Independent Schools Queensland
choice & diversity

Income of Families with Students Attending Schools in Queensland

Research Report
NOVEMBER 2022

Fraser Coast Anglican College

CONTENTS

OUR SCHOOLS – OUR FUTURE

Our Schools – Our Future is an Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) research-based initiative designed to promote informed public policy debate about schooling. Through commissioned and internal research, Our Schools – Our Future explores trends and issues in key areas which determine the nature and performance of our school education systems. While the initiative has a particular focus on the contribution of independent schools to our education provision and outcomes, it examines a range of issues and trends relevant to the development and implementation of effective public policy for schooling. All research reports are available to members on the Independent Schools Queensland website.
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Cover image: Somerset College

Message from the Chief Executive Officer

The diversity of schools across the Queensland independent sector is reflected in the parents, families and communities who choose to send their children to an independent school.

This diversity however, is often misconstrued in public discourse surrounding the independent sector.

The 2022 *Income of Families with Students Attending Schools in Queensland* report looks at the data from the 2021 Australian Census of Population and Housing to obtain an accurate and objective picture of the income profile of Queensland families and their school choices.

This report highlights a truth that is already well known within the sector: independent schools cater for families from right across the socioeconomic spectrum.

The analysis also confirms that independent and Catholic schools, both serve families in reasonably similar socioeconomic circumstances.

Families make choices about education based on a range of factors, including their own values and beliefs, what they can afford, and critically for some, what other areas of their lives they will sacrifice for that choice.

Governments and policy makers should draw on this data when making critical decisions about future schools funding.

CHRISTOPHER MOUNTFORD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND

Introduction

Queensland independent schools are a valued education choice for an ever-increasing number of Queensland families, educating 15.9% of all school-age children. They are as diverse as the communities they serve and offer parents choice in the education of their children.

Analysis of the 2021 Australian Census of Population and Housing data provides insight into the income backgrounds of families and their school choices, busting a number of common myths about all school sectors.

Key findings:

- **Queensland independent schools serve families from every income level – from those with the lowest weekly earnings to the highest.**
- **Nearly 16% of all students in Queensland schools attended independent schools in 2021.**
- **Government schools educate the highest proportion of students whose families earn weekly wages that put them in the highest three income brackets:**
  - **Government schools catered for 54%**
  - **Catholic Schools catered for 26%**
  - **Independent schools catered for 20%**
- **Independent and Catholic schools serve families with broadly the same financial profile and capacity to pay fees.**
- **Of those students from families with incomes in the lowest three deciles (less than $1,625 per week):**
  - **Independent schools catered for 10%.**
  - **Catholic schools catered for 11%.**
  - **Government schools catered for 79%.**
- **Independent and Catholic schools market share may reduce if schools are operating at capacity in areas experiencing population growth.**

John Paul College

Sheldon College

Data considerations

Data presented in this report is based on the Australian Census of Population and Housing in 2016 and 2021 and was provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Family income decile ranges have been calculated based on families in Queensland who had at least one child attending either primary or secondary school, where the family income was fully stated.

Each decile represents approximately one tenth of families with children at school. Decile 1 represents income levels where 10% of families had the lowest income levels while decile 10 represents income levels where 10% of families had the highest income levels.

Table 1: Weekly Gross Family Income Decile 1 to 10, Families With School Children

DECILE	2016	2021
Decile 1	$571 or less	$735 or less
Decile 2	$572 - $897	$736 - $1,128
Decile 3	$898 - $1,241	$1,129 - $1,624
Decile 4	$1,242 - $1,604	$1,625 - $1,931
Decile 5	$1,605 - $1,855	$1,932 - $2,310
Decile 6	$1,856 - $2,206	$2,311 - $2,738
Decile 7	$2,207 - $2,570	$2,739 - $3,211
Decile 8	$2,571 - $3,074	$3,212 - $3,859
Decile 9	$3,075 - $3,996	$3,860 - $4,751
Decile 10	$3,997 or more	$4,752 or more

Family income decile data provided in this report refers only to students where data was provided and where the schooling sector and level of schooling (either primary or secondary) was identified. As such, while most deciles account for approximately 10% of students at a state-wide level, this is not always the case.

Participation rates in schooling at the state and Local Government Area (LGA) level is as reported in the 2021 Australian Census of Population and Housing.

Interpreting figures in this report

Decile – Equal groups into which the population can be divided according to the distribution of family income. Each decile includes 10% of the total number of families.

Student profile data – How the total student population is spread across the decile range. As deciles capture the number of families (not students), there is not an equal spread of students across the decile range.

Sector data – Proportion of students attending schools in the Government, Catholic and independent sectors.

Independent school participation average – The average proportion of students attending independent schools across the decile range.

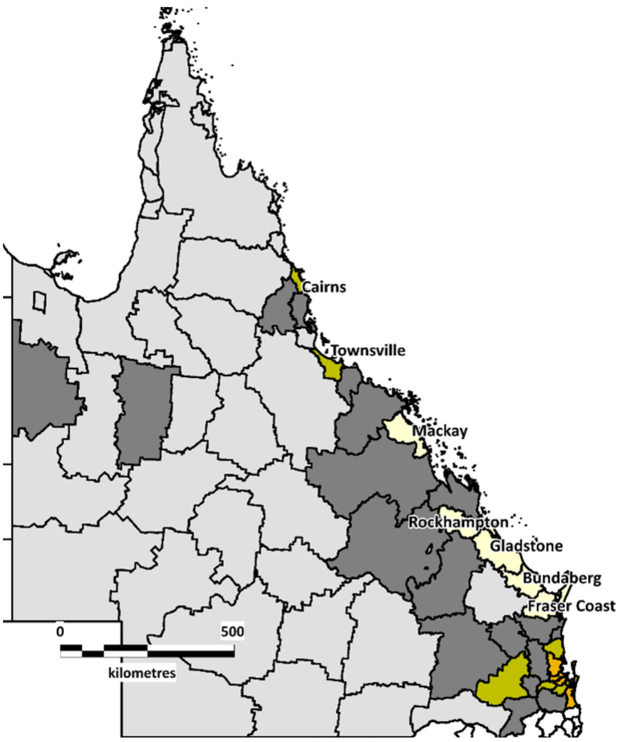
State-wide distribution of students by income decile

The highest number of students tend to reside in LGA's located in South-East Queensland. This is not surprising given the distribution of Queensland's population. Analysis suggests that the LGAs with the highest number of students are, in descending order of enrolments, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Moreton Bay, Logan, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Townsville, Toowoomba, Redland and Cairns (refer Map 1 and Map 2).

