

The Value of Independent Schools



Independent schools are valued institutions and a pivotal part of Queensland's education system.

They are valued:

- schooling choices for families
- hubs of human and community connection
- places of intellectual, civic and social development
- employers and employment generators
- education innovators and changemakers.

Independent schools have proven their worth over more than 150 years.

Parent confidence in the quality and tailored learning provided by independent schools has seen enrolments surge by 20% over the past 10 years.

In 2020 there are 218 independent schools operating across about 250 campuses educating almost 129,000 students from all backgrounds and cultures. About 40% of non-government schools in Queensland are independent.

Their unique and prized autonomy allows them to be highly attuned and responsive to any changes in their local communities, and to pivot quickly and galvanise support in times of crisis and to harness new opportunities in times of prosperity.

Innovation is part of the independent schooling sector's DNA – a characteristic that will ensure its longevity and ongoing role in shaping the education futures of Queensland children.

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ABOUT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Queensland independent schools are not-for-profit institutions that educate about 15% of school-age Queenslanders and make up 12% of schools statewide.

Independent schools are autonomous institutions – required to meet state and national educational, operational and governance standards – but free to structure and deliver their learning approaches and programs in line with their individual school missions.

Every year Queensland independent schools – led by their inspiring, experienced and passionate staff – enrich the lives of the children they teach and the communities they serve.

Underpinned by parental trust and confidence, independent schools continue to inspire a love of learning in their youngest students and to realise the potential in their oldest.

The value of the independent sector – to schooling, families, the community, society, the economy and the future – is considerable and worthy of its own story.



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CHOICE AND DIVERSITY

Queensland independent schools are valued members of the state's tripartite – state, Catholic and independent – education system. They are independent by name and individual in nature.

Diversity is a hallmark of the sector, diversity of faith, philosophy, size, students and approach. The sector is a kaleidoscope of school choice. There are schools that educate children from Prep to Year 12 and those that only cater for primary or secondary students. There are co-educational schools, single-sex schools, distance education schools and boarding schools. The majority of the state's 218 independent schools have a religious affiliation, while the remainder are guided by their individual school missions and educational philosophies.

About 40% of independent schools are located in regional or remote Queensland. These schools educate about 26% of all independent school students. The remaining 74% of students are educated in metropolitan schools which comprise 60% of schools in the sector.

Families from cultural, language, disability and socio-economic backgrounds are served by independent schools.

Nine in 10 independent schools educate students from Indigenous backgrounds and students with disability. In the decade to 2020, enrolments of Indigenous students have increased by 50% to 4,897 and students with disability have more than doubled to 4,706.

The independent sector is a mirror of society with schools ranging from long-standing grammar schools with more than 150 years of education tradition to fledgling community-driven start-ups that rely on donations and second-hand equipment to open their doors.

In 2020, the sector's smallest independent school in regional Queensland has just seven students, the largest, in the state's highly populated south-east, educates more than 3,000 students across three campuses.

The majority of independent schools (55%) have less than 500 students, a reflection of the often specialist nature of schooling provided. However, most students (58%) are concentrated in larger schools with 1,000 or more enrolments.

For about 2.7% of independent school students, school is also home. In the non-government school sector about 3 out of every 5 Queensland boarding students attend independent schools.

The calibre of education and opportunities provided by independent schools is also a drawcard for international families. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the sector welcomed about 1,700 overseas students.

Rising community demand for more specialised and personalised learning options is fuelling growth in bespoke education services in the sector. These services are often started by motivated parents or community members who have experienced or witnessed children failing to thrive in existing models of schooling.

The stories of their determination and tenacity to establish new independent schools, such as small community schools, schools for children with autism spectrum disorder or colleges that engage students in paid training while earning their senior certificate, are inspiring, but not widely known.

The sector has also experienced exponential growth in Special Assistance Schools (SAS) for disengaged young people whose education has been disrupted by trauma or disadvantage.

SAS independent schools – which take an integrated welfare and education approach – have increased from 11 operating across 14 sites in 2015 to 25 operating across 31 sites in 2020. About 1 in every 9 independent schools is now a Special Assistance School. Over the same period enrolments in these schools have more than doubled – from 921 students to 2,335 in 2020.

