

The Contribution of Christian Schooling

Exploring the social benefit Christian schools
provide to the Queensland community



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Introduction



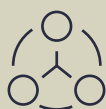
Four in five independent schools in Australia have a religious affiliation (83%)ⁱ



2.4 million Queenslanders identify with Christianityⁱⁱ

There are currently 59 registered Christian schools in QLDⁱⁱⁱ

Of the 59 registered Christian schools, 45 are within the Associated Christian Schools (ACS) Network



28,000 students are currently enrolled in a school within the Associated Christian Schools Network

Australian society celebrates the diverse range of cultures, ethnicities and worldviews of its people. It is this diversity that gives Australia its multicultural identity, celebrating the various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds that make Australia the nation it is today. Within this diversity, there is a need to accurately educate, providing spaces where people of all ages can learn about the lens in which others in their community view the world. While being a multi-faith society, Christianity remains the largest religious affiliation in Australia with 43.9% of the population identifying as Christian^{iv}. Schools are uniquely placed to help young people develop a strong sense of self while discovering how to build relationships with others who may see the world with a different perspective than their own. In fact, seven in ten Australians (72%) agree that it is beneficial to society to have various education options available including government, selective and faith-based schools^v.

Christian schools are widely recognised for being places where students holistic development is a priority, educating both young peoples mind and hearts. Positively, more than half of Australians (54%) believe this approach to education, educating both the mind and hearts of young people, is a benefit to society as a whole^v.

Christian education today provides choice for many families who are perhaps seeking a more values driven approach to their child's education. One where academic excellence is pursued at the same pace as developing young people into global minded and contributing citizens of society.



Methodology

This report brings together primary research conducted by McCrindle and relevant secondary sources as outlined below.

Online survey of Christian school parents in Queensland

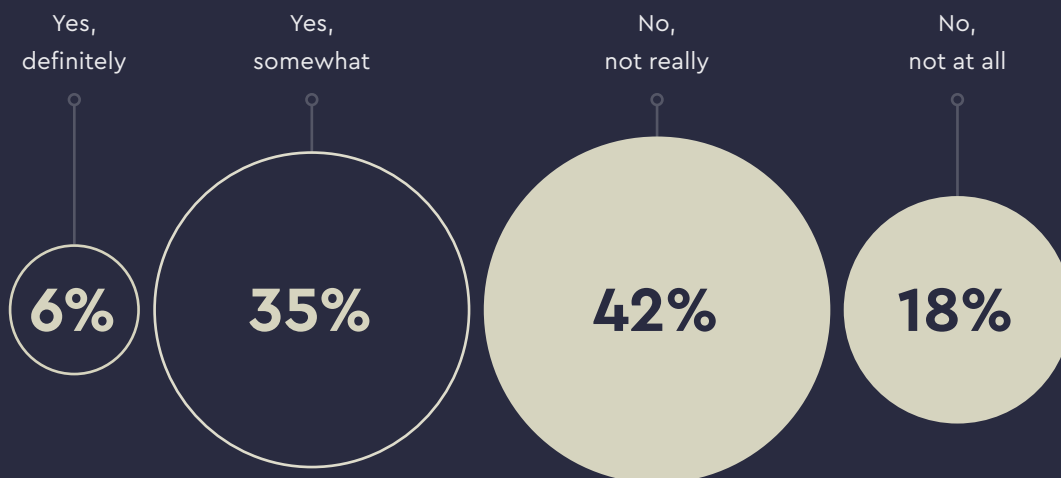
The parent perspective regarding Christian schools was collected via an online survey of parents that have at least one child attending a school within the Associated Christian Schools network. The survey was distributed to all parents within the ACS network by the individual schools with fieldwork taking place from 27th of February to 19th of March 2023. A total of 1,083 responses were received representing responses from 16 out of 45 schools within the Associated Christian Schools.

Data from the Cardus Education Survey Australia Report

Insights from Christian school graduates are drawn from the *Cardus Education Survey Australia Report*. The data collection was administered between October and December 2019 by ORIMA Research to a nationally representative sample of 4,913 adults ages 25 to 39 who graduated secondary school in Australia. The report is available online at <https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/report-launch/>.

Parents' experience does not match the media portrayal of Christian schools

Do you believe the way Christian Schools are portrayed in the media accurately reflects your experience?



Parents believe Christian schools to be more inclusive and supportive than they are portrayed in the media

