

# NSW Independent schools are flying into the future

By Peter Buckingham

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Many of us (myself included) were of the view a couple of years ago that the pandemic would cause more economic strain across the country, and force (for financial reasons) an exodus of students from Independent schools into the Government schools system. Whilst unemployment went up, it was low in the white collar and grey collar communities, and these are predominantly the parents of your students.

Independent schools enrolments were up 3.54% in NSW 2021 over 2020, mainly due to people sending their children to Independent schools earlier than they were planning to because the Independent schools handled home schooling far better than Government schools. This was not surprising when you think of the quality of your teachers and of the computer hardware that would be available in households of Independent school families compared to lower socio economic families with children at Government schools.

We keep hearing there is a strain on the Y5 and Y6 levels as parents wanted to send their children a couple of years earlier than they may have been previously planning.

We extracted this information out of the new ACARA data for NSW that goes up to and includes 2021:

Full Time Equivalent Enrolments NSW	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018 - 2021	2019 - 2021	2020 - 2021
<b>Catholic</b>	<b>214,121</b>	<b>214,338</b>	<b>216,886</b>	<b>220,562</b>	<b>3.01%</b>	<b>2.90%</b>	<b>1.69%</b>
Combined	7,540	7,934	10,413	12,678	68.14%	59.79%	21.76%
Primary	120,422	119,802	118,628	118,679	-1.45%	-0.94%	0.04%
Secondary	86,068	86,473	87,674	89,009	3.42%	2.93%	1.52%
Special	90	128	171	195	116.67%	52.34%	14.04%
<b>Government</b>	<b>795,618</b>	<b>805,625</b>	<b>810,038</b>	<b>802,182</b>	<b>0.83%</b>	<b>-0.43%</b>	<b>-0.97%</b>
Combined	16,125	16,642	16,353	16,472	2.15%	-1.03%	0.73%
Primary	483,851	486,340	485,246	478,782	-1.05%	-1.55%	-1.33%
Secondary	289,978	296,906	302,659	301,057	3.82%	1.40%	-0.53%
Special	5,664	5,737	5,780	5,872	3.67%	2.35%	1.59%
<b>Independent</b>	<b>203,208</b>	<b>208,759</b>	<b>212,878</b>	<b>220,405</b>	<b>8.46%</b>	<b>5.58%</b>	<b>3.54%</b>
Combined	168,664	171,960	176,137	184,988	9.68%	7.58%	5.03%
Primary	8,203	8,558	8,072	8,437	2.85%	-1.42%	4.52%
Secondary	21,064	22,415	22,483	21,840	3.69%	-2.56%	-2.86%
Special	5,277	5,827	6,187	5,141	-2.58%	-11.77%	-16.91%
<b>NSW</b>	<b>1,212,946</b>	<b>1,228,721</b>	<b>1,239,802</b>	<b>1,243,149</b>	<b>2.49%</b>	<b>1.17%</b>	<b>0.27%</b>

Source – recently released ACARA data including school enrolments 2021.

Note – Combined is a school K – 12, so many more combined schools in the Independent groups than Govt or Catholic.

The ACT has their own separate numbers as follows:

Full Time Equivalent Enrolments ACT	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018 - 2021	2019 - 2021	2020 - 2021
Catholic	14,016	14,036	14,395	14,675	4.70%	4.56%	1.94%
Primary	8,707	8,638	8,749	8,841	1.54%	2.35%	1.05%
Secondary	5,310	5,397	5,646	5,834	9.87%	8.09%	3.33%
Government	43,192	44,208	45,545	46,091	6.71%	4.26%	1.20%
Combined	8,634	8,853	8,907	8,941	3.56%	0.99%	0.38%
Primary	20,926	21,628	22,505	22,828	9.09%	5.55%	1.43%
Secondary	13,298	13,393	13,792	13,965	5.02%	4.28%	1.25%
Special	334	335	340	357	6.98%	6.66%	5.15%
Independent	13,716	14,105	14,179	14,487	5.62%	2.71%	2.17%
Combined	11,977	12,379	12,371	12,599	5.19%	1.78%	1.84%
Primary	300	303	368	392	30.75%	29.37%	6.52%
Secondary	1,400	1,383	1,385	1,427	1.90%	3.15%	2.99%
Special	39	40	55	69	76.92%	72.50%	25.45%
<b>ACT</b>	<b>70,924</b>	<b>72,349</b>	<b>74,119</b>	<b>75,253</b>	<b>6.10%</b>	<b>4.01%</b>	<b>1.53%</b>

This shows the distribution of additional children has been shared far more evenly, and actually Government schools have grown the most from 2018 - 2021. Maybe this can be interpreted as the government's spending on education per student in the ACT is far more than is spent by the combined Federal and State governments in all other states?

Nationally, a similar set of numbers is showing to what we see in NSW, meaning this has been a national phenomenon.

AUSTRALIA							
Full Time Equivalent Enrolments	Year				2018 - 2021	2019 - 2021	2020 - 2021
	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Catholic	713,654	717,503	727,912	738,094	3.42%	2.87%	1.40%
Combined	102,019	104,714	110,878	118,004	15.67%	12.69%	6.43%
Primary	356,573	355,432	354,748	354,818	-0.49%	-0.17%	0.02%
Secondary	252,505	254,588	259,298	262,238	3.85%	3.01%	1.13%
Special	2,556	2,769	2,989	3,033	18.68%	9.53%	1.48%
Government	2,565,024	2,604,588	2,643,301	2,637,137	2.81%	1.25%	-0.23%
Combined	187,174	192,111	196,108	197,529	5.53%	2.82%	0.72%
Primary	1,484,902	1,498,264	1,500,215	1,487,459	0.17%	-0.72%	-0.85%
Secondary	860,652	881,181	913,679	918,517	6.72%	4.24%	0.53%
Special	32,297	33,032	33,299	33,632	4.14%	1.82%	1.00%
Independent	614,503	629,370	645,446	669,202	8.90%	6.33%	3.68%
Combined	536,555	548,681	562,162	582,691	8.60%	6.20%	3.65%
Primary	28,797	28,606	28,337	29,451	2.27%	2.95%	3.93%
Secondary	39,866	41,526	42,504	43,614	9.40%	5.03%	2.61%
Special	9,285	10,557	12,442	13,447	44.82%	27.38%	8.08%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3,893,181</b>	<b>3,951,460</b>	<b>4,016,659</b>	<b>4,044,433</b>	<b>3.89%</b>	<b>2.35%</b>	<b>0.69%</b>

### **Learnings from these numbers**

If your school has remained stable, dropped enrolments or has NOT felt the pressure of additional enrolment requests, you should be concerned! Whilst averages can be dangerous, and different geographies may have different challenges, the overall climate within NSW for Independent schools over the last 3 years has been moving strongly upwards. When the total number of students at Independent schools in NSW is up 6.33% from 2019 to 2021, hopefully you have felt the trend.

Longer term this may not last, but if parents have now placed their children in Independent schools, it is very difficult to then explain to them why you wish to take them back to a Government school. My view is that these numbers will hold for the next few years, and may reduce in the future once the threat of home schooling hopefully disappears, and Covid becomes something we all live with.