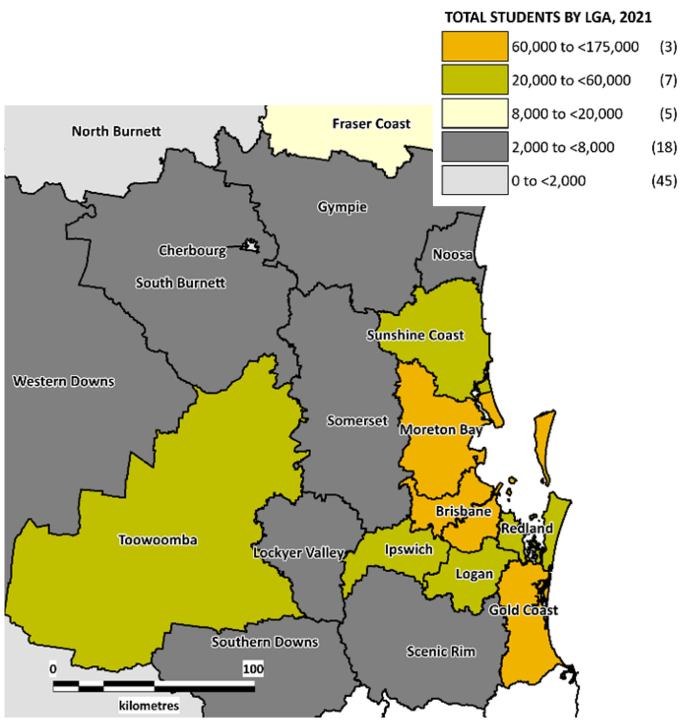
All of these LGAs were reported by decile data as containing at least 20,000 students but less than 175,000. With the exception of Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns, all of these LGAs are located within South-East Queensland. At least 8,000 students resided in Mackay, Fraser Coast, Bundaberg, Rockhampton and Gladstone.

Independent schools were located in each of these 15 LGAs which together represented 85% of independent school sites and 93% of independent school enrolments in 2022 .

Map 1: Distribution of students in Queensland by LGA, 2021



Map 2: Distribution of students in Queensland by LGA, 2021 – South-East Queensland



2 Source: Non-State School Census (February), 2022.

Moreton Bay Boys' College

Brisbane Christian College

The next highest numbers of students resided in Noosa, Gympie, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Livingstone, Western Downs, Southern Downs, Whitsunday, Central Highlands and South Burnett LGAs, each containing at least 4,000 students, but less than 8,000 students. A further 8% of independent school sites were located within these LGAs, together catering for 5% of independent school students.

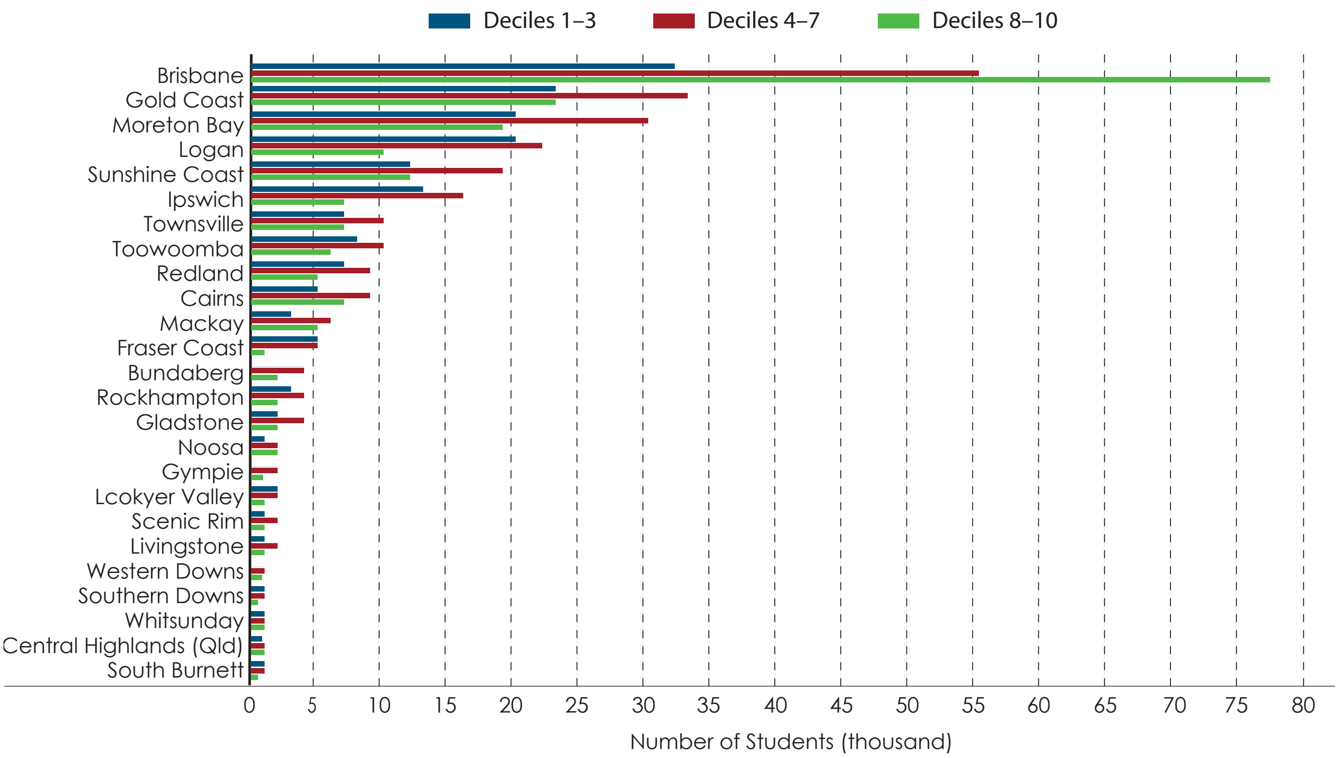
The balance of 2% of independent school enrolments were located within 13 LGAs which contained less than 4,000 students in 2021.

It should also be noted that where an LGA does not have an independent school, students are not precluded from travelling into another LGA to attend an independent school, an independent school offering distance education or boarding schools located elsewhere.

As a consequence of the distribution of students across the state, it is not surprising that the largest numbers of students in the lowest three, middle four and highest three income deciles are found in South-East Queensland LGAs (refer Figure 1).

Brisbane, the LGA which has the highest number of students, ranks amongst the 78 LGAs in the State as having the highest number of students in all deciles. Gold Coast and Moreton Bay, the second and third largest LGAs respectively, have the second and third highest numbers of students in all deciles (refer Figure 1).

Figure 1: Largest 25 LGAs Number of Students in Deciles, 2021



Change in distribution of students by income decile between 2016 and 2021

A comparison of the distribution of school students across income deciles between 2016 and 2021 was undertaken to identify if there had been a significant change in the student income profile. If this has occurred, it may have significant bearing on the extent to which school fee structures at schools are aligned to the community being served.

As shown in Figure 2, among the LGAs with the largest numbers of students, there have been significant changes in the proportion of students in the lowest, middle and highest income deciles (where the proportion of students has increased or decreased by at least 2%).

A significant reduction in the proportion of students in the highest three income deciles is evident in Gladstone. The proportion of students in this decile group was 39% in 2016 and reduced to 28% in 2021.

However, the proportion of students in the lowest and middle income decile increased significantly as a consequence (5 and 6 percentage points, respectively). The second largest reduction in the proportion of students in the highest income deciles occurred in Western Downs and Central Highlands LGA (4 percentage points).

In contrast, a significant increase in the proportion of students in the highest income deciles occurred in the Noosa LGA, where the proportion of students increased from 24% to 31% over the five-year period. The next highest increase was in the adjoining LGA of Sunshine Coast (2 percentage points).

The LGA experiencing the greatest increase in the proportion of students within the lowest income deciles was the Western Downs, where there was an increase from 33% in 2016 to 39% in 2021. The next highest increase was in Gladstone (5 percentage points), followed by Logan (4 percentage points), Toowoomba and Southern Downs (both 3 percentage points).

