



Why Parents Choose Christian Schools

Christian Schools Community Profile Survey



National Report



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Christian Schools Australia would like to sincerely thank project sponsor:



Foreword

by
Dr. Daniel Pampuch

Australia is in a unique position with a government-funded public and private school sector. The private or non-government sector, is based on the premise of choice. Parents, as tax contributors, should be able to choose how their tax dollars are spent. In 2022, nearly 40% of all children in Australia were educated by the private sector. This sector is made up of schools which distinguish themselves by the provision of faith-based education (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, etc), philosophical approach (Steiner, Montessori, etc), selective entry (academic, gender, etc), specialisation (trade, sport, vocational), or specific assistance (educational, behavioural, etc).

With increases to funding, as well as a growing media and political presence, parents have become more informed of the choices at their disposal. Parents accordingly have been active in investigating these options in terms of what is best for their children and family as a whole. The mainstream media, however, has often painted the choices of parents as a ‘drift’ from government schooling to the non-government sector. That would infer that parents are not taking an active interest, nor making considered choices when it comes to where their children attend school. On the contrary, it is our view, that parents are extremely savvy in their choices and put substantial time and effort into the selection of school for their children. Furthermore, as Catholic and Independent schooling often requires the payment of school fees, parents see their choice of schooling and fee payment as an investment in their children’s future. Christian Schools Australia (CSA) as an Australia-wide member association of Christian schools, recognises that parents are actively selecting schools. Commentary by parents at enrolment in Christian schools often centres around the fact that they desire schools match their home values, provide places of safety and support, are relational communities, as well as ensuring good academic outcomes. To corroborate these views, CSA invited its member schools to participate in a parent choice survey to confirm the motivating factors which saw parents enrol their children in a Christian school. To this end, 101 schools and 8,595 parents participated in the Christian Schools Community Profile (CSCP). The CSCP provided an opportunity to establish baseline evidence relating to family backgrounds, values, faith commitments, spirituality interests and decision-making practices, and expectations of parents within this dynamic educational space.

Such information is important as it highlights the value given to the variety of elements that make up a school. For CSA, the place of faith and religious instruction is of particular interest. Schools are more than places of knowledge transmission, but are, more significantly, places of formation. As CSA’s collaborative work in the Cardus Education Survey (CES)

(2020-21) has shown, schools will shape the citizens of society and imbue students with a set of behaviours and attitudes. Christian schools in the CES study were shown to be active participants in their communities, working across traditional boundaries, with a passion for serving others, and contributing financially to causes they were passionate about. Additionally, earlier research from the Relational Schools Project Australia (2017-19) indicates that Christian schools have the potential to be places of deep connection and belonging where students develop a positive outlook about themselves, others, and their place in the world. By being communities of ‘well-belonging’ inhibiting social and economic factors could be overcome and flourishing promoted.

The CSCP is a complementary piece of research to this previous research and seeks to identify a base-line of factors within Christian schools that resonate deeply with parents. Along with marriage and buying a house, choosing a school is one of the most significant decisions parents will make. This study assists school leaders in shaping their schools more thoughtfully and intentionally in alignment with parents’ needs and preferences, as well as provides a data-driven approach to dialogue with politicians, the media, and social commentators. There are very clear factors ‘driving’ parent choice and decision-making in Australia. The CSCP provided parents in Christian schools with an opportunity to express what matters most to them and the education of their children.

Dr. Daniel Pampuch
Chief Executive Officer,
Christian Schools Australia

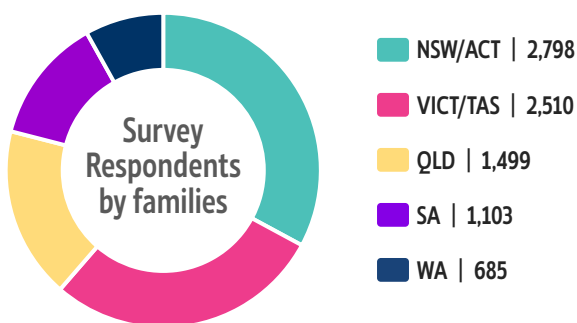


Executive Summary

Over the past decade, there have been seismic shifts in the numbers of types of families that enrol students in our Christian schools, and families are coming to Christian schools with diverse, and at times surprising, expectations and motivations for choosing these types of schooling options for their children.

The *Christian Schools Community Profile (CSCP)* was a survey commissioned by Christian Schools Australia (CSA) to provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the parents that select Christian schools for their children. The largest survey of its kind ever undertaken in Australia; the survey explored the responses of 8,595 parents from across 101 Christian School Australia member schools from across the nation. This data provided, for the first time, national trends, themes, and benchmarks that were unique to CSA schools across the nation. The survey was unprecedented in both its size and scope and provided important national baseline data regarding parents' values, engagement, decision-making, and perceptions across CSA member schools in Australia.

The survey was conducted between 8 March and 16 April 2021 in 101 Christian schools located across every state of Australia.¹ By state², the number of families who responded to the survey were as follows:



¹ See Appendix A for full list of CSA Member schools involved in the survey

² For an explanation of Australian State and Territory sampling, refer to p. 12

³ ATAR is an acronym for *Australian Tertiary Admission Rank*; NAPLAN is an acronym for *National Assessment Program Literacy And Numeracy*

Overall Key Findings of the Christian Schools Community Profile

Parents Pursue Christian Values and Beliefs

The findings relating to why parents from Christian schools across Australia are making informed decisions regarding the choice of Christian schools within a highly competitive and diverse educational marketplace revealed that they are intentionally preferencing distinctly Christian school values and alignment as a key consideration. Key findings included:

- » The dominant reason why parents are choosing CSA schools was for the distinctly Christian values and teaching, with 54% of parents selecting 'values that align with my own' as the primary determinant and when asked what practices should be most important at a Christian school, 74% of parents indicated teaching of traditional Christian values and beliefs was "extremely", or "very important". Parents desire a school where they perceive their personal beliefs are reinforced and perpetuated by the school community they select for their children.
- » The least important factors that influenced Christian school parents when selecting a school included level of ATAR/ NAPLAN results (10%), quality of co-curricular programs (7%), use of IT and latest technology (5%), and quality of sporting programs (3%).³
- » When determining schooling options for their children, 44% of Christian school parents would only consider other Christian schools and over a fifth of all parents (23%) did



not consider any other school but the Christian school they enrolled in. Furthermore, the primary alternative to Christian schools according to the respondents was state schools and not other non-government school options.

- » The importance of community service (69%) and the demonstration and application of Christian values and beliefs was also highly regarded by parents seeking a Christian school for their children. Parents from VIC/TAS Christian schools (72%) were more likely than any other state in Australia to identify community service as an important characteristic of Christian schools, and this finding supports results from the Cardus Education Survey Australia project regarding the importance of community service and outreach opportunities.
- » The most important outcome that families hoped children would achieve through attending a Christian school was strong character and Christian values (45%), with this intended outcome especially prevalent with parents from NSW/ACT (47%) and VIC/TAS (49%) Christian schools.
- » 61% of parents made their decision regarding a Christian school in less than six months and 83% took 12 months or less to decide on a Christian school. These findings are in contrast to the comparatively longer decision-making by parents in other Independent schools.⁴

Parents Seek a Supportive Relational Community

Families were most satisfied with the safety, care and supportiveness of Christian schools and the quality of relationships between teachers and students. These findings also support the results of the Relational Schools Project, which concluded that the level of relationship between teachers and students within Christian schools was strongly correlated to an overall sense of relational

belonging that was effectively cultivated within Christian school communities. Key findings included:

- » Relationships and an ethic of care and support were very important to parents choosing Christian schools, with 74% of parents extremely satisfied with the ‘Quality of teacher/student relationships’ in their Christian school and 73% were “extremely satisfied” with the ‘pastoral care and support programs’ that the school provided.
- » A quarter of parents also identified that the Foundation to Year 12 model was an important factor in school selection.
- » The importance of spiritual and character formation was further reinforced when parents were asked about the purposes of education and what they hope their children would obtain and achieve through their schooling journey. Rather than financial success or increased social status, parents overwhelmingly identified Christian values and virtues, ‘strong character and Christian values’ and ‘love for God and others’ being selected in nearly three-quarters of all responses.
- » The caring and supportive nature of Christian schools was evidenced by parents identifying ‘Supportive’, ‘Christ-centred’ and ‘Safe’ as the top three words to describe their schools, closely followed by ‘Respectful’ and ‘Nurturing’. Parents were overwhelmingly ‘extremely’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the ‘Safety and supportiveness’ of their school (81% of respondents).

⁴ What Parents Want: An Independent Schools Queensland Survey. Survey Reports, February 2021. Independent Schools Queensland

Parents Value Quality Educational Outcomes that are Affordable and Lead to Flourishing

Parents were very satisfied with the high levels of community engagement and connection that are evident across Christian schools. Parents are highly satisfied with the overall performance, emphasis and quality of Christian schools across all Australian states. Whilst Christian schools promote academic learning and career preparation, these types of schools are also highly intentional about the promotion of human flourishing, community service and holistic development. Parents are highly satisfied with the way Christian schools seek to cultivate a meaningful contribution to the common good and the ways these schools are intentional in developing engagement and interaction with society and culture in a manner that promotes strong relationships and community. Key Findings included:

- » Parents were satisfied with the overall affordability of school fees in Christian schools across the nation with 44% extremely satisfied or very satisfied, and 89% expressing some level of satisfaction with the school fees currently being charged in Christian schools. Parents were most satisfied with the affordability of school fees in QLD (59%). Christian school parents in non-metropolitan areas were also more likely to be extremely or very satisfied with the affordability of school fees (53%) than parents in metropolitan areas (46%) although perceived levels of overall satisfaction remained similar in both jurisdictions (Metropolitan 88% satisfaction and non-metropolitan – 89% satisfaction).
- » Just under a third of parents' whose children attend Christian schools have a household income of \$150,000 or more but 39% of parents who have enrolled their child at a Christian school have a combined household income less than \$100,000.
- » Parents were also extremely satisfied with the graduate outcomes and overall performance of Christian schools across the nation. Parents were most satisfied with the manner in which Christian schools contributed to the common good within society (76%) and how graduates interacted with the society and culture around them (74%), findings that are also reinforced in the 2020 Cardus Education Survey Australia Report findings.
- » Parents perceived that Christian schools also provided a very important focal point for the parent community, rating almost two times higher than any other community group and second only to church and religious groups. The majority of parents indicated they had a good or excellent connection to their school.
- » Most Christian school parents (54%) are also actively involved in their communities as volunteers across a broad range of organisations. Such a public facing posture by parents also models what community service practically looks like for their children and cultivates an active, participatory model of school and community engagement.



Parents Value Christian Education and Spirituality in a Post-Institutional Age

The findings also identified religious practices and perspectives of parents who have selected Christian schools for their children. Whilst parents who have enrolled their children in a Christian school may be more sympathetic to the idea of a God or a transcendent being than the general population, it nevertheless suggests that the interest and support for the idea of God is still prevalent within parents seeking a Christian school for their children, irrespective of their religious commitment or church attendance.

- » While nearly 1 in 5 parents themselves went to a Christian school, the majority of parents attended government schools.
- » Christian school parents are ethnically diverse, with 42% identifying their ethnic origin as other than 'Australian'.
- » 57% of all respondent parents from VIC/TAS Christian schools identified as 'other than Australian' and Chinese (17%) and Indian (8%) ethnic groupings were strongly represented in this jurisdiction.
- » Nearly half (46%) of parents in Christian schools attend church once a week, and 59% at least once a month.
- » The majority of parents pray on a daily basis, nearly four out of five at least once a month.

- » Parents overwhelmingly selected that 'God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today' (82%) with only 3% of all respondents reporting that they believe that 'God does not exist'.

The CSCP Survey provides, for the first time, detailed national and state benchmarks for parent choice of CSA member schools and will enable trends to be monitored, analysed and evaluated in future surveys.

The findings reveal that parents are deliberately choosing Christian schools because of a high regard for the caring and supportive communities that Christian schools cultivate. Furthermore, parents are also intentionally seeking an alignment with their family values and beliefs, and are very satisfied with the educational quality and graduate outcomes that Christian schools provide. It is hoped that these findings stimulate further conversation, reflection and analysis regarding the parent communities that choose Christian schools across Australia and lead to improved ways of engaging families and communities across all Christian schools.



We chose a Christian school for our children because of the safe and nurturing environment.

The teachers really do care and we could not be happier with the school and the overall quality of education.

Introduction

The Importance of Parent-School Partnerships in Christian Schools

The popular adage “*it takes an entire village to raise a child*” underscores the importance of intentionally cultivating partnerships between the home, the school, and the wider community in the provision of a quality education. Effective schools are established and flourish in and for community, and the cultivation of strong, supportive relationships powerfully impact upon the formation, nurture, and learning of every child.

At the heart of every school community, sits the vital role of parents in the education process. School and families are mutually supporting in dynamic and symbiotic ways and

there is a causal reciprocity of relationship between healthy schools and healthy families in the growth, development, and formation of young people.⁵ The task of formal schooling through partnership with families incorporates formal academic learning but also includes the shaping of lives and character of young people to take their place in Australian culture and communities. In this sense, all education is inherently public—irrespective of whether that school is government or non-government; public or private, and therefore necessitates that all education be publicly funded—because it advances a common good that transcends merely

⁵ Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., and Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research. A report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)*. Canberra: Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau



individual goods, solely economic outcomes, or personal social utility.

Parents are central, not peripheral to, the education of children and this partnership necessitates that parent voices and perspectives are valued, heard, and well understood in both individual school communities, but also in the wider context of educational policy and decision-making processes. Research arising from Harvard University's Human Flourishing program confirms that families, in partnership with schools and the community, enhance the capacity for the development of virtues necessary for social cohesion. Such virtues include the nurturing of self-sacrifice, commitment, kindness, empathy and forbearance. Families, like government, charitable organisations, friendships, and neighbourhoods, are a critical foundation in a civil society and one of a plethora of community support structures and systems that are essential to flourishing cultures and social cohesion.⁶

The Christian Schools Community Profile and Related Research

Because of the vitally important role that parents and communities play in education and development of every child, Christian Schools Australia (CSA) in 2021 commissioned a nationwide, large scale, and statistically robust research

project that sought to investigate, identify and analyse the values, faith commitments, perspectives and decision-making practices of parents who send their children to Christian schools within contemporary Australian society.

The project, titled: *Christian Schools Community Profile*, is the third in a series of key research projects that CSA has undertaken to investigate and evaluate the contemporary educational landscape and complements two other seminal projects that have included:

- » the comprehensive Relational Schools Project⁷ with Dr Robert Loe and the Relationships Foundation; and,
- » the landmark Cardus Education Survey Australia Project, which CSA undertook in partnership with a consortium of other Christian school associations.⁸

These three, large-scale, nationwide research projects incorporate data sets that are unprecedented for Christian schools in Australia and provide benchmarks and evidence-based findings relating to Christian schools that are significant in both size and scale.

⁶ VanderWeele, T. J. (2017a). On the promotion of human flourishing. *PNAS*, 114(31), p. 8152; Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A., Tipton S.M. (1985). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Wilcox, W.B. (2011). *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty conclusions from the social sciences* (3rd Edition). New York: Institute for American Values

⁷ <https://www.csa.edu.au/CSA/Resources-and-Media/Resource-Pages/Relational-Schools.aspx>

⁸ Cheng, A. and Iselin, D. (2020). *Australian Schools and the Common Good*. Ontario: Canada.



Background and Context



Schools...have played an important part in the national story — culturally, socially, economically and even politically. There is no civic institution that has had a greater impact on social and family life.⁹

The plurality of options now available within contemporary Australian schooling is significant in both its range and diversity. When collectively aggregated across both primary and secondary schooling contexts, approximately 65% of all Australian schools are government schools, whilst non-government or private schools account for about 35% of all student enrolments. The size and diversity within the private sector in Australia is truly extraordinary when compared to other OECD countries. Figure 2.1¹⁰ provides a breakdown of total student enrolment in Australia in 2021 according to government/non-government sectors across all Australian states and territories:

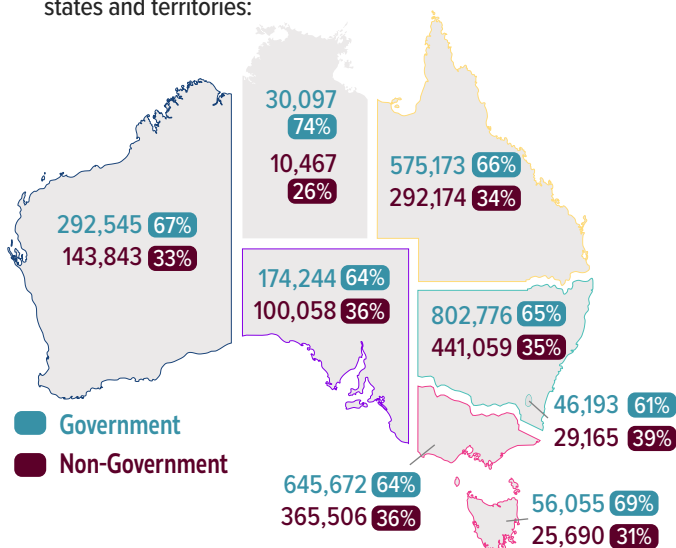


Figure 2.1 Student enrolment by State and Territory and school affiliation

For the purposes of statistical benchmarking, Australian schools are typically grouped into three dominant sectors: government, and non-government: which includes the Catholic and Independent school sectors.

- 1 **Government Schools**
- 2 **Non-Government Schools: Catholic**
- 3 **Non-Government Schools: Independent**

Figure 2.2, on the next page, identifies schools according to the school type in each of these dominant sectors.

Longitudinal trend data indicates growth in new student enrolments for government schools has been 3.9% over the last five years,¹¹ which is higher than the Catholic sector (2.6%) but well behind the five-year growth rate in the Independent sector of 11.4%.

