

What Parents Want

An Independent Schools Queensland Survey



The Lakes College

Key Findings
March 2015



Acknowledgements

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The role played by Dr Deidre Thian, ISQ Principal Consultant (Research), who designed and conducted the survey is particularly acknowledged.

Quotations appearing in this document are from survey responses.

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“Apart from a loving family, the gift of a good education is the single biggest gift you can bestow on your children which will last a lifetime.”

Parent Comment

Executive Summary

School choice is one of the most critical decisions any parent will make in respect of their children. Understanding how and why parents make such a decision is crucial in ensuring independent schools continue to meet the needs of parents while sustaining a healthy and viable independent schooling sector into the future.

In October 2014 Independent Schools Queensland commissioned the third in a series of surveys previously undertaken in 2006 and 2010. The *What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey* examines the decision-making process parents undertake when choosing to send their child/children to an independent school, including the influence of varying sources of information available to parents and the relative importance of a myriad of factors that can influence school choice.

The 2014 survey was completed by more than 1,000 parents who had children attending independent schools in Queensland. These children attended 67 schools across the State.

Results from the series of surveys reinforce that while some things change over time, many things remain the same.

The most important factors for parents choosing an independent school identified in the 2014 Survey were the same as reported in earlier surveys

- *Preparation for student to fulfil their potential in later life*
- *Good discipline*
- *Encouragement of a responsible attitude to school work*
- *The high quality of teachers*
- *Teaching methods/philosophy*

As in previous surveys, *family, friends and colleagues* and *other parents with children at the school* were the most influential sources of initial information for parents.

The 2014 Survey outcomes indicate parents are becoming more discerning when it comes to school choice, starting the decision-making process earlier and being more likely to consider a greater range of schooling options, albeit they still choose an independent school.

- In 2014 approximately seven in every 10 parents started thinking about *which school* for their child at least two years before the child was due to commence schooling, up from approximately five in every 10 parents in 2010.
- The proportion of parents considering all three schooling sectors (State, Catholic and independent) increased from 17% in 2006, to 23% in 2010 and 28% in 2014.
- Forty-eight per cent (48%) of parents considered only independent schools in 2014, down from 56% in 2010 and 61% in 2006.

Satisfaction levels with independent schools remain high, but financial pressures are impacting on parental choice.

- Eighty-five per cent (85%) of parents with children that had attended the same school in the preceding year did not consider changing school. In 2006 and 2010, 93% and 89% of parents respectively did not consider changing school in the preceding year.

- The most commonly cited reason by the 15% of parents who thought about changing schools in 2014 was *financial reasons*. Despite thinking about changing school, nearly 70% of parents who thought about changing schools were satisfied their child remained at the school.
- In 2014, 86% of parents said their children under school age would definitely attend an independent school. This is a reduction from 89% in 2010 and 91% in 2006. In both 2006 and 2010, 8% of parents were undecided. In 2014 this percentage had increased to 12%.

Government policy has had an impact on attendance at kindergarten programs prior to school commencement. The establishment of Government approved programs across Queensland has occurred since the 2010 survey. In 2010 just over two-thirds of Prep students had attended a kindergarten program in the previous year. In 2014 this proportion increased to 88% of Prep students.

Despite an increase in availability of kindergarten facilities associated with schools, with many provided through Government support, the proportion of Prep students that attended a kindergarten associated with a school in 2014 was similar to the result in 2010 (37% compared to 36%, respectively).

Key Findings

Responses were received from 1,048 parents with students attending 67 independent schools across Queensland.

The full What Parents Want Survey Report analyses these responses across a range of variables, including type of school (co-educational or single gender), attendance (day and boarding students), year levels, whether students were new to the school or continuing students, as well as a number of socio-economic factors, including family type and family income levels.

Satisfaction with independent schools

Overall, most parents are satisfied with the quality of education provided by the independent schools their children attend.

The majority of parents (89%) that had more than one child attending school, had all their school-aged students attending independent schools (refer Figure 1).