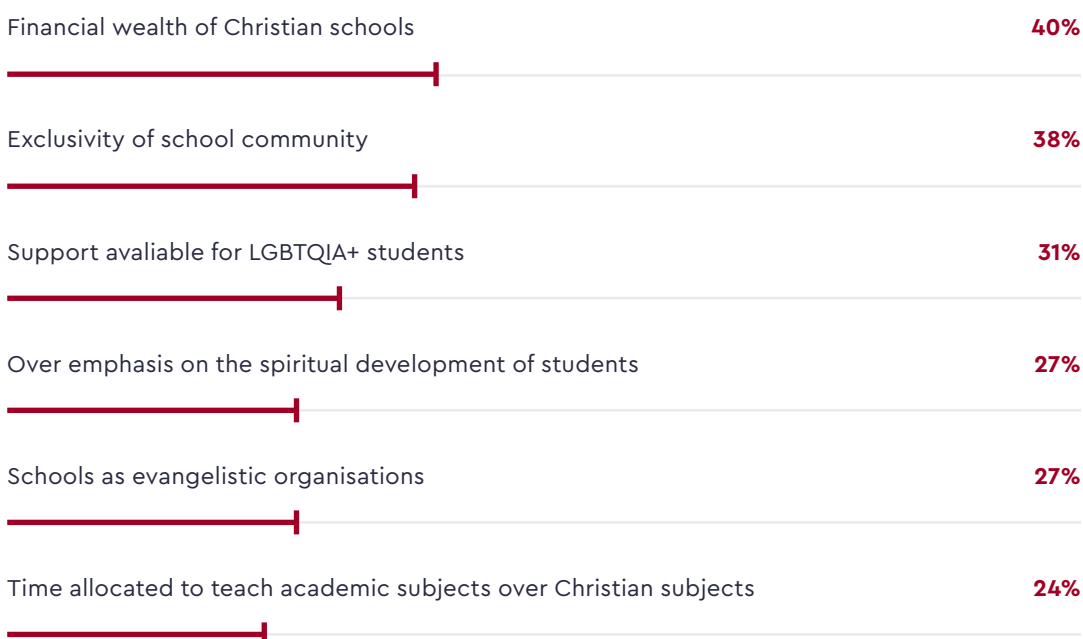
Three in five parents (60%) believe the way Christian schools are portrayed in the media does not accurately reflect their experience. This discrepancy suggests the way Christian schools are portrayed in the media may be more reflective of stereotypes rather than the lived experience of the majority of parents in the school community.

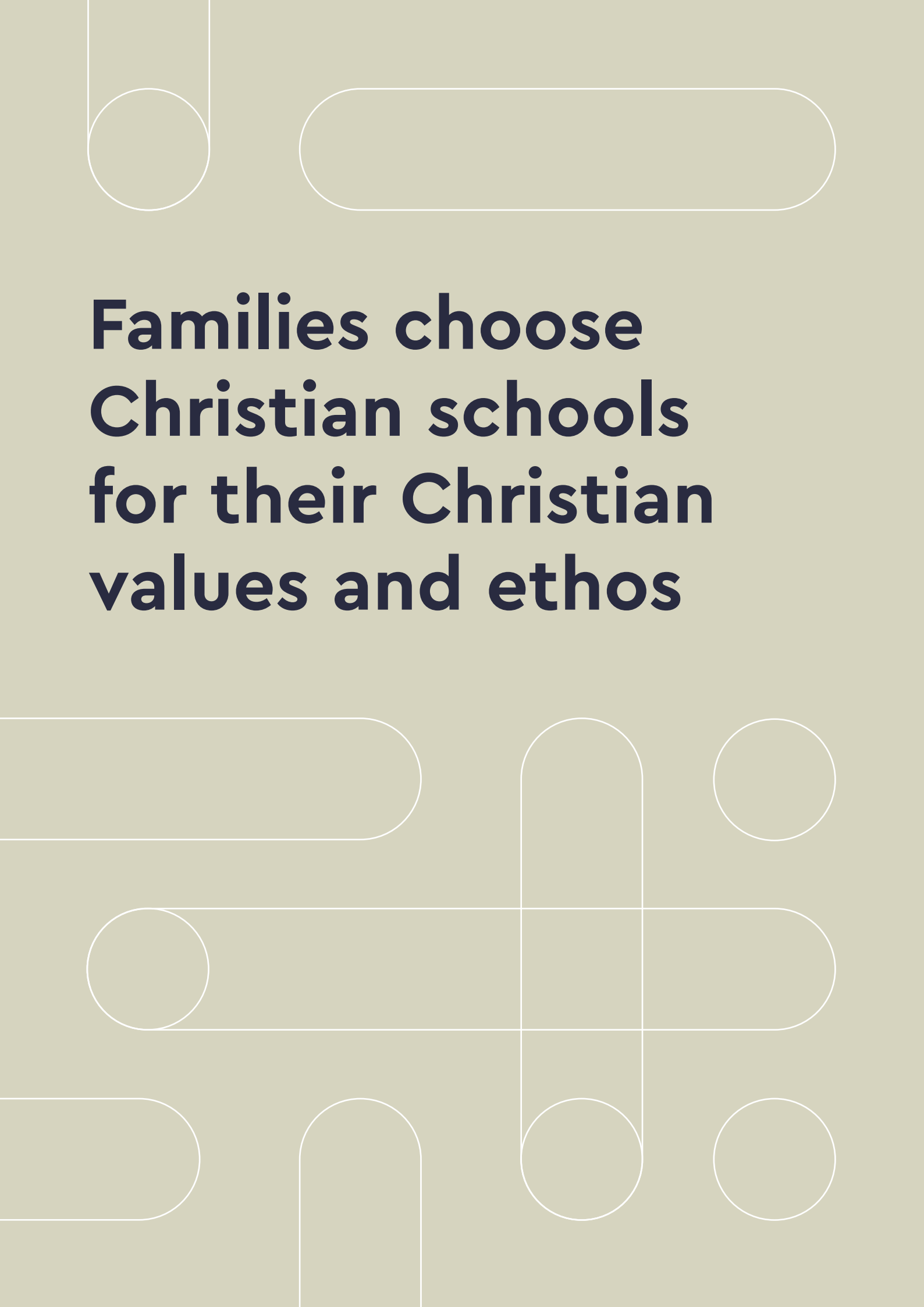
The aspects of Christian schools that parents believe are most misrepresented in the media are the financial wealth of Christian schools (40%), the exclusivity of the school community (38%), and the support available for LGBTQIA+ students (31%), with at least three in ten

Christian school parents believing Christian schools are misrepresented in one of these aspects. This suggests parents see Christian schools as much more supportive – and much less exclusive – environments for students than is presented in the media.

