

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

From the Executive Director

Economic conditions are a major factor in determining the health of the independent schools' sector. According to the latest Independent Schools Queensland *What Parents Want*¹ survey, 9 in 10 (93%) of parents rely on their salaries, either wholly, or in combination with other sources such as part scholarship/bursary, or other family members, to meet schooling costs.

A strong economy, low unemployment and increasing levels of disposable income enable more parents to exercise their rightful choice of the wide range of schooling provision available.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia will face challenging economic conditions. A recession appears certain, but time will tell in terms of the depth and length of the downturn. It is already known that the financial impact on families is widespread and deep. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, nearly half of Australians aged 18 years and over had their household finances impacted by COVID-19 in the period mid-March to mid-April 2020². The speed of the economic downturn is unique.

While the September quarter 2019 Queensland State Accounts showed trend gross state domestic product (GSP) enjoyed its 20th consecutive quarter of economic growth³, economic conditions have changed markedly since COVID-19. The International Monetary Fund forecasts the Australian economy to contract by 6.7% in 2020. The Reserve Bank of Australia expects the national unemployment rate to be around

10% by June. Queensland Treasury estimates 130,000 employees in 20,000 Queensland businesses are likely to be impacted by forced closures.

However, there are positive predictions of a swift recovery. The IMF forecast for Australia has the economy rebounding at 6.1% growth in 2021, with the RBA also predicting GDP growth of around 6% to 7% in 2021.

Australia has suffered two major economic downturns in the past 30 years – the early 1990s recession (the recession “we had to have” according to the then Federal Treasurer Paul Keating) and the Global Financial Crisis of 2007 to 2009.

Independent sector enrolment data during these two economic downturns give some reasons for optimism. As illustrated in Tables 1 and 2 (see page 2), the sector continued to enjoy not only positive enrolment growth, albeit at a lesser rate, during both periods, but also increased market share.

The sector's sustainability during the past two economic downturns is encouraging, given its reliance on parents ability to pay fees from their disposable income.

1 Independent Schools Queensland *What Parents Want* (2019) available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/advocacy-representation/what-parents-want-survey>

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics Cat No 4940.0 released 1 May 2020 available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4940.0>

3 See Briefing Paper by Queensland Treasury and Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning to the Queensland Parliament Inquiry into the Queensland Government's economic response to COVID-19 available at <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/EGC/inquiries/current-inquiries/COVID-19>

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Table 1: Independent Sector Enrolments – Queensland and Australia 2007 to 2011

GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS – 2008
MID 2007 TO PEAK IN SEPTEMBER 2008

	Queensland Independent Sector Enrolments	% Increase Queensland	Australian Independent Sector Enrolments	% Increase Australia	Independent Sector Market Share	
					Queensland	Australia
2007	97,562	n/a	458,339	n/a	13.9%	13.4%
2008	102,107	4.7%	474,208	3.5%	14.4%	13.8%
2009	105,318	3.1%	484,638	2.2%	14.6%	14.0%
2010	107,532	2.1%	492,146	1.5%	14.8%	14.1%
2011	109,296	1.6%	501,419	1.9%	14.8%	14.2%

Table 2: Independent Sector Enrolments – Queensland and Australia 1989 to 1993

EARLY 1990S RECESSION
STARTED SEPT QTR OF 1990 AND LASTED TO SEPT QTR 1991

	Queensland Independent Sector Enrolments	% Increase Queensland	Australian Independent Sector Enrolments	% Increase Australia	Independent Sector Market Share	
					Queensland	Australia
1989	38,709	n/a	243,407	n/a	7.5%	8.0%
1990	41,655	7.6%	252,611	3.8%	8.0%	8.3%
1991	44,258	6.2%	259,701	2.8%	8.3%	8.4%
1992	47,022	6.2%	265,231	2.1%	8.8%	8.6%
1993	49,635	5.6%	271,032	2.2%	9.1%	8.7%

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics Cat No 6401.0 available at <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nsf/mf/6401.0?opendocument&ref=HPKI>

5 All sectors will have benefited from an overall increase in school enrolments in 2020 as a result of the exiting from system in 2019 of the Prep-half cohort. In 2020, for first time since 2007 which saw a change in school starting age with the re-introduction of the Prep year, all year levels have a full cohort of students enrolled.