Of those parents who had children under school-age, the majority (86%) of parents were intending to send these children to independent schools (refer Figure 2). Only 2% indicated that they had decided these future students would not attend an independent school. The balance (12%) of parents with under school-aged children was undecided.

Parents of students who were at the same independent school as they had attended in the previous year were asked if they had considered changing school. Eighty-five per cent (85%) of parents with children continuing at their school did not consider changing school (refer Figure 3). Over two-thirds (69%) of parents who considered changing schools were satisfied with their decision for the child to remain at the school.

Parents with a child who had considered changing school, most frequently cited *financial reasons* such as *fee increases* - 41% of parents cited this as a reason for considering changing schools. It is of interest to note that approximately four in every 10 parents indicated they had not planned ahead for payment of school fees, with most parents reliant on salary/wages for fee payment.

The majority of students who had transferred to their current independent school in 2014 had previously attended a government school (57% of students including students who had previously attended an Independent Public School (IPS) (refer Figure 4).

Just over a quarter (26%) of students had attended a different independent school, with the balance having attended Catholic schools (16%) or been home schooled (1%).

A range of reasons were given for parents deciding to change to the current independent school, with the most frequently cited being that *a better level of education was available elsewhere* (36% of parents cited this as a reason for changing schools), followed by *insufficient attention was being given to the child's individual needs* (27% of parents).

Parents of students who had previously attended a different independent school most frequently cited *family relocation* as the reason for changing school (51% of parents).

The majority (88%) of Prep students had previously attended a kindergarten program. Of those responses where the Prep student had *previously attended a kindergarten program*, 63% attended *a program at a centre not attached to a school* (37% at a kindergarten service and 26% at a long day care service), with 30% attending a kindergarten program associated with the independent school the child attends (refer Figure 5).

The balance of Prep students who had attended a kindergarten program attended a service associated with a different school (7%).



Figure 1: Schooling Sectors Attended – Parents With More Than One School-aged Child (%)

- Independent & Catholic Schools 3%
- Independent & State Schools 8%
- Independent Schools Only 89%

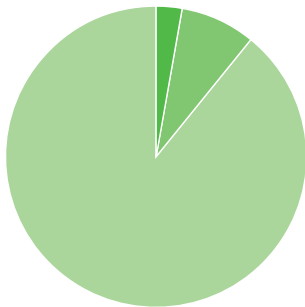


Figure 2: Intending to enrol at an Independent School – Parents With Children Under School-age (%)

- Yes 86%
- No 2%
- Undecided 12%

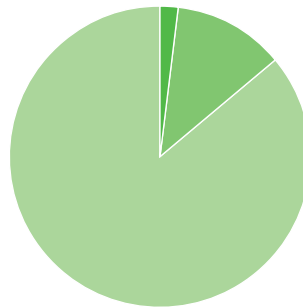


Figure 3: Continuing Students – Proportion of Parents Who Considered Changing School (%)

- No 85%
- Yes 15%

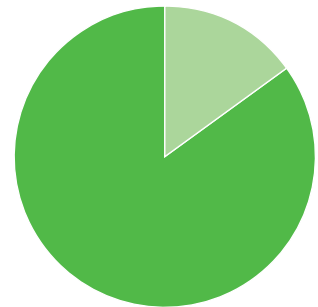


Figure 4: Schooling Sector Previously Attended (%)

- A Independent Public School (IPS) 1%
- Home schooled 1%
- A Catholic school 16%
- A different independent school 26%
- A State/Government school 56%

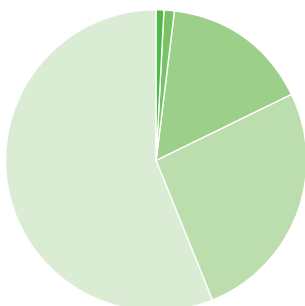
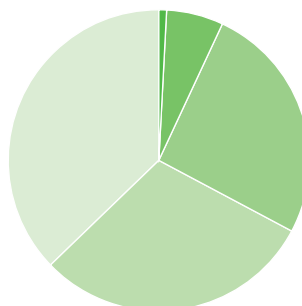


Figure 5: Proportion of Prep Students Who Attended a Kindergarten Program, by Service Type (%)