⁹ Campbell, C. & Proctor, H. (2014). A History of Australian Schooling. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. pp. 248-249

¹⁰ ABS, 2022 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/2021#schools>

¹¹ Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019

Number of schools by school type and school sector, Australia 2021

School Type	Government Schools	Non-Government Schools		All
		Catholic	Independent	
Primary	4,801	1,243	212	6,256
Secondary	1,059	324	59	1,442
Combined	496	149	729	1,374
Special	336	46	127	509
All	6,692	1,762	1,127	9,581

Figure 2.2 Number of schools by school type and school sector in Australia 2021

Source: ACARA National Report in Schooling 2022

<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-data-portal/school-numbers#view1>

According to 2021 ABS data, approximately 35% of all schools in Australia are affiliated in some form with a religious ethos, which equates to approximately 83% of all private schools (ISA snapshot, 2022). Rowe (2017) contends that Australia

therefore has one of the highest levels of religious schooling in the world when compared to all other OECD countries. Buckingham reflects on the sheer size and scale of this sector and contends that,



The defining change in schooling over the last two decades has been the diversification of religious schools. Before the 1980s, close to 90% of students in the non-government sector attended schools associated with the two major denominations, Catholic and Anglican. In 2006, this proportion dropped to just over 70%, with the remaining students attending schools affiliated with a large array of minority faiths.¹²

Christian Schools

Whilst the presence of faith-based, religious schools has historically shaped Australian education since British settlement;¹³ the post war migration of the 1960s and the subsequent landmark changes to non-government school funding during the Menzies and Whitlam eras contributed to the rapid rise and growth of a specific type of faith-based school within the Australian Independent schools' sector during the 1970s and 80s.¹⁴

¹² Buckingham, J. (2010). *The Rise of Religious Schools. Australia*. The Centre for Independent Studies. p.1

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Barcan, A. (1988). *A Short History of Education in New South Wales*. Sydney: New South Wales University Press; Marginson



These networks of schools, whilst somewhat diverse in their denominational expression and tradition, have been referred to in the academic literature as Thematic schools¹⁵ but are more commonly referred to as 'Christian' schools. These schools have historically been represented as a range of Protestant denominational sub-categories within the Independent schools' sector.¹⁶ They are generally identified as a range of denominational subcategory groupings within data pertaining to Independent schools and typically, these schools are affiliated with Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Reformed traditions and denominations. They are, generally, locally governed and often beginning as schools drawing on a network of church families from a local community.¹⁷

Cheng and Iselin (2020) contend that these types of Christian schools are,

“often also differentiated by a requirement for employees to adhere to a clear statement of Christian faith and a lifestyle clause. However, it is not always the case that students share the same religious tradition or any faith commitment. This is possibly the result of many non-religious families purposefully seeking enrolments in these schools because of broad assent to common values, perceived affordability, and local availability”.¹⁸

It is important to note that whilst also categorised as 'Christian', Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and a majority of Presbyterian and Uniting Church schools are generally denominationally run or affiliated with systemic associations established by each of these respective denominations. Due to this denominational administration, these particular schools, whilst Christian in ethos and values, are not included in this newly defined 'Christian' school category.

Christian schools are also typically (though not always) affiliated with one of a number of peak association bodies that include Adventist Schools Australia (ASA); the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Christian Education National (CEN) and Christian Schools Australia (CSA). There are currently over 320 schools who would identify as a 'Christian school' throughout Australia, enrolling over 145,000 students.¹⁹ This represents almost 30% of schools in the independent schools sector.

Christian Schools Australia

The current wave of affordable, low-fee Christian schools have their origins in the 1960s and 1970s. The earliest of these commenced when groups of Christian parents came together to start Christian schools. In the mid-1970s local Protestant churches increasingly looked to start schools staffed

¹⁵ Long, R. (1996). "New Christian Schools: A Thematic Tradition (Part I)." *Journal of Christian Education* 39, no. 2: 5-25

¹⁶ Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019

¹⁷ Cheng and Iselin, 2020

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid



by Christians and who sought to teach a curriculum from a distinctively Christian life and world view. The first Christian Community School, a predecessor organisation to Christian Schools Australia, commenced in 1976 and many other Christian schools followed in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s. For decades, these types of schools have been among the fast-growing segment of the Independent schools sector.²⁰

Geographically, these schools are spread throughout Australia, mainly in outer metropolitan areas, but also in regional, remote, and very remote locations. The schools are community based, serving the local community where they were located, which are typically low-middle socio-economic groups, but also include some indigenous communities in more remote areas. These schools operate within a variety of governance structures: some are the ministry of a local church, others involve a number of local churches, some govern with parent groups, and still others have more explicit denominational links. While some Christian schools focus specifically on serving church families, many others seek to serve the wider community. However, what they all share is a commitment to communicating Christian perspectives and biblical truth as an essential part of educating the whole child.

In 2002, Christian Schools Australia Limited (CSA) was established and arose out of conversations to bring together a number of denominationally diverse Christian schools around a common purpose. Today, CSA provides a wide range of support to schools, and the wider community, through the advancement of Christian education in Australia and internationally. Christian Schools Australia (CSA) is a thriving national association of over 180 school campuses Australia-wide and serves over 11,000 staff and 75,000 students across the nation. Through CSA membership, schools both participate and gain support from the movement. They gain from serving and being served. CSA advocates for member needs and those of the wider movement and is a respected voice in public debate about education and faith. CSA provides a wide variety of resources, programs, and services to ensure the Christian distinctive for member schools is maintained, thereby enhancing the capacity for these schools to be sustainable in providing high quality Christian education into the future.

It is within the bounded sample of these CSA member school sites that the CSCP survey was undertaken.

²⁰ Buckingham, 2010, p.1



Research Methodology

Project Objectives

The Christian Schools Community Profile sought to investigate and identify the decision-making practices, backgrounds, values, faith commitments, spirituality, and interests of parents within contemporary Australian society. The survey focussed specifically upon parents of schools affiliated with Christian Schools Australia (CSA) from across the nation.

Over the past decade, there have been seismic shifts in the families that enrol students in Christian schools, and families are coming to these faith-based schools with diverse and at times surprising expectations for choosing Christian schooling options for their children. CSA aimed to develop a reliable and robust quantitative profile of the parent population in relation to the key determinants of school choice. This was to be explored by analysing parents':

- ✓ **reasons for school choice**
- ✓ **satisfaction with the school and their child's learning**
- ✓ **engagement with the school community**
- ✓ **personal profiles and how the above issues vary between parents with different profiles**

The survey was also conducted to: provide information to individual schools about these preferences; allow schools to compare their school with similar schools in their state and across the nation; stimulate discussion about how to improve parent engagement; and, assist in identifying areas for improvement and professional development.

This survey was administered online by a leading public research company - ORIMA Research. Due to the nature of the survey (which included feedback on reasons for family

decision-making), parents were asked to complete one survey per family.

Overall Survey Response

The CSCP survey investigated and analysed the data from five state jurisdictions across Australia: New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (VIC), Queensland (QLD), South Australia (SA) and Western Australia (WA). Whilst an important part of the nationally representative CSCP data collection, the very small sampling sizes of Tasmania (TAS) meant that results were included in the Victorian data samples. Furthermore, whilst the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is also a distinct education system with well-established ministerial oversight, for the purposes of this stand-alone report, ACT data has been included into the NSW data sets.

By state, the number of families who responded to the survey were as follows:

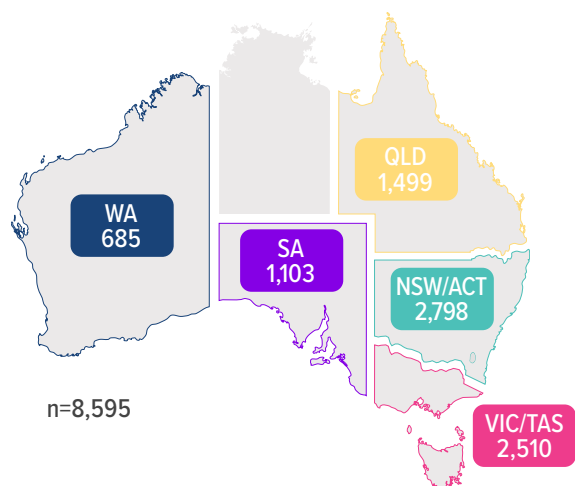
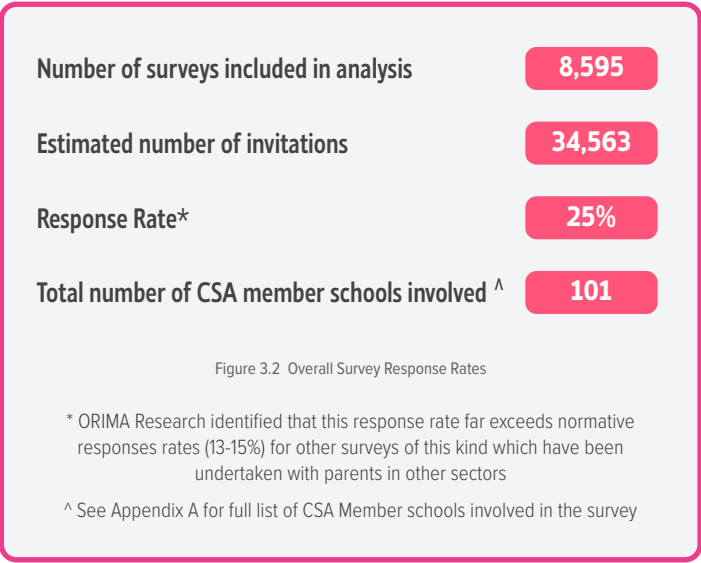


Figure 3.1 Family participation in survey by State/Territory


There are no CSA member schools in the Northern Territory. Accordingly, no data has been included from this jurisdiction.





It is important to note that, throughout this report, results representing all Christian Schools Australia (CSA) member schools, that participated in the survey, are presented under the heading ‘all schools’. Furthermore, for the purposes of this report, these CSA member schools are categorised as ‘Christian schools’.


Four Emerging Themes Arising from the Survey Responses

Four themes emerged from the survey responses and were the focus for the parent survey data. These included:

1  **School Choice**

2  **School Satisfaction**

3  **School Engagement**

4  **Family Profile**

These themes will be described, analysed and evaluated in the subsequent sections of this report. These findings provide the first ever national and state benchmarks for parents of CSA member schools and will enable trends to be monitored, analysed, and evaluated in future surveys. It is hoped that these findings will stimulate rich discussion and

further conversation, reflection and analysis regarding the parent communities that choose Christian schools across Australia and lead to improved ways of engaging families and communities across all Christian schools in Australia.

School Choice



Key Findings

The selection of a school is one of the most important decisions that parents make for their children. Australian families have an excellent range of schooling options available to them and are both discerning and intentional about choosing from a diverse range of schools across the government, Catholic and Independent sectors. Such decision-making considers location, school size, cost, educational quality, programs offered, and alignment to core values and ethos.

With the option to choose from such a broad range of educational alternatives, the CSCP findings revealed that parents were actively choosing Christian schools for a multitude of reasons, both personal and aspirational, that were impacted by friends, family and community perceptions. The findings highlighted that there were a range of specific determinants for Christian schooling choice across all respondents and all Australian states.

Primary Reasons for Choosing a Christian School

The primary reason why families are choosing Christian schools was related to the explicit Christian values that were being taught and promoted within the school community with 54% of parents selecting ‘values that align with my own’ as the primary factor in choosing a Christian school. Parents value a school where they perceive their personal values and beliefs are reinforced and perpetuated by the school community they select for their children.

The findings revealed that parents in VIC/TAS are the most likely to select a school based on the alignment of school values with their own more than other states across the nation (59%); closely followed by parents in NSW/ACT (57%).

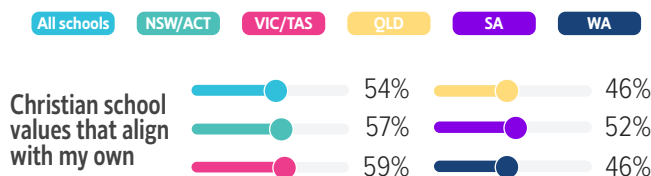


Figure 4.1 Primary Reason for Choosing a Christian School

This result is reinforced by the next two determiners of parent Christian school choice: the ‘quality of teacher/student relationships’ (35%) and ‘Christian curriculum’ (34%). These findings highlight the unique nature of Christian schools in embodying the distinctly Christian ethos in the daily interaction of staff and students as well as through the way that the curriculum is approached.

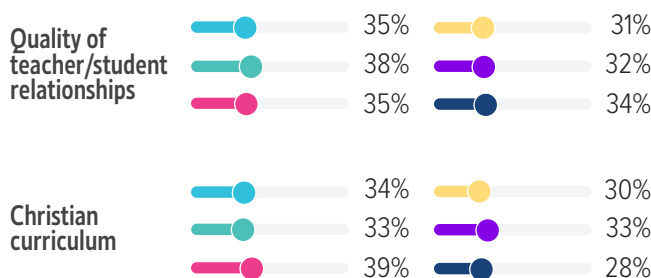


Figure 4.2 Other Reasons for Choosing a Christian School



Affordability of school fees was also a key factor with 30% of all respondents identifying this as a primary reason for choosing a Christian school (30%). These rates were significantly higher in QLD (38%) which has comparatively lower levels of socio-economic advantage than other states. Christian schools are perceived by many families as an affordable option within the diverse range of schooling options that are available to them within contemporary Australian society.

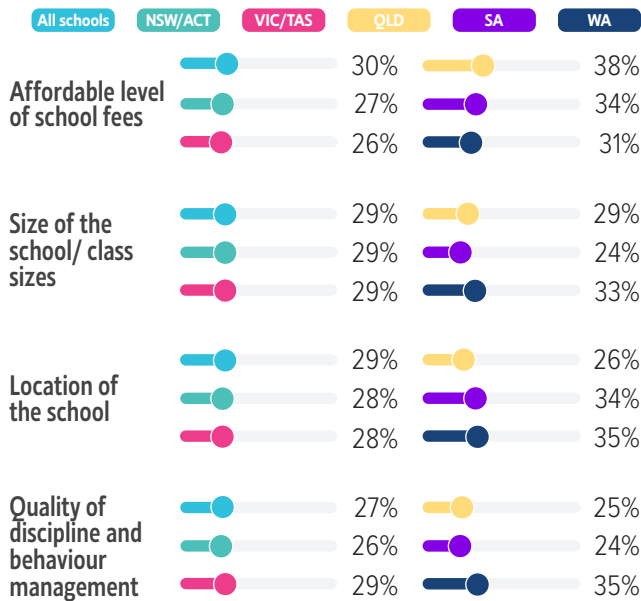


Figure 4.3 Remaining Reasons for Choosing a Christian School

A quarter of parents (25%) also identified the importance of a Foundation to Year 12 campus model as a key factor in choosing a Christian school. This reveals that parents are placing value on having all of their children in one location.



Figure 4.4 Parents Seeking a K-12 Schooling Option



Furthermore, the *least* important factors that influenced parents when selecting a school according to the survey respondents included the quality of co-curricular programs (7%), use of IT and latest technology (5%), and quality of sporting programs (3%). These findings correlate with other independent school sector surveys.

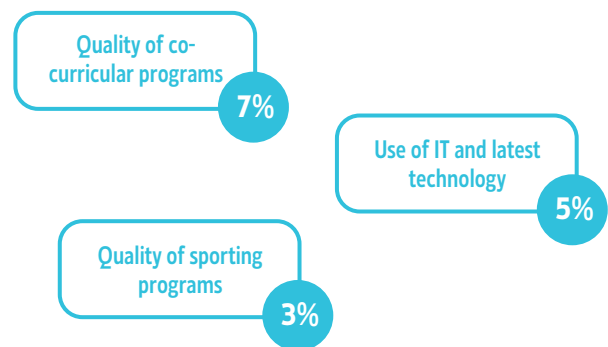


Figure 4.5 Least Important Reasons for Choosing a Christian School

Other Schools Considered

When determining schooling options for their children, 44% of Christian school parents would only consider other Christian schools and over a fifth of all parents (23%) did not consider any other school but the Christian school they enrolled in.

Furthermore, the primary alternative to Christian schools according to the respondents was state schools and not other non-government school options. Whilst further investigation into these findings are necessary to draw definitive reasons, this finding could reflect the income levels of families interested in Christian schools and the relative affordability of the Christian schools sector when compared to other non-government alternatives.

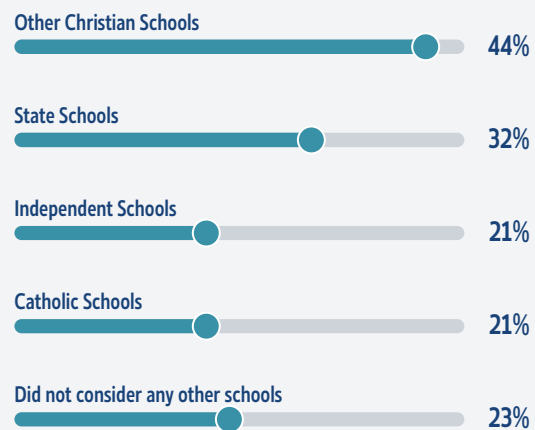


Figure 4.6 Other Schools Considered in the Choosing Process



Main Decision-Maker Regarding Enrolment

According to the survey findings, the primary decision-makers for enrolling children in a Christian school are both parents (71%). Whilst for one fifth of the respondents (20%) the mother was the primary decision-maker.