Parents also believe the media over-emphasises the spiritual and evangelistic nature of Christian schools. One in four parents believe Christian schools are misrepresented in the media in relation to the over-emphasis on the spiritual development of students (27%) and schools as evangelistic organisation (27%).

% of parents who believe the following aspects are misrepresented in the media:



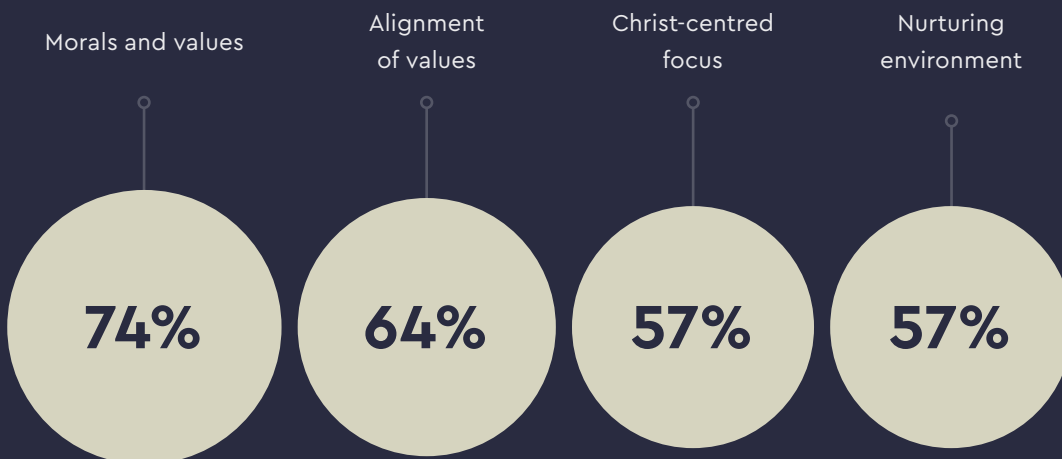


**Families choose
Christian schools
for their Christian
values and ethos**

Overall, parents are seeking schools that embody their own values and that promote the values they want their children to live by. Previous research has revealed seven in ten Australians (72%) strongly/somewhat agree it is beneficial to society to have various education options available. This includes a variety of government, faith-based and selective schools.^v

The Christ-centredness of schools in the ACS network is a key draw card for many parents, with the Christian foundation of the school reflecting their own values and contributing to the overall culture of the school.

Parents are most likely to have chosen a school within the ACS network for their child for the following reasons:



Four in five parents (79%) strongly/somewhat agree the Christian ethos of the school was an important factor in their decision to send their child to a Christian school

Parents see the Christian values and ethos of Christian schools as a drawcard rather than a hindrance. Four in five parents (79%) strongly or somewhat agree that the Christian ethos of the school they chose for their child was an important factor in their decision to send their child to a Christian school. In fact, three in five parents (60%) strongly agree, indicating that the Christian values of the school significantly contribute to the schools attractiveness to prospective parents.

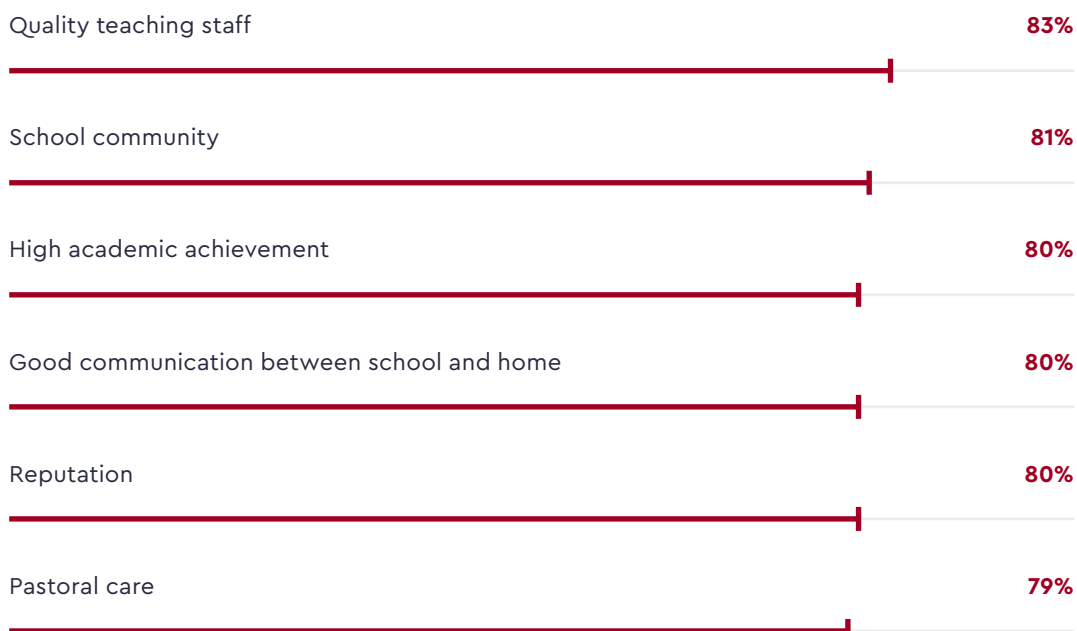
For one in ten parents (10%), the Christian ethos was not an important factor in their choice of school. There is therefore a proportion of Christian school parents who have been drawn to the school for reasons other than its Christian ethos. This suggests the value Christian schools provide to parents is broader than solely a Christian ethos and environment.

