INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAMILIES PRIORITISE SCHOOL CHOICE DESPITE COST-OF-LIVING PRESSURES

Families choosing Independent schools are continuing to prioritise their child's education despite significant cost-of-living pressures, according to new national research released today.

The research, conducted by independent market research agency Insightfully for Independent Schools Australia (ISA), shows cost of living is a dominant issue for families, with 66 per cent nominating it as their top priority for government to address.

The research shows three in four families (75 per cent) have adjusted their household budget in the past 12 months to keep their child in their chosen school. Nearly 60 per cent have been saving for school fees for three years or more, and one in five receive financial support from family members.

Independent Schools Australia CEO Graham Catt said the findings challenge the stereotype of wealthy families.

"This is a cost-of-living story," Mr Catt said.

"It is also a story about commitment. Families are making real trade-offs because they believe this choice is right for their child."

Sacrifice is a reality

Mr Catt said the data highlights how important school choice is to families.

"When families are cutting back on other parts of the household budget, it tells you how important this decision is to them," he said.

The research found:

- 75 per cent have adjusted their household budget in the past 12 months
- 28 per cent have cut back on essentials such as groceries, medicine and transport
- 27 per cent say they would cut back further on essentials if needed
- 18 per cent would reduce housing costs to keep their child in their school

More than half of families reported experiencing financial pressure as cost-of-living pressures continued.

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Keeping choice affordable

Independent Schools Australia said the findings highlight the need to keep school choice affordable for families already carrying significant costs.

“Families are not asking for special treatment,” Mr Catt said.

“They are already making significant contributions to support the choices they’ve made.”

“Independent schools are working hard to keep fees as affordable as possible for families.”

“The message for policymakers is simple: keep that choice affordable and do not make it harder for families already under pressure.”

The research forms part of a broader body of work examining how families are engaging with education.

“In the coming weeks, we will continue to release insights from this research as part of a broader conversation about how we ensure parents are properly heard in education policy.”

KEY FACTS

- 66% say cost of living is their top issue
- 75% have adjusted their household budget
- 28% have cut back on essentials (e.g. groceries, medicine, transport)
- Nearly 60% have been saving for school fees for 3+ years
- 1 in 5 receive financial support from other family members
- 27% would cut back further on essentials to afford their education of choice
- 18% would reduce housing costs

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted by Insightfully on behalf of Independent Schools Australia.

- Online survey conducted between 19 March and 6 April 2026
- Total sample size: 1,508 Independent school parents who are registered voters
- Includes current and prospective Independent school parents and family members contributing to school fees
- Results are statistically representative with a margin of error of +/-2.5% at the 95% confidence level

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ABOUT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AUSTRALIA

Independent Schools Australia is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector.

Independent schools educate more than 18 per cent of Australian students and serve a diverse range of communities, including low-fee schools, faith-based schools, Special Assistance Schools, and schools in regional and remote areas.

Education in Australia is a public good, and government funding supports students across all school sectors.

Independent schools operate within that system, with funding following students, not systems. Families and school communities make a significant additional contribution, funding more than half of the cost of Independent schooling.

ISA advocates for policies that reflect how families engage with education and ensure all students have access to high-quality schooling.

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