

# Building social capital

Measuring the social impact of independent education in Australia

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**ahisa**  
Association of Heads of  
Independent Schools of Australia

**mccrindle**



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# Introductions



**Mark McCrindle**

This research highlights the massive contribution the independent school sector makes to Australia and corrects some misconceptions. Far from being a small sector, the students and their parents and the staff at independent schools total more than 1.8 million Australians. An additional 2.8 million people each year directly benefit from independent schools by, for example, attending events or using their facilities. As for being for the “urban elite”, one-third of independent schools are in regional and remote locations, and there are more low-fee than high-fee independent schools nationally. In addition, independent schools each year give scholarships to low income families worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Independent schools are very diverse geographically, culturally and religiously, which in part explains why it has for several decades been the fastest growing school sector in Australia. This report shows the strong culture in the sector which equips young people to serve their communities. This culture, combined with the clear purpose that these schools communicate results in the significant positive impacts recorded herein. It became clear through this research that the principals surveyed have not only a vision for their school, but a vision for their community.



**Beth Blackwood**

Social capital is fostered by strong connections between people, and is nourished by generosity, cooperation and trust. Social capital is the life blood of healthy communities and is the heartbeat of strong and compassionate nations.

AHISA Heads are well aware that their schools contribute significantly to building and sustaining social capital in Australia and beyond. AHISA's 2019 Social Capital Project, undertaken on our behalf by McCrindle Research, is our first attempt to describe and measure that contribution.

The data gathered by McCrindle is, firstly, evidence of the outstanding work of independent schools in developing young people of character. It is also evidence of how independent schools set about that work, reflecting the holistic educational philosophy which underpins each school's vision and mission.

In describing the work of independent schools in particular, this project also demonstrates how all schools in Australia contribute to our national wellbeing.

Importantly, the Social Capital Project reveals the enormous capacity of young Australians to be good citizens – locally, nationally and globally. The willingness of young people to engage with the wider community, to take on the responsibility of leadership roles and to harness body, mind and spirit for the betterment of others shines through this report.

At a time when influence is largely determined by evidence, this report will provide invaluable data to support the important role the AHISA National Office plays in advocating for independent school Heads. At a more local level, it offers AHISA members a framework through which they can communicate the particular narrative of their own schools around community and nation building.

Thank you to our members whose participation in this project has provided us with such a rich tapestry of information about how independent schools contribute to building social capital in Australia. We look forward to working with our members to further build our story of 'optimising the opportunities for the education and welfare of Australia's young people'.

# Increasing social capital in Australia

## What is social capital?

Social capital represents the **shared values** within a community that enable its individuals to **trust each other** and as a result **work together** more effectively.<sup>1</sup>

The term social capital finds its roots in education, with the first reference dating back to 1916.<sup>2</sup> The American state supervisor L. J. Hanifan believed that community involvement was an important component of a successful school.<sup>2</sup> Social capital has since been referred to as the glue which holds our communities together, facilitating co-operation, exchange and innovation.<sup>3</sup>

*The strength of a school comes from its stories and traditions, but the future of a school rests in its relevance and innovation.*

## Social capital has broad civic and economic benefits

Like many forms of capital, social capital is an important part of society and an integral component of human flourishing. The benefits of effective social capital reach beyond friends and families, positively impacting the social and economic composition of Australia.

In modern Australia, independent schools are foundries of social capital creation. With 1,137 independent schools in Australia, employing nearly 81,000 staff and enrolling 612,000 students,<sup>4</sup> the social impact of independent education stretches both far and wide.

The independent sector values holistic student development, social responsibility, global citizenship, collaboration and diversity. Until now, quantifying the large social impact that the sector has on Australian society has been challenging.

New research has found, however, that the impact and influence the sector has on Australian society is significant. Each year more than one in ten Australians (11%) directly engage with the independent sector as a result of community engagement by individual schools. These meaningful engagements, which impact local, national and global communities, highlight the integral social glue that is developed by independent schools across Australia.



