

What Parents Want

An Independent Schools Queensland Survey



**Key
Findings**

Survey Report
AUGUST 2025



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.

What Parents Want Survey 2025

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 is acknowledged for her work in the preparation of the 2025 report findings of the sixth *What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey*.

SCHOOL IMAGES

Pacific Lutheran College
Canterbury College
Saint Stephen's College
Stuartholme School
Tec-NQ
St Paul's School
Livingston Christian College

School images are not necessarily aligned with the response quotes listed throughout this document. Quotes are a diverse selection from the 2025 survey.

SECTOR SNAPSHOT

STUDENTS: 158,664

18% of all Queensland students
20% of all Queensland high school students

SCHOOLS: 249

SCHOOL TYPES

165 Combined
30 Primary
48 Secondary
6 Special *

SCHOOL GENDER

232 Co-educational
17 Single-gender

FAMILIES

Independent schools serve families from all income levels

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

Source 2025 Non-government School Census (State) February collection.

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

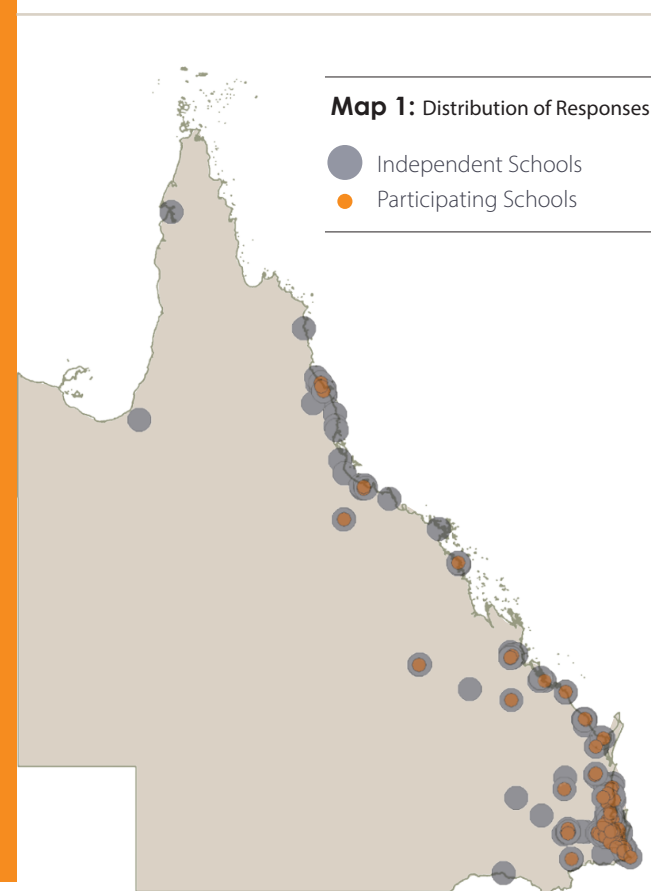
- Six surveys over 19 years: 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2021, 2025

2025 Survey

The 2025 survey gained responses from 3,308 parents with children attending 103 independent schools which operated across 107 sites. This reflects a representative snapshot of the sector by location, school type, parental background and student enrolments.

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).



Our family highly values (the school's) focus on all aspects of the student's development, including academic, sporting and emotional. We believe the school provides plentiful opportunities to meet the individual needs of each of our children in a very supportive and professional environment.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 403



Saint Stephen's College

Executive Summary

These are the top line findings from 3,308 parents with children at 103 independent schools who participated in the 2025 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:

- 44% of parents with children entering a new school in Years 1–12 only considered independent schools, while almost one in three (34%) looked at schools from all three sectors.

Decision timeframe

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

- More than two-thirds of parents (67%) indicated the start of the process of school selection commenced at least two years before the child started school, while 23% 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 (19%)
- School open days/formal school visit (16%)
- Other parents with children at the school (16%)
- School website and social media (16%)
- Family members already attending the school (7%).

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.

- More than seven in 10 parents (73%) 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.