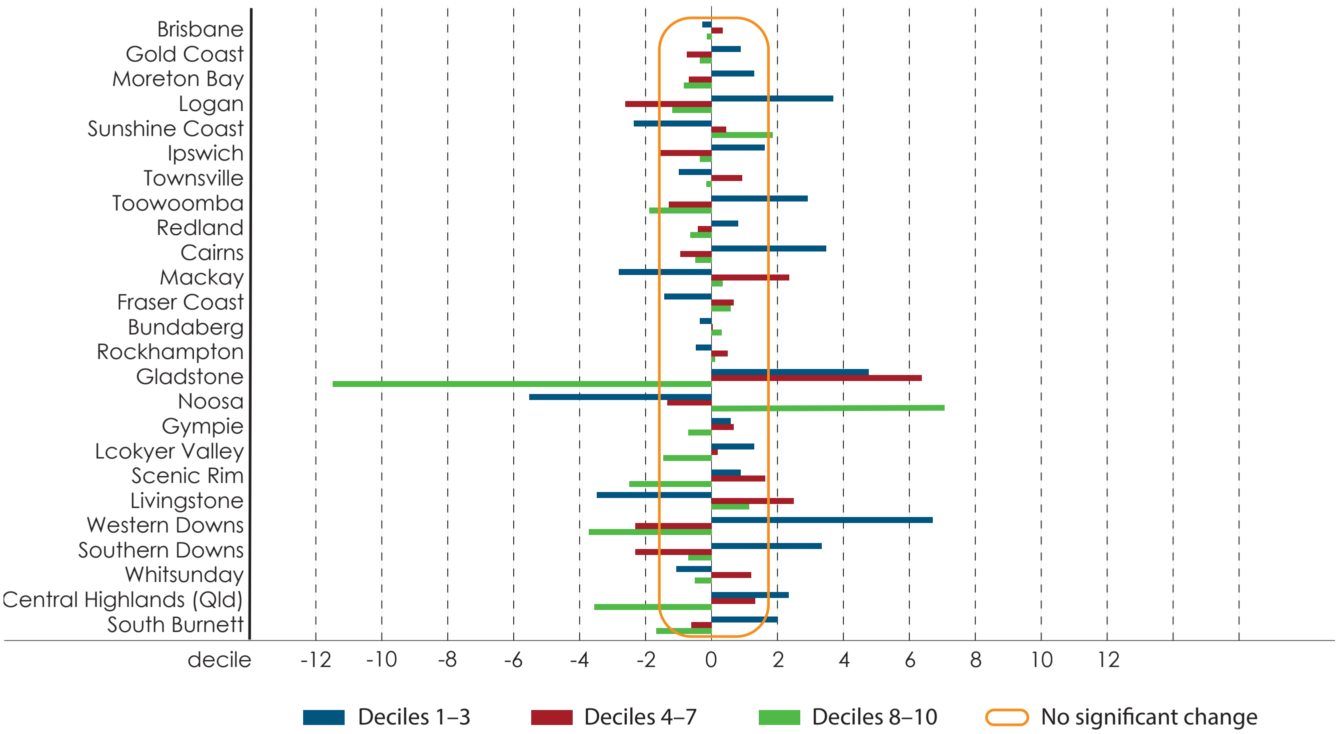
In contrast, the greatest reductions in the proportion of students within the lowest income deciles over the 2016 to 2021 period occurred in Noosa, where the proportion of students in these deciles decreased from 35% in 2016 to 29% in 2021. The next highest decreases were in Mackay and Livingstone LGAs (both 5 percentage points).

Only two LGAs, Logan and Southern Downs, experienced a significant decrease in the proportion of students within the middle income deciles (deciles 3 - 7) from 2016 to 2021. On the contrary, only Gladstone experienced a significant increase in the proportion of students within middle income deciles (6 percentage points).

Freshwater Christian College

Moreton Bay College

Figure 2: Largest 25 LGAs Change in Student Distribution Across Income Decile Groupings, 2016 to 2021

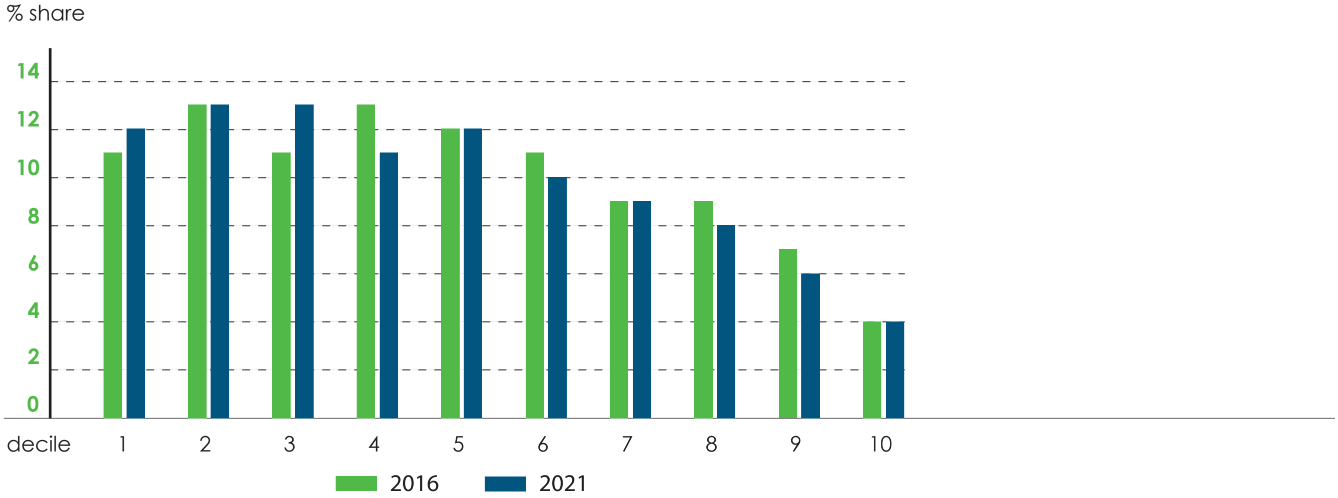


CASE STUDY:
Logan City LGA

ABS data indicates that in 2016 there were 50,719 students residing in the Logan City LGA. The number of students increased to 58,859 students in 2021. This means there are 8,140 additional students, a 16% increase over the five-year period, or 3% annual growth rate.

Over this period there has not only been growth in the student population, but the family income of parents with children attending schools has changed (refer Figure 3). In 2021 there was a higher proportion of students from families within each of the three lower income deciles (deciles 1 - 3) than suggested by 2016 data. There was a lower proportion of students from families within decile 6, decile 8 and decile 9 in 2021, while a similar proportion of students from families with incomes in 7th , 9th and 10th deciles.

Figure 3: Logan City LGA, Change in Student Distribution, by Family Income Deciles, 2016 to 2021



King's Christian College

School sector attendance by family income deciles

The 2021 Australian Census of Population and Housing indicates family income levels influence the schooling sector a student may attend.

As shown in Figure 4, students from every decile are represented in each of the three school sectors. However, the proportion of students that attend independent or Catholic schools increases as family income levels increase. The only exception occurred in the independent school sector, where the proportion of students with family income levels in the 1st and 2nd deciles was similar (in the order of 10% of students in both deciles attended independent schools).

Independent school participation increased from approximately 10% in deciles 1 and 2, to approximately 32% in decile 10. Similarly, Catholic participation increased from approximately 10% in decile 1 to nearly 31% in decile 10. In contrast, just over 80% of those students from families within the lowest income decile attended Government schools, reducing to 38% of students in the decile 10.