# Snapshot of independent education in Australia

In Australia there are **612,462 students** in **1,137 schools**



**1 in 3** independent schools are in regional /remote areas



**80,693** staff



**1.1 million** parents/guardians of independent school students



**90%** are coeducational

Of the single sex schools most are girls' schools (58%) compared to boys' (42%)

## Breakdown by state

	Students	Staff*	Schools
NSW	203,848	26,427	399
VIC	143,668	20,210	216
QLD	120,947	15,479	206
WA	65,948	8,856	145
SA	48,827	5,785	103
TAS	9,382	1,418	31
ACT	13,716	1,666	18
NT	6,127	852	19

\*Includes teaching and non-teaching staff

# Creating cohesive communities

## Independent schools drive social capital creation

Independent schools are a hub of community connection for many Australians. These communities are created and supported by independent schools which connect individuals, families and communities across the country. This enhanced social cohesion, fostered by independent schools, is the foundation for developing social capital among Australia's diverse communities.

Each year more than one in ten Australians (11%) are positively impacted by community engagement driven by independent schools. This represents 2.8 million people that engage with one of Australia's 1,137 independent schools. These meaningful engagements, which impact local and international communities, are examples of independent schools creating social capital.

Many schools promote positive community interactions by making student events, such as musicals and drama performances, available to the wider community (89%). More than two thirds of independent schools also promote community cohesion by running non-student events such as lectures and professional learning programs (77%) for people in the community to attend. Four in five schools provide their school facilities to community groups (80%).

## Independent schools directly engage 2.3 million parents, guardians and past students

In Australia, each independent school engages 1,000 (median) parents and guardians as well as an equal number of past students each year. This represents a total of 2.3 million parents, guardians and past students that are engaged by the sector nation-wide.

Many of these stakeholders are not only engaged, but also actively involved in helping the school and volunteering in the local community. A large proportion of schools involve parents and guardians in volunteering (90%) and three in five (62%) also facilitate volunteering programs for alumni.

One in ten Australians (2.8 million) are impacted by independent school community engagement



## Community connection



Musicals and drama performances

89%



Providing facilities to community groups

80%



Lectures and professional learning programs for the community

77%

# Serving Australia

## Independent schools produce social citizens

Many independent schools recognise the value of students being active members of society, encouraging students to connect with their local communities and celebrating their efforts (96%).

In order to create a culture of community participation and social reciprocity, four in five independent schools have introduced formal service-learning programs (such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award). These service-oriented programs help develop each students' sense of social responsibility as well as prepare them for a life of community engagement and participation.

Each year 450 (median) students per school participate in formal service-learning programs. This is the equivalent of 511,650 students across Australia.

Independent schools also encourage students to serve their local community in non-programmed ways. Students in almost all independent schools (96%) serve their local communities by hosting events or by providing fundraising for local charities. A similarly large proportion (93%) also raise awareness for those in need in the local community. Nine in ten schools run student-led community engagement initiatives (90%) and partner with local community organisations (87%).



**450 students**  
per school participate  
in service-learning



## Nearly half a million independent students serve local Australian communities

Many independent students serve their local community outside of formal learning programs. Across the independent school sector, the number of students engaged in serving the local community per school is 400 (median). This represents a national total of 454,800 independent school students. These students are instilled with a passion for serving their local communities with nearly two in five (38%) involved in initiatives that are led by their fellow students.

The high level of community service observed across the sector means that in every community of 100 people in Australia, there are an average of two independent students actively serving the community.



**community of  
100 people**



**2 independent  
students serving**

In every community of 100 people in Australia, there are an average of **two independent students** actively serving the community