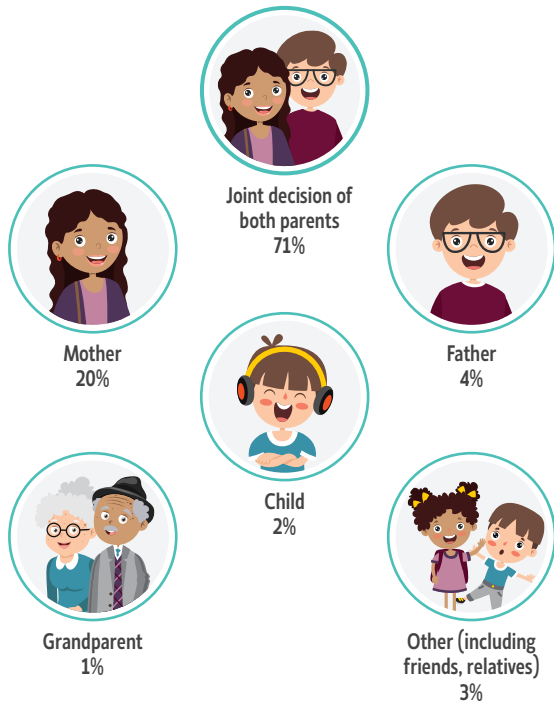


Figure 4.7 Main Decisionmakers When Choosing a School

Time Taken to Select a School

Parents of Christian schools do not appear to take long when selecting a Christian school for their children with 61% taking less than six months to make a decision and 83% taking 12 months or less to decide on a Christian school. These findings are in contrast to the comparatively longer decision-making timeline processes of the majority of parents from across Qld Independent schools (65%) who first start thinking about schools for their child at least two years before their child commenced school.²¹

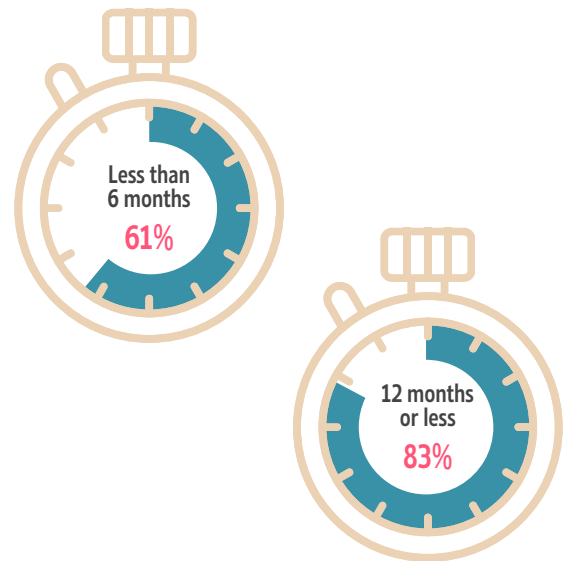


Figure 4.8 Time Taken when Choosing a School

Main Sources of Information Families used to Choose a School

When seeking to choose a school, the primary source of information that was used by families seeking Christian schooling for their children was word of mouth. Parents sought recommendations from family, friends and work colleagues (39%) as well as other parents of the school (29%). The importance of school tours, where the opportunity to connect with school staff and view the campus facilities and

classrooms in person, was also perceived as a key source of information gathering regarding Christian school selection. Whilst nationally, 29% of families identified school tours as a key determinant in selecting a Christian school, parents from SA Christian schools perceived this to be the most important source of information for families when choosing a school.

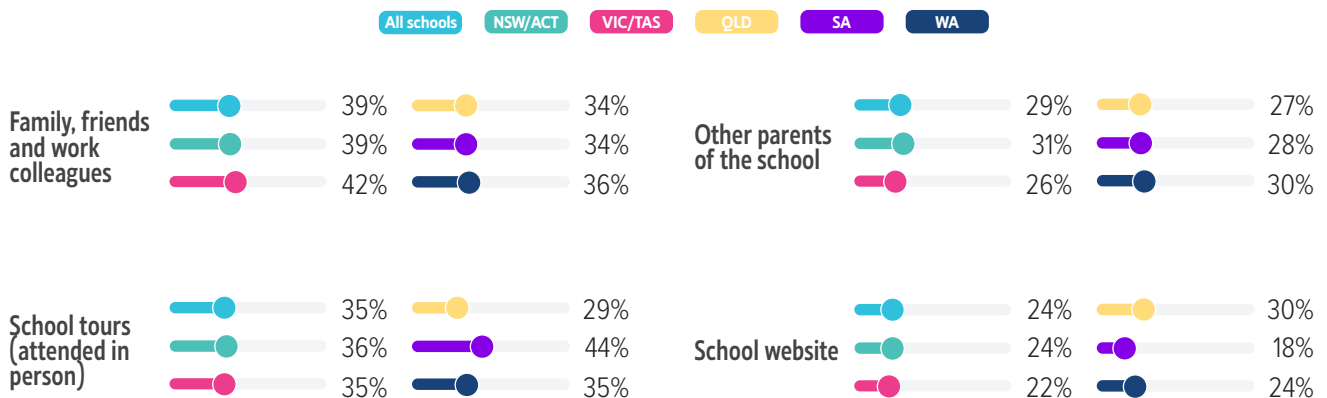


Figure 4.9 Main Sources of Information Used when Choosing a School

²¹ What Parents Want: An Independent Schools Queensland Survey. Survey Reports, February 2021. Independent Schools Queensland



Of significantly less importance to parents within this survey were virtual/online tours (3%), the ACARA/My School website (3%), school social media sites (4%), and publications like the Good School Guide (5%).²²

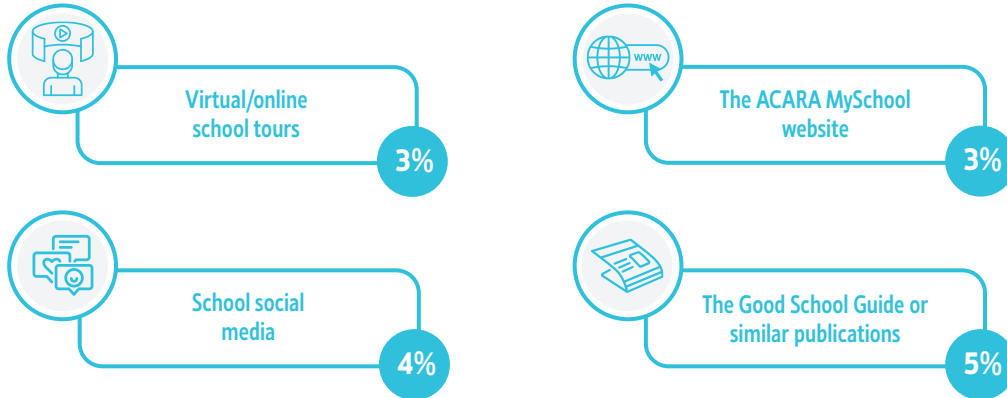


Figure 4.10 Least Important Information Sources Used when Choosing a School

In terms of digital media investment, the school website still remained the single most important tool a school could mobilise in terms of communicating to prospective parents their distinctive offerings and values.

This finding suggests that websites remain the primary digital marketing and promotions platform for prospective parents

seeking information regarding a Christian school. It will be important to closely monitor these trends longitudinally in future years as a digitally literate generation of parents seek to access online media in new and divergent ways.

²² ACARA is an acronym for *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority*





Meeting with School Representatives

When deciding upon the Christian school their child will attend, parents preferred to meet with the school principal (60%) more than any other person within the school community. The importance of a meeting with the principal was especially important to parents when selecting either a very small (72% when enrolments less than 100) or small school (83% when enrolments 100-300). Whilst the principal was still the most important person to meet with when deciding school choice, parents selecting schools of medium

(69% when enrolments 300-750) and large schools (47% enrolments 750 or more) also valued meeting with key members of the leadership team and the school registrar. This suggests that as schools grow in size and complexity, there is often a structural delegation of responsibilities that occurs with enrolment interviews and these findings possibly highlight this organisational reality for many medium and large school communities.

School representatives parents prefer to meet with when choosing a school

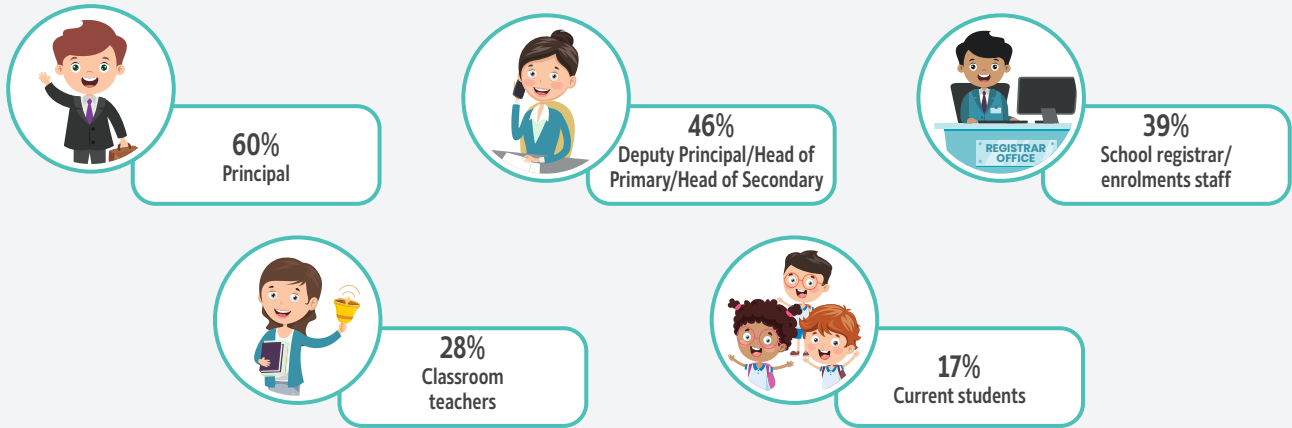


Figure 4.11 School Representatives Parents Prefer to Meet with when Choosing a School

School representatives parents prefer to meet with when choosing a school (by school size)

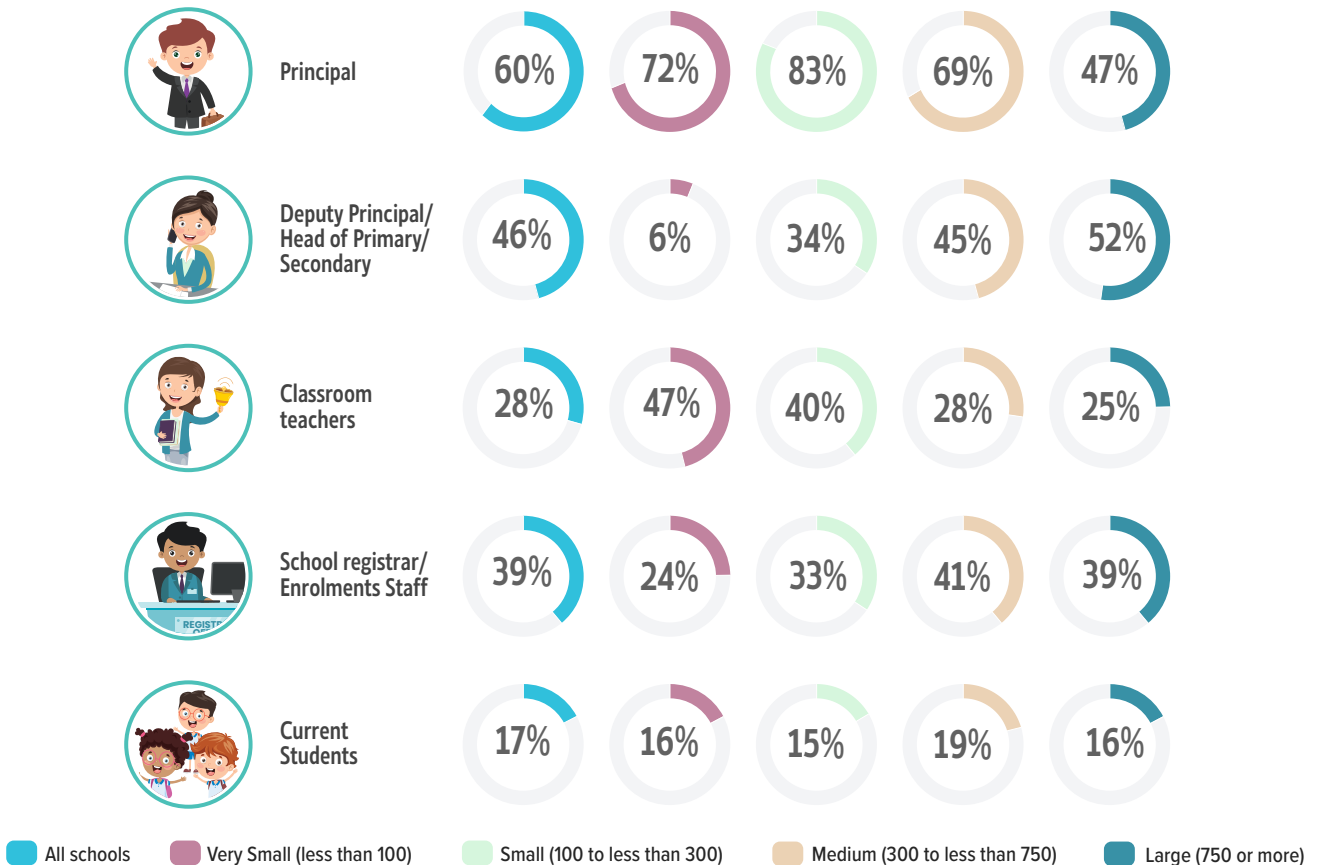


Figure 4.12 School Representatives Parents Prefer to Meet with when Choosing a School (by School Size)



Value-Added Practices Families Think Should be Most Important at a Christian School

Another key component of decision-making regarding selecting a school is what value-added Christian practices parents perceive as important within a specifically Christian school community that complement the academic program and curriculum.

When asked what value-added practices should be most important at a Christian school, 74% of parents indicated teaching of traditional Christian values and beliefs was extremely or very important, the second highest of any category (behind work and career guidance at 83%). Parents value the importance of vocation that was consistently emphasised within Christian schools, and a sense of calling and suitable preparedness for whatever career pathway their children may choose.

The Christian studies program was considered the fourth most important value-added practice that parents considered important (64%) within a Christian school community. The importance of community service (69%) and the application of Christian values was also highly regarded by parents seeking a Christian school for their children. Parents from VIC/TAS Christian schools (72%) were more likely than any other state in Australia to identify community service as an important characteristic of Christian schools.

This finding supports results from the Cardus Education Survey Australia project regarding the importance to Christian school graduates of community service and the service and outreach opportunities afforded by such programs.²³

²³ Cheng, A. and Iselin, D. (2020). Australian Schools and the Common Good. Ontario: Canada

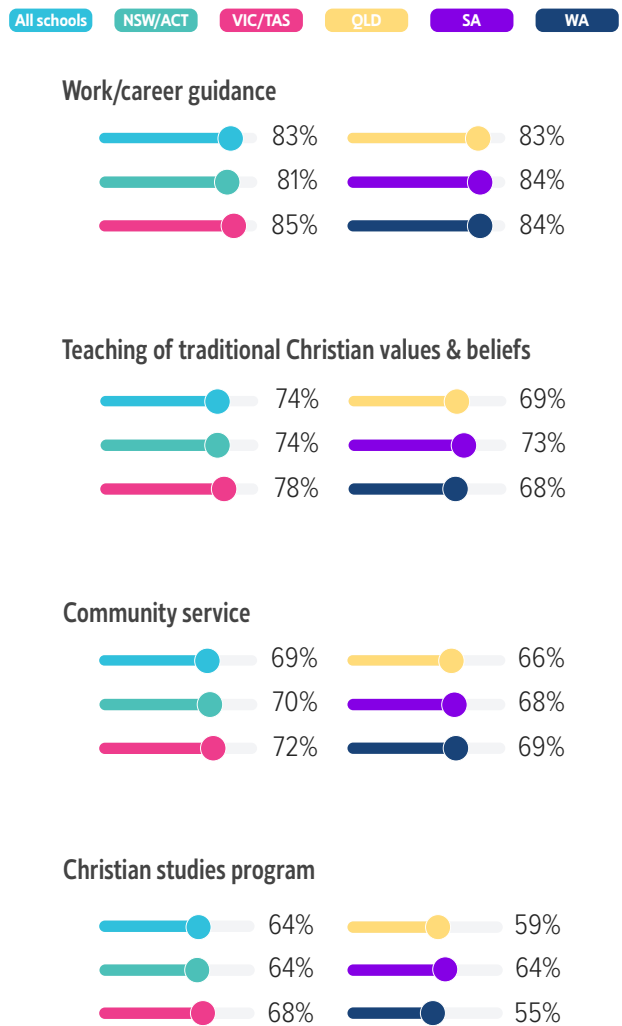
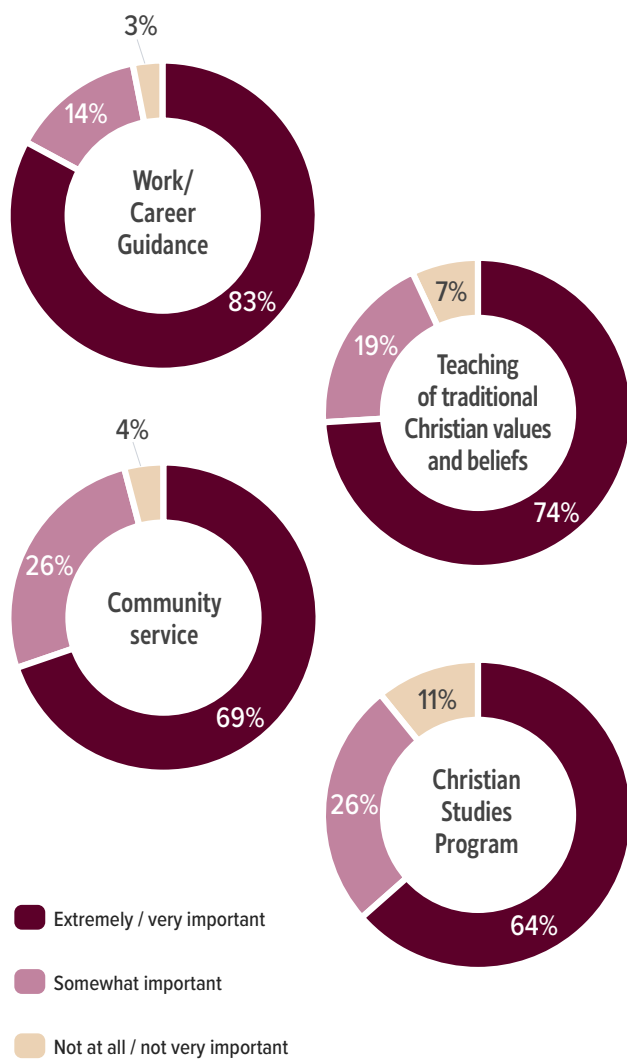


Figure 4.13 Most Important Value-Added Christian Practices at a Christian School



Value-Added Outcomes Families Hope their Children will Achieve from School

Furthermore, parents who choose Christian schools for their children highlighted a range of desired holistic outcomes that undergird their decision-making regarding the type of students who will graduate from these school communities.

