

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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LONG-TERM VISION CRUCIAL FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

From the CEO

The 2022 Federal Election will be held this Saturday, 21 May, however unfortunately education has remained largely absent from the deluge of press conferences and high-vis laden photo-ops.

Education is a fundamental service to be delivered and funded by the Federal Government with \$25.3 billion dollars earmarked for schools in the 2022-23 Federal Budget. However, despite the enduring trend of federal initiatives and funding playing a significant role in shaping the nation's schools, any visionary plans from the current election campaign for the future of the education sector has to date been lacking.

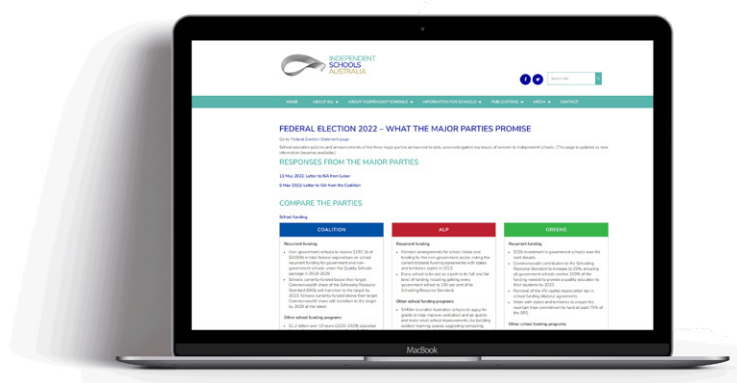
In this election campaign so far, most attention in education has been focused on teacher quality. Both major parties' Education Ministers — one a Shadow Minister, the other an Acting Minister — have parlayed the concept of mandating the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education (LANTITE) being taken and passed as part of the acceptance process for aspiring teachers, as well as tightening the entry requirements for teaching degrees to students who graduate in the top 30%¹.

In terms of dollars promised, Labor has provisioned \$71.5 million to boost the High Achieving Teachers Program to retrain mid-career professionals into teaching and will offer over \$50 million in bursaries for the 'best and brightest' to study teaching. The Party will offer part-time salary and mentoring for high demand specialties like maths and science.

Labor has also said it will focus on attracting teachers to regional areas, however details of this plan are still scant considering the longevity of this challenge. Student enrolments in regional, rural and remote independent schools are growing at the same rate as metropolitan enrolments. For many families, regional and remote boarding provides the only practical educational

option, yet repeatedly, reports have shown regional boarding schools are chronically underfunded, particularly Indigenous boarding.

The Coalition, meanwhile, has committed to provide \$40 million to support 700 new Teach for Australia teachers and 60 new teachers through La Trobe's Nexus program, as well as \$13.4 million to support changes to accreditation standards and the return of a one-year Graduate Diploma of Education. The party is also looking to invest \$6.4 million to develop a new performance assessment framework for Initial Teacher Education courses to increase quality and drive improvement².



**Figure 1: Independent Schools Australia website
Federal Election 2022 – What The Major Parties Promise**

1. Available at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/struggling-school-students-to-be-blocked-from-teaching-degrees/news-story/726bcd0ae1f415af0e9d6daa57466e88>
2. Available at <https://isa.edu.au/media-events/federal-election-2022-political-parties/>

LONG-TERM VISION CRUCIAL FOR THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

While admirable in their pursuit of quality, it seems both major parties are paying little attention to the elephant in the room. Quality means nothing if you can't attract the people in the first place and ensure a sustainable pipeline of teachers stretching longer than a three-year term in Government.

The latest data from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data initiative (ATWD) shows that one in four members of the teacher workforce indicated they were likely to leave the profession before they retire (25%) and around one in ten (13%) intended to leave in under 10 years. We also know that around 16% of our teaching workforce is approaching retirement age³.



Australian Teacher Workforce Data National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report December 2021



Figure 2: Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report December 2021

Without a doubt, teachers are central to schooling provision. They represent the heart of education. Never has this been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers continue to respond with incredible flexibility and professionalism to the challenges this great disruption presents to the school community. Inevitably, this has not come without a toll.

Independent schools urgently require resources at the school level to address the acute mental health needs of students, and to support protection and prevention programs for students and staff.

As underscored in recent research commissioned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), *School Leaders' and Staff Wellbeing is Critical for Student Success*, school leaders and teachers benefit both professionally and personally from having high levels of wellbeing, which impacts improved health, relationships, and creativity, as well as their professional commitment and job performance⁴.

While most education professionals enjoy the many opportunities working in schools and with students provides, they are also exposed to numerous stressors that can compromise their wellbeing, including excessive workload, complex and challenging students' needs, responding to parents' demands, a lack of appreciation and respect for their profession, and in some cases insecure employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified these pressures.