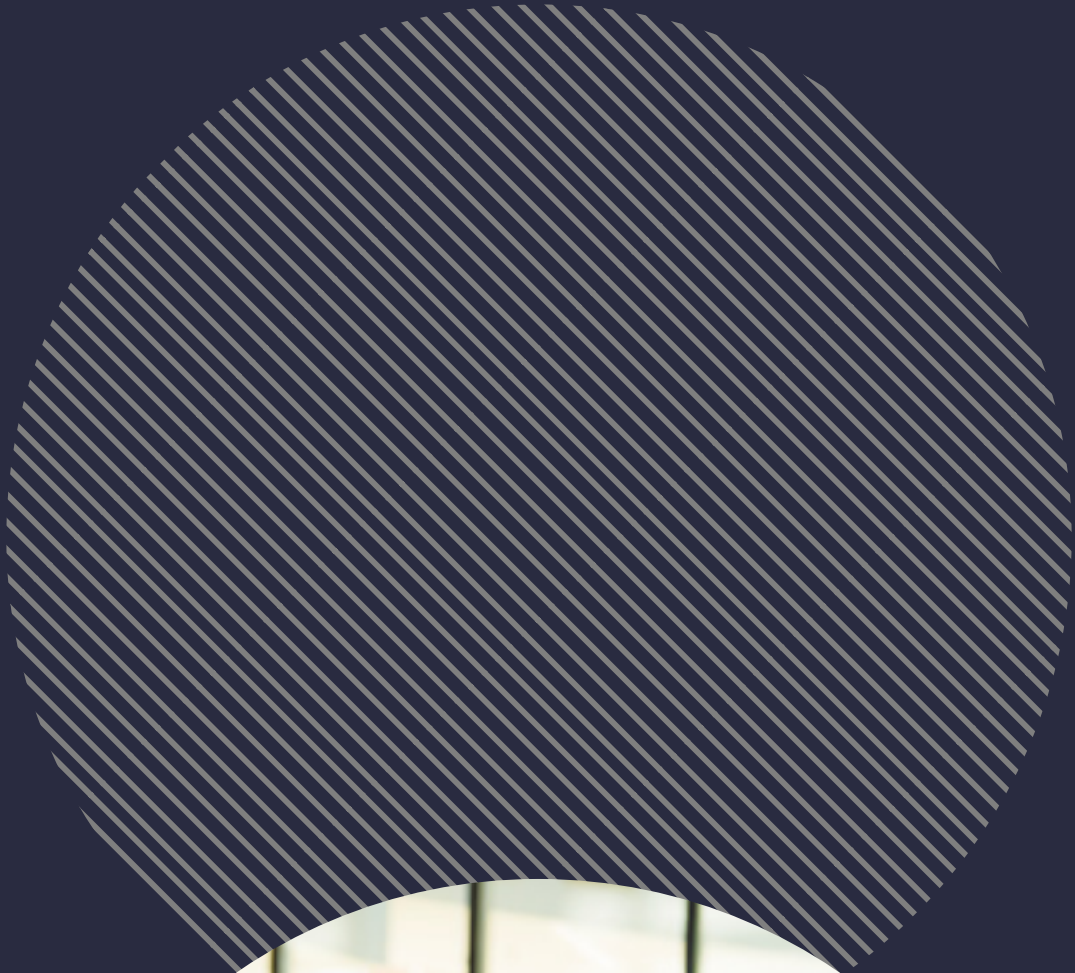
Parents are looking for schools that provide a holistic approach to education

Christian schools are uniquely placed to provide a strong values driven approach to education, showcasing how students can excel in all areas when they have a strong foundation to build upon.

Parents believe Christian schools foster an environment that empowers students to thrive holistically.

This supportive environment is a product of Christian schools proving extremely/very effective in the following areas:







Christian schools are developing global citizens



Christian schools play a central role in developing students to be good citizens and contributors to society

"A commitment to the common good also recognises the importance of formation, that is, educating students to become the kind of persons who enrich others' lives, not simply by contributing economically but in many other ways consistent with our mutual humanity."^{vi}

Schools undoubtedly play a crucial role in encouraging the characteristics that define a good and contributing citizen, equipping students with strong values, sense of purpose and global mindedness. As learning institutions underpinned with strong value systems, Christian schools are uniquely placed to offer students opportunities to discover and understand their own values and purpose, preparing them well for life outside of the classroom.