Apart from academic-related outcomes, the most important outcome that families hoped children would achieve through attending a Christian school was strong character and Christian values (45%), with this intended outcome especially prevalent with parents from NSW/ACT (47%) and VIC/TAS

(49%) Christian schools. This was followed by a desire to see graduates have a love for God and others (28%) and to be positioned for increased opportunities in life (24%). QLD parents were the least likely parents from any other state to identify strong character and Christian values (39%) as outcomes they hoped their children would achieve but QLD parents still preferred character and Christian values more than any other category.

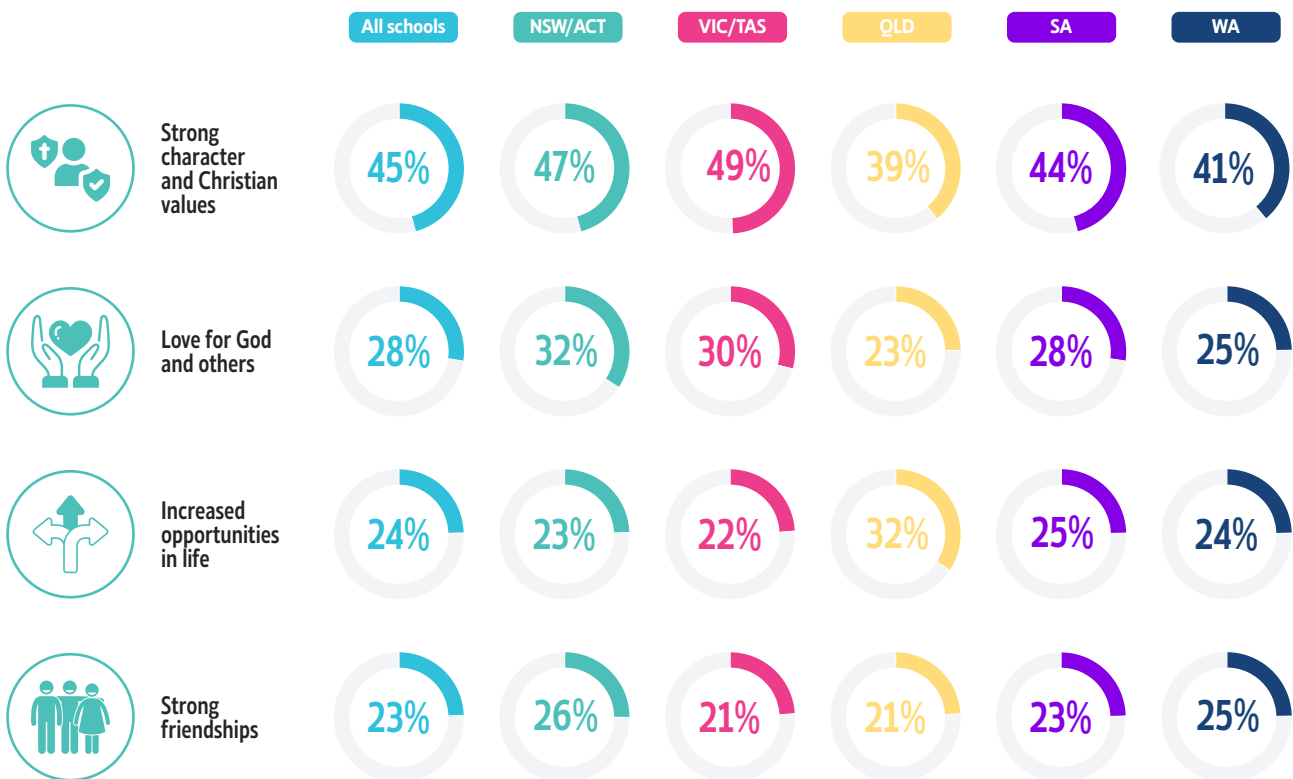


Figure 4.14 Holistic Outcomes Families Hope their Children will Receive from a Christian School



Conversely, respondents were least likely to desire the following outcomes for graduates of Christian schools:

- Independence from parents **4%**
- Financial success **3%**
- Increased social status or mobility **1%**

These findings further reinforce that within this survey sample, parents and families who enrol in Christian schools are distinct in both why they enrol their children in Christian schools and in the preferred outcomes they are expecting from Christian school communities upon graduation. Significantly, the least important aspect identified by parents across over 100 Christian schools was increased social status and mobility,

which is often a distinguishing feature of school choice in higher fee paying Independent schools. This suggests that parents are intentionally choosing Christian schools for very different reasons than parents who are attracted to higher fee-paying Independent schools.



Early Learning Centres Associated with the School

The survey also revealed that there are a number of Christian schools across the nation that are served by early learning centres/childcare facilities that provide a seamless transition for young children into their schools. These centres typically focus on the years prior to formal schooling commencing. Within Christian schools, these facilities are more likely in metropolitan areas (45%) than in non-metropolitan areas (32%).

Is there an early learning centre/childcare facility associated with your school?

Yes
No

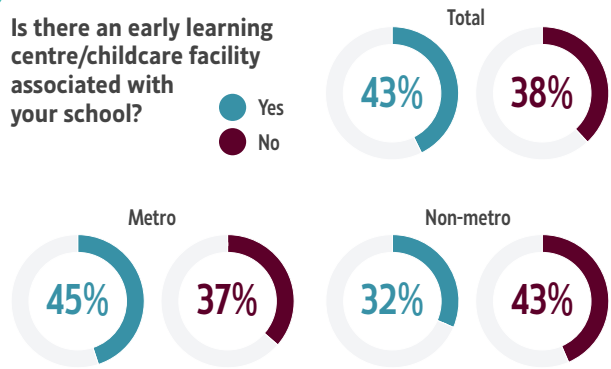


Figure 4.15 Early Learning Centre/Child Care Facility associated with your School

Summary

The findings relating to school choice reveal that the selection of a school is one of the most important decisions that parents make for their children. Such decision-making invariably considers a range of factors that include location, school size, cost, educational quality, programs offered, and an alignment of parents to a Christian school’s core values and ethos.

It is evident from these findings that parents from Christian schools across Australia are making informed decisions

regarding the choice of Christian schools within a highly competitive and diverse educational marketplace. They are clearly preferencing distinctly Christian values and faith alignment as key factors when considering the type of school they are seeking for their child’s education.



Our son graduated last year with excellent academic grades and a strong sense of purpose and direction for his life.



School Satisfaction



Another key focus of the CSCP was to identify and benchmark levels of satisfaction of parents who are part of Christian school communities. Schools that maintain high levels of satisfaction are far more likely to both attract and retain enrolments and cultivate a positive and welcoming relationship with their local communities.

Words Families used to Describe the General 'Feel' of their School

The caring and supportive nature of Christian schools was clearly evidenced by parents within the national survey, with respondents identifying 'Supportive' (51%), 'Christ-centred' (46%) and 'Safe' (41%) as the top three words to describe their Christian schools, closely followed by 'Respectful' (39%) and 'Nurturing' (36%). Parents from SA Christian schools were most likely to describe their Christian schools as supportive (55%) whilst WA (37%) and Qld (39%) Christian schools were less likely to describe their school communities as Christ-centred than parents from other states.

Parents perceived Christian schools to be safe, supportive, respectful, and nurturing environments where a Christ-centred focus underpinned the culture and ethos of the school community. These distinctive characteristics reinforce the strong ethic of care that differentiates Christian schools. This care has become a highly appealing value proposition for families in a disconnected, fragmented, and increasingly depersonalised socio-cultural milieu.

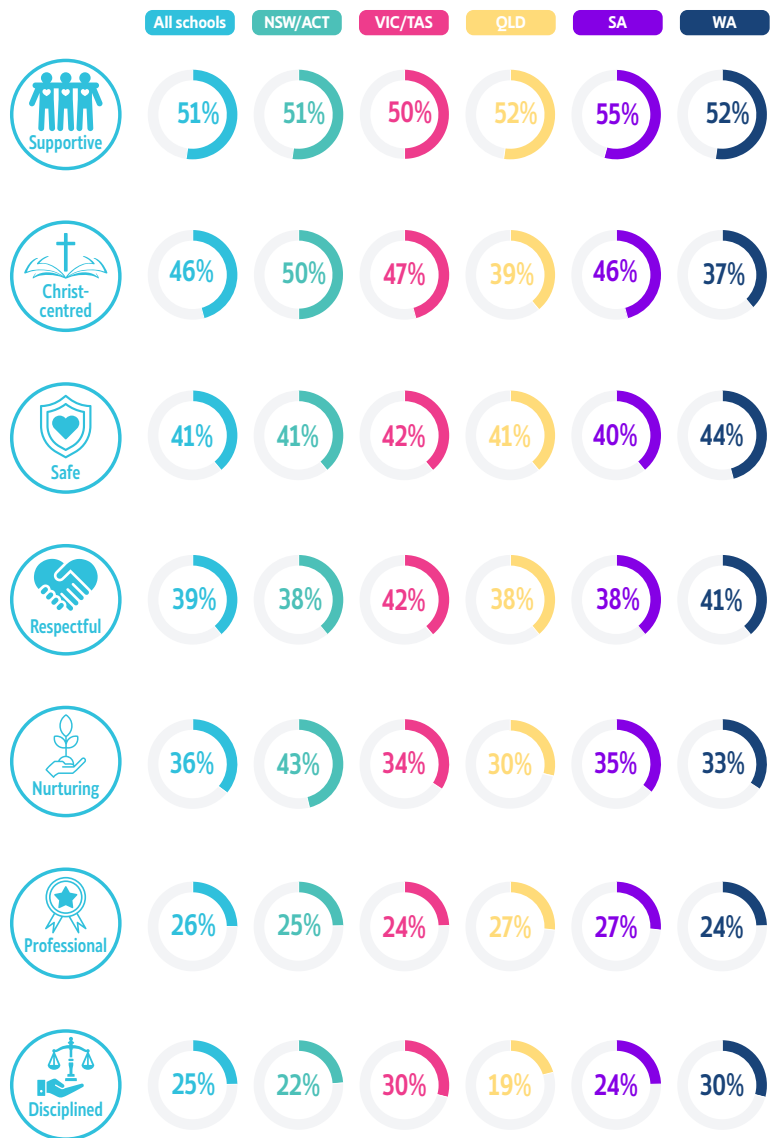


Figure 5.1 Words Used to Describe Christian Schools



Parent Levels of Satisfaction with Christian Schools

In regard to parent levels of satisfaction with Christian schools, the findings revealed that families were most satisfied with the safety and supportiveness (81%) of Christian schools. Parents were also extremely/very satisfied with the quality of buildings and classroom learning spaces (78%), the overall quality of teaching (74%), and the quality of relationships between teachers and students (74%). These findings also support the results of the Relational Schools Project, which concluded that the level of relationships between teachers and students within Christian schools was strongly correlated to an overall sense of relational belonging that was effectively cultivated within Christian school communities.²⁴

The CSA Relational Schools Project report also highlighted the importance of teacher-student relationships and the impact this has upon students. Relational teachers intentionally build and sustain relationships with young people and have one quality that unites them. They build environments of belonging, whereby learning, relating and belonging are all highly interrelated to well-being and attainment.²⁵

These types of strong teacher-student relationships which were evident in the Relational Schools research are further evidenced and reinforced through the parent responses within this survey.

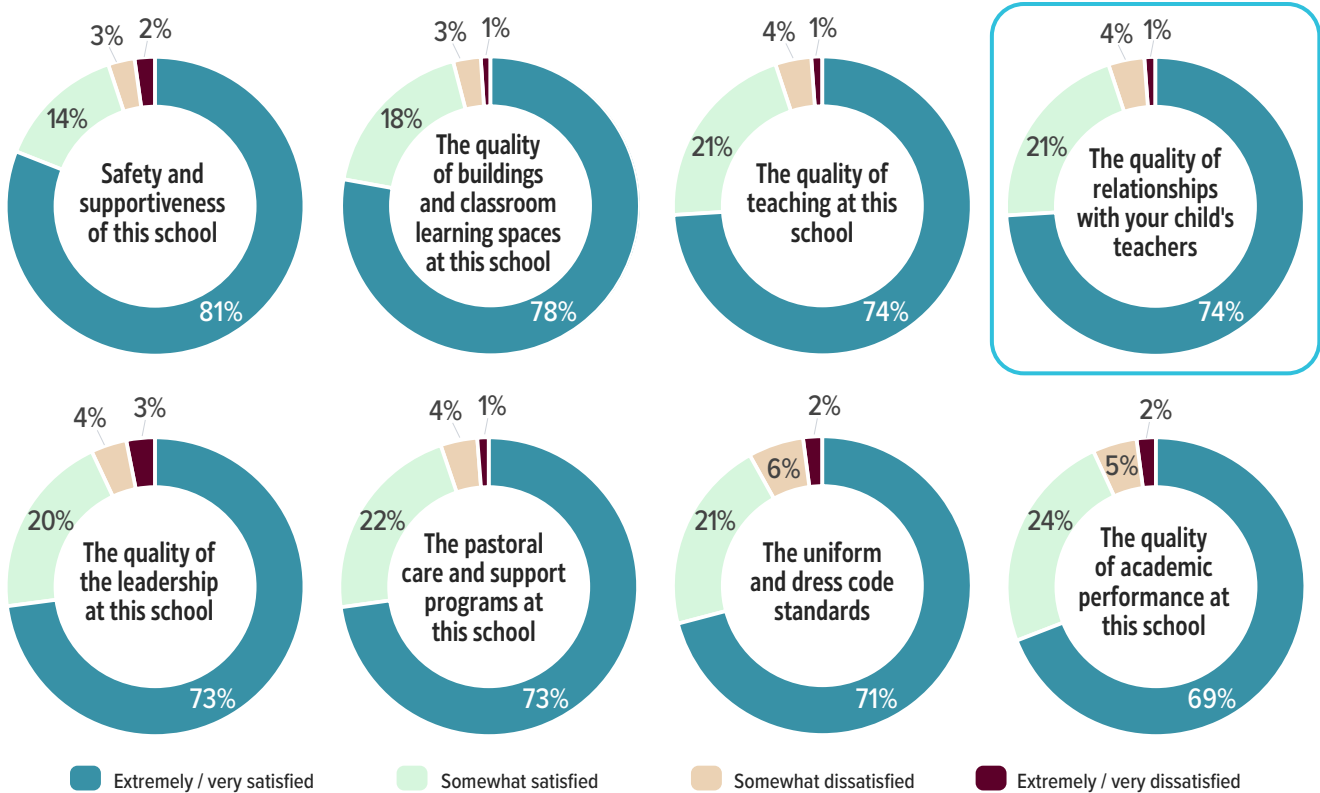


Figure 5.2 Parent Levels of Satisfaction with Christian Schools

²⁴ Loe, R. (2018). Being and Belonging: Teacher and Student Relationships in Christian Schools. *CSA Relational Schools Project*. Sydney: NSW
²⁵ Ibid. p.3



“ We love sending our children to a school where our values at home are reinforced by teachers.”



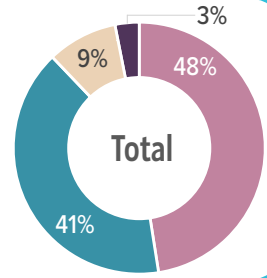
Parent Satisfaction with the Affordability of School Fees

Overall, parents were satisfied with the affordability of school fees in Christian schools across the nation with 48% extremely satisfied or very satisfied, and 89% expressing some level of satisfaction with the school fees currently being charged. Parents were most satisfied with the affordability of school fees in QLD (59%).

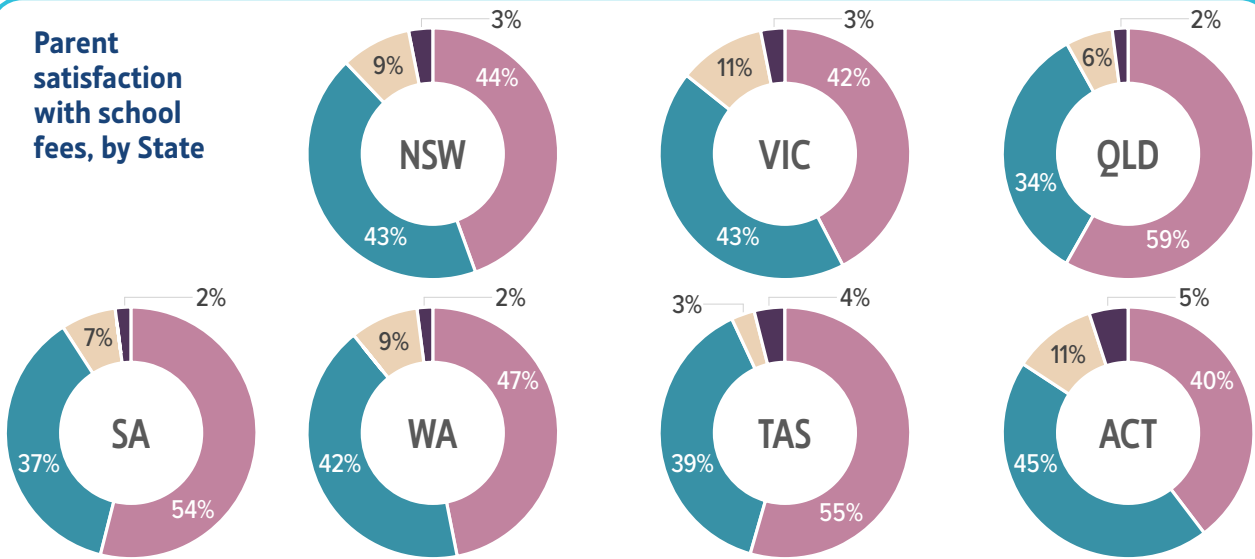
Christian school parents in non-metropolitan areas were also more likely to be extremely or very satisfied with the

affordability of school fees (53%) than parents in metropolitan areas (46%) although perceived levels of overall satisfaction remained similar in both jurisdictions (Metropolitan 88% satisfaction and non-metropolitan – 89% satisfaction).