- Kindergarten/Long Day Care service attached to a Catholic school 1%
- Kindergarten/Long Day Care service attached to a DIFFERENT independent school than the one your child is attending 6%
- Long Day Care service not attached to a school 26%
- Kindergarten/Long Day Care service attached to the SAME independent school your child is attending 30%
- Kindergarten service not attached to a school 37%

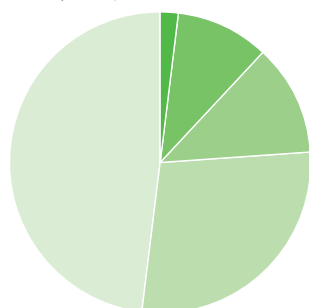




The Decision-making Process

Figure 6: Schooling Sectors Considered (%)

- Independent and Independent Public Schools 2%
- Catholic and independent schools 10%
- State and independent schools 12%
- State, Catholic and independent schools 28%
- Only independent schools 48%



Schooling Sectors

Nearly half (48%) of parents *only considered independent schools* to provide their child's education (refer Figure 6).

All three schooling sectors were considered by just over a quarter (28%) of parents.

Of these parents who ultimately selected an independent school for their child, 38% had *also considered Catholic schools* while 42% had *considered State schools (including Independent Public Schools)*.

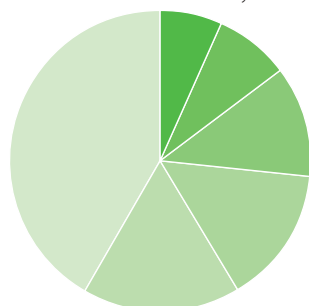
When the decision-making process starts

For most parents (71%) the start of the process of school selection commenced *at least two years before the child commenced at the school* (refer Figure 7).

Most parents start considering which school *more than a year out from the child commencing school* with only 15% of parents starting the process *within one year of the child commencing school*. This highlights the importance of marketing to parents of children who will enter their school in the medium and long term.

Figure 7: When Parents First Start Thinking about School Selection (%)

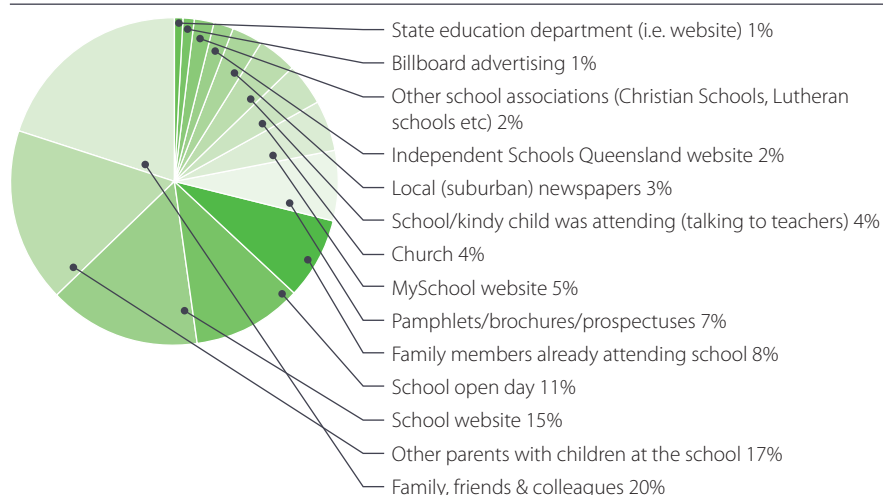
- <6 months 7%
- 6 months to <12 months 8%
- Before birth 12%
- 1 year to <2 years 15%
- From birth 17%
- 2 to 5 years 42%



"My choice was not about fees, religious affiliation, or academic results, it was about a nurturing and fulfilling environment for my boys, where I know they will enjoy actual learning."

Parent Comment

Figure 8: Sources of Information Accessed by Parents When Considering School Selection (% of citations)



Information sources accessed initially

Parents identified the people and places they went to in order to gather information when they first started thinking about which school to choose for their child. Parents indicated a wide range of information sources was accessed (refer Figure 8).