90% of parents believe their child's school encourages students to become better citizens and contributors to society





Nine in ten parents (90%) believe their child's school encourages students to become better citizens and contributors to society and that their child's school equips them with a strong value system (90%). Similarly, parents believe their child's school equips them with a strong sense of purpose (86%) and empowers students to be curious (82%). More than three in four parents (77%) also believe their child's school develops students with a global perspective.

Encouragingly, parents believe students across all age groups are being set up well by their school to become better citizens and contributors to society (91% K-6, 89% 7-10, 84% 11-12). Additionally, Christian schools encourage students from the beginning of their schooling to develop a strong global perspective (79% K-6, 75% 7-10, 70% 11-12).

Christian schools help students develop spiritual self-reflection and awareness

Schools rightly need to focus on their academic offering, helping students develop key skills and knowledge that will direct them into post-school pathways and careers. Christian schools complement academic learning with developing students spiritually, providing a safe space where students can ask questions and discover more about how they and others see the world.

Christian school parents recognise the impact of their child's school in helping them develop spiritually not just academically. Almost nine in ten parents (87%) strongly/somewhat agree their child's school offers opportunities for them to grow in their spirituality. In a similar fashion, 70% of parents believe their child's school encourages students to ask questions about their own religious identity, facilitating important conversations around the role of religion and spirituality to students' sense of self and purpose.

Developing an awareness and understanding of how others see the world is essential in young people interacting with the changing world around them. By understanding differences in worldviews, it enables students to be more globally-minded and less siloed in their own understanding of the world. While Christian schools play an important role in growing students' Christian faith and sharing the news of the Gospel, they also play a role in accurately educating students about other religions and spiritual beliefs that contribute to Australia's growing multicultural society. Encouragingly, parents see Christian schools doing this where 57% strongly/somewhat agree that their child's school develops students' awareness of other religions and worldviews.

Students are equipped with a well-rounded set of skills, enabling them to succeed into the future

In today's rapidly changing world, students equipped with strong character qualities and a sense of purpose are best positioned to thrive in life beyond school, being active and engaged citizens who contribute to the flourishing of society around them.

Parents believe Christian schools are doing this well. Nearly nine in ten Christian school parents (89%) believe their child's school plays an active role in developing students with a preparedness for the future and interpersonal

skills (89%). A similar proportion believe their child's school plays an active role in development of their child's leadership (87%) and critical thinking skills (87%). These skills are essential in shaping students to be active and contributing citizens in any environment they may belong to in the future including workplaces, community groups and personal relationships.

% who strongly/somewhat agree Christian schools play an active role in the following:



Preparedness for the future

89%



Interpersonal skills

89%



Leadership

87%



Critical thinking skills

87%

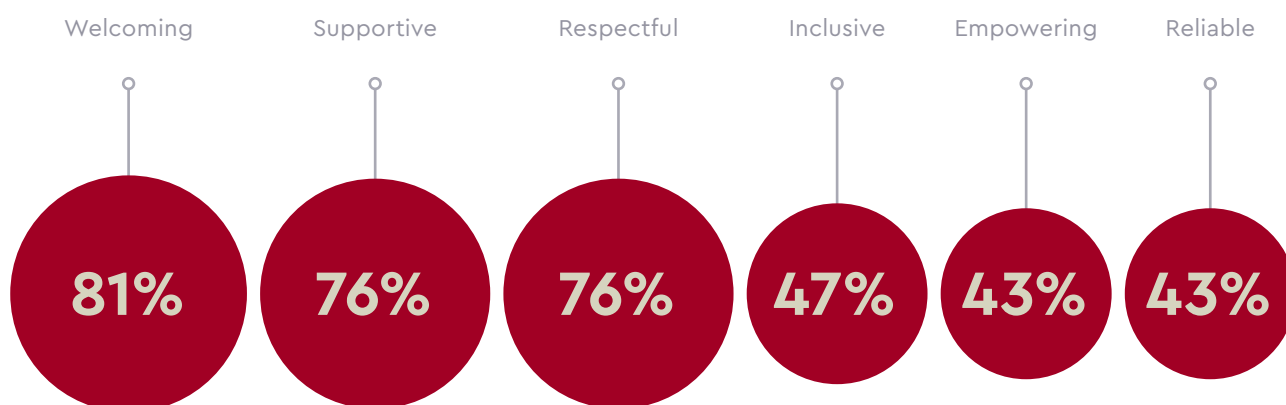


**Christian schools
are welcoming
and supportive
communities**

When thinking about the defining characteristics of the school community at their child's school, many Christian school parents consider it to be a warm and welcoming environment, promoting a sense of inclusivity for all. In fact, parents are most likely to describe their school community as welcoming (81%), supportive (76%) and respectful (76%). Other key terms that parents use to describe their school

community are inclusive (47%), empowering (43%) and reliable (43%). Parents are least likely to describe their school community as judgemental (8%), narrow-minded (7%) and exclusive (6%). These qualities of being welcoming, supportive, respectful and inclusive are important elements of strong and empowering communities, and model to students what healthy communities can look like in our increasingly diverse society.

% who describe their school community as:



Strong communities recognise that the support available must be holistic in nature, considering all aspects that contribute to a student's sense of self and belonging. Parents are likely to believe that Christian schools effectively support their child in a range of areas, enabling them to thrive while at school. This includes effectively managing academic support (93%), building strong relationships among students (91%) and promoting mental health in students (88%).