- More than five in 10 parents (54%) 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. The high-quality of teachers
3. School seemed right for child's individual needs
4. Reputation of school
5. Encouragement of responsible attitude to school-work
6. Good discipline
7. Emphasis placed by school on developing student's sense of community responsibility
8. Teaching methods/philosophy
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.

- Four out of five parents (80%) put their child's name on a waiting list. Of those students on a school's wait list, 30% were also registered on at least one other school's wait list.

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.

- Nearly three quarters of parents (74%) said they had planned ahead to ensure the financial cost of school fees was manageable. The highest percentage in the survey's history.



After two weeks at the school, our daughter has come home positive, having had an engaging and enjoyable experience. Our initial impression is that the school is successfully meeting our primary concern: providing a safe, supportive environment that allows her to focus on her studies.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 1095



Stuartholme 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.

Of particular note for this year's survey, is it is the first with majority of respondents falling into the Millennial demographic.

What Parents Want Survey Trends 2006–2025

Independent school parents are more likely to weigh up all available schooling options in Queensland's three schooling sectors – 34% in 2025 compared with 17% in 2006.

Parents are now more likely to plan ahead to pay for school fees – 74% in 2025 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 – 67% in 2025 compared with 58% in 2006.

The overwhelming majority of children now entering Prep at Queensland independent schools have already attended kindergarten – 92% in 2025 compared with 66% in 2010. This is back on par with the 2018 survey after dipping to 90% in 2021, the only year when the trend had decreased.

Parents are more likely to base their decisions, wholly or to a significant degree, on the appearance of a school and its facilities – 73% in 2025 compared with 42% in 2006.

The influence of a child's opinion on school choice in 2025 remains fairly consistent at 54%, compared to 53% in the previous two surveys.

Family, friends and colleagues have been the most turned to and influential sources of information on school choice for parents across all six 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

2006

2010

2014

2018

2022

Social, Economic and Policy Change 2006–2025

2006 Facebook launched to the public; Twitter commenced
2007 First Apple iPhone released
2007 Full-time Prep Year introduced
2007 Global Financial Crisis

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

2023 Global COVID-19 pandemic ends
2023 Australian Curriculum (V9.0) begins being implemented across Australian schools

Figure 1: Schooling Sectors Considered (%)

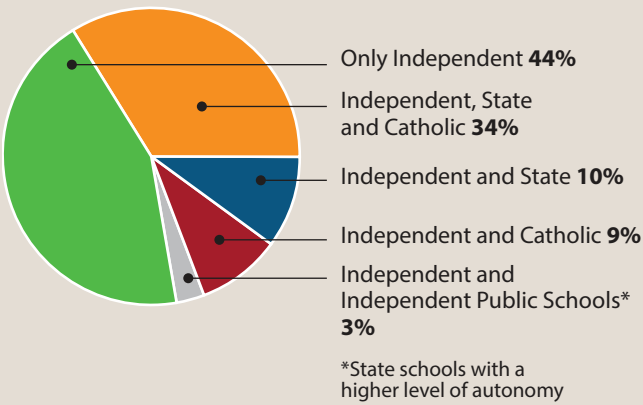


Figure 2: Consideration by Parents of All Three Schooling Sectors in Survey Years

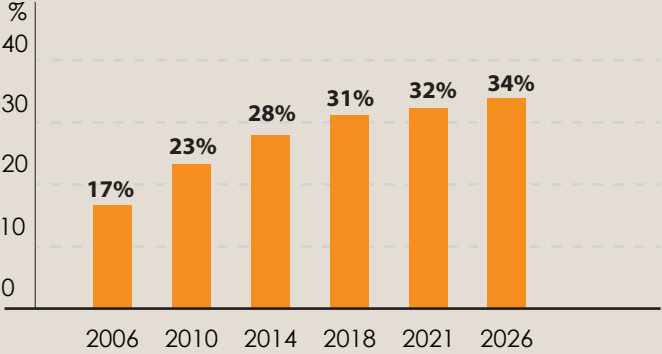


Figure 4: Schooling Sectors Attended, More than One School-Aged Child (%)