Much has changed about the independent sector in the past thirty years, including its size and diversity, and as a result, there is no guarantee these past trends will be replicated in 2020/2021 and beyond. There is likely to be significantly different impacts at the individual school level where many factors and local conditions determine enrolment trends.

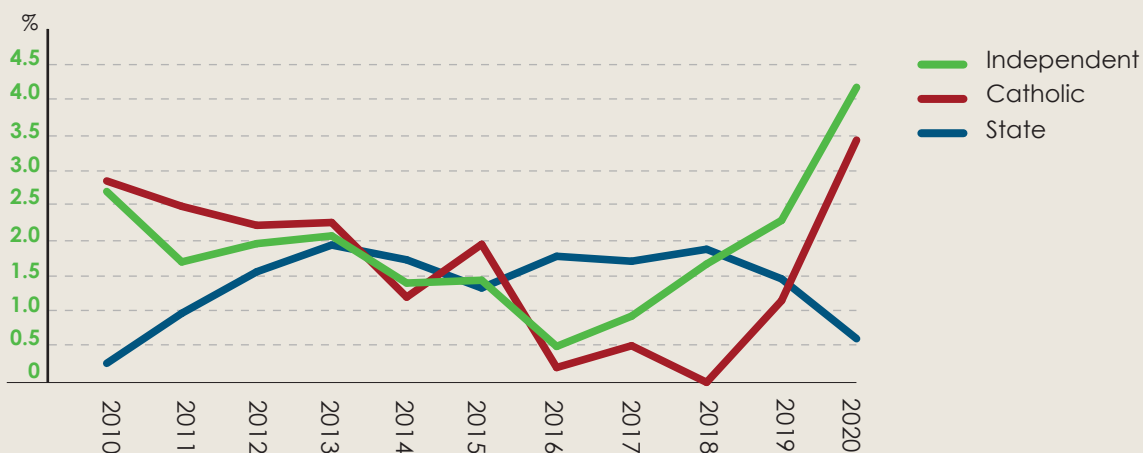
Boards and school leaders should examine the impact of past economic downturns on their school's enrolment patterns including looking at retention and transition rates to be better informed about the possible impacts of the current financial stresses on families.

This reflection should also consider the level of school fees that are sustainable for a school's community taking into account the latest Consumer Price Index figures reveal fee increases continue to rise at a rate higher than CPI. While the increase in the March quarter 2019 to March quarter 2020 CPI for Brisbane was 1.8%, the education component of the CPI showed increases of 3.2% for Primary and preschool education and 3.1% for secondary education⁴.

No matter the impact economic conditions on enrolments, the Queensland independent sector will be starting from a high point with February 2020 data recording a record number of students in the sector. Enrolments reached 128,810 in February 2020, an increase of 4.2% over February 2019⁵. As illustrated in Graph 1, the percentage increase in independent sector enrolments has improved annually since 2016. The continuing increase in independent sector enrolments has resulted in an increase in market share to 15.2% in 2020 (compared to 14.8% in 2019).

The role of Governments in stimulating the economy is paramount during any

Figure 1: Percentage Increase in Enrolments – Queensland Schooling Sectors⁶



The percentage increase in independent sector enrolments has improved annually since 2016. This continuing increase in independent sector enrolments has resulted in an increase in market share to 15.2% in 2020 (compared to 14.8% in 2019).

time of economic downturn. During the GFC, the then Rudd Government's Building the Education Revolution (BER)⁷, delivered through a \$16 billion injection of funding into school capital works, was recognised as a major contributor to easing the GFC impact in Australia.