Christian schools also strive to provide everyone in the school community access to the same opportunities, including assistance for families experiencing financial hardship. In fact, almost nine in ten parents (85%) believe their child's school effectively provides financial support for families.

Christian schools stand out from their peers by prioritising strong partnerships between the school leadership and school community

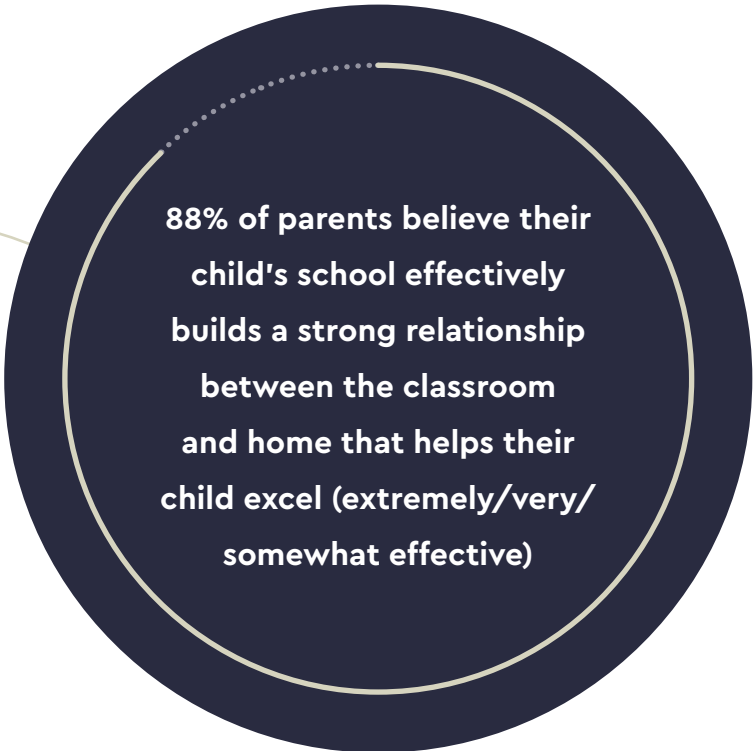
In prioritising an open line of communication between school leadership and the broader school community, Christian schools are able to build deeper relationships between all members of the school community, creating a warm and welcoming environment for all.

Four in five parents (78%) strongly or somewhat agree that their child's school goes above and beyond to keep the school community up to date. Parents also feel safe and heard in their school community, with seven in ten (70%) parents strongly or somewhat agreeing school leadership actively listens to any concerns shared by the school community. A similar proportion (68%) believe the school community is encouraged to share their opinions, highlighting how Christian schools are seeking to ensure all members of the school community feel seen, heard and valued.

The strength of this partnership between the school and home is evident in the highly effective way Christian schools involve parents in their child's journey through

school. In fact, nine in ten parents (90%) believe their child's school effectively helps them effective in helping them to navigate their child's classroom experience and in managing challenges their child faces (89%). Encouragingly, a similarly high proportion of parents believe their child's school effectively builds a strong relationship between the classroom and home that helps their child to excel (88%).

Effective communication between school and home is key in ensuring that parents feel they are being supported throughout their child's time at school. Encouragingly, this is an area that parents believe Christian schools excel in, receiving extremely, very or somewhat effective communication regarding their child's academic progress (93%), day-to-day school updates (91%) and their child's wellbeing (86%).

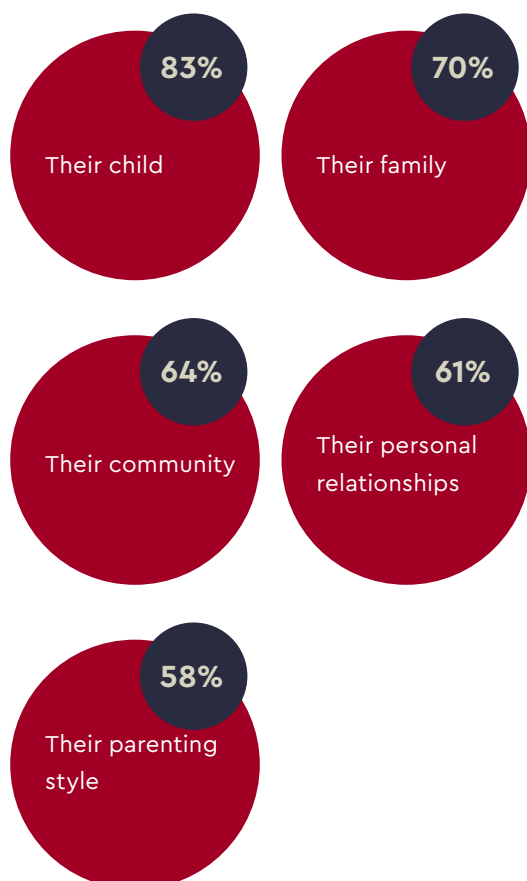


88% of parents believe their child's school effectively builds a strong relationship between the classroom and home that helps their child excel (extremely/very/somewhat effective)

The impact of Christian schools reaches beyond the student

When strong partnerships between the classroom and home are prioritised, the positive impacts enrich not only the life of a student but others within that student's world. Christian schools play an essential role in developing students who go on to make meaningful social contributions by facilitating a warm and welcoming environment for students to grow and learn.