In all income levels, the Government schooling sector is the largest provider of education. However, there is a pattern of decreasing proportions of students being gained by Government schools as income increases. Even in the two highest income deciles, where the Government sector catered for less than half of all students, it was still the largest provider amongst the three schooling sectors. It caters for 48% of students with family incomes in the 9th decile (compared to independent and Catholic schools catering for 23% and 29% of students in this cohort, respectively).

With respect to the 10th and highest income decile, the Government sector caters for 38% of students (compared to independent and Catholic schools catering for 32% and 30% of those students with family incomes of at least $4,752 per week, respectively).

Primary Students

At the primary schooling level Government schools and Catholic schools catered for a greater proportion of students than independent schools in all income deciles (refer Figure 5). Both Catholic and independent school primary student participation rates increased consistently from the lowest to the highest income deciles, with highest participation rates by primary students in both schooling sectors gained in the highest income decile. Independent school share of primary students increased from 8% in decile 1 to 24% in decile 10, while Catholic school share increased from 10% in decile 1 to 29% in decile 10. The converse pattern was evident in terms of the proportion of primary students attending Government primary schools, with Government school share decreasing from 83% in decile 1 to 47% in decile 10.

Secondary Students

At the secondary schooling level, Government schools catered for a greater proportion of students across all family deciles with the exception of decile 10 where both Catholic and independent schools catered for a higher proportion of secondary students than Government schools (refer Figure 6). Catholic schools catered for a higher proportion of secondary students than independent schools in all but three deciles. Independent schools catered for a higher proportion of students in the two lowest income deciles (13% and 12% of secondary students in decile 1 and decile 2 income brackets, respectively) while 10% and 11% of secondary students in decile 1 and decile 2 income brackets attended Catholic schools.

Figure 4: Queensland Students by Schooling Sector, by Family Income Deciles, 2021

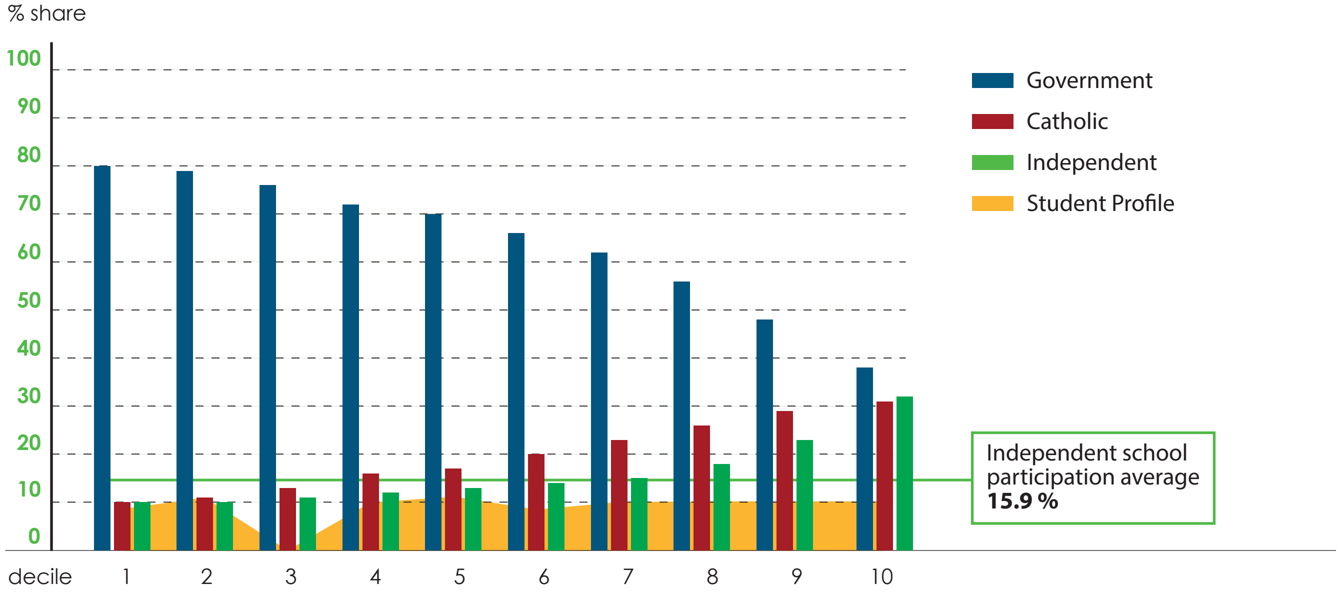


Figure 5: Queensland Primary School Students by Schooling Sector, by Family Income Deciles, 2021

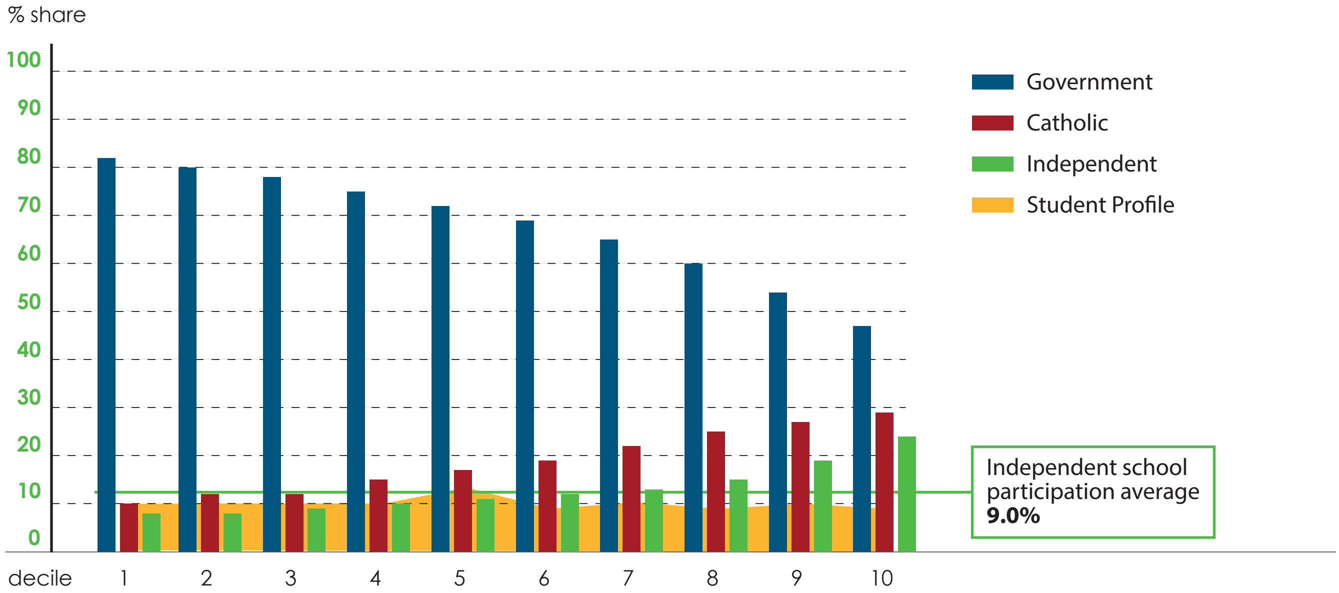


Figure 6: Queensland Secondary School Students by Schooling Sector, by Family Income Deciles, 2021