To date there has been little government targeted assistance for independent schools as a result of COVID-19, although many schools are able to access various measures applied across the economy⁸. The design and implementation of the *Jobkeeper Payments* initiative will result in a very limited number of schools being able to access this key Australian Government measure (at a cost of \$130 billion) in response to COVID-19.

Government's lack of specific support for the sector might be an indication

of their view that levels of government funding are already high for many independent schools. The latest (2018) financial data for independent schools in Queensland shows the sector receives nearly 58% of its recurrent income from government grants. Against this, little recognition is given to the fact that the Queensland independent sector carries almost \$1 billion in debt as a result of investment in school facilities including providing new places for an expanding population.

There are two measures the Federal Government should consider in terms of ensuring the ongoing financial viability and sustainability of the independent sector.

Urgent consideration should be given to the sensitivity to current economic

conditions of the new Direct Measure of Income (DMI) as the determinant of parents Capacity to Contribute (CTC) to the costs of schooling.

The financial impacts of COVID-19 on family income will be felt first in the 2019/20 tax year and to a greater extent in the 2020/21 tax year, yet, as illustrated in Table 3, these impacts will not flow through to the calculation of the DMI until 2023 at the earliest. Even then, the ramifications will not be truly reflected because the DMI is based on a three-year rolling average of the median adjusted taxable income of the parents at a school. It will not be until the 2025 when the calculation of the DMI incorporates the three tax years most likely to reflect the economic consequences of the downturn (tax years 2019/20 to 2021/22).

⁶ For the independent and Catholic sectors, enrolment data is based on the February Census of Non-State Schools. For the state sector, data is based on Day 8 enrolments.

⁷ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Building_the_Education_Revolution for further details on BER.

⁸ See <https://www.dese.gov.au/document/covid-19-support-available-non-government-schools> for details.

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Table 3: Calculation of the Direct Measure of Income – Tax Years

DMI Year	LATEST YEAR DATA		YEAR 2 FOR ROLLING AVERAGE DMI		YEAR 3 FOR ROLLING AVERAGE DMI	
	Parent Name and Address	Parent Adjusted Taxable Income	Parent Name and Address	Parent Adjusted Taxable Income	Parent Name and Address	Parent Adjusted Taxable Income
2020	2019	2016 - 2017	2018	2015 - 2016		
2021	2020	2017 - 2018	2019	2016 - 2017	2018	2015 - 2016
2022	2021	2018 - 2019	2020	2017 - 2018	2019	2016 - 2017
2023	2022	2019 - 2020	2021	2018 - 2019	2020	2017 - 2018
2024	2023	2020 - 2021	2022	2019 - 2020	2021	2018 - 2019
2025	2024	2021 - 2022	2023	2020 - 2021	2022	2019 - 2020
2026	2025	2022 - 2023	2024	2021 - 2022	2023	2020 - 2021
2027	2026	2023 - 2024	2025	2022 - 2023	2024	2021 - 2022
2028	2027	2024 - 2025	2026	2023 - 2024	2025	2022 - 2023
2029	2028	2025 - 2026	2027	2024 - 2025	2026	2023 - 2024
2030	2029	2026 - 2027	2028	2025 - 2026	2027	2024 - 2025

There should be a short-term revision of the methodology to calculate a school’s DMI to better reflect the speed and depth of the current economic downturn. This could be achieved by calculating DMI scores for 2021 and 2022 on estimated adjustments to median incomes based on economic data which takes account of the impact on different regions and industries.

Alternatively, all school scores after calculation could be reduced by one or two points. This would be less effective as such a reduction might not result

in any change in funding for those schools that have a DMI 93 and below or 125 and above⁹.

The second measure would be to delay the full implementation of the DMI by two or three years. Implementation is currently scheduled for 2022 for all schools. The 2022 implementation on current data results in many independent schools having reduced Australian Government funding or funding increases which are below the rate of education cost increases. For these schools, adjusting to reduced or lower than expected Government

funding at the same time as dealing with the financial implications of the economic downturn will be a serious challenge.