In fact, parents see their child's school having an extremely or very positive impact on:





Christian schools develop servant- hearted leaders



Encouragingly, parents are likely to recognise that their child's school is actively involved in their local community with 83% of parents seeing that their child's school facilitates activities that serve the community.

It is not only the school itself that is active in the local community but the students also, where 90% of students at Christian schools are involved in community service activities.

Students are most likely to be involved in fundraisers (67%), national charity initiatives (36%) and in supporting local community programs (36%).

Encouragingly, Christian schools instil a sense of servanthood that lasts beyond students time at school. Graduates of Christian schools are active in supporting causes that have both local and global impacts.



90% of Christian school students are involved in community service activities

Graduates of independent schools continue to support the work and efforts of not-for-profit organisations and charities after leaving school. Two in three Christian school graduates (64%) have donated money or goods to a not-for-profit or charitable organisation in the past 12 months.

Christian school graduates continue to be active members of their community after leaving school where almost half (48%) have volunteered in the past 12 months (cf. 34% Catholic, 28% Government). Graduates are most likely to volunteer in an organisation that helps children or youth (62%), a church/religious group (55%) or in an organisation that helps the poor (51%).^{vii}

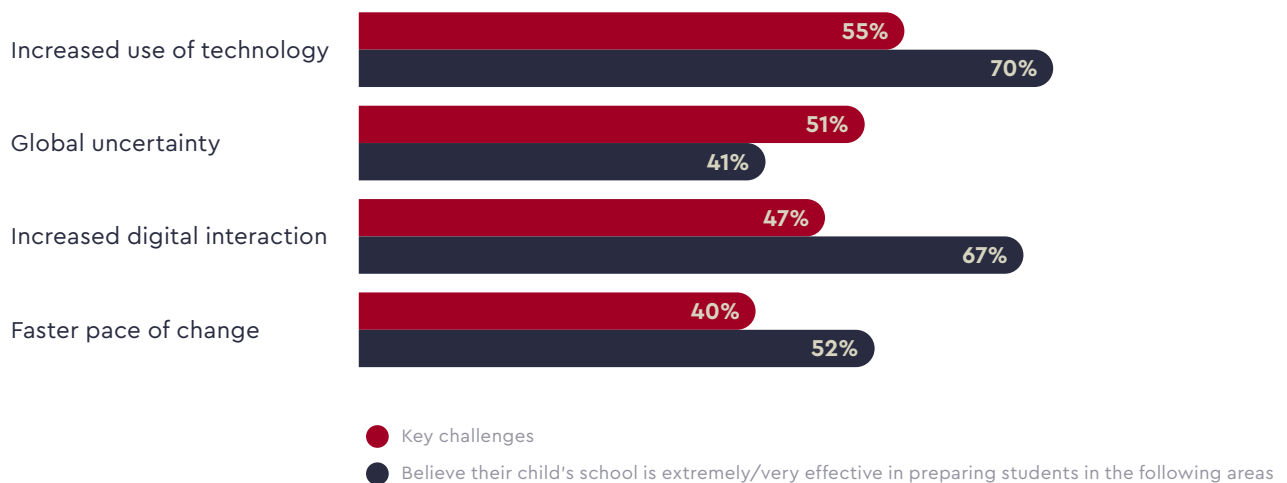
The background is a solid light green color. It features several white outline shapes: a circle at the top left, a horizontal rounded rectangle at the top right, a vertical rounded rectangle on the right side, a horizontal rounded rectangle in the middle, a vertical rounded rectangle in the center, and three circles at the bottom (one on the left, one in the center, and one on the right).

**A Christian education
positively impacts
students well into
their future**

When parents think about the challenges their child will face after leaving school, they are likely to feel their child's Christian school has prepared them well to navigate these challenges. Parents believe their children will face challenges navigating the highly digitised future and the unknown pace of this change. Parents are most likely to believe their child will need to navigate increased use of technology (55%), global uncertainty (51%), increased digital interaction (47%) and faster pace of change (40%).

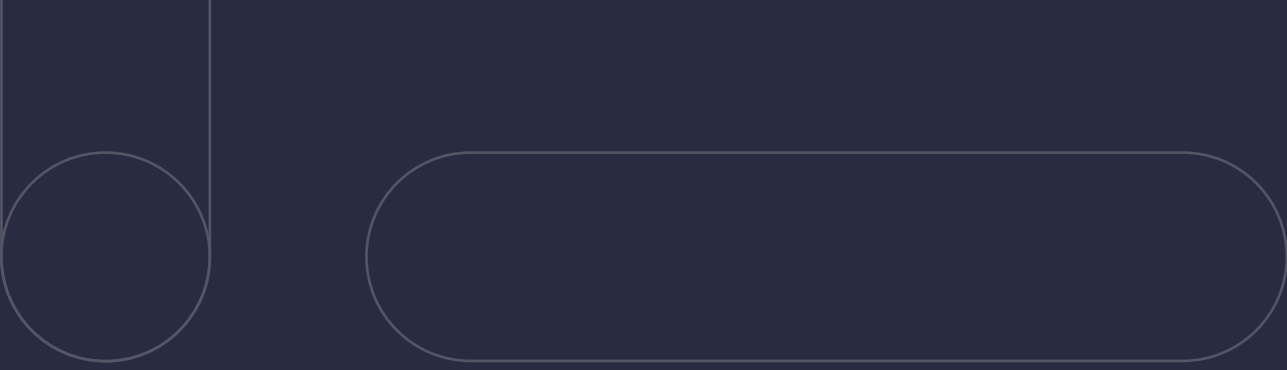
Encouragingly, parents are likely to believe Christian schools are effectively preparing students to meet these future challenges. Seven in ten parents believe their child's school is extremely or very effective in preparing students for increased use of technology (70%) and increased digital interaction (67%). More than half of parents (52%) believe their child's school effectively prepares them to adapt to a faster pace of change while 41% believe their child's school has prepared them well to navigate global uncertainty.