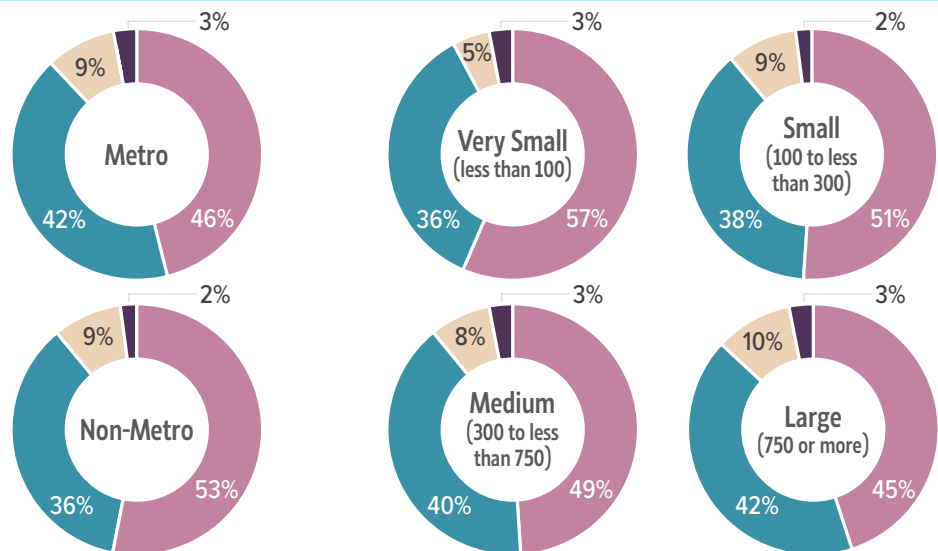
All School Levels: Parent satisfaction with school fees



Parent satisfaction with school fees, by State



Parent satisfaction with school fees according to the size of school and region



■ Extremely / very satisfied
 ■ Somewhat satisfied
 ■ Somewhat dissatisfied
 ■ Extremely / very dissatisfied

Figure 5.3 Parent Satisfaction with Affordability of School Fees

There also appears to be linear correlation on perceptions of parent satisfaction regarding affordability of school fees and school size, however further investigation is needed to confirm this trend.

The overall findings regarding parents' perceptions of school fees in Christian schools would suggest that Christian schools

are perceived by parents as an affordable and accessible option for the majority of parents across the nation. In most cases, affordability serves as a point of differentiation and a significant value proposition for selecting a Christian school when compared to other Independent schooling options.



Parents' Perception of the School's Graduate Outcomes

Parents were also extremely satisfied with the graduate outcomes and overall performance of Christian schools across the nation. Parents were most satisfied with the manner in which Christian schools contributed to the common good within society (76%) and how graduates interacted with the society and culture around them (74%). These findings are also reinforced in the 2020 Cardus Education Survey Australia Report.²⁶

Parents from SA Christian schools were more likely than any other state to rate highly their schools performance

on contributing to the common good within society (81%), interacting with the society and culture around them (79%) and dealing with life's problems (74%) and finding a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life (75%) rated as very good/good.

Such findings also dispel the false assumption that some people have regarding Christian schools as being isolationist and separatist, and highlights the public facing posture that Christian schools cultivate toward flourishing within culture and society.

²⁶ Cheng, A. and Iselin, D. (2020). Australian Schools and the Common Good. Ontario: Canada



Figure 5.4 Parents' Ratings of School's Performance





Parents' Perception of the School's Community and Relationships

The overall quality relating to the community and relational emphasis of Christian schools was also an area of strength according to the survey respondents, who perceived the systems and processes for communication and interaction between school and parents (87%) to clearly be the strongest aspect of Christian school communities. Parents also viewed

the strong alignment between their own expectations and perceptions of what a good school and education looks like and the school's expectations and priorities (83%) as another area of particular strength across the Christian school sector.

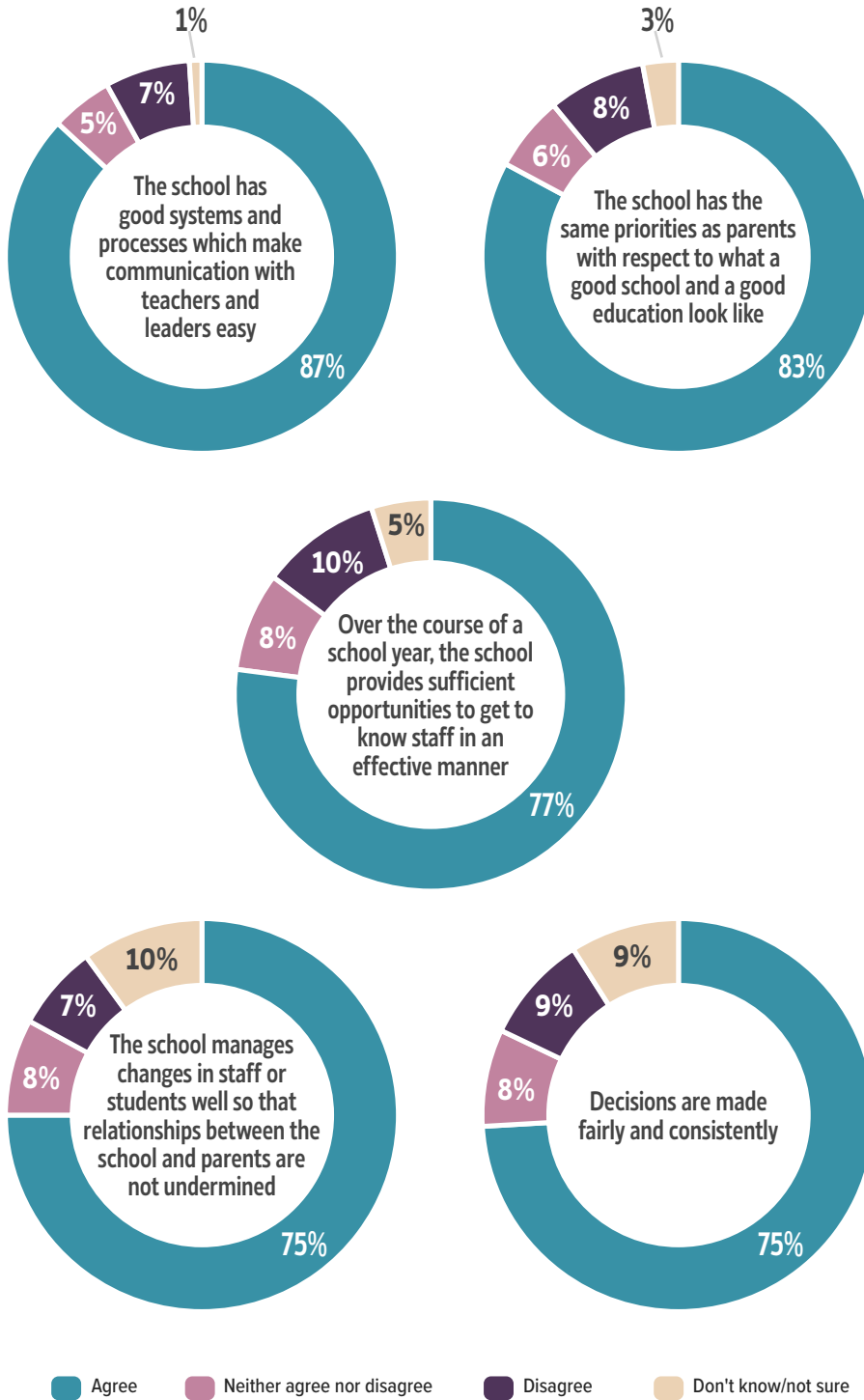


Figure 5.5 Parents' Perception of the School's Community





Summary

These findings reveal the very high levels of satisfaction that parents have with Christian schools across the nation and the high levels of community engagement and connection that are evident across the sector.

Parents are highly satisfied with the overall performance, emphasis, and quality of Christian schools across all Australian states. Whilst Christian schools promote academic learning and career preparation, these types of schools are also highly intentional about the promotion of human

flourishing, community service, and holistic development. Parents are highly satisfied with the way Christian schools seek to cultivate a meaningful contribution to the common good and the ways these schools are intentional in developing engagement and interaction with society and culture in ways that promote strong relationships and community.



We could not be happier with the decision we made to enrol our children at this Christian school. The support and care they have received has been extraordinary.



School Engagement



Key Findings

In seeking to better understand the community profile of families in Christian schools, the survey sought to benchmark and analyse the level to which parents engaged and were actively involved within their Christian school communities. Such levels of engagement reflect deeper levels of commitment and purposeful interaction with a school community and reveal the extent to which stronger relationships can be forged with parents in ways that are more than merely transactional, but are reciprocally beneficial to the flourishing of students and the entire community.

Important Local Community Groups

According to the respondents, the most important local community group for Christian school families was a church or religious community (46%). Such strong ties further reinforce the important relationship between Christian schools and local churches/religious groups and highlight the close alignment between the Christian school and the values and beliefs of their parents' broader affiliations. These strong church links were particularly evident in NSW/ACT

(49%) and VIC/TAS (50%) and were far less evident in QLD where only 37% of respondents viewed the church / religious community as the most important community group. These results, regarding alignment with religious communities, were also consistent with the state-by-state analyses that were evidenced in the nationally representative Cardus Education Survey Australia Project.²⁷

For nearly a quarter of all families, the school was deemed the most important community (24%). As involvement in community groups (including churches) has waned over recent years, schools are increasingly providing the social glue for many within their local communities and are becoming the most important location for social gatherings and community connection and involvement. These findings will be interesting to track longitudinally and to observe whether this current trend towards schools as one of society's few remaining social network hubs continues to be evident into the future.

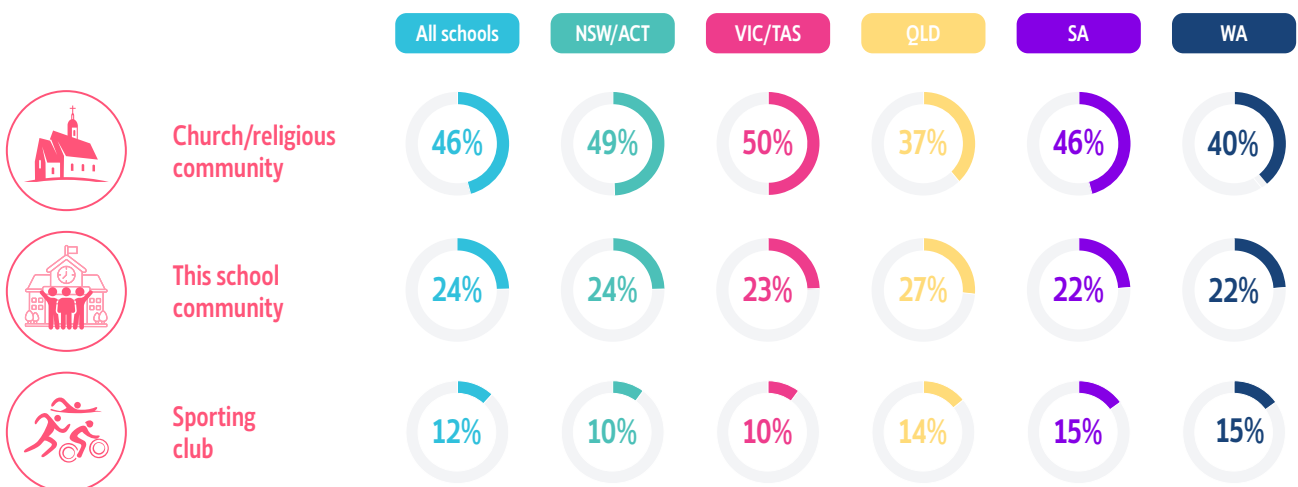


Figure 6.1 Important Local Community Groups for Parents

²⁷ Cheng, A. and Iselin, D. (2020). Australian Schools and the Common Good. Ontario: Canada



Preferred Methods of Communication with School

In seeking to be informed of ways to engage in the school community, Christian school parents overwhelmingly prefer email (87%) as the means for communication from the school to occur; with face-to-face meetings (50%) and SMS/text messages (46%) also being preferred over more traditional modes such as school newsletters (36%) and the school's website (16%).

The findings also revealed that the increased use of school portals (32%) and school apps (30%) to communicate to parents are more popular than the school's social media platforms (21%).

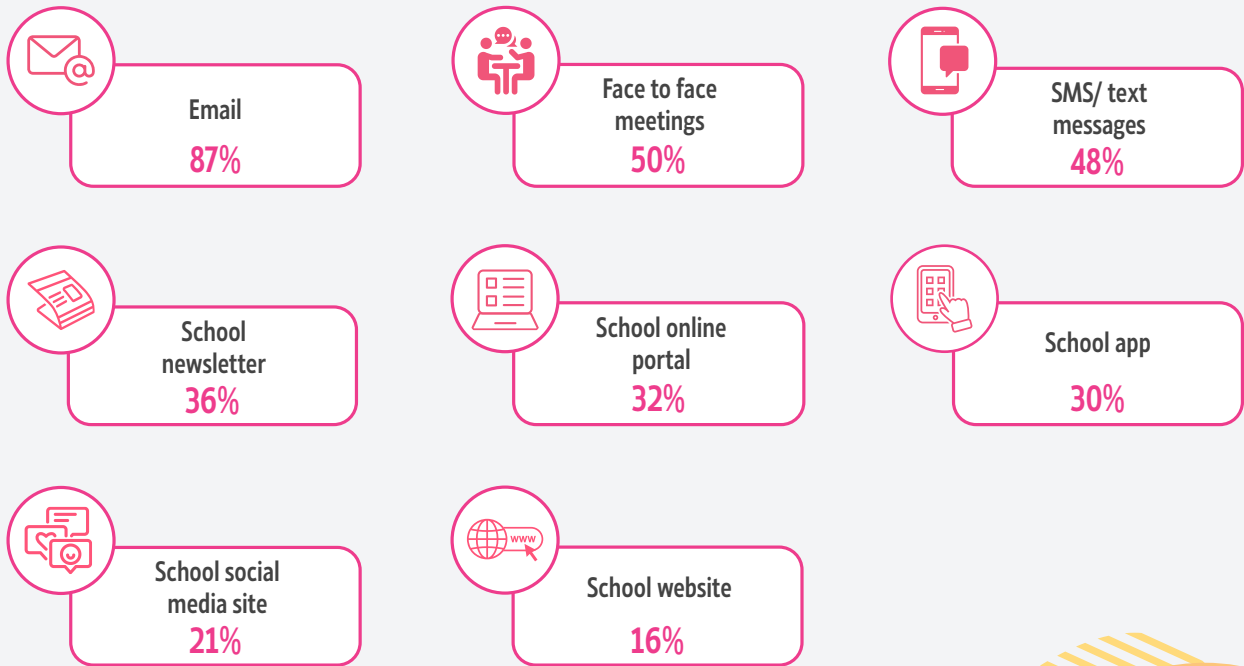


Figure 6.2 Parents' Preferred Methods of Communication with School





Extent Parents feel Personally Connected to School

The survey also explored the extent to which parents felt connected to their school communities. Whilst only 16% of parents surveyed thought they had an excellent connection with their Christian school, 50% of all respondents thought their connection was either good or excellent.

Levels of strong connections were highest in SA Christian schools (54%) and lowest in Qld Christian school communities (46%). The findings also reveal that parents from QLD Christian schools had the highest levels of non-connection to their school communities (20%), whilst Christian school parents from Victoria had the least level of non-connection (11%). The level of excellent and good connections with a

Christian school community also appeared to have a linear correlation with school size. The findings showed that parents perception of connection was strongest in very small Christian school communities and small schools (23% excellent / 59% good and excellent). This connection diminished somewhat in medium sized schools (18% excellent / 52% good and excellent); and even further in large sized Christian schools (13% excellent / 47% good and excellent). These findings suggest that as schools grow, in terms of student population, it becomes vitally important to maintain strong relationships and community connections and to actively seek ways to ensure that the schooling process does not become transactional, depersonalised, and siloed.