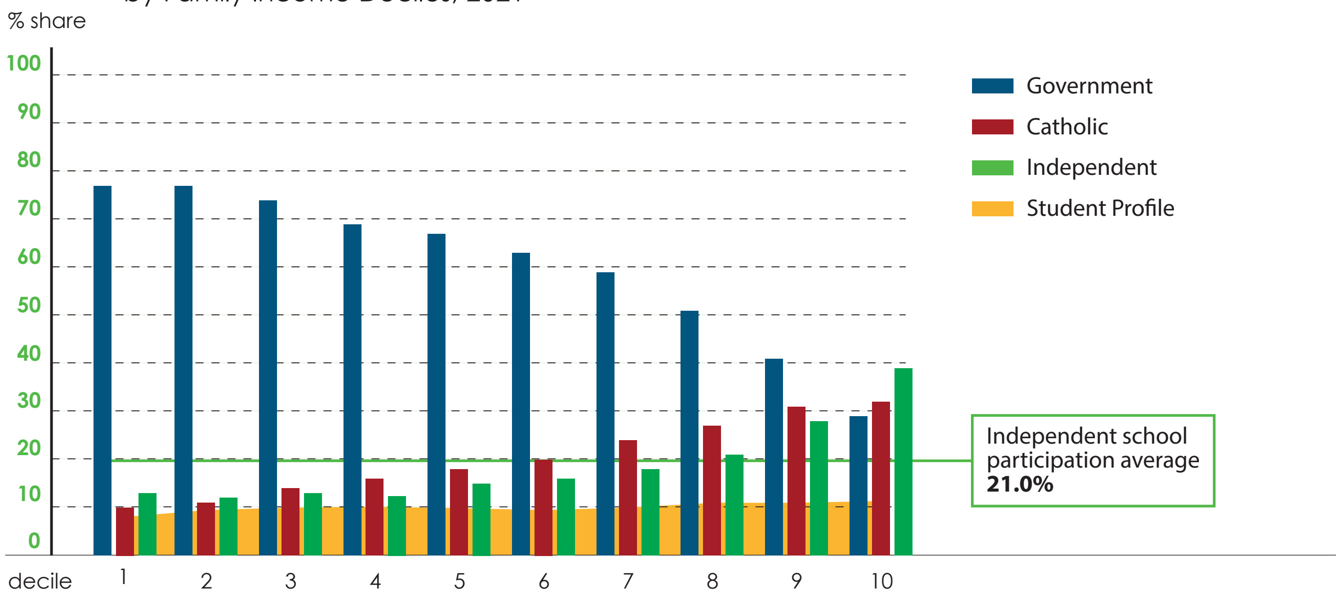


Table 2: Queensland Students by Type of Educational Institution Attending, by Family Income Deciles, 2011[2]

Type of Educational Institution Attending 2021	Decile 1	Decile 2	Decile 3	Decile 4	Decile 5	Decile 6	Decile 7	Decile 8	Decile 9	Decile 10	Total (excludes Income Not Stated)
PRIMARY											
Government	33,100	32,513	30,286	29,677	32,383	24,085	26,279	21,796	20,696	16,900	267,715
Catholic	3,931	4,645	4,712	6,083	7,737	6,832	9,119	9,256	10,449	10,243	73,007
Independent	3,106	3,231	3,606	4,056	4,968	4,140	5,231	5,425	7,180	8,671	49,614
Primary Total	**40,137**	**40,389**	**38,604**	**39,816**	**45,088**	**35,057**	**40,629**	**36,477**	**38,325**	**35,814**	**390,336**
SECONDARY											
Government	19,466	21,829	22,137	19,860	20,477	17,960	18,070	16,287	13,290	10,243	179,619
Catholic	2,555	3,195	4,074	4,726	5,434	5,773	7,317	8,752	10,014	11,616	63,456
Independent	3,286	3,346	3,885	4,141	4,657	4,568	5,395	6,816	8,857	13,956	58,907
Secondary Total	**25,307**	**28,370**	**30,096**	**28,727**	**30,568**	**28,301**	**30,782**	**31,855**	**32,161**	**35,815**	**301,982**
ALL											
Government	52,566	54,342	52,423	49,537	52,860	42,045	44,349	38,083	33,986	27,143	447,334
Catholic	6,486	7,840	8,786	10,809	13,171	12,605	16,436	18,008	20,463	21,859	136,463
Independent	6,392	6,577	7,491	8,197	9,625	8,708	10,626	12,241	16,037	22,627	108,521
All Schools Total	**65,444**	**68,759**	**68,700**	**68,543**	**75,656**	**63,358**	**71,411**	**68,332**	**70,486**	**71,629**	**692,318**

2 Data is based on place of enumeration. Data is constrained to families who identified their family income level, as well as schooling sectors students attended. Approximately 86% and 89% of student numbers reported in 2016 and 2021 Censuses of Population & Housing, respectively, were included in this data.

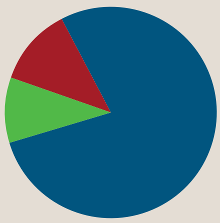
In Summary

15.9% of all students in Queensland schools attended independent schools in 2021.

Independent and Catholic schools both cater for families across all income deciles.

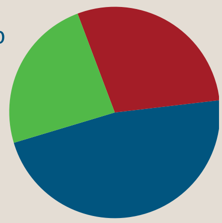
Proportion of students by sector:
Deciles 1–3

Independent 10%
Catholic 12%
Government 78%



Proportion of students by sector:
Deciles 8–10

Independent 24%
Catholic 29%
Government 47%



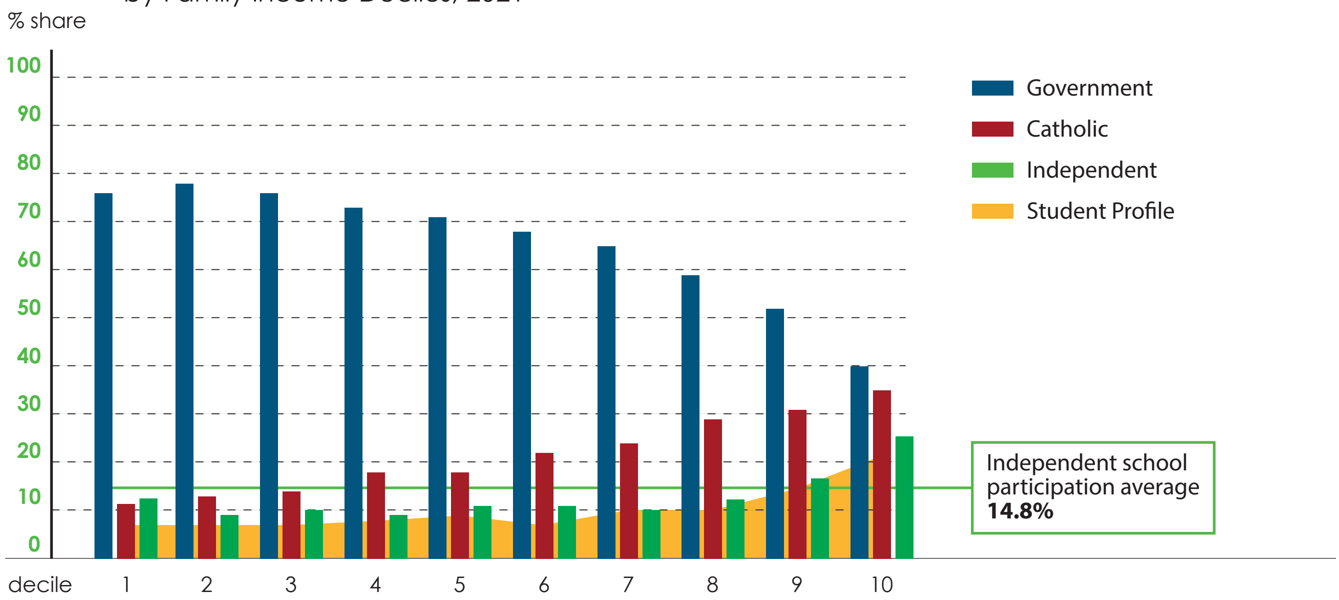
CASE STUDY: Brisbane LGA

ABS data indicates that in 2016 there were 153,028 students residing in Brisbane City LGA. In 2021, there were 179,226 students. This growth of 26,238 students reflects a 3.2% annual growth rate, or a 17% increase in the number of students over the five-year period.