The most influential sources of information were *family, friends and colleagues*, followed by *other parents with children at the school*, the *school website* and the *school open day*.

School Visits

School visits are amongst the more important sources of information for decision-making, with 83% of parents visiting a school prior to making a decision.

Nearly 6 in every ten parents (59%) visited *two or more schools*, with half of these (3 in ten) visiting *only two schools*. The remaining 41% (4 in ten) *only visited one school*.

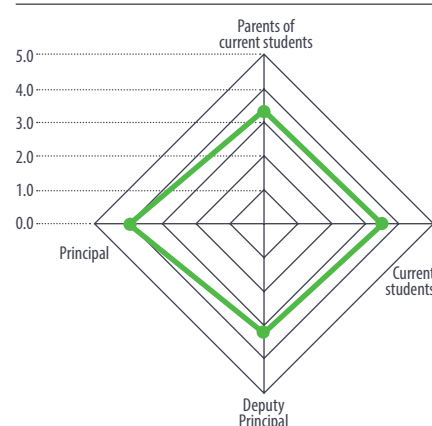
Over 80% of parents considered the *school visit as very useful or extremely useful*. This reinforces the emphasis schools need to place on ensuring the school visit is well planned and addresses the needs of individual parents.

When visiting schools parents considered the most important person for them to meet was the Principal. The *Principal* was considered more important than meeting *current students*, who were more important to meet than *parents of current students*, who were slightly more important to meet than the *Deputy Principal* (refer Figure 9).

School Websites

Thirty-eight per cent (38%) of parents identified *school websites* amongst the more important sources of information for decision-making. The majority (58%) of parents visited *three or more school websites*. This would suggest school websites need to be exceptional to stand out amongst the large number of school websites parents will visit.

Figure 9: Relative Importance of People to Meet at a School Visit



When asked to identify how useful school websites were in the decision-making process only 17% of parents considered websites as *extremely useful*. A further 34% of parents considered websites as *very useful*. This suggests that there is some room for improvement in the design and planning of school websites to help schools more directly address the questions/issues of parents looking for a school for their child.

School Printed Information

Printed information still has a place in the decision-making process despite school websites being accessed by many parents. Eighty-six per cent (86%) indicated they sourced *printed information* from a school to assist in decision-making.

Only 18% of parents considered printed information as *extremely useful*, although in total 52% of parents rated printed information as *very useful* or *extremely useful*. This suggests there is some room for improvement in the material schools provide to parents to help inform their school selection decision.

The Final Decision

While the decision as to which school a parent chooses may be influenced by information, actions and resources developed and provided by a school, ultimately there is a range of other considerations that underpin whether what people say about the school and what information provided by the school resonates with parents. More practical factors will also influence parents – *fees* may preclude attendance at a school, or the *location* of a school may make it impractical for a child to attend. Equally less tangible factors may be influential – parents are often reported as saying the school just ‘felt right’. The survey endeavours to identify which of these factors are influential and the relative importance of these factors.

Parents were provided with a list of 42 factors, categorised as relating to school type, curriculum/programs offered at the school, school characteristics, aspects related to services and the nature of people who could be influential in decisions. Parents were asked to identify the extent to which each of the factors contributed to their decision on a five point Likert scale ranging from *no importance* to *very important*.

Relative Importance of Factors

Fourteen factors received a Likert scale score of at least 4 out of 5. These factors were, in descending order of Likert scores:

- *Preparation for student to fulfil their potential in later life*
- *Good discipline*
- *The high quality of teachers*
- *Encouragement of responsible attitude to school work*
- *Teaching methods/philosophy*
- *School seemed right for child's individual needs*
- *Emphasis placed by school on developing student's sense of community responsibility*
- *Reputation of school*
- *Strong academic performance*
- *Range of subjects offered*
- *Appearance/behavior of existing students*
- *Facilities for technology and science*
- *Small class sizes*
- *Prospects for school leavers*

Those five factors to receive the highest Likert scores were all categorised as *School Characteristics* and also identified by over half of all parents as *very important*.