Delaying the full implementation of DMI would give these schools much needed time to stabilise their financial base and plan for DMI changes in a more secure economic environment.

Keeping the current best of 2011 SES, 2016 SES or DMI through to 2024 or 2025 would be a major contribution to the stability and sustainability of the independent sector.

⁹ Under Australian Government funding arrangements, schools with a DMI of 125 or above receive the minimum entitlement and schools with a DMI of 93 and below receive the maximum entitlement.

To date there has been little government targeted assistance for independent schools as a result of COVID-19, although many schools are able to access various measures applied across the economy.

The impacts of the COVID-19 shutdown of our economy will present major challenges to every independent school over the next couple of years. The quality of the teaching and learning provided by the independent sector and the ongoing strong support of parents for choice in schooling gives optimism that the sector will continue to not only thrive, but to grow and improve on the outstanding student outcomes consistently achieved over many years. A little help from Governments could boost this optimism further and would be welcome recognition of the continuing importance of the independent sector's contribution to not only providing parents with school choice but also its significance in Australia's schooling outcomes.



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MONITORING AND MANAGING CYBERINCIVILITY



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Civility is crucial to all our interactions, from face-to-face to the ever-changing global digital frontier.

CINDY ANN PETERSON (2019)

COVID-19 has forced massive increases in the use of digital platforms requiring schools and their communities to be continually online. Not only do schools need to be observing behaviours on official social media channels, but now with online learning fast-tracked and a daily reality for most Australian schools, protocols for learning platforms and email behaviour must also be strengthened. As a result of the pandemic, the increase in online traffic has also provided opportunities for schools to model good online behaviour.

Governments and organisations worldwide grapple with monitoring user interactions, balancing freedom of speech with the moderation of undesirable content. There is concern in populations with democratic values that any form of moderation may mean censorship, going against a core democratic principle. For schools, *cyberincivility* – “disrespectful, insensitive, or disruptive behavior of a user in cyberspace” – may be experienced by students, teachers and staff, parents and carers, or even the school (as a brand) from others in the community (De Gagne et al., 2018, p. 35).

This research feature looks at web governance and its impact on issues management regarding negative online behaviour, key areas for consideration by schools to minimise cyberincivility, and the opportunities that more frequent online use, due to COVID-19, provides to promote positive and respectful behaviour in line with school values.

The Origins of Internet Governance

The origins of the debate around whether or not to govern activity that occurs across the internet began in the US in line with that country’s individualist libertarian values. American, John Perry Barlow’s *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* in 1996 framed the internet as a separate place without political borders, free from government control. A wild-west rhetoric ensued with cyberspace referred to as an electronic frontier, a place with its own rules. Barlow declared on behalf of a small online community: “We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity” (Barlow, 1996, para. 8). A decade later, and the introduction of web platforms that consisted solely of user-generated content (such as social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, and message boards such as 8Chan) allowed the widespread production and distribution of all forms of media by anyone with access to the internet. Individuals all over the world were now enjoying creating, uploading, commenting and sharing. That capability to broadcast individual views to a mass audience, without regulation, has seen cyberincivility become a key concern, with activists calling for change.

Natasha Tusikov, author of *Chokepoints: Global Private Regulation on the Internet*, is one of these activists and asserts that governments must not rely on platforms to regulate content; furthermore, her view is that “rules...

can (and should) vary by country, reflecting each country's distinctive legal and political frameworks, domestic priorities and values. American-based platforms typically express a strong ideological support for free speech that reflects U.S. constitutional values. Other countries... may decide on a different balance between free expression and regulated speech" (Tusikov, 2019, para. 13). While schools have limited power over undesirable content shared by, or about, their community across foreign-owned platforms, they can ensure school policy and other measures regarding online behaviour reflect their own values, including decisions around moderating user-generated content ('posts') on school-based social media and online-learning platforms.