As indicated in Figure 7, a higher proportion of the school student population of Brisbane LGA reside in families with income levels in the two highest income deciles (decile 9 with approximately 15% of students and decile 10 with 21% of school students).

Across all income levels, the state sector caters for the highest numbers of students. Catholic schools cater for a higher proportion of students (deciles 2 - 10) than independent schools, with the exception of the lowest income decile (decile 1).

Figure 7: Brisbane City LGA Students by Schooling Sector, by Family Income Deciles, 2021



Changes in levels of growth between 2016 and 2022

A comparison was undertaken of the student market share catered for by the three schooling sectors within each income decile in 2021 and 2016, with 2016 income deciles based on the family income deciles of parents with school children in 2016. This comparison identifies whether particular income deciles have become more likely, or less likely, to attend different schooling sectors over time.

As shown in Figure 8, the independent school sector caters for a higher proportion of students in 2021 than in 2016 across nearly all income deciles. Gains in market share predominantly occurred in lower and middle income deciles, while a loss in market share occurred in highest deciles.

The greatest reduction was in the 10th decile, with the sector losing 0.9 percentage points, primarily to the Government sector. A reduction of 0.3 and 0.2 percentage points occurred in the 7th and 9th deciles, respectively.

The highest market share gains were in the 4th decile, with independent and Catholic schooling catering for higher proportions of these students (1.5 and 1.1 percentage points respectively). The next highest gain by the sector was in the 8th decile, where a market share gain of 1.2 percentage points between 2016 and 2021 was commensurate with market share losses by both Government and Catholic schooling sectors. Percentage point gains of 0.7 to 0.8 in decile 2, 3, 5 and 6, occurred respectively.

The Government schooling sector experienced a market share loss from the lowest decile through to the 6th decile, as well as in the 8th decile, with a significant reduction in the 4th and 2nd deciles (refer Figure 9). The greatest increase by the Government sector was in the highest income decile (0.8 percentage points).

Any change in market share by Catholic schools tended to low, with reductions and increases ranging from -0.5 to +0.5 percentage points in 7 of the 10 income deciles. The highest gain was in the 4th decile (1.1 percentage points), while the greatest reduction was in the 8th decile (0.6 percentage points) (refer Figure 9).

The independent school sector's market share remained relatively stable or increased across all deciles, except for the two highest deciles in primary (decile 9 and decile 10) and decile 7 and decile 10 in secondary (refer Figure 9 and Figure 10).

Figure 8: Change in Share of Students, by Income Deciles and Schooling Sector, 2016 to 2021

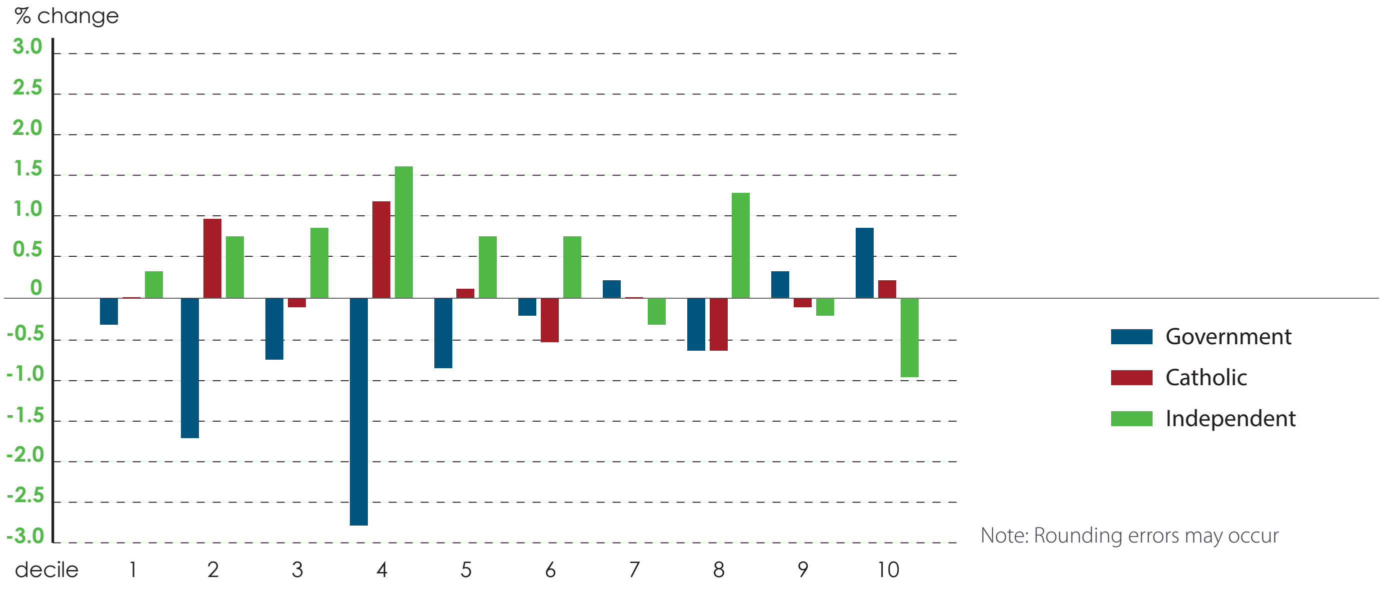


Figure 9: Change in Share of Primary Students, by Income Deciles and Schooling Sector,2016 to 2021