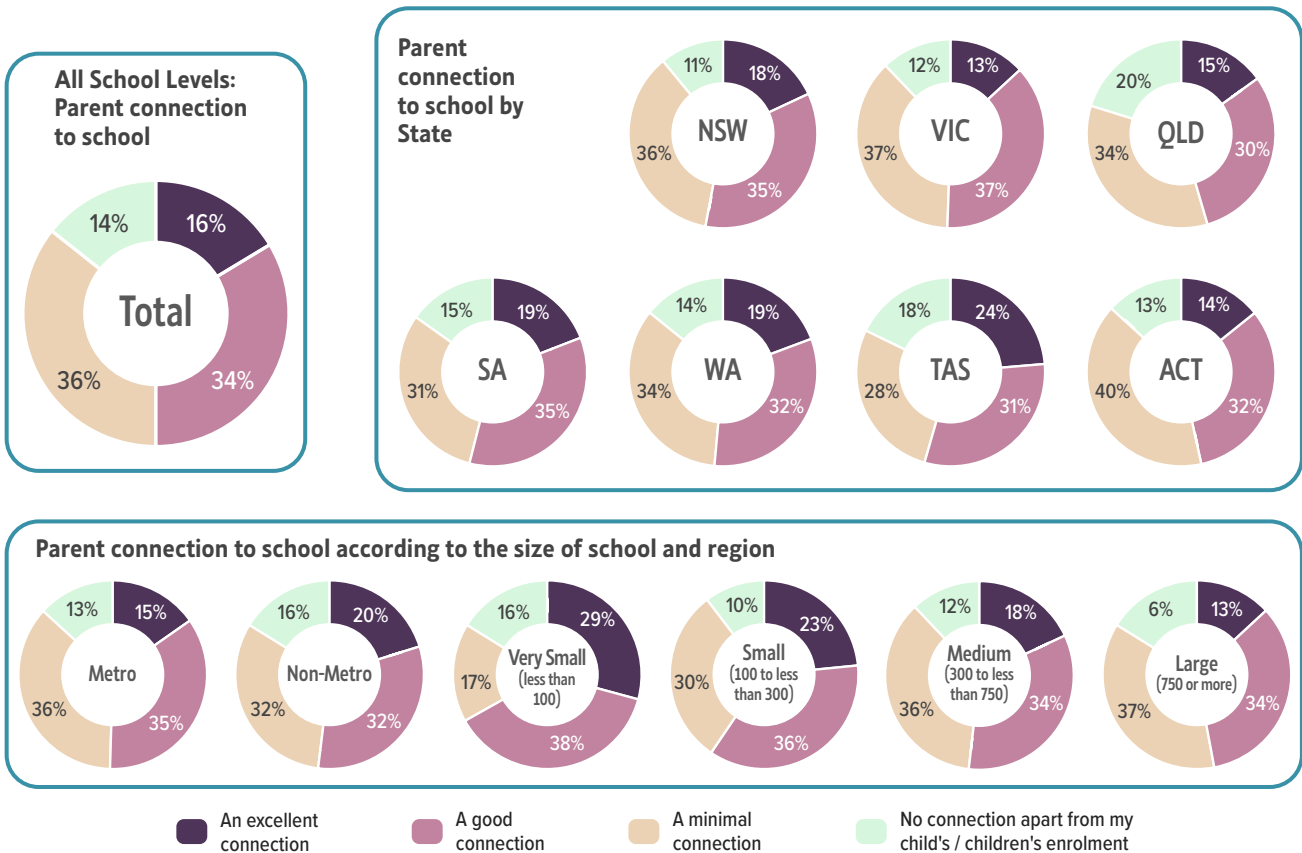


Figure 6.3 Parents' Perception of Connection with School

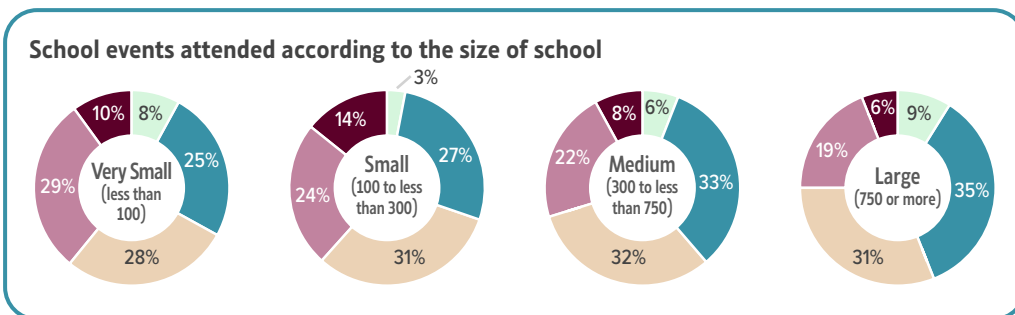
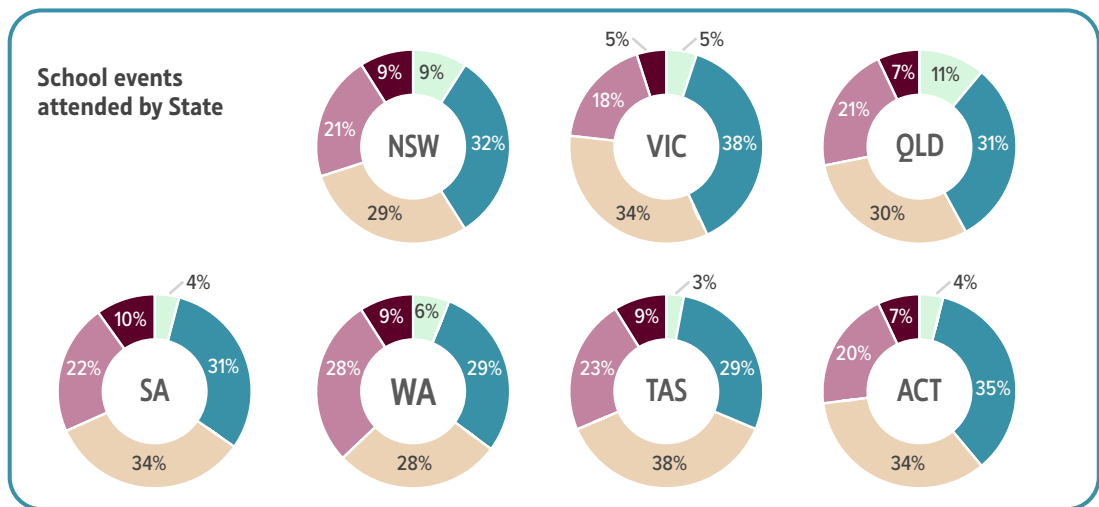
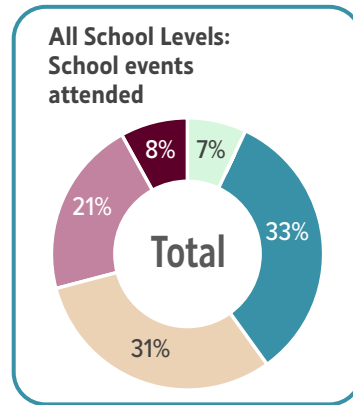




Number of School Events Attended

Typically, a third of respondents (33%) from Christian schools across Australia attended school events at least 1-2 times a year, with nearly 29% attending school events at least five or more times.

Parents from WA Christian schools were more likely to attend more than 5 events per year (37%) than parents from any other state. Parents were far more likely to attend more than 5 events per year in very small (39%) and small schools (38%), than in medium (30%) and large Christian schools (25%).



0 events 1 - 2 events 3 - 4 events 5 - 10 events More than 10 events

Figure 6.4 Number of School Events Attended by Parents



“ The highlight of the school year for our family is the awards ceremonies. They are always a time of great celebration and enjoyment and reflect the strong Christian culture of the school.



Active Engagement of Parents in Volunteer Work

Parents from Christian schools were active and engaged in volunteer work with 54% of all respondents involved in some form of volunteering. This comparatively high level of volunteer work is above the national average, with a 2020 research report identifying that only a third of all Australians

have volunteered (33%) in the past 12 months.²⁸ This level of volunteering was most evident in respondents from NSW/ACT, VIC/TAS and WA (56%).

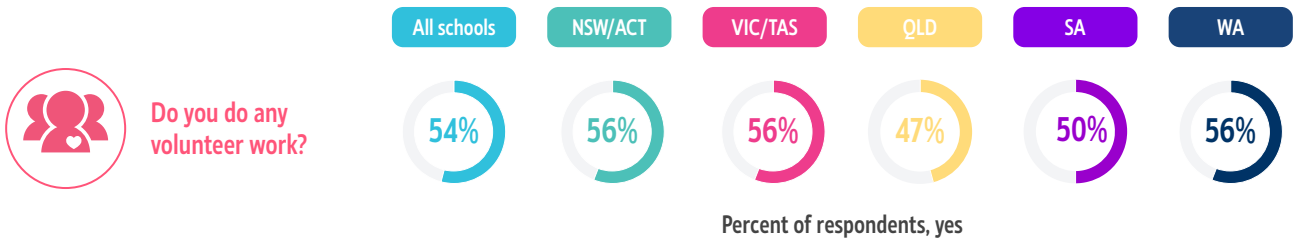


Figure 6.5 Parents' Level of Engagement in Volunteer Work

The types of organisations and groups that respondents volunteered in varied from church/religious groups (68%), the Christian school where their child attended (56%), sporting and community interest groups (49%), and organisations that help children or youth (45%). One possible reason for the higher-than-average engagement with volunteering activities by Christian school parents may be the emphasis

that the school's ethos and values placed on service and the importance of partnering with others in the community towards common goals and outcomes. Such a public facing posture by parents also models what community service practically looks like for their children and cultivates an active, participatory model of school and community engagement.

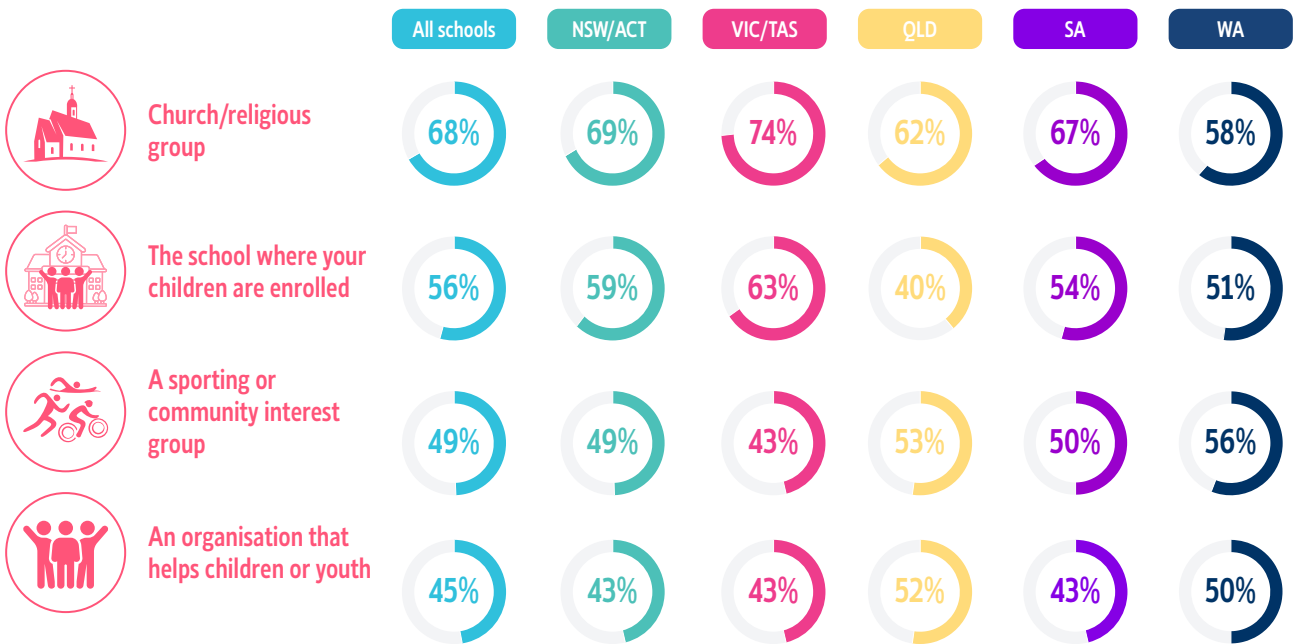


Figure 6.6 Type of Volunteer Work Parents are Involved in

²⁸ McCrindle. (2020). Australian communities 2020: Exploring Social Licence, Trust, and the Next Generation. McCrindle: Norwest, NSW



Summary

The findings of this national parent community survey highlight the importance of strong connections, involvement, and engagement by parents within Christian school communities. In an age of increasing disconnection, isolation and fragmentation, Christian schools have an important role to play in providing the social glue that connects families and communities together. Furthermore, Christian schools reinforce and build upon the vital role

that families play, in nurturing civic connections. In this symbiotic way, the school and family structures are mutually supporting; healthy schools need healthy families to engage and serve in their communities and in so doing the entire community flourishes.²⁹

²⁹ Cheng and Iselin. 2020



In an age of increasing disconnection, isolation and fragmentation, Christian schools have an important role to play in providing the social glue that connects families and communities together.



Family Profile



Key Findings

The CSCP survey provides a comprehensive snapshot of the types of families that choose Christian schools in Australia. Whilst placed within the Independent schools sector, it is important for Christian schools to know and understand the distinctive profiles and characteristics of the families that choose this particular type of schooling from other non-government schooling options. The profile that emerges from this rigorous and nationwide survey data set, provides an evidence-based and statistically robust snapshot of the families, from across the country, that choose Christian schools for their children.

number of families more broadly who are having less children and giving birth later in life than occurred 40 years ago.³⁰

The findings reveal that NSW has the highest rate of families enrolling more than one child at a Christian school (52%), whilst Tasmania had the highest rate of one-child enrolments across all Christian schools in the nation (59%). The total number of children from each family enrolled in a Christian school is higher in regional (non-metropolitan) areas (51% of families with 2 or more children and 15% with more than 3 children) than in capital cities (48% of families with 2 or more children and 11% with more than 3 children).

Children Currently Enrolled in Schools

According to the respondent sample, the most common number of children from a family enrolled at a Christian school was one child (51%) whilst families with two children enrolled in school was 36%. These percentages align with the larger

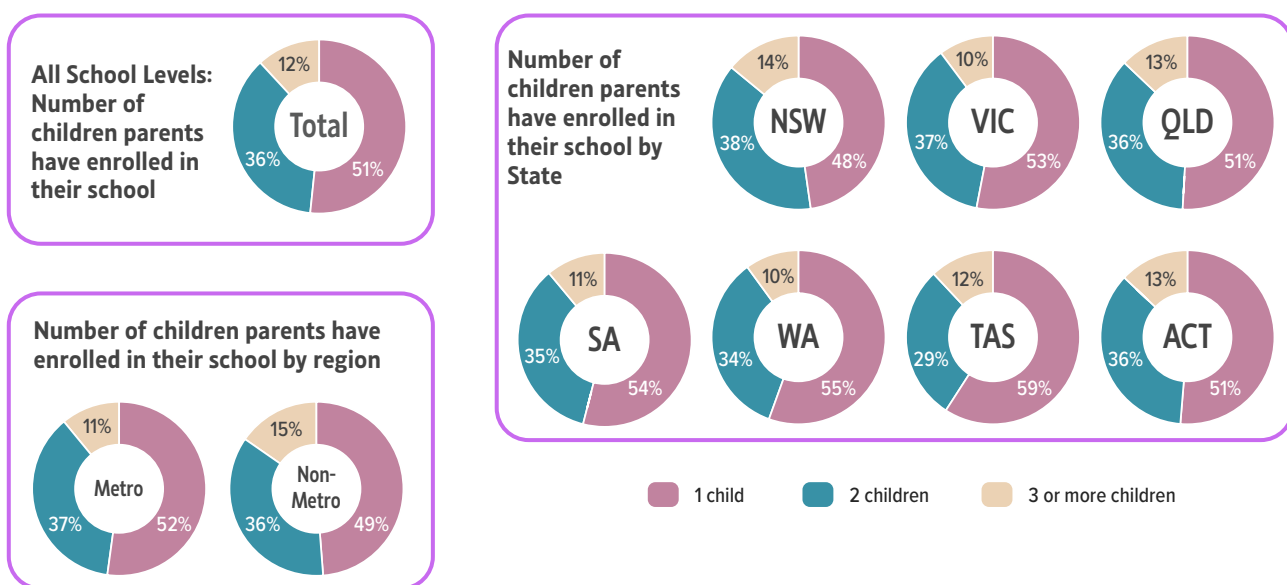


Figure 71 Number of Children Each Family have Enrolled in a Christian School

³⁰ Qu, L. (2020). Australian Families Then and Now: Having Children. Australian Institute of Family Affairs. Australian government: Canberra



School Attended by Parents

According to the survey, parents who have enrolled their child in a Christian school were themselves most likely to have attended a government (state) school (54%) or Christian school (17%) when they were children. This profile suggests that many current Christian schools families are seeking an accessible and values-aligned educational experience for their children that offers educational quality and reflects shared values between school and parents.

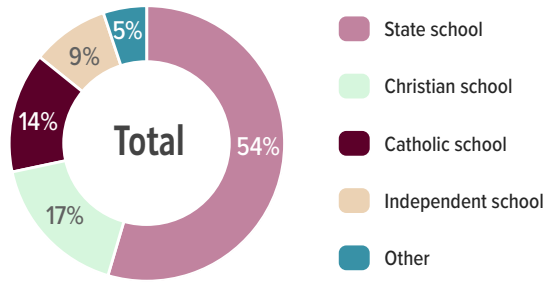


Figure 7.2 School Type Attended by parents

Occupation of parents

The most common occupation for Christian school parents was in the professional fields (44%) which were over two times more common than managerial roles (20%) and clerical and administrative worker (14%) roles. The higher percentage of parents from professional fields also correlates the findings regarding the overall number of children of families at Christian schools, with current trends suggesting professionals are having less children and later in life than in previous generations.³¹

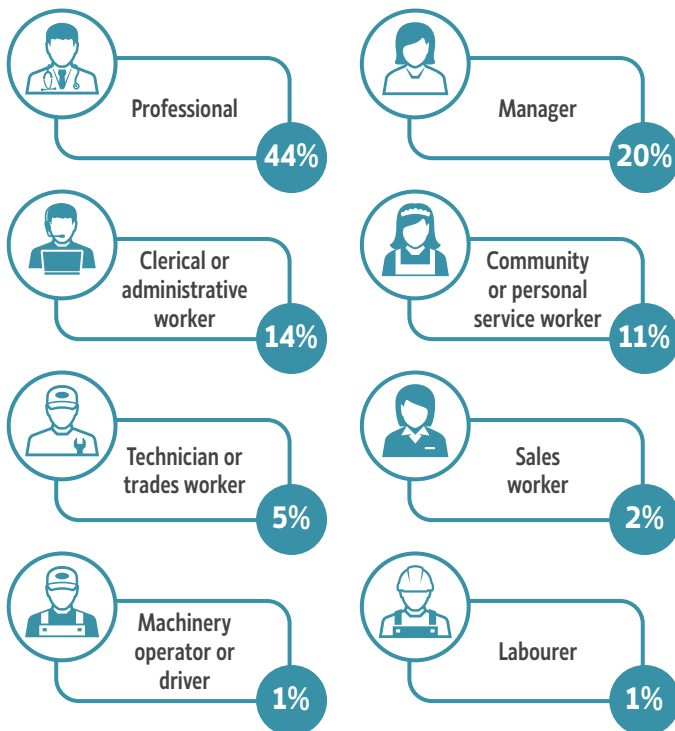


Figure 7.3 Occupation of Parents who have their Children enrolled in a Christian School

Age of Parents

According to the respondents in the survey, just under a third of all Christian school families are Millennials (30%), whilst over half of all Christian school parents are Generation X, in the 40 to 49-year-old category (53%).