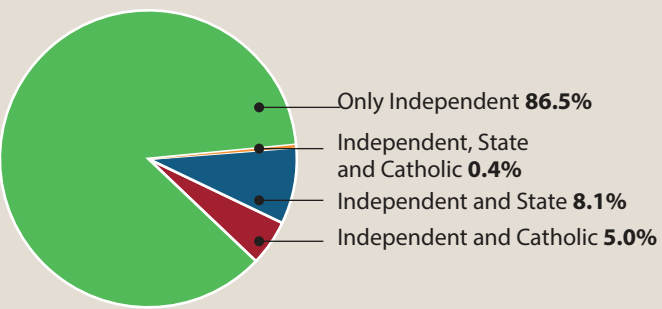
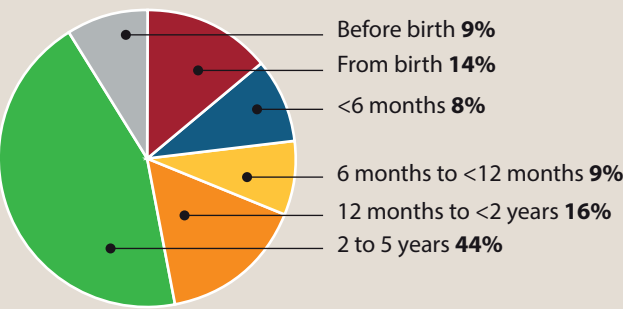


Figure 5: School Selection Process Timeframe (%)



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 2025 *What Parents Want* Survey, while the largest proportion of parents (44%) had their sights firmly set on an independent school for their child, more than one third of parents (34%) weighed up schools in all three sectors (refer Figure 1).

Parents of new entrant to secondary year levels from Year 8-12 were the most likely new entrant group to consider only independent schools (47% compared to an overall response average for new entrant parents of 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 nearly 18% of all Queensland school children, and roughly 20% of families with children in secondary school.

Moving Schools

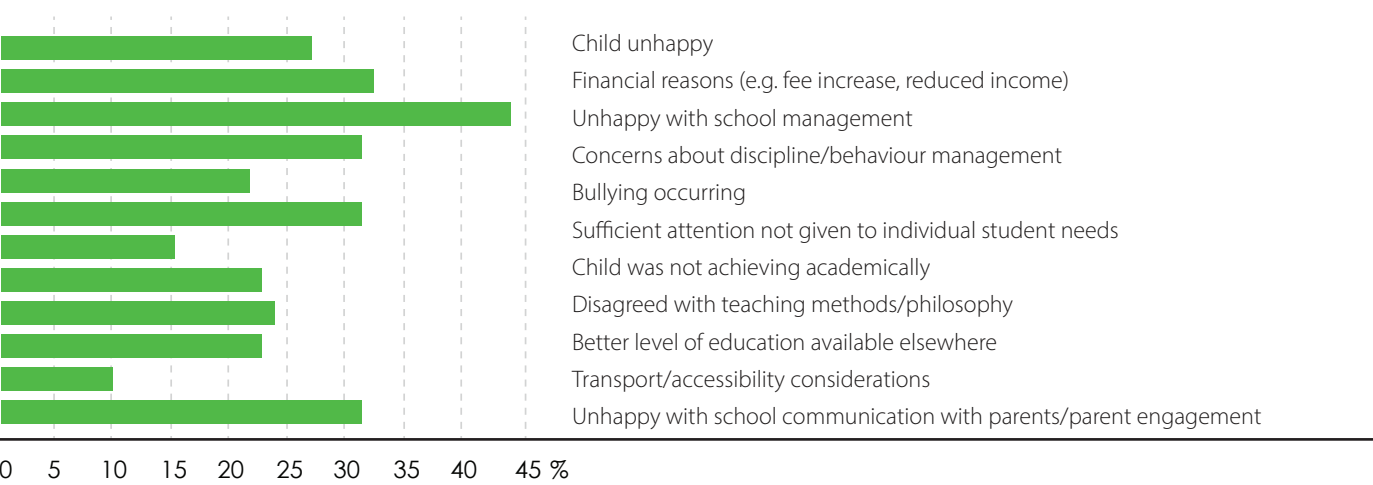
Each year some families move their children to different schools for various reasons.