1 IN 7 SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS ARE EDUCATED IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

9 IN 10 INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS EDUCATE STUDENTS FROM INDIGENOUS BACKGROUNDS AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

2 IN 5 INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE FROM FAMILIES WITH INCOMES BELOW THE STATE MEDIAN

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ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Queensland independent schools are valued economic contributors, supporting the livelihoods of tens of thousands of employees, building critical social infrastructure and injecting billions into the state economy.

A strong and growing independent schooling sector, backed by the significant private investment of Queensland families, delivers a substantial economic return on the public funding provided by governments. School choice pays dividends.

The direct and indirect contribution Queensland independent schools make to the state economy has been estimated to top \$4.88 billion, according to AEC Group modelling commissioned by ISQ.

On average one enrolment at an independent school adds \$40,300 to Gross State Product (GSP).

In terms of jobs – a key economic indicator – the sector supports the livelihoods of almost 33,600 full-time workers either directly employed or supported through the sector's purchase of goods and services elsewhere in the economy.

That's one job for every 3.6 students enrolled at Queensland independent schools and a total wages investment of \$2.95 billion benefiting local households.

In terms of construction, independent school communities invest more than \$300 million annually in new and upgraded facilities – the majority of which is met by parent contributions and borrowings.

Independent schools operate with funding support from three key stakeholders, the Australian and Queensland Governments and parents, who are on average the single largest financial contributors.

This valuable partnership delivers both economic returns and government savings.

In Queensland for every \$1 of combined public recurrent and capital investment in the sector, Queensland derives \$3.66 in economic benefits.

In addition, by not taking up a fully funded place at a state school, independent school families free up \$1.02 billion in recurrent and capital funding annually for governments to spend on other essential services and nation-building programs. In the education sector, these savings equate to the construction of five new Prep to Year 12 schools and jobs for more than 10,100 beginning teachers.

For the sector to maintain existing levels of education choice for Queensland families, a further 21 new Prep to Year 12 independent schools and 622 extra classrooms at a cost of \$1.25 billion will be needed by 2036 to accommodate the sector's anticipated 41,000 share of projected school-age enrolments.

EACH INDEPENDENT SCHOOL ON AVERAGE CONTRIBUTES \$24 MILLION TO THE QUEENSLAND ECONOMY

EVERY 3.6 INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STUDENTS SUPPORT 1 FULL-TIME JOB

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS PROVIDE \$1.02 BILLION SAVINGS TO TAXPAYERS

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Queensland independent schools are valued community hubs, reaching out beyond the school gate to connect with and give back to the suburbs, towns and cities in which they operate.

During the best and worst of times independent school communities rally together to support one another and those around them – celebrating the highs of stellar academic, cultural and sporting achievements.

Schools bond individuals and communities. During natural disasters or crises independent schools naturally reach out to those experiencing hardship, providing refuge, meals, essential items and raising funds.

During the COVID-19 pandemic independent school students wrote letters of thanks to local frontline workers and scientists working on vaccine candidates. They also extended virtual hugs via letter to isolated elderly community members.

Many schools have developed local programs that connect students, teachers and families to deserving causes or projects that have lasting impacts beyond the school gate.

Through volunteering their time to help others or to fundraise for important causes, students gain a rich understanding of the world around them and the difference their contribution can make.

All schools, including independent schools, will have a positive narrative on student engagement with communities at a local, national or international level.

It is impossible to quantify the value of these programs, but this “lived culture” of independent schools is highly valued by parents as confirmed by ISQ’s long-running *What Parents Want* survey. The emphasis independent schools place on “developing a student’s sense of community responsibility” featured among the top 10

reasons parents choose independent schools, according to family insights from the latest 2018 survey report.

Parents also value being part of and contributing to this education community.

More than 50 years of national and international research shows students do better academically, socially and emotionally when parents are positively engaged and interested in their child’s learning and help continue and extend it through conversations, questions and support at home. This connection can also strengthen family bonds.

**“DEVELOPING A STUDENT’S
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VALUE TO SOCIETY

Queensland independent schools are valued learning institutions, playing a pivotal role in the development of engaged, informed and globally aware citizens – citizens whose intellect, talent, skills and passion advance society and the state.

Independent schools are well-regarded for their commitment to supporting students to uncover their talents and achieve their potential, whether it be academic, practical, creative, cultural or sporting. Many independent schools have a long and proud history of offering annual scholarships and bursaries to students across a wide range of disciplines.