These findings are generally consistent in Christian schools across all states. The current trend of having children much later in life may suggest that the age of parents enrolling their children in Christian schools may continue to decrease in the 35 to 44-year-old age category.³²

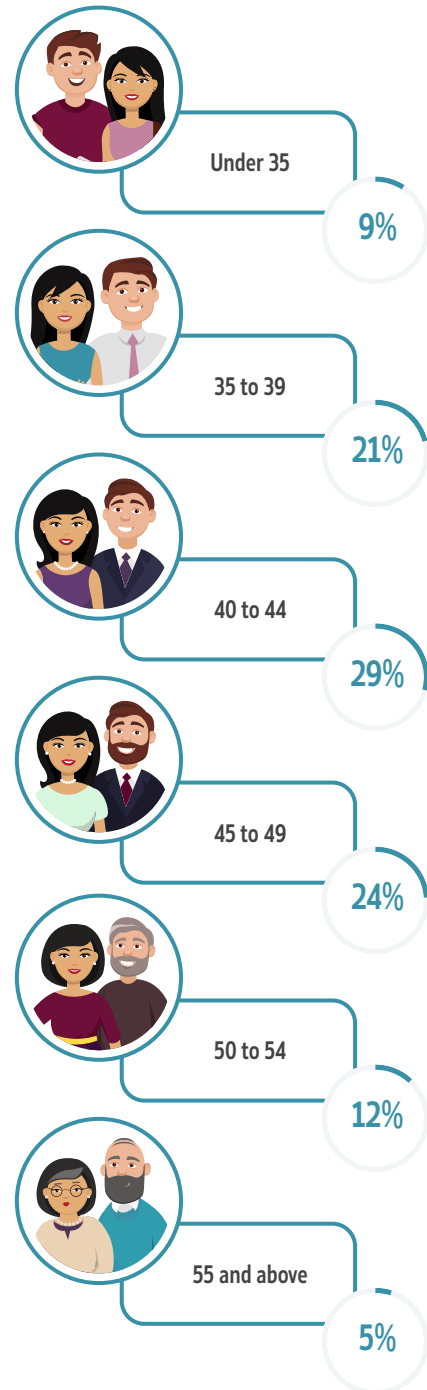


Figure 7.4 Age of Parents who participated in this Survey

³¹ Qu, L. (2020). Australian Families Then and Now: Having Children. Australian Institute of Family Affairs. Australian Government: Canberra

³² Ibid



Household Income of Parents

Whilst just under a third of combined household income for parents with children in Christian schools is \$150,000 or more, 39% of parents who have enrolled their child at a Christian school have a combined household income of less than \$100,000. Parents who have children enrolled in NSW/ACT Christian schools are far more likely to have combined incomes of over 150,000 (39%) which is twice more likely than parents in SA Christian schools (19%). Conversely, half of all SA Christian school parents had an income less than \$100,000 (50%), and a quarter had a household income of less than \$60,000 (24%). The breakdown of household income across states loosely aligns with cost of living, house

prices, and mean income levels across the nation. Only WA parents in this survey show less than the average earnings for WA reported in the ABS data.³³

These findings reveal that nearly 40% of parents sending their children to Christian schools have household incomes of less than \$100,000. This would suggest that, not only are Christian schools affordable, they are also accessible to a diverse cross section of Australian society. It will be interesting to monitor this accessibility longitudinally to see if Christian schools remain both affordable and accessible to such a large cross section of Australian society into the future.

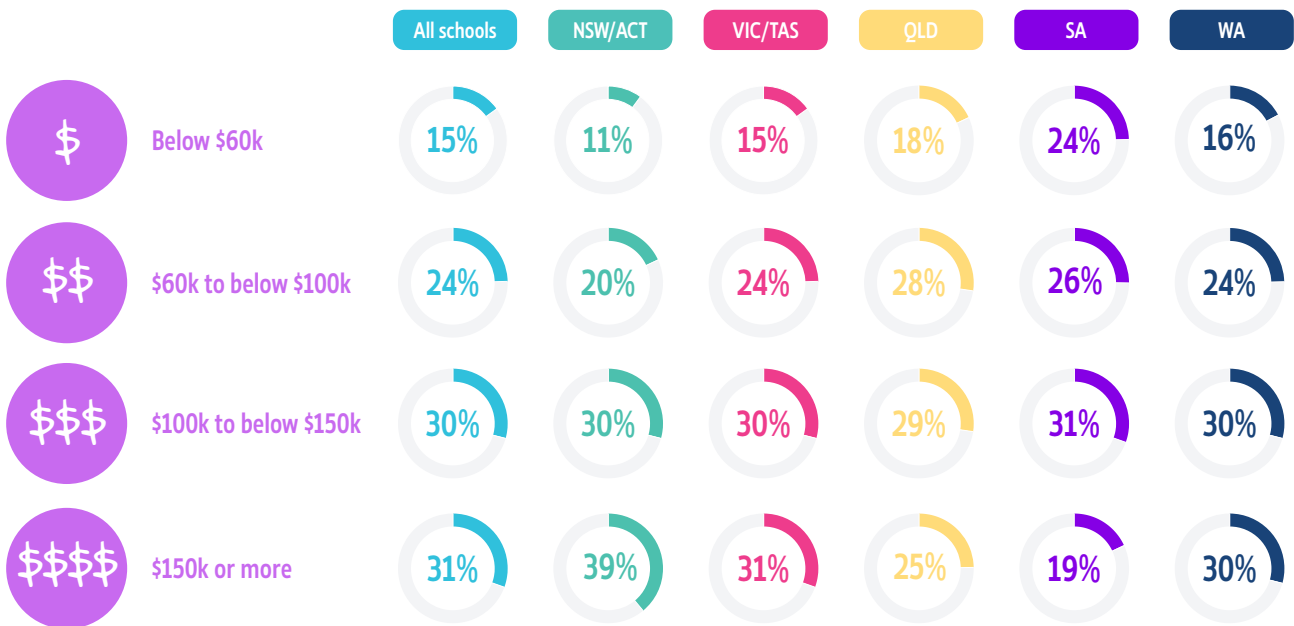


Figure 7.5 Parents' Household Income

³³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Labour Earnings and Working Conditions: Average Weekly Earnings in Australia. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics



Ethnic Origin of Parents

According to the survey findings, Christian school parents are also ethnically diverse, with 42% identifying their ethnic origin as other than 'Australian'. This was most evident in VIC/TAS Christian schools, where 57% of all respondents identified as 'other than Australian'. In these locations, Chinese (17%) and Indian (8%) ethnic groupings are strongly represented. Such diversity in ethnic origin could be the result of higher levels of migrant families looking in green field housing growth corridors.

Ethnic communities also tend to align with strongly religious communities and adopt more conservative value stances on contemporary issues. These ethnic communities also cultivate tightly woven networks that often tap into 'word of mouth' recommendations. Subsequently, great support and engagement from local ethnic groups can be garnered by Christian schools.

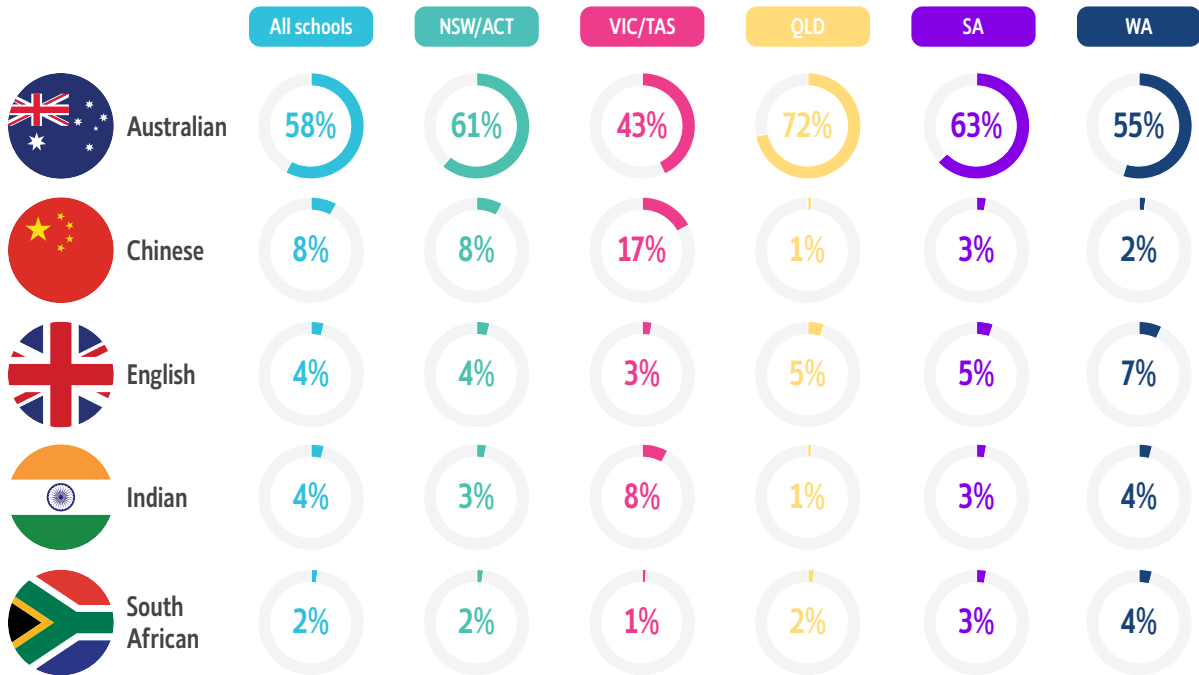


Figure 7.6 Ethnic Origin of Parents

Ethnic Origin of Parents (Region and School Size)

Christian school parents in non-metropolitan areas were far more likely to be of Australian ethnicity than parents from metropolitan Christian schools (56%). Closely aligned with these findings is the much higher proportion of small and very small Christian schools that are located in regional and remote areas, and these schools consequently have a much higher percentage of homogenous populations of families who identified as 'Australian'.

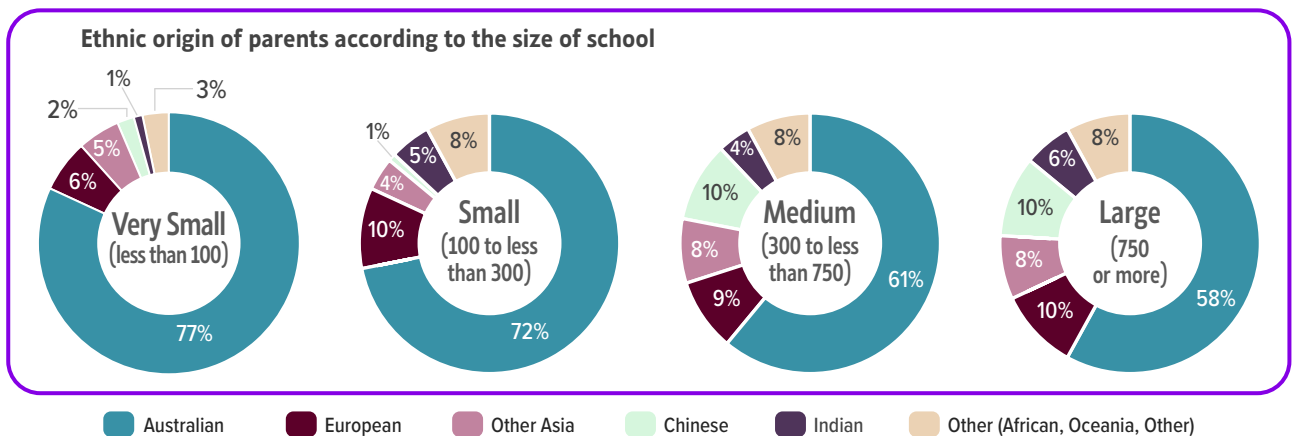
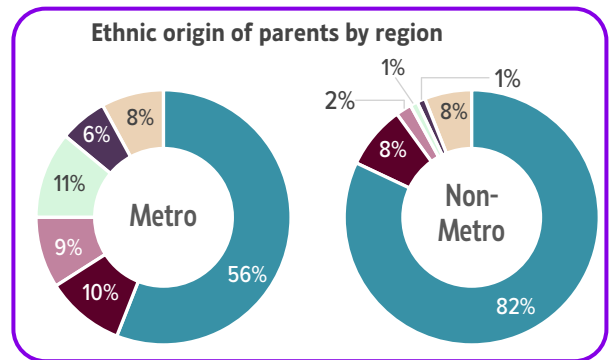


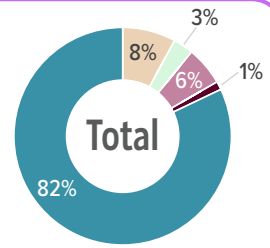
Figure 7.7 Ethnic Origin of Parents (by Region and School Size)



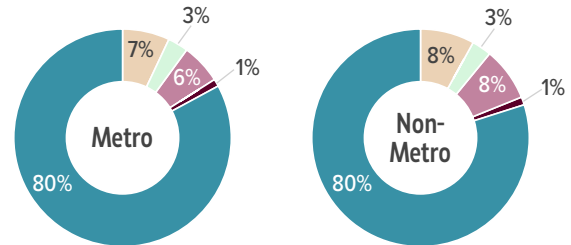
Religion of Parents

The survey findings also identified religious practices and perspectives of parents who have selected Christian schools for their children. When asked to identify their own personal view of God, parents from Christian schools overwhelmingly selected 'God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today' (82%) with only 3% of all respondents reporting that they believe that 'God does not exist'. Whilst parents who have enrolled their children in a Christian school may be more sympathetic to the idea of a God or a transcendent being than the general population, it nevertheless suggests that whilst recent census data confirms that organised religion and the rise of those reporting 'no religion' is waning within Australia,³⁴ the interest and support for the idea of God is still prevalent within parents seeking a Christian school for their children, irrespective of their religious commitment or church attendance.

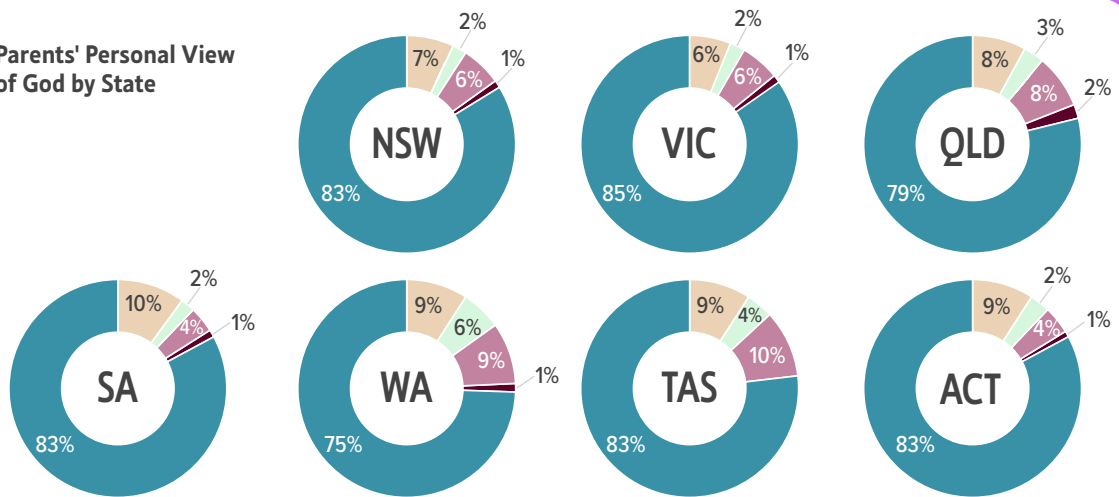
All School Levels: Parents' Personal View of God



Parents' Personal View of God by region



Parents' Personal View of God by State



- Don't know/not sure
- God does not exist
- God is not personal, but something like a cosmic life force
- God created the world but is not involved in the world now
- God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today

Figure 7.8 Religion of Parents Choosing Christian Schools

³⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). Religious Affiliation in Australia: Census 2021. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics



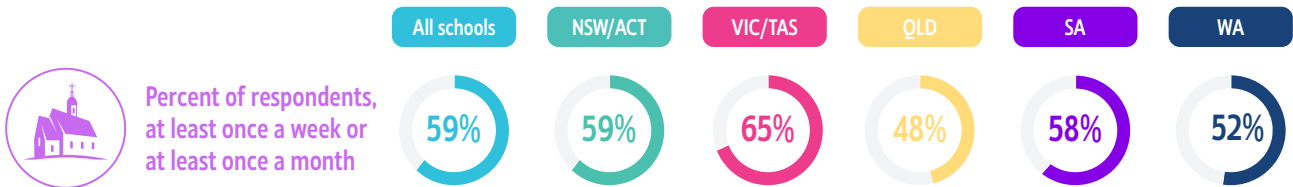
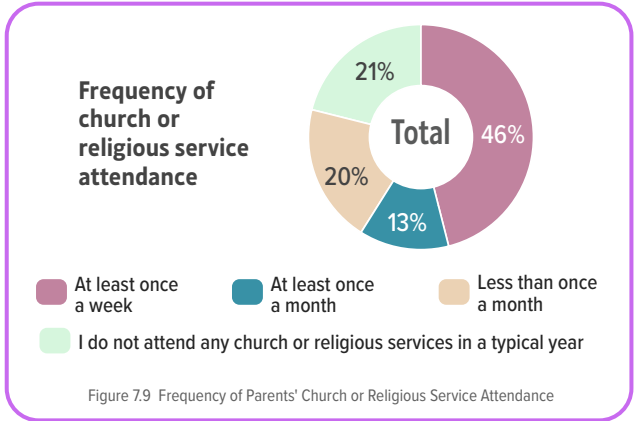


Religious Practices of Parents

Furthermore, such belief also translates into action and involvement, with nearly half (46%) of parents in Christian schools attending church once a week, and 59% at least once a month. Parents from VIC/TAS (65%) and NSW/ACT (59%) were most likely to attend church or a religious service more regularly than those from QLD (48%).