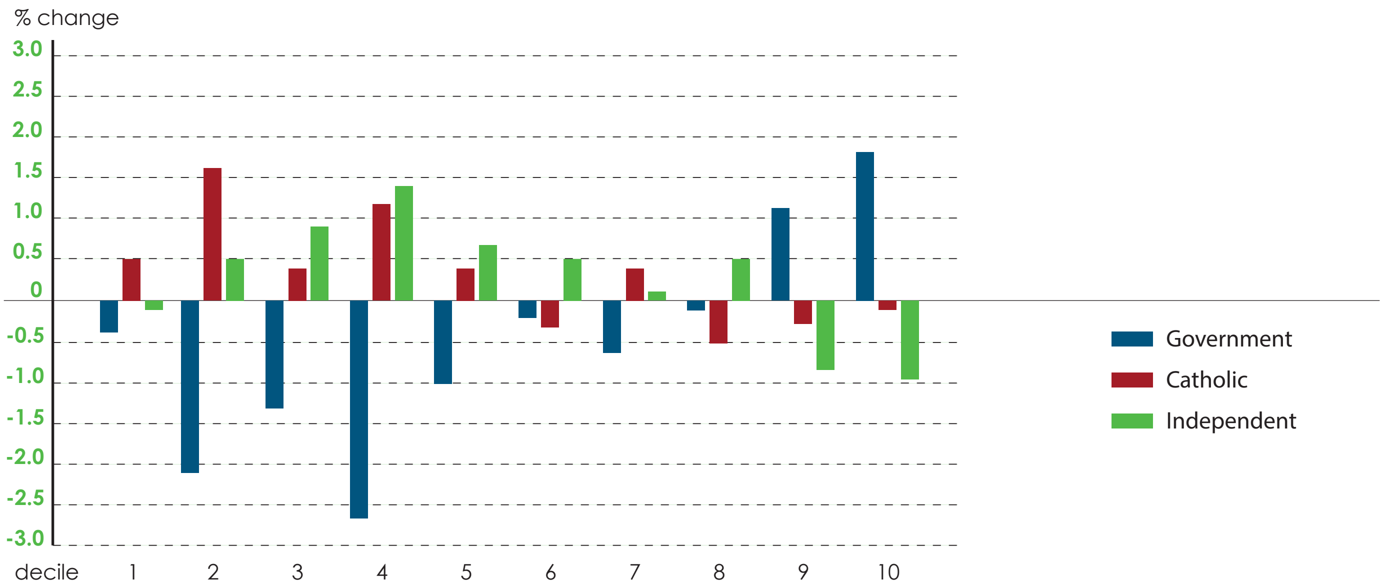
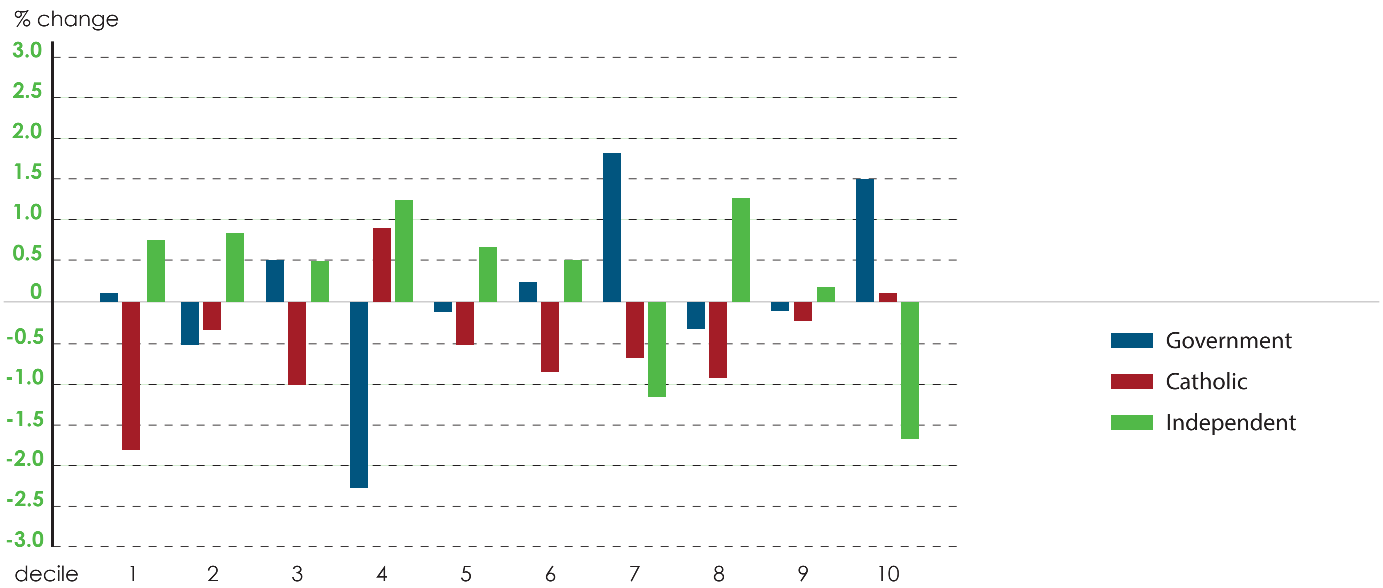


Figure10: Change in Share of Secondary Students, by Income Deciles and Schooling Sector,2016 to 2021



In Summary

Independent school participation rates experienced growth across nearly all income deciles, catering for a higher proportion of students in 2021 than in 2016.

All students
decile 4

+1.5% points

Primary students
decile 2

+1.6% points

Secondary students
decile 8

+1.3% points

St Paul's School

Changes in independent school participation between 2016 and 2022

A comparison was undertaken of the proportion of school students attending independent schools across income deciles between 2016 and 2021 to identify if there had been a significant change in the proportion of students that attend independent schools over time.

As shown in Figure 11, there have been significant changes in several LGAs (an increase or decrease by at least 2%) in the proportion of students attending independent schools in all income deciles.

Significant reductions in the proportion of students attending independent schools in the highest three income deciles are evident in Redland and Cairns LGAs. In 2016, the proportion of students attending independent schools in this decile group was 37%, compared to 35% in 2021. In Cairns LGA the proportion of students attending independent schools in the highest decile group reduced from 14% to 12% over the same timeframe.

In contrast, significant increases in the proportion of students attending independent schools in the three highest income deciles was evident in a number of LGAs. The highest increase in the proportion of students attending independent schools in this income decile group was in Western Downs, where the proportion increased from 9% to 18% over the 2016 to 2021 period.

The next highest increase was in Gympie and Fraser Coast where the proportions of students attending independent schools in these higher deciles increased from 16% to 25% in Gympie and from 29% to 34% in Fraser Coast from 2016 to 2021. Similarly, higher proportions of students within the three highest income deciles attended independent schools over this timeframe in South Burnett, Lockyer Valley, Noosa and Southern Downs.

In contrast, none of the LGAs with higher numbers of students experienced a significant reduction in the proportion of students attending independent schools from the lowest decile group.