The same research also highlights the need to facilitate equitable access to trained mental health professionals in all Australian schools, in order to respond to the increasing complexity of student behaviour and mental health and wellbeing difficulties.

The Coalition has stated⁵ that if re-elected it will work with the non-government school sector in the next National School Reform Agreement to review in-school access to mental health and wellbeing programs for students and greater support for teachers and school leaders. What this actually looks like is yet to be seen, and of course, depends entirely on a Coalition Government being re-elected.

Labor meanwhile has said it will invest \$10.5 million in a new voluntary mental health check tool that primary schools will be able to use, with parents' permission, to identify children who are struggling and make sure they can get the help they need.

Queensland students and families deserve a proactive vision by our nation's leaders, regardless of their political allegiances, for the future of education. Rhetoric is not enough. A world class education system, that includes a diverse independent sector, is essential to a strong and prosperous Australian economy, an area that has been front and centre of the election campaign.

Policy makers would be well served to consider the full economic impact of the independent school sector, which nationally saves governments \$5.5 billion each year.

3. Available at <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/atwd/national-teacher-workforce-char-report.pdf>

4. Available at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/struggling-school-students-to-be-blocked-from-teaching-degrees/news-story/726bcd0ae1f415af0e9d6daa57466e88>

5. Available at <https://isa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Response-to-ISA-from-Coalition.pdf>

Without doubt, teachers are central to schooling provision. They are its heart. Never has this been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enrolments in independent schools continue to rise, now making up nearly 16% of all school enrolments in Queensland alone. Federal Government funding support has been integral to this growth, notably the highly successful funding to the non-government sector to implement the Australian Government's educational priorities over the past three decades.

The Coalition has reaffirmed its commitment outlined in the 2022-23 Budget "to provide an additional \$40.3 million to extend the fund for another 12 months to December 2023".

Labor has indicated it will "deliver the extended funding in the 2022-23 Budget for the Non-Government Reform Support Fund and will consider ongoing support for the fund as part of the next school funding agreements"⁶.

Everybody wants to see the Australian education system thrive. It is the foundation of the nation's future and is built on quality teaching, empowered school leadership, strong communities, and an invested Government.

Independent schools look forward to working in partnership with the next Federal Government on the important task of fostering, supporting and strengthening schools and the education sector as they continue to educate and reshape future generations.



CHRISTOPHER MOUNTFORD
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Schools Queensland

6. Available at <https://isa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Independent-Schools-Australia-ALP-Response.pdf>

WHAT PARENTS WANT



SHARI ARMISTEAD
Director (Strategic Relations)

Nearly nine in every 10 parents (86%) indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied by the school's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two-thirds (65%) 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.

WHAT PARENTS WANT 2021 SURVEY

Community attitudes research is extremely valuable, especially for schools. The success and sustainability of independent schools rests with their ability to meet the needs of parents and their children. The findings of the latest *What Parents Want – An Independent Schools Queensland Survey* also serve as a reminder to governments, especially at election time, that school education public policy should give paramount importance to parents' aspirations for the education of their children.

What Parents Want Survey

What factors into the decision-making process when parents are considering schooling options for their children? *What Parents Want* (Independent Schools Queensland, 2022) has been delving into this question for the past 15 years. This longitudinal research report from ISQ (3,961 respondents with children attending 116 Queensland independent schools) is the fifth in a series of surveys and goes to the heart of the value of the independent sector and the fundamental right of parents to choose the school that best fits their child.

Parents are schools' key market and they vote with their feet. According to the latest Commonwealth Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022) enrolments at independent schools increased to 136,000 or 15.7% of all Queensland students. This is the biggest market share to date and is

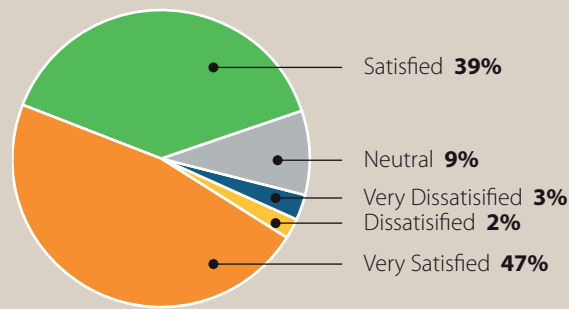
encouraging news for independent schools, especially during difficult times.

What Parents Want questions focused on the decision-making process undertaken to select the independent school for the child that had most recently commenced at that school. Questions were directed at identifying when parents first started thinking about school choice, the places and people they consulted to gain initial information about schools, and how this list was refined to ultimately result in the school selected. The survey was undertaken in the second half of 2021 and the report was released in April 2022. While many of the survey results have not changed much over time (an interesting finding in itself) the addition of questions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic provides some valuable new insights.

