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Sustained growth confirms community trust in independent schools

Today's Australian Bureau of Statistics schooling data show a continuing trend of significant enrolment growth in the NSW independent school sector, the Association of Independent Schools NSW (AISNSW) said.

During the period from 2018 to 2019:

- the NSW government sector, with 2,152 schools, grew by 7,651 students or 1.0 per cent
- the independent school sector, with 401 schools, grew by 4,871 students or 2.4 per cent, and
- the Catholic systemic school sector, with 550 schools, grew by 451 students or 0.2 per cent.

"This rapid growth - the fastest of the three school sectors in NSW - is driving the development of new independent schools and the rapid expansion of teaching and learning infrastructure in existing independent schools," AISNSW Chief Executive Dr Geoff Newcombe said.

Dr Newcombe said the sector's enrolment growth over the past few years has been boosted by a surge in primary school aged students.

"Traditionally, the enrolment growth in independent schools has been driven by new secondary students.

"That is still the case, but independent primary enrolments are now growing at 2.7 per cent – faster than independent secondary enrolments, which increased by 2.2 per cent."

Dr Newcombe said the bulk of new independent school students were from low and middle income areas.

"Our sector is now very much a sector that caters for families across all demographics; the median fee received from parents in NSW independent schools is \$5,169 per year."

Dr Newcombe said families chose independent schools for different reasons, with the most common responses in surveys being high quality teaching, classroom management and suitability for their child.

"Because independent schools are autonomously run, they're able to be more agile and more responsive to the needs of their communities than schools that belong to a much larger system.

"The independent sector is also the most diverse school sector, giving families the broadest range of options to choose from.

"In our multicultural, multi-faith society, it's important that parents can choose a school that reflects their cultural values and beliefs, and best suits the needs of their child."

Dr Newcombe said parents are increasingly discarding 'brand loyalty' and looking for schools that provide high quality teaching and an education that goes beyond conventional academic subjects.

"New parents are looking for schools that will also develop non-academic capabilities in their child such as creativity, collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving and resilience – and they will expect schools to be able to assess and report on those capabilities.

"All schools are going to change over the next five to 10 years and offer value in those areas because the first generation of millennial parents is changing the consumer concept of education," Dr Newcombe said.

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