Croeser (2016) also rejects the way that discussions to address online harassment are invariably seen through a free-speech lens. While Croeser defends the intention of free speech – to protect citizenry from authoritarian states and to ensure that unusual ideas can be voiced as part of a flourishing democracy – she asserts that "[p]erpetrators of cyber civil rights abuses commonly hide behind powerful free speech norms that both online and offline communities revere (Citron, as quoted in Croeser, 2016, para. 6), and insists a new approach is needed to discuss and combat negative online behaviour. Recently, there have been signs of social media platforms, such as Facebook, being forced to reconsider their role from merely a conduit between platform users, to distributors of media with ethical responsibilities. Even the

US has had enough, with Congress demanding action from the tech giants after the manifesto of the man behind the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings, was posted on 8Chan by the El Paso gunman (Romm & Harwell, 2019).

High Rates of Australian Internet Access

Australians have very high rates of internet use across all age groups. In 2018, Pew Research Center (Pew) ranked Australia second-highest globally, after South Korea, with a 93% uptake rate (Poushter, Bishop, & Chwe, 2018); furthermore, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), households with school-aged children ('children under 15 years of age') rise to 97% access, with device use split evenly between desktop computers and smartphones. Pew's research related to a 2016 United Nations decision to pass a "nonbinding resolution to make disruption of internet access a violation of human rights" (2018, para. 1), and the growing realisation that access to the internet was a marker of economic success. However, with Australia's privileged position of almost full access by its citizenry comes some well known downsides, such as cyberincivility and cyberbullying. As discussed by Chalmers et al. (2016), cyberbullying between students in Australia tends to happen outside school hours but is "felt in the school social and learning environment" (Chalmers, et al., 2016, p. 92). As such it is "often seen as a disciplinary matter to be handled

Figure 1: The Six Factors of Online Disinhibition, from John Suller's *The Online Disinhibition Effect*

- 1 Dissociative anonymity – "my actions can't be attributed to my person"
- 2 Invisibility – "nobody can tell what I look like, or judge my tone"
- 3 Asynchronicity – "my actions do not occur in real-time"
- 4 Solipsistic Introjection – "I can't see these people, I have to guess at who they are and their intent"
- 5 Dissociative imagination – "this is not the real world, these are not real people"
- 6 Minimising authority – "there are no authority figures here, I can act freely"

(Suller, as cited in Martin, 2013)

within the school system" (Chalmers, et al., 2016, p. 92). While schools are very aware of these issues and independent schools commonly have good policy, cyberincivility and the more serious cyberbullying – the deliberate intention to hurt or harm in an online space (Chalmers, et al., 2016) – can quickly escalate.

Curbing Cyberincivility

The phenomenon of cyberincivility has been heavily researched. The possibility for anonymity while on the net was assumed to be the key driver of online harassment; however, Facebook's requirement for everyday names to be used by members of their community has not made the expected impact on harassment rates (Martin, 2013). WIRED looked at trolling behaviours against psychologist John Suller's "six factors that could combine to change people's behaviour online" (Martin, 2013, para. 4) (see Figure 1), and ultimately believes that "In the real world people subconsciously monitor the behaviour of others around them and adapt their own behaviour accordingly...

In the real world people subconsciously monitor the behaviour of others around them and adapt their own behaviour accordingly... Online we do not have such feedback mechanisms.

GRAHAM JONES (AS QUOTED IN MARTIN, 2013)

MONITORING AND MANAGING CYBERINCIVILITY CONTINUED

Figure 2: The Key Areas Relating to the Effectiveness of a School's Anti-bullying Policy. (Chalmers et al., 2016)

School anti-bullying policy should:

- 1 be clear/consistent
- 2 be a position statement
- 3 include practice/procedures
- 4 provide for education
- 5 encompass a whole school approach
- 6 include examples
- 7 specify roles
- 8 include definitions of both bullying and cyberbullying.

Online we do not have such feedback mechanisms" (Suller, as quoted in Martin, 2013, para. 5).