Of those parents that considered changing schools, the most frequently cited reason was 'unhappy with school management' (41% of parents cited this as a reason for changing schools) (refer Figure 3). This proportion was a slight increase from previous *What Parents Want* surveys in both 2018 and 2021 when 38% of parents considered changing schools.

The next most frequently cited reason by parents was 'Financial reasons (e.g. fee increases, reduced income)' (30% of parents cited this as a reason). This is a significant increase from the previous *What Parents Want* survey in 2021 when 22% of parents cited this reason, but lower than the percentage in the 2018 edition when 33% of parents considered this as a reason for considering changing schools, making this the second most commonly cited reason in both 2025 and 2018.

Considering the cost of living pressures facing Australians in recent years, it is not overly surprising to see this number increase in the latest survey.

Figure 3: Reasons for Considering a School Change in 2024, Parents



Siblings

Parents' satisfaction with the independent sector is reflected by survey findings showing 86.5% of parents with more than one school-aged child also sent these children to independent schools (refer Figure 4).

Of those parents who had children under school-age, the majority of parents were intending to send these children to independent schools (89%).

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%.

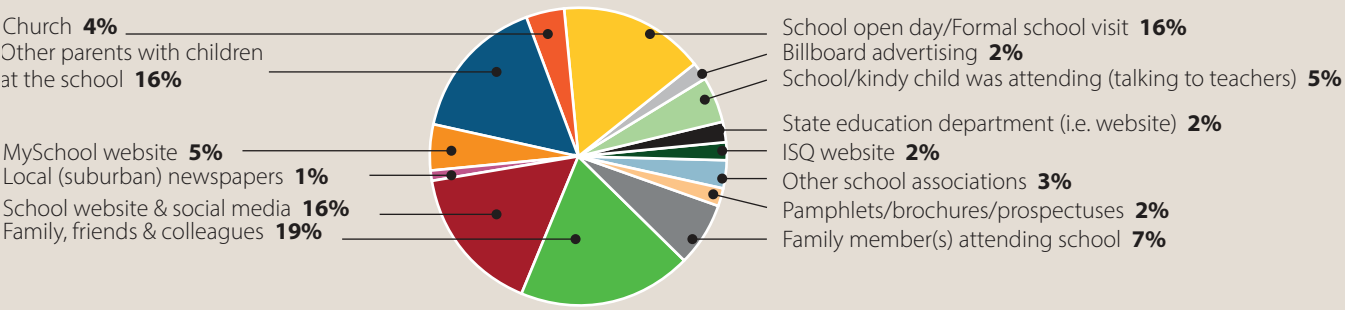
Decision Timeframe

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.

Parents were asked when they first started thinking about schools for their child. More than two-thirds of parents (67%) indicated the start of the process of school selection commenced at least two years before the child started school. An even greater proportion of parents (74%) also indicated they planned ahead to pay school fees.

The 2025 survey found 23% of parents started considering schools well in advance, before or from their child's birth (refer Figure 5) – a similar proportion as in 2006.

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 (refer Figure 6).

Parents most frequently cited 'family, friends and colleagues' for information. This group has been the top trusted source in all six parent surveys since 2006.

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 (69%)
- 2. School open day/formal visit (58%)
- 3. Other parents with children at school (51%)
- 4. School website and social media (40%)
- 5. Family members already attending the school (23%)

The only other information sources to be identified by at least 10% of parents as being amongst the three most influential in their decision-making were, in descending order of influence, the MySchool website and the School/kindy child was attending (14% each) and the church (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.