COVID-19 Response

This latest *What Parents Want* (2022) survey was the first opportunity in the research to see how parents viewed the responses of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how the level of support provided by schools to COVID-19 may have influenced parental choice when selecting a school. Overwhelmingly, participating parents in the *What Parents Want* survey supported the view that independent schools have 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 1: Satisfaction with School Response to COVID



Two-thirds (65%) 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 (refer to Figure 1). Just under one-third (32%) considered the level of support provided by schools as “highly” or “totally influential” to their school choice (24% and 8% respectively).

The influence of how well schools handled COVID-19 is backed up by other research. A national sentiment survey undertaken by Independent Schools Australia (ISA) (Independent Schools Australia, 2021) of 2000 respondents found 82% of independent school parents said that independent schools had adjusted well to the changing school environment brought about by the pandemic. Independent school parents identified that schools moved to online or remote learning quickly (74%) and provided regular communication to students and families (68%) as the most common reasons for a successful adaptation to the changing school environment. They also valued the autonomy of Independent schools to make decisions quickly (66%), the quality of the online learning (66%), teachers’ familiarity with technology (65%) and regular contact with students (62%).

The ISA (2021) national survey noted, “The enrolment growth experienced by the Independent sector – the highest of all sectors and the strongest in more than a decade despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – validates the survey findings.”

The *Real Education Report* (2022), with 5,007 respondents, found “... parents are putting more focus on the safe operations of schools during pandemics (54%), as well as access to digital resources and effective home-schooling support (46%).”

The *Real Education Report* (Real Insurance, 2022) found that, while non-state education has always been preferred by most (39%), recent experiences have made non-state schools even more of a front-runner with some parents (15%).

One-third of those surveyed (36%) who changed preferences have either already enrolled or are planning to enrol their children in the non-state system, after their demonstrated value-add during lockdowns, with one advantage being more individual attention (35%).



What Parents Want
An Independent Schools Queensland Survey



Key Findings
Survey Report
APRIL 2022

Read the 2021 Key Findings.



The *What Parents Want* report examines the decision-making process parents undertake when choosing an independent school, including cultural influences, sources of information, and the important factors that guide school choice. The report is the fifth in a longitudinal study.

[Access the full report \(available to ISQ members only\)](#)

WHAT PARENTS WANT

Figure 2: 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	

Critical Factors Influencing Parents' Decision-Making

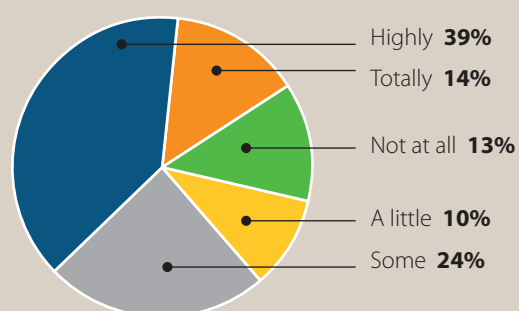
Parents' responses reveal that they draw on multiple sources of information and considerations before making a final decision and choosing a school for their child. The survey shows that ultimately their decision is underpinned by a combination of information provided by people, and by actions taken and resources developed by a school.

Practical factors also influence parents' decision making, including fees and location. Less tangible factors may be influential – parents are often reported as saying the school just “felt right”.

The most important factors are summarised in Figure 2 with order of importance noted for each of the five surveys. For the fifth survey straight since the research began in 2006, “Preparation for student to fulfil potential in later life” was the number one most important factor for parents.

Child's Opinion

While parents are undoubtedly the most important stakeholder for schools, many parents don't make decisions about their child's schooling on their own, children themselves have a lot of influence. According to the What Parents Want 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 to Figure 3). 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 3: Degree Influenced by Child's Opinion, Distribution of Responses (%)

THE FINAL DECISION

School choice is a very personal decision for families.

However, there are common factors parents identify. The 2021 survey reveals these 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

Conclusion

Parents are becoming more discerning when it comes to choosing a school for their children. Today's parents are placing a greater emphasis on personalised learning and quality teaching. The Australian Government Direct Measure of Income (DMI) funding model for schooling looks at parents' capacity to contribute to the cost of schooling in the non-state sector which affects the amount of funding received. This funding measure, coupled with the latest parental research and the COVID-19 learning from home experience, points to the need for schools to pay a lot more attention to their parents.

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QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

How can you use the parental choice research to your school's advantage?

How well do you know your school community?

What are your parent engagement policies and practices?

Are you promoting the value of an independent school education to your parents and prospective parents? Are you considering the opinion of their children?

**2022
ISQ AGM ○
25 MAY**

Network with fellow leaders

The ISQ Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer, Christopher Mountford invite member school leaders and governing board Chairs to attend the Independent Schools Queensland Annual General Meeting.

REGISTER NOW

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