The Final Gate – the Waiting List

A myriad of reasons interact to determine which school a parent chooses. However whether the student can attend the chosen school will depend on sufficient capacity existing in the appropriate year level. A parent's decision may ultimately come down to whether there is a place available at the school of choice.

After the decision-making process is completed, most parents want to make sure their child can commence school in at least one of the schools selected, with the majority (79%) of parents placing their child's name on a waiting list. Of these students *on a waiting list*, 57% (nearly 6 in every ten) were *only on the waiting list for the school they attended*. The balance (approximately 4 in every ten students on a waiting list), were *registered with more than one school*.

“The ‘feel’ of the school played a huge role in where we chose to send our child. It had to be child centred with a strong home/school connection and open door policy for parental involvement.”

Parent Comment



Responses to the survey were received from parents with children attending 67 independent schools in Queensland

All Souls St Gabriels School	Hervey Bay Christian Academy	Somerville House
Anglican Church Grammar School	Immanuel Lutheran College	St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School
Annandale Christian College	Ipswich Girls' Grammar School	St Andrew's Anglican college
Brisbane Girls Grammar School	John Paul College	St Hilda's School
Brisbane Grammar School	King's Christian College	St John's Anglican College
Bundaberg Christian College	Living Faith Lutheran Primary School	St Margaret's Anglican Girls School
Caboolture Montessori School	Moreton Bay Birali Steiner School	Stuartholme School
Calvary Christian College – Logan	Moreton Bay Boys' College	Sunshine Coast Grammar School
Calvary Christian College – Townsville	Moreton Bay College	The Cathedral School of St Anne & St James
Cannon Hill Anglican College	Nambour Christian College	The Lakes College
Carinity Glendyne	Noosa Pengari Steiner School	The Rockhampton Grammar School
Central Queensland Christian College	Northpine Christian College	The School of Total Education
Clayfield College	Ormiston College	The SCOTS PGC College
Concordia Lutheran College	Peace Lutheran Primary School	Toowoomba Anglican College & Preparatory School
Coomera Anglican College	Peregian Beach Community College	Toowoomba Christian College
Emmanuel College	Prince of Peace Lutheran College	Toowoomba Grammar School
Endeavour Christian College	Redeemer Lutheran College	Trinity Anglican School
Fairholme College	Redlands College	Victory College
Faith Lutheran College – Plainlands	Rivermount College	West Moreton Anglican College
Faith Lutheran College – Redlands	Rockhampton Girls Grammar School	Whitsunday Anglican School
Fraser Coast Anglican College	Saint Stephen's College	Whitsunday Christian College
Grace Lutheran College	Silkwood School	
Heights College	Somerset College	



Stuartholme School

What parents are saying



"Word of mouth from friends was the most influential thing and observing the growth and development of their children at the school."

Parent Comment



It was very hard to choose one thing that made our decision to choose [School Name]. The school ticked all the boxes and it had an amazing 'feel' about it right from the start, from the children to the staff to the buildings. I would sell my house before pulling my child from [School name] it is just wonderful.

Parent Comment



"After experiencing this school since the beginning of 2013, I wouldn't send our children anywhere else. It's amazing!"

Parent Comment



"We have particularly valued the supportive community environment of [School Name]. It is so much more than an education; they're raising leaders within a respectful, valuing family. Our teenage sons want to go to school because they respect and appreciate their teachers, and are valued and supported by both staff and peers. As a family, we cannot speak highly enough of [School Name]."

Parent Comment



"Our expectations have been exceeded by our school. The teachers are so good that they have set a very high standard in our minds, we wouldn't consider leaving now. The families we have met through the school are great, they seem to share the same family goals as we do."

Parent Comment



"Our transition from a state school (where he attended Year 7) has been a very positive one. He is now surrounded by boys who are keen to work and try hard. His opportunities to try new sports and have specialist coaching are amazing. He will be encouraged to grow into the great community minded person that we know he is."

Parent Comment

This document can be downloaded at www.isq.qld.edu.au
The full Survey Report can be downloaded by members from ISQ Hub.



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Queensland**

choice & diversity

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