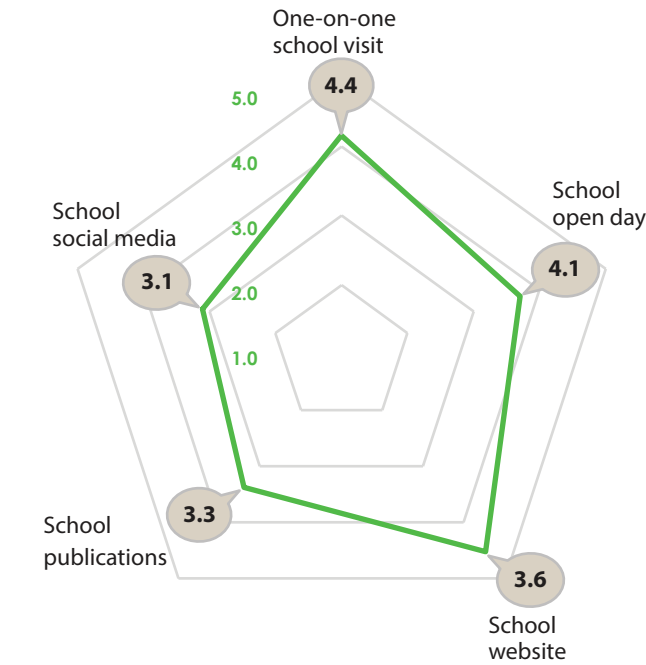
Parents were asked to rate how useful these sources of information were, by rating them on a five-point Likert scale with a score of five being the highest rating.

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.

- 92% visited school websites, with 79% visiting two or more
- 92% attended a one-on-one school visit or open day
- 79% read school publications, such as school prospectuses and brochures.

Figure 7: Usefulness of School Marketing, All Responses

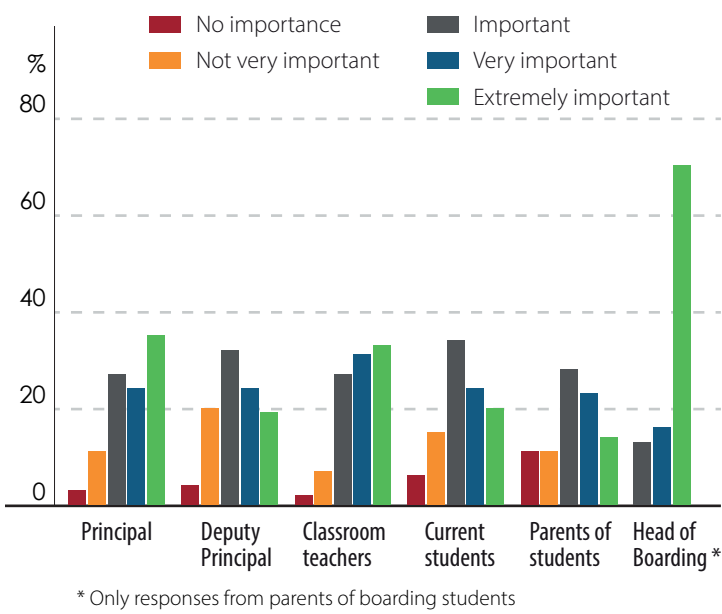


Meeting School Representatives

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 and the principal.

According to the 2025 survey, 33% of all respondents considered meeting classroom teachers as 'extremely important'. Meeting the Principal had a similar response.

Figure 8: Distribution of Importance of Meeting School Representatives



We love how our school has the ability to decide what is best for the school culture and students.

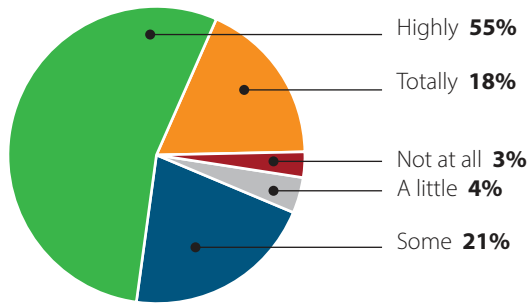
PARENT RESPONSE ID 526

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, 73% 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). This is a 3% increase compared to the previous survey.