These findings closely align with the Cardus Education Survey Australia findings regarding religious commitment when analysed according to specific state by state categories.³⁵ Whilst these findings of religious commitment are noteworthy, it is also interesting to reflect that nearly 40% of all parents who have enrolled their children at Christian schools do not

regularly attend church or religious services. Additionally, the fact that Christian schools are chosen by many parents of no regular religious commitment underscores the appeal that Christian schools have to both persons of faith and no apparent faith commitment.



Religious Affiliation of Parents

The religious affiliation of parents who have their children enrolled in Christian schools highlighted that the most common denominational affiliation was Pentecostal (18%), followed by Baptist (12%), Anglican (12%) and Catholic (10%).

There were also a proportionally large percentage of parents who had no religious affiliation (12%) yet still chose Christian schooling as the preferred choice for their child's education.

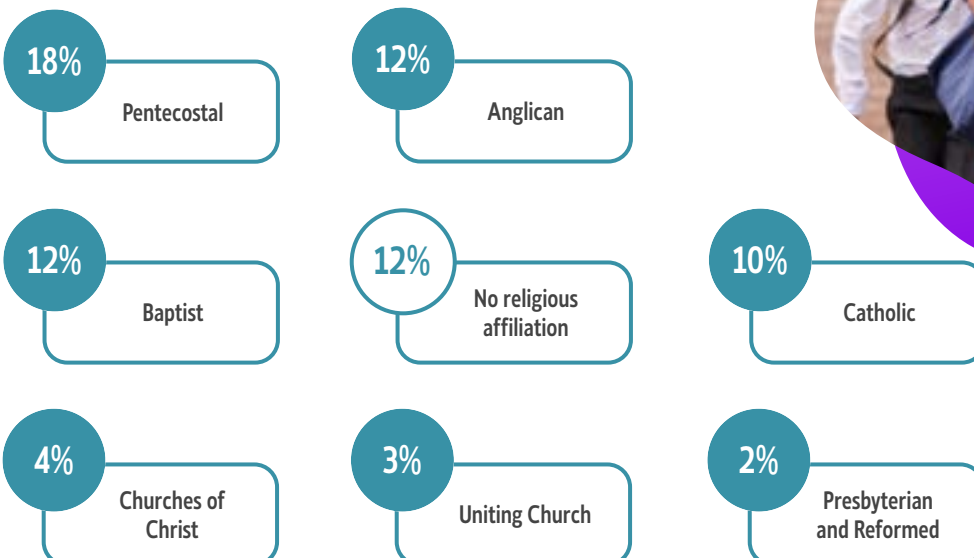


Figure 7.11 Denominational Affiliation of Parents

³⁵ Cheng and Iselin, 2020



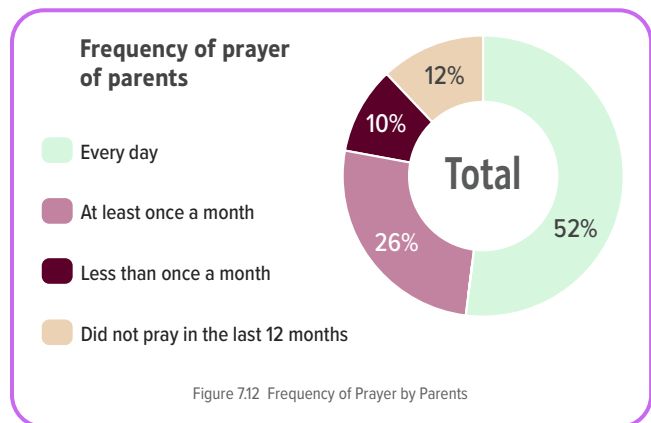


Frequency of Prayer of Parents

The findings also revealed that the majority of parents who have enrolled their children in Christian schools pray on a daily basis, with nearly four out of five praying at least once a month (78%). At least monthly prayer was most prevalent in Christian school parents from VIC/TAS (83%) and least prevalent with parents with children in Christian schools in QLD (73%).

The much higher rates of prayer, than participation in religious services reflects the contemporary attitude of many people who would describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. This delineation is an area worthy of further investigation and it will be important to track this data longitudinally to identify consistent trends within these findings.

Furthermore, the use of the term 'no religion' as a catch-all category within ABS census data does not seem to suitably reflect the rising percentage of parents who would describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'. Whilst many seem to be rejecting organised religion, they are not abandoning all forms of faith, belief in a god or faith practices, such as prayer.



Percent of respondents, every day or at least once a month

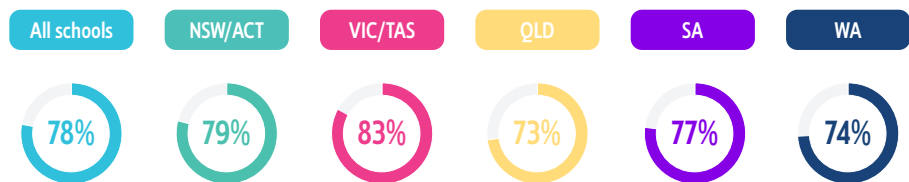


Figure 7.13 Percentage of Parents who Pray at least once a month

Summary

The family profile of families attending Christian schools within this comprehensive nationwide sample powerfully reinforces the diversity and ethnic plurality of Christian school communities. In this way, Christian school communities are microcosms of contemporary Australian society and represent a mosaic of rich cultural backgrounds and traditions. Whilst parents who have enrolled their children in a Christian school

represent a plethora of religious traditions and beliefs, the interest and support for the idea of God or a transcendent being is still prevalent with parents seeking a Christian school for their children, irrespective of their religious commitment or church attendance.

The CSCP survey provides, for the first time, a clear, robust and evidence-based snapshot of the types of families that choose Christian schools in Australia, why they choose Christian schooling for their children, and the level of satisfaction and engagement they have with Christian schools across the nation. The selection of a school is one of the most important decisions that any parent can make in the life of their child. The findings of the CSCP highlight that this decision is grounded upon a conviction by parents to align with a school that: has values and beliefs that are consistent with their own; provides safe, supportive and quality education for their child; encourages them, as parents, to engage in and contribute to the education process; and delivers high levels of satisfaction in regard to educational performance and outcomes. The findings of the CSCP can be summarised across four key categories:

- 1 Christian School Choice is Based Upon a Values Alignment
- 2 Parents are Seeking a Supportive Relational Community
- 3 Parents highly Value Holistic Educational Outcomes that lead to Flourishing
- 4 Parents Value Christian Education in a Secular Age

Christian School Choice is Based Upon a Values Alignment

Specifically, the findings relating to the theme of school choice highlighted that parents across Australia are making informed decisions regarding the choice of Christian schools within a highly competitive and diverse educational marketplace. The findings also revealed that parents are intentionally and deliberately preferencing distinctly Christian values, similar to their own, as a key factor when considering the type of school they are seeking for their child's education. The findings confirmed that this alignment was the primary determinant for selecting a Christian school in Australia. When asked what practices should be most important at a Christian school, 74% of parents indicated teaching of traditional Christian values and beliefs are of significant importance to them. Put simply, parents who choose Christian schools are seeking educational opportunities where they perceive their personal beliefs are going to be valued and supported by the school they select for their children.

Such a commitment to values alignment was also reinforced by the finding that, when determining schooling options for their children, 44% of Christian school parents would only consider other Christian schools and over a fifth of all parents (23%) did not consider any other school but the Christian school they enrolled their children in. 61% of parent participants in the survey made their decision regarding a Christian school in less than six months and 83% took 12 months or less to decide on a Christian school. These findings are in contrast to the



comparatively longer decision-making time frames adopted by parents in other types of Independent schools.

Furthermore, the importance of community service (69%) and the demonstration and application of Christian values and beliefs was also highly regarded by parents seeking a Christian school for their children. When analysed according to the state jurisdictions, parents from VIC/TAS Christian schools (72%) were more likely than any other state in Australia to identify community service as an important characteristic of Christian schools. This finding supports results from the Cardus Education Survey Australia project regarding the importance of community service and outreach opportunities to Christian school graduates. The findings also revealed that the most important outcome that they hoped children would achieve through attending a Christian school was strong character and Christian values (45%), with this intended outcome especially prevalent with parents from NSW/ACT (47%) and VIC/TAS (49%) Christian schools.

Parents are Seeking a Supportive Relational Community

A second key finding arising from the survey highlighted that parents were actively seeking supportive and nurturing communities for their children's education. Families were most satisfied with the safety, care and supportiveness of Christian schools, and the quality of relationships between teachers and students. These findings are supported by the results of the Relational Schools Project, which concluded that the level of relationships between teachers and students within Christian schools was strongly correlated to an overall sense of relational belonging that was effectively cultivated within Christian school communities. Relationships across all levels of the school community were very important to parents choosing Christian schools, with 'Quality of teacher/student relationships' being prioritised by 35% of all respondents. These findings highlight the unique nature of Christian schools in embodying the distinctly Christian ethos in the daily interaction of staff and students.



A quarter of parents also identified that the Foundation to Year 12 model of education was an important factor in school selection. The importance of spiritual and character formation was further reinforced when parents were asked about the purposes of education and what they hope their children would obtain and achieve through their schooling journey. Rather than financial success or increased social status, parents overwhelmingly identified Christian values and virtues, 'strong character and Christian values' and 'love for God and others' being selected in nearly three-quarters of all responses.

Parents perceived from their own experience that Christian schools were overwhelmingly described as being 'Supportive', 'Christ centred' and 'Safe', closely followed by 'Respectful' and 'Nurturing'. Respondents to the survey were also "extremely" or "very satisfied" with the 'Safety and Supportiveness' of their school (81% of respondents). These findings underscore the importance of relationships and a supportive community as foundational and not peripheral to a child's education. Nurturing classroom environments and a strong relational connection to a school community are an integral considerations that drive parent decision-making in a contemporary sociocultural milieu.

Parents highly Value Holistic Educational Outcomes that lead to Flourishing

A further key theme arising from the survey findings was the very high levels of satisfaction with the overall performance, emphasis and quality of Christian schools across all Australian states. Whilst the survey confirmed that Christian schools effectively promote academic learning and career preparation, these types of schools are also highly intentional about the promotion of human flourishing, community service, and holistic development. Parents indicated that they were highly satisfied with the way Christian schools seek to cultivate a meaningful contribution to the common good and the ways these schools are intentional in developing engagement and

interaction with society and culture that promote holistic development, strong relationships, and connections with the wider community.

Parents were also extremely satisfied with the graduate outcomes and overall performance of Christian schools across the nation. Parents were most satisfied with the manner in which Christian schools contributed to the common good within society (76%) and how graduates interacted with the society and culture around them (74%), findings that are similarly reinforced in the 2020 Cardus Education Survey Australia Report findings. Parents revealed that Christian schools provided a very important focal point for the parent community, rating almost two times higher than any other community group and second only to church and religious groups. The majority of parent respondents indicated they had a good or excellent connection to their school and that they were also actively involved in their communities as volunteers across a broad range of organisations (54%). Such a public facing posture by parents also models what community service practically looks like for their children and cultivates an active, participatory model of school and community engagement.

The survey findings reinforced that parents selecting Christian schools are actively seeking a quality holistic education that produces graduates who are well prepared for whatever life and career paths they choose. Such an education is grounded in the holistic formation of persons and actively promotes flourishing that shapes the student's character as well as their intellect.

Parents Value Christian Education in a Secular Age

The survey findings also highlighted that parents still value the importance of Christian education, even in a secular, and what some have referred to as a post-Christian, age. Nearly half (46%) of parents in Christian schools attend church once a week, and 59% at least once a month. The majority of parents pray on a daily basis, and nearly four out of five respondents pray at least once a month. Whilst these findings on religious commitment are noteworthy, it is also interesting to reflect that nearly 40% of all parents who have enrolled their children at Christian schools do not attend any church or religious services in a typical year, nor regularly attend church or religious services. Additionally, the fact that Christian schools are chosen by many parents of no regular religious commitment underscores the appeal that Christian schools have to both persons of faith and no apparent faith commitment.

When asked to identify their own personal view of God, parents from Christian schools overwhelmingly selected 'God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today' (82%) with only 3% of all respondents reporting that they believe that 'God

does not exist'. Whilst parents who have enrolled their children in a Christian school may be more sympathetic to the idea of a God or a transcendent being than the general population, it nevertheless suggests that the interest and support for the idea of God is still prevalent within parents seeking a Christian school for their children, irrespective of their religious commitment or church attendance. Furthermore, while nearly 1 in 5 parents themselves went to a Christian school, the majority of parents who selected Christian schools for their child attended government schools for their education.

The survey findings confirm that an overwhelming majority of parents who select Christian schools highly value the Christian foundations that are an integral part of these thriving school communities, irrespective of their own personal religious commitment or church attendance.

Final Thought

The CSCP provides, for the first time, detailed national and state benchmarks for parent choice of CSA member schools and will enable trends to be monitored, analysed and evaluated in future surveys. The findings reveal that parents are deliberately choosing Christian schools because of a high regard for the caring and supportive communities that Christian schools cultivate. Furthermore, parents are also intentionally seeking an alignment with their family values and beliefs and are very satisfied with the educational quality and graduate outcomes that Christian schools provide.

For policy makers, regulators, and politicians these findings challenge the notion that students are 'drifting' into Christian

schools. In reality their families are actively choosing schools which reflect their own values and beliefs and which they believe are going to form their children holistically and prepare them well to take their place within society. These findings are important as State and Federal governments continue to add increased levels of regulation upon schools which have the danger of homogenising the educational landscape. The concepts of choice, diversity, and contribution are key themes for decision-makers to keep in mind in terms of future policy developments. Parents' choices in this study provide a revealing insight into the type of society parents are not only imagining, but actively pursuing, for their children, as well as the core characteristics they believe constitute human flourishing.

It is hoped that these findings stimulate further conversation, reflection and analysis regarding the parent communities that choose Christian schools across Australia and lead to improved ways of engaging families and communities across all Christian schools. For the 8,595 parents who responded to this survey, Christian schools across Australia provide a quality, supportive and holistic education for their children that is delivered within thriving relational communities. Parents were highly satisfied with this type of education and highly appreciative of the distinct type of education that Christian schools provide, not just for their family, but also, the common good of all within contemporary Australian society.

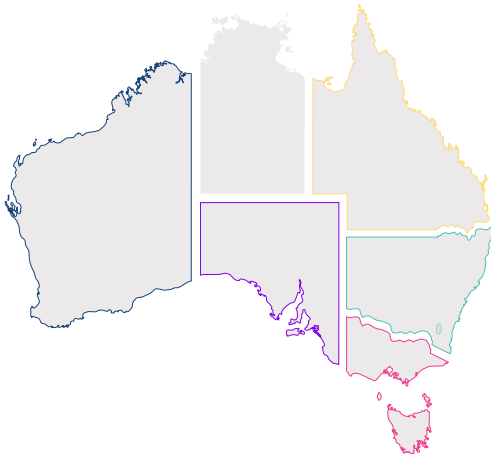


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Appendix A: Participating Member Schools



QLD

Australian Christian College - Moreton
 Caloundra Christian College
 Carmichael College
 Discovery Christian College
 Freshwater Christian College
 Glasshouse Christian College
 Jubilee Christian College
 Lighthouse Christian School
 Mueller College
 Riverside Christian College
 Victory College

NSW/ACT

Arise Christian College
 Australian Christian College - Marsden Park
 Australian Christian College - Singleton
 Belmont Christian College
 Berowra Christian School
 Brightwaters Christian College ACC
 Brindabella Christian College
 Casino Christian School
 Cedars Christian College
 Charlton Christian College
 Green Point Christian College
 Greenacre Baptist Christian Community School
 HopePoint Christian School
 Hunter Christian School
 Koinonia Christian Academy
 Liberty College
 Maitland Christian School
 Nambucca Valley Christian Community School
 Northcross Christian School
 Norwest Christian College
 Nowra Christian School
 Oxford Falls Grammar
 Penrith Christian School
 Regents Park Christian School
 St George Christian School
 Summerland Christian College
 Taree Christian College
 Toongabbie Christian College
 Trinity Christian School
 Wyong Christian Community School

VIC/TAS

Australian Christian College - Burnie
 Australian Christian College - Hobart
 Australian Christian College - Hume
 Australian Christian College – Launceston
 Australis Christian College
 Bairnsdale Christian Community School
 Ballarat Christian College
 Belgrave Heights Christian School
 Creek Street Christian College
 Flinders CCC Tyabb
 Flinders CCC Carrum Downs
 Geneva Christian College
 Grace Christian College Wodonga
 Heatherton Christian College
 Hillcrest Christian College
 Kerang Christian College
 Kings College
 Lighthouse Christian College
 Mildura Christian College
 Northside Christian College
 Red Rock Christian College
 River City Christian College
 Rivercrest Christian College
 Shepparton Christian College
 Southern Christian College
 St Andrews Christian College
 Victory Christian College
 Waverley CC Narre Warren South
 Waverley CC Wantirna South
 Wyndham Christian College

SA

Bethany Christian School Incorporated
 Emmaus Christian College
 Harvest Christian College
 King's Baptist Grammar School
 Pilgrim School
 Portside Christian College
 Southern Vales Christian College
 Sunrise Christian School - Fullarton
 Sunrise Christian School - Marion
 Sunrise Christian School - Morphett Vale
 Sunrise Christian School - Naracoorte
 Sunrise Christian School - Paradise
 Sunrise Christian School - Whyalla
 Temple Christian College
 Tyndale Christian School Murray Bridge
 Tyndale Christian School Salisbury East
 Tyndale Christian School Strathalbyn

WA

Atlantis Beach Baptist College
 Australian Christian College - Darling Downs
 Australian Christian College - Southlands
 Beechboro Christian School
 Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School Coolgardie
 Dale Christian School
 Ellenbrook Christian College
 Emmanuel Christian Community School
 Grace Christian School
 Hillside Christian College
 Kennedy Baptist College
 Mandurah Baptist College
 Mundaring Christian College