The legacies of all independent schools are their distinguished alumni who have gone on to lead or contribute to all areas of society, from business to politics, agriculture, construction, social services, health, education, the arts and sport – locally, nationally and internationally.

Independent school students achieve results that are comparable to the world's best, according to the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The latest results from the 2018 PISA test showed Australian independent school students achieved average scores that placed them among the world's top 10 performing countries.

At home, Year 12 independent school graduates also excel. In 2019, 50% of the 34 Year 12 graduates who received the highest academic accolades in the Queensland Certificate of Education Achievement Awards were from independent schools.

Independent school students are supported to achieve their potential in whatever path they choose, with the overwhelming majority either learning or earning after completing high school, according to surveys of Queensland Year 12 school leavers. In 2018, 92% of independent school graduates were in university, further training or work compared with 86% statewide.

A higher proportion are also more likely to go on to university after graduation.

Almost 60% of Year 12 graduates from independent schools were enrolled in a Bachelor-level degree after finishing school in 2018 compared with 40% statewide.

Enhanced academic outcomes add value to the economy according to analysis by global economic modelling consultancy the AEC Group.

Student outcomes are shaped by a multitude of factors. However, research confirms the most significant in-school influence on student learning is the quality of teaching students experience in the classroom. Incredible teachers shape incredible students.

The independent schooling sector's more than 9,000 dedicated and passionate leaders and teachers are among independent schools' greatest assets and instrumental to the progress and success of their students. Many are recipients of local, state, national and international awards recognising their expertise.

ISQ is a certifying authority for the nationally endorsed Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) program. Currently 56 teachers from independent schools have achieved this professional career recognition.

ISQ research shows these teachers are a powerful and influential force whose impact and expertise not only benefits the learning engagement and trajectory of their students, but also has a ripple effect on the wider school community.

ENHANCED EDUCATION OUTCOMES BY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STUDENTS DELIVER \$217.1 MILLION EXTRA TO GROSS STATE PRODUCT

ON GLOBAL TEST RANKINGS, AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STUDENTS COME 3RD IN READING AND 4TH IN SCIENCE

EDUCATION INNOVATION

Queensland independent schools are valued education trail blazers, leading the disruption and transformation of teaching and learning for maximum student benefit.

The autonomy of independent schools creates the ideal conditions for education innovation. It gives schools the freedom to try new evidence-based ideas and technology and to incorporate what works best into student learning and wellbeing programs.

It also allows them to pivot quickly to respond to changing student and community need, economic circumstances and unprecedented events like COVID-19.

Professor Jim Watterston and Professor Yong Zhao believe this freedom from “systemic constraints” gives independent schools greater opportunity to be “innovative and to create new possibilities for their students through the strong engagement of parents as co-designers of bespoke education reforms”.

According to an issues paper the University of Melbourne academics authored for ISQ, *A Catalyst for Change*: “Independent schools are well placed to lead the nation to build fit-for-purpose bottom-up solutions to the wicked educational problems that need to be addressed.”

The sector was well-positioned to transition to remote and online learning models when government restrictions were introduced to limit movement during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategic investment many independent schools had made in online learning platforms, teacher professional development and parent engagement created a strong foundation for rapid change.

Across history, independent schools have been leading the transformation of schooling. Independent schools embraced the evidence showing the critical importance of the foundation years.

Independent schools were the first to offer families access to a full-time Preparatory year before its statewide introduction by the Queensland Government. The sector has also been a pioneer in the development of the modern-day Prep to Year 12 school, the creation of learning spaces that optimise student engagement and collaboration and the establishment of entrepreneurial education programs and student pathways.

Independent schools are early technology adopters – recognising that the deliberate and evidence-based incorporation of new technologies into the curriculum can enhance and extend quality teaching.

Today many schools have incorporated 3D printing, virtual and augmented reality and other new technologies into their programs, exposing students to these new technologies and their capabilities.

Other forward-thinkers have pioneered entrepreneurial pathways that not only equip students to secure the jobs of tomorrow, but to create them.

Challenging students to think creatively, question existing knowledge and take learning risks is interlaced through independent school programs. Many have already given their students, who are living and learning in a different world to the one their parents grew up in, greater agency in their learning. They have also re-imagined their curriculums allowing time for real-world learning and student-driven passion projects alongside a rigorous focus on literacy and numeracy and the core disciplines.

THE AUTONOMY OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS CREATES THE IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR EDUCATION INNOVATION





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