Figure 9: Degree of Influence of School Facilities (%)



“

We have been extremely happy with the school environment, the education provided, and the school staff. We chose an independent school that aligns with our family values and appreciate the opportunity to do so.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 650



“

The school's philosophy program and outdoor education program were major factors in our decision. We also appreciate the emphasis on having a balanced life.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 951

Child's Opinion

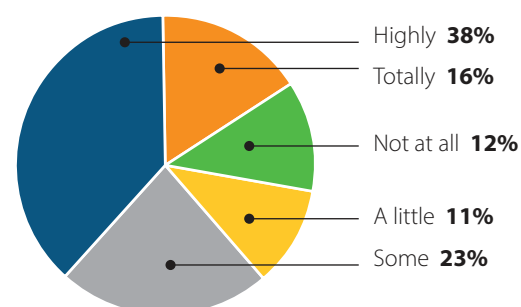
Many parents don't make decisions about their child's schooling on their own. Often children have a say in their future school.

According to the survey findings, 54% of parents said their selection of school was 'totally or highly' influenced by their child's opinion (refer Figure 10).

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

The next two groups to be most likely to consider the child's opinion was 'totally' or 'highly' influential were parents of students attending regional schools (64% of parents) and parents of students attending single gender schools (62% of parents).

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

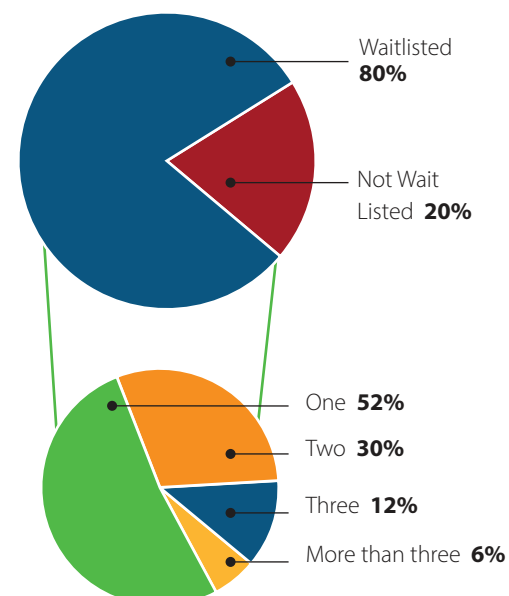


Applying for Enrolment

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 latest survey, 80% of parents put their child's name on a waiting list compared to 76% in 2021. Of these families, 52% were only on the waiting list they assumedly attended (refer Figure 11).

Figure 11: Number of School Waiting Lists Students Registered On (%)



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 one being of 'no importance' and five 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 19 years, although their rankings have changed over time, with other factors making the top 10 in previous years.

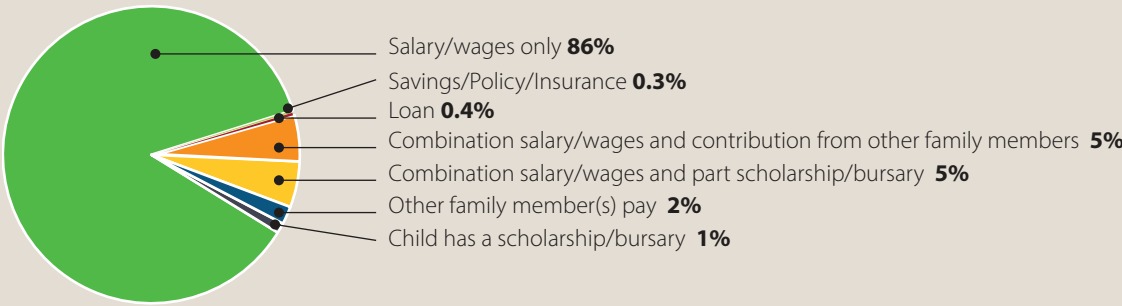
'Preparation for Student to Fulfil their Potential Later in Life', however, has remained the number one factor over the survey's lifetime.

IN SUMMARY

Ten Most Important Factors (2006-2025), By Ranking

FACTOR	2006	2010	2014	2018	2021	2025
Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life	1	1	1	1	1	1
School seemed right for child's individual needs	5	7	6	3	2	3
The high-quality of teachers	n/a	4	3	2	3	2
Encouragement of responsible attitude to school work	3	3	4	6	4	5
Teaching methods/philosophy	4	5	5	5	5	8
Reputation of school	7	6	8	7	6	4
Good discipline	2	2	2	4	7	6
Emphasis placed by school on developing student's sense of community responsibility	6	8	7	8	8	7
Range of subjects offered			10	9	9	9
Prospects for school leavers		10			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 (%)



The school grounds are very welcoming, clean, modern. The school has a community feel with teachers who are engaged, friendly and genuinely care about students and their families.