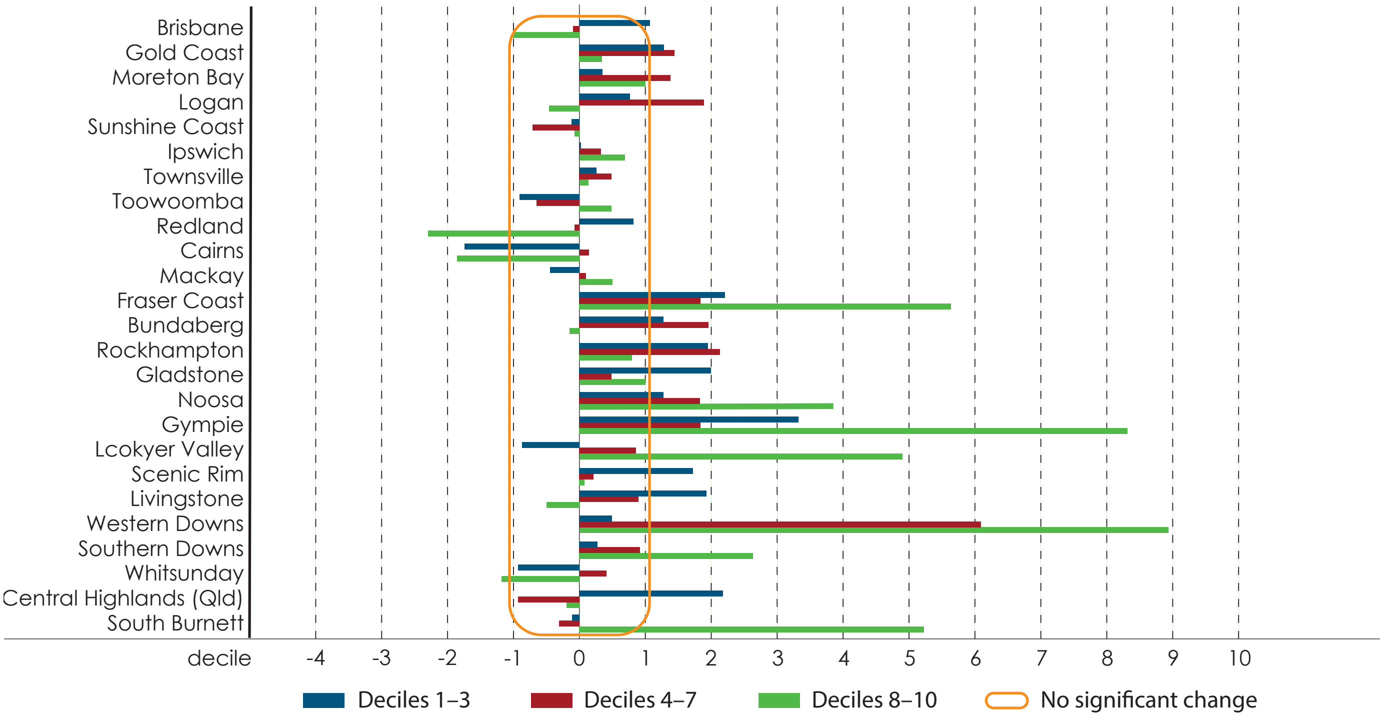
Significant increases in the proportions of students attending independent schools also occurred in a number of LGAs. The greatest increase in the proportion of students attending independent schools from within the lowest income deciles over the 2016 to 2021 period occurred in Western Downs, where the proportion of students in these deciles increased from 10% in 2016 to 16% in 2021. The next highest increases were in Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Noosa, Fraser Coast, Logan and Gympie (Figure 11).

No LGA experienced a significant decrease in the proportion of students attending independent schools from within the middle income deciles (deciles 3-7) from 2016 to 2021.

Peace Lutheran College

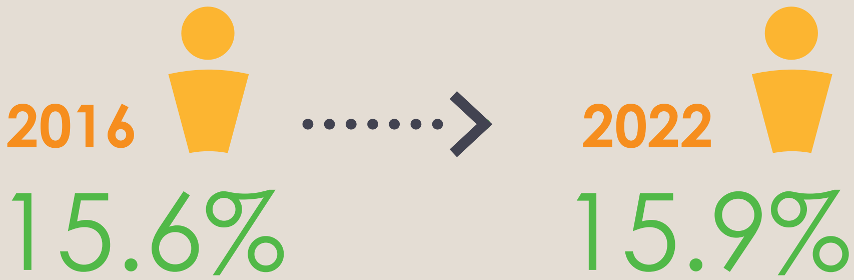
Caloundra Christian College

Figure 11: Largest 25 LGAs Change in Independent School Participation Across Income Decile Groupings, 2016 to 2021



In Summary

Independent school participation rates increased slightly from 2016 to 2022.

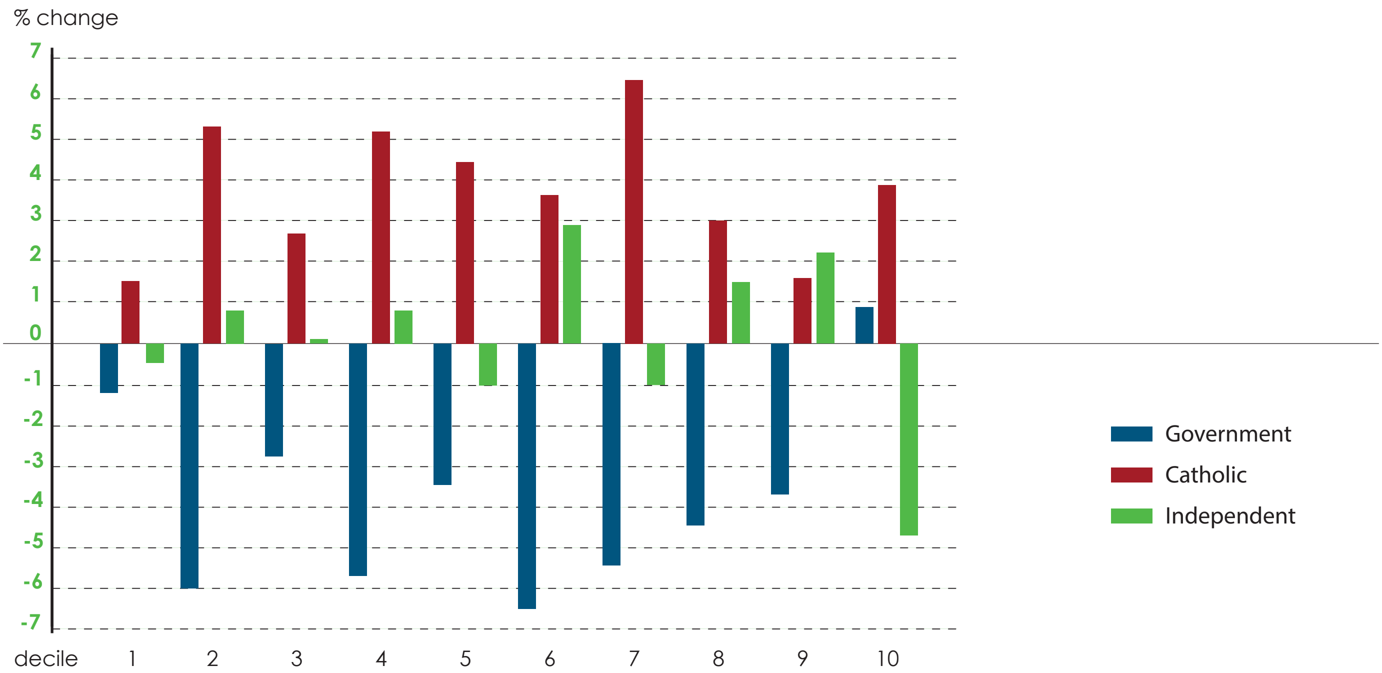


CASE STUDY: Townsville LGA

ABS data indicates that in 2016 there were 28,685 students residing in the Townsville LGA. The number of students increased to 29,631 students in 2021. This growth of 946 students reflects a 0.7% annual growth rate, or a 3% increase in the number of students over the five-year period.

Consideration of participation rates in the three schooling sectors from 2016 to 2021, by family income deciles, suggests relative stability in the proportion of students catered for by independent schools in most deciles (+/-1.5% change) (refer Figure 12). The only decile where participation rates in the independent schooling sector decreased by more than 1.5 percentage points was in the highest income decile, with a 4.7 percentage point decrease in market share. Data suggests Catholic schools gained the majority of students lost by the independent school sector in this income decile

Figure12: Townsville LGA Change in Market Share, by Income Deciles and Schooling Sector, 2016 to 2021



Clockwise from top left: The Rockhampton Grammar School; Lutheran Ormeau Rivers District School; Australian Industry Trade College; The Springfield Anglican College; Anglican Church Grammar School; The Village School

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