# Empowering student leadership and civic engagement

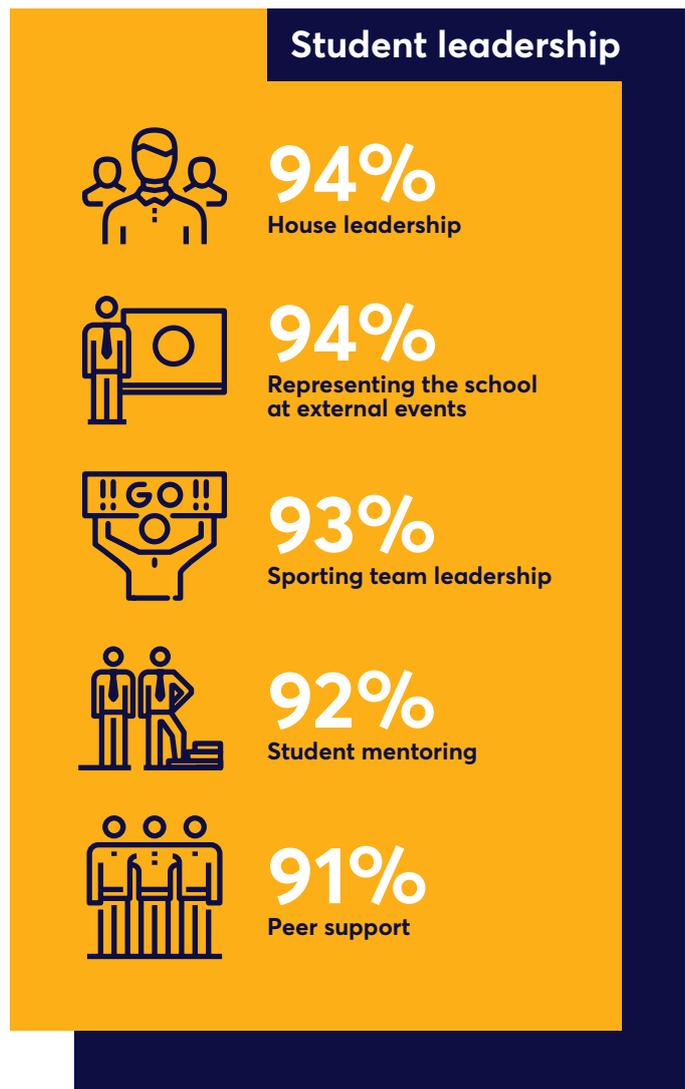
## Leadership is an important element of social cohesion

Creating social capital is at the heart of the independent school ethos. Many independent schools in Australia encourage their students to not only participate in Australian society, but to be active leaders in it. More than nine in ten schools develop leadership through house leadership positions (94%), school representation at external events (94%), sporting team leadership (93%) and mentoring of younger students (92%) such as peer support programs (91%).

In each independent school there are 150 (median) students engaged in some form of student leadership. Nationally, this represents 171,000 students learning important leadership skills.

## Independent students are engaged in civic life

Independent school students are also encouraged to be actively involved in civics. More than nine in ten schools (92%) allow students to participate in civic engagement in the form of debating. Seven in ten schools (71%) have student bodies that invite local Members of Parliament or other parliamentarians to visit the school. Three in five have student-run social justice groups (61%) and on campus groups affiliated with international aid and development organisations (56%). A further one in three schools (36%) also have students who write to government representatives.



**150 students**  
in student leadership



**171,000**  
nationally

# Inter-school collaboration

## Independent schools model inclusivity

As Australian communities continue to grow and change, the independent sector is enhancing social cohesion by modelling values based on inclusivity and collaboration. The overwhelming majority of independent schools participate in inter-school academic competitions (99%) and sporting competitions (96%). Nine in ten schools partner in inter-school creative arts events (89%) and a similar proportion

share their skills and knowledge by having staff join in professional learning with other schools (88%).

Independent schools don't limit their collaboration within their own sector. Three in four independent schools participate in collaborative ventures across education sectors (75%) including Catholic and government education.



99%

Academic competitions



96%

Sports



89%

Creative arts



88%

Professional development of staff

## Cross-cultural collaboration

Independent schools are also likely to engage collaboratively with different cultural and religious groups.

Three in five (61%) actively collaborate with schools that have a different faith background to their own.

## A culture of collaboration

Many independent schools see collaboration as the key to success with nearly three in five schools (58%) sharing their resources with others.

The independent sector's collaborative approach is modelled to its students who will go on to shape Australia's emerging culture. These leaders of tomorrow have experienced first-hand the benefits of sharing what they have for the benefit of others. The culture of interschool collaboration, displayed by the independent school sector, is an integral component of developing positive social capital across Australia's diverse communities.