PARENT RESPONSE ID 1441

Paying fees

Queensland independent schools serve families from all income levels.

Responses showed 20% of respondents indicated they came from families in the two lowest income brackets (less than \$2,000 per week). A further 20% came from households earning \$2,750 per week or less. Income levels were based on Queensland income deciles evidenced in the 2016 Census of Population and Housing.

The overwhelming majority of parents (86%) 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 (refer Figure 12).

Funding sources outside the immediate family also played a significant role in providing financial support for some parents. In the order of 7% of parents indicated scholarships and bursaries or family members such as grandparents, either paid school fees or contributed towards school fee payments.

Participating Member Schools

A B Paterson College
Aboriginal & Islander Independent Community School
All Hallows' School
All Saints Anglican School
All Souls St Gabriels School
Alta-1 College
Angelorum College
Anglican Church Grammar School
Annandale Christian College
Arethusa College (Forest Lake)
Arethusa College (Spring Hill)
Australian International Islamic College
Bethania Lutheran Primary School
Bethany Lutheran Primary School
Biralí Steiner School
Blackall Range Independent School
Brisbane Adventist College
Brisbane Boys' College
Brisbane Christian College
Brisbane Girls Grammar School
Brisbane Grammar School
Bundaberg Christian College
Caloundra Christian College
Calvary Christian College (Springwood)
Cannon Hill Anglican College
Canterbury College
Carinity Education – Rockhampton (Mount Chalmers)

Carinity Education – Shalom (Condon)
Challenge Trade and Business College
Citipointe Christian College
Clayfield College
Clearview Christian College
Concordia Lutheran College
Cooloola Christian College
Coolum Beach Christian College
Emerald Christian College
Emmanuel College
Fairholme College
Fraser Coast Anglican College
Genesis Christian College
Glasshouse Christian College
Good Shepherd Christian School
Goora Gan Steiner School
Grace Lutheran Primary School
Highlands Christian College
Hillbrook Anglican School
Hills International College
Iona College
Ipswich Adventist School
Ipswich Grammar School
John Paul College
Josiah College
Kairos Community College
Kairos Community College (Deception Bay)
Lighthouse Christian School
Lourdes Hill College
Matthew Flinders Anglican College
Moreton Bay Boys' College

Moreton Bay College
Mueller College
Nambour Christian College
Northpine Christian College
Omni Academy of Learning
Ormiston College
Peace Lutheran College (Kamerunga)
Pine Community School (Arana Hills)
Prince of Peace Lutheran College
Redeemer Lutheran College (Rochedale)
Redeemer Lutheran College (Biloela)
Redlands College
Riverside Christian College
Rockhampton Girls Grammar School
Saint Stephen's College
Samford Valley Steiner School
Silver Lining School (Ficks Crossing)
Somerset College
South East Brisbane Steiner School
St Aidan's Anglican Girls School
St Andrew's Anglican College
St Andrews Lutheran College
St Hilda's School
St John's Lutheran School (Kingaroy)
St Luke's Anglican School
St Margaret's Anglican Girls School
St Michael's College

St Paul's School
St Peters Lutheran College (Indooroopilly)
St Peters Lutheran College (Springfield)
Staines Memorial College
Stuarthome School
Tamborine Mountain College
Tec-NQ
The Cathedral School of St Anne and St James
The Glennie School
The Lakes College
The River School
The Rockhampton Grammar School
The School of Total Education
The SCOTS PGC College
The Southport School
The Springfield Anglican College
The Sycamore School
The Village School Gold Coast
Toowoomba Anglican School
Toowoomba Christian College
Toowoomba Grammar School
Townsville Christian College
Trinity Anglican School (Kewarra Beach)
Trinity Anglican School (White Rock)
Trinity Lutheran College
Victory College
West Moreton Anglican College
Westside Christian College
Whitsunday Anglican School

* 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.

AUGUST 2025