services and people, contributed to their decision. This was done on a five-point Likert scale with a score of 1 being of “no importance” and 5 being “totally important”.

Based on an analysis of these results the top 10 most important factors driving school decisions by independent school parents are listed, in order (ranked 1-10) in the summary table.

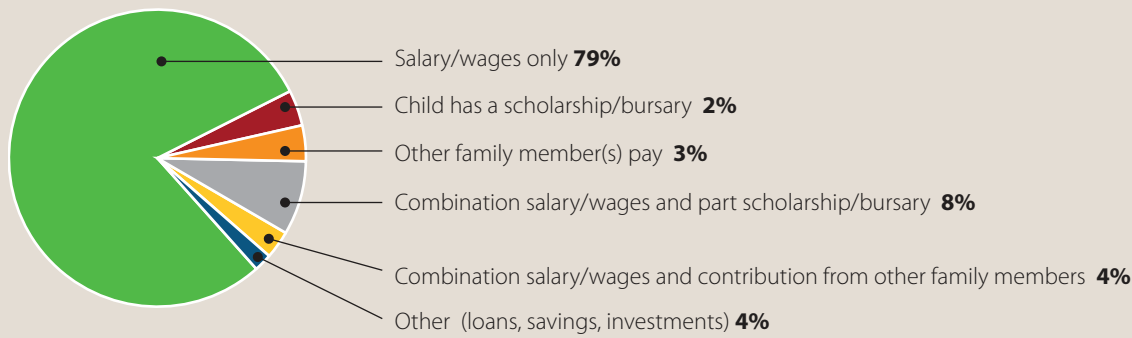
These factors have remained relatively constant over the past 15 years, although their rankings have changed over time, with other factors making the top 10 in previous survey years.

IN SUMMARY

Ten Most Important Factors (2006-2021), By Ranking

FACTOR	2006	2010	2014	2018	2021
Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life	1	1	1	1	1
School seemed right for child's individual needs	5	7	6	3	2
The high-quality of teachers	n/a	4	3	2	3
Encouragement of responsible attitude to school work	3	3	4	6	4
Teaching methods/philosophy	4	5	5	5	5
Reputation of school	7	6	8	7	6
Good discipline	2	2	2	4	7
Emphasis placed by school on developing student's sense of community responsibility	6	8	7	8	8
Range of subjects offered			10	9	9
Prospects for school leavers		10			10
Strong academic performance	9	9	9		
Small class size	8				
Appearance/behaviour of existing students	10				
Size of school				10	

Figure 12: School Fee Payment Strategies



Paying fees

Queensland independent schools serve families from all income levels.

Almost 30% of respondents indicated they had weekly gross household income levels in the three lowest income brackets (less than \$2,000). Income levels were based on Queensland income deciles evidenced in the 2016 Census of Population and Housing.

Queensland independent schools that charge tuition fees* recognise the financial commitment their parent communities make in their child's education from their after-tax incomes.

Parents often make significant financial sacrifices in other areas of their lives to send their child to an independent school.

The overwhelming majority of parents (91%) rely on their salaries, either wholly (79%), or in combination with other sources such as part scholarship/bursary (8%), or other family members, to meet schooling costs (4%) (refer Figure 12).

* Special Assistance Schools serving at-risk and disengaged young people do not charge tuition fees. Special Assistance Schools are the fastest growing school type in the independent sector rising to 28 schools in 2021.



The sense of community we felt the moment we walked in was not something we had felt anywhere else. My daughter was immediately at ease and excited about starting school.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 619

Participating Member Schools

A B Paterson College
 Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School
 All Saints Anglican School
 All Souls St Gabriels School
 Ananda Marga River School
 Anglican Church Grammar School
 Annandale Christian College
 Arcadia College
 Arethusa College
 Australian Christian College – Moreton
 Australian Industry Trade College – Redlands
 Australian International Islamic College
 Australian Technology and Agricultural College
 Autism Queensland Education and Therapy Centre
 Bayside Christian College Hervey Bay
 Birali Steiner School
 Blackall Range Independent School
 Brisbane Boys' College
 Brisbane Christian College
 Brisbane Girls Grammar School
 Brisbane Grammar School
 Brisbane Independent School
 Brisbane Montessori School

Bundaberg Christian College
 Burdekin Christian College
 Caboolture Montessori School
 Caloundra Christian College
 Caloundra City Private School
 Calvary Christian College
 Calvary Christian College – Townsville
 Cannon Hill Anglican College
 Carinity Education – Glendyne
 Carmichael College
 Chinchilla Christian College
 Christian Outreach College
 Clayfield College
 Concordia Lutheran College
 Cooloola Christian College
 Coolum Beach Christian College
 Discovery Christian College
 Emerald Christian College
 Emmanuel College
 Fairholme College
 Faith Lutheran College – Plainland
 Glasshouse Christian College
 Glenvale Christian School
 Good News Lutheran School
 Good Shepherd Christian School
 Good Shepherd Lutheran College
 Goora Gan Steiner School
 Grace Lutheran College
 Grace Lutheran Primary School
 Groves Christian College
 Heights College

Hillbrook Anglican School
 Immanuel Lutheran College
 Ipswich Girls' Grammar School
 Ipswich Grammar School
 Kimberley College
 Lighthouse Christian School
 Living Faith Lutheran Primary School
 Lourdes Hill College
 Mackay Christian College
 Montessori International College
 Montessori Noosa
 Moreton Bay Boys College
 Moreton Bay College
 Mueller College
 Ormiston College
 Pacific Lutheran College
 Parklands Christian College
 Peregian Beach Community College
 Prince of Peace Lutheran College
 Redeemer Lutheran College – Rochedale
 Redlands College
 Redwood College
 Rivermount College
 Riverside Christian College
 Samford Valley Steiner School
 Sheldon College
 Somerset College
 Somerville House
 St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School
 St Andrew's Anglican College
 St Andrew's Lutheran College

St Luke's Anglican School
 St Margaret's Anglican Girls School
 St Michael's College
 St Patrick's College Townsville
 St Paul's Lutheran Primary School
 St Paul's School
 St Peters Lutheran College
 St Peters Lutheran College – Springfield
 St Ursula's College (Toowoomba)
 Staines Memorial College
 Stuartholme School
 Suncoast Christian College
 Sunshine Coast Grammar School
 Tec-NQ
 The Glennie School
 The Lakes College
 The SCOTS PGC College
 The Southport School
 The Spot Academy
 The Springfield Anglican College
 Toowoomba Christian College
 Toowoomba Grammar School
 Townsville Christian College
 Townsville Grammar School
 Trinity Anglican School
 Trinity College
 Trinity Lutheran College
 West Moreton Anglican College
 Westside Christian College
 Whitsunday Anglican School

APRIL 2022



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