**3 in 4 schools (75%)**  
collaborate with Catholic  
and government schools



**3 in 5 schools (61%)**  
collaborate with schools  
from different faith  
backgrounds

# Champions of diversity

*These leaders bring unity to the diversity. For them, diversity is an asset not a symbol.*

## Independent schools aim to increase diversity

Australia is an increasingly diverse nation, with growing cultural diversity. Nearly three in ten Australians (29%) were born overseas and more than a fifth (21%) speak a language other than English when at home.

Independent schools in Australia enhance social cohesion by championing Australia's growing diversity, encouraging students to engage with different communities and cultures. Nine in ten schools achieve this by ensuring they actively incorporate Indigenous and other cultural events into their school calendar (91%). A similarly large proportion host students on exchange (89%) and nearly four in five host events that reflect the cultural backgrounds of their students' families (79%). Just over seven in ten (72%) encourage cultural diversity by allowing students to wear uniform variations that accommodate cultural and religious traditions.



**3 in 10 Australians** are born overseas (29%)



**1 in 5 Australians** speak a language other than English (21%)

## Independent schools are working towards a future of greater cultural diversity

More than half of all independent schools in Australia have an explicit aim to increase the cultural diversity of their student populations (51%). A similar proportion, meanwhile, are also seeking to increase the cultural diversity of their staff (47%). The sector's passion for diversity has resulted in nearly 57,000 scholarships/fee reductions/bursaries being offered to low income households and refugees.

Most schools (93%) offer scholarships, bursaries or fee reductions for low income families, and two in five (43%) offer these for refugee families. The estimated value of this financial support is \$645 million each year.

### Scholarships for low income families



**51,813** scholarships nationally



**\$553,256** Combined value of scholarships per school



**\$585 million** Total economic value per annum

### Scholarships for refugee families



**4,400** scholarships nationally



**\$123,685** Combined value of scholarships per school



**\$60 million** Total economic value per annum

# Values of independent education

*The success of a principal is ultimately measured not by what they achieve in their tenure, but by what they set in motion.*

## Principals believe school values are important for all of society

Nearly all independent school principals (98% strongly/somewhat agree) believe that promoting and modelling their school's ethos and values is an important way for students to learn about how successful communities function. They also believe (95%) student engagement within the community through service and fundraising is an important way for schools to develop 'bridging' social capital. Bridging social capital gives students the confidence to engage with others beyond their school community and family circle.

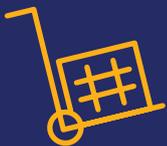
## Principals are motivated to increase their school's social impact

Almost all principals (97%) feel motivated to increase the social impact of their school. They also agree that students' support and adherence to school values or guidelines is an important way to learn how to be part of a community (97%). Similarly, they also agree that parents' support and adherence to school values or policies is a valuable way students learn about the importance of rules to support community and civil society (97%).

## Global connections create reciprocal social capital

Many independent schools also encourage their students to look beyond the limits of Australian society and become global citizens. More than four in five schools (82%) run programs such as fundraising or goods collection to support other schools and organisations overseas.

Three in four participate in student exchanges (75%) and a similar proportion (74%) send students overseas to serve those less fortunate. Overall, close to nine in ten school principals (89%) find that connections with young people in other countries is a key element to building social capital on a global scale.



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**Nine in ten school principals** (89%) find that connections with young people in other countries is a key element to building social capital on a global scale



# Methodology

The AHISA Principal Survey 2019 is a collation of quantitative data collected through an online survey of independent school principals around Australia.

The survey was deployed via email to AHISA's association members. The survey was in field from 1 May 2019 to 1 August 2019. The survey recorded 116 starts and 101 survey completes.

## Schools data

Data relating to the number of independent schools and students in Australia comes from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Schools Profile 2018.

## Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded and may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph) which have then been rounded once combined.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Keeley B., 2007, Human Capital: How what you know shapes your life, OECD

<sup>2</sup> Hanifan, L. J., 1916, The Rural School Community Centre. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 67, 130-38.

<sup>3</sup> OECD, 2001, *The New Economy: Beyond the Hype*.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2018, *School profile*





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