Australia was one of the first countries with a government-led approach to tackle bullying, via the National Safe Schools Framework. This provided states with a basis to develop their own tools to promote good behaviours to schools in their jurisdiction, and has meant that Australian schools were well prepared to act on cyberbullying as face-to-face bullying extended into the online sphere. Chalmers et al. (2016) investigated the presence and location of policy templates in Australian schools and whether policy operated as a tool of prevention or intervention. Participants in the study were from state education departments across Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. Participants were consistent in their belief that educating the school

"Although free speech advocates will wince, communities that are well moderated seem to be more civil places"

(MARTIN, 2013)

community in good online behaviour was critical, and that the policy itself can act as a preventative tool when all members of the school community – staff, parents and students – are very clear on the policy's existence and location. In addition, promoting good online behaviour could provide a focus for parent engagement; schools can consider ways in which parents and carers can instil and uphold good online behaviour at home, both personally and as bystanders. In so doing, schools promote parent engagement, reinforce their values to the entire school community, and lead the way in the promotion of respectful online interactions.

Initially, it was thought that cohesive and sustained online communities were not possible and that community required face-to-face interaction.

Historically, community was seen as the *opposite* of society, and the rise of mass production and globalisation seen as the death of community, yet large global brands have managed to create strong and sustained online communities despite geographic distance (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define the modern online community which is "based on a structured set of social relations... marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (2001, p. 412). Brand communities may provide some guidance for schools around issues of moderation, as these bespoke platforms incorporate tools and mechanics, different to those on offer in Facebook and other digital spaces predominantly used to build online communities. For example, Lego offers young fans a defined set of emojis as a way to communicate on their platform to ensure a safe and kind space; and, Louis Vuitton employs a very active 'administrator' on its retail brand platform, Sephora, to engage with the community as *part* of the community, ensuring both close scrutiny and on-brand behaviour (Heath, 2018). While these specific examples may not translate exactly to the school experience, it does show that moderating the web is happening, and with positive sentiment from those individuals using the sites. Like brand communities, school communities share rituals and traditions around the values of the school; building connected online communities requires effort but can make for a cohesive group through tough times.

"I think it's more about educating kids/teachers/parents about what is appropriate behaviour ... not only about the use of multimedia and all that sort of stuff but about what is right and what is not acceptable ... about how to interact properly."

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT (AS QUOTED IN CHALMERS ET AL., 2016)

Conclusion

COVID-19 has forced everyone to markedly increase online usage in a sudden and constant way and schools have risen to the challenge. While the rapid rise in online use can lead to bad behaviour, it also provides a unique opportunity for schools to showcase their values and lead by example.

A clear online behaviour policy stated up front to all parties (students, staff, parents and the wider school community) can be a powerful preventative measure against cyberincivility. Clever design elements and consideration of the mechanics available on bespoke or third-party platforms can also be helpful in guiding the content that users can post and what interactions can occur in school-managed digital spaces.

Schools should not be afraid to moderate, as long as they are transparent through policy and the agreed rules of engagement for particular online platforms. The choice of words, where and when they are used to manage issues and moderate can make all the difference. If the policy states that inappropriate or hurtful comments will not be tolerated, and the administrator reserves the right to remove such comments from school social media and online learning sites then they can and should be taken down. However, if the person is known by the school, a pre-emptive personal phone call to explain why the comment was or will be removed may go a long way to ease tensions. Relationship building in-person and online is a crucial element of community engagement. A strong online community with a common ethos around school values will extend into respectful online behaviours.

ISQ RESOURCES

Independent Schools Queensland has a range of resources to support member schools develop appropriate policies and procedures for their communities.

Marketing and communications resources | Includes digital and social media tools and templates

Social network reputation protection | Advice on escalating severe misuse or abuse of social network platforms

Expectations for online learning | Considerations for online behaviour and copyright issues during COVID-19 pandemic

OTHER RESOURCES

The **eSafety Commissioner** has a wide range of useful resources, such as a checklist for developing effective online safety policies and procedures; guidelines for social media use, video sharing and online collaboration; and, a guide to responding to cyber abuse that targets staff | **Toolkit for schools**

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