Key challenges children will face in life after school vs how effective the parents think their child's school is in the following areas

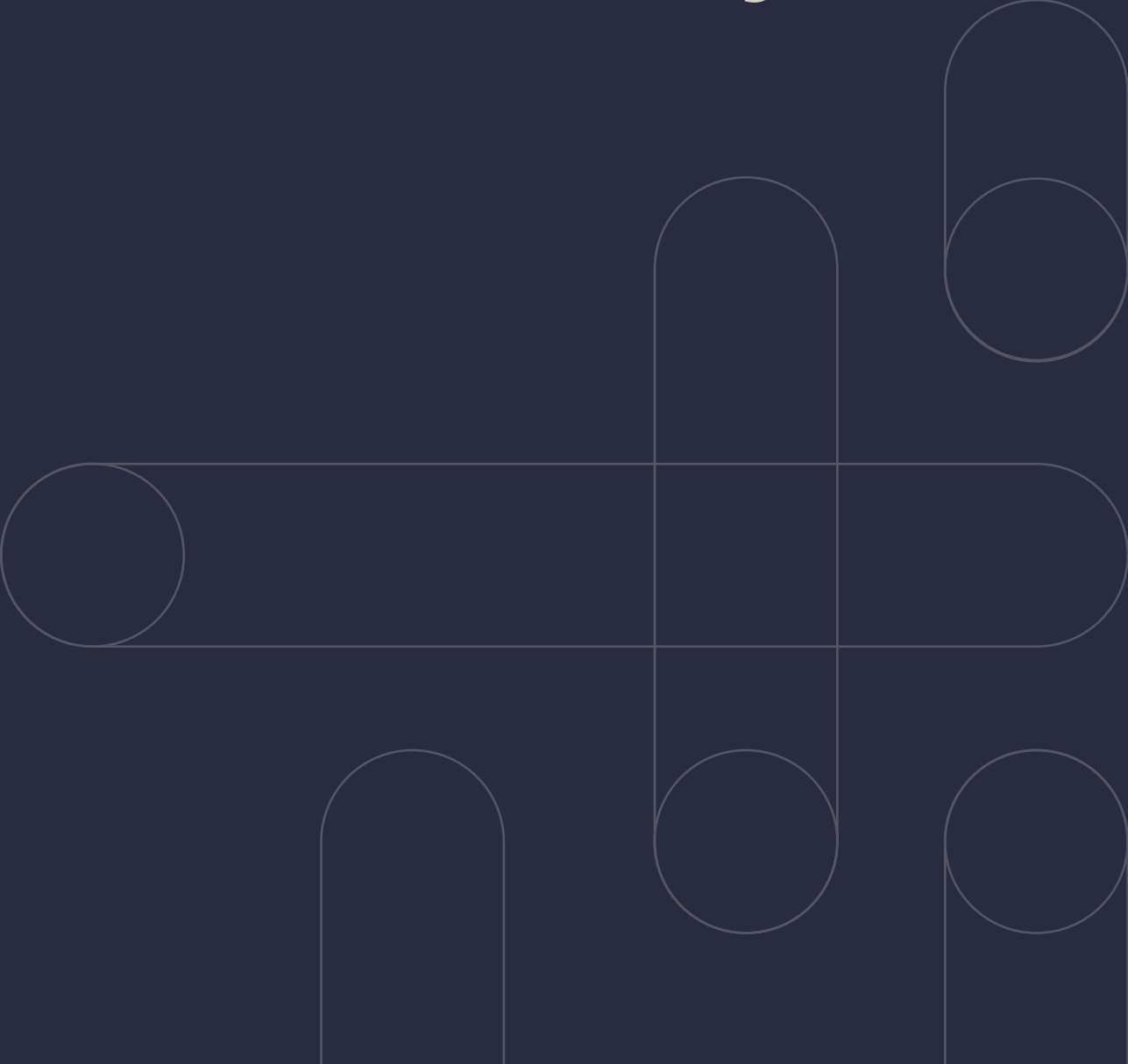


Positively, graduates resonate with this parent sentiment in that they feel their school has prepared them well for life beyond school, to succeed in post-school studies and employment and to thrive in their personal lives.

Four in five Christian school graduates (75%) feel very/somewhat prepared by their school for academic success in university and similarly in finding purpose, meaning and direction in life (74%). Christian school graduates also feel their school has prepared them well to interact with the culture and society around them (71%) and dealing with life's problems (70%). A similar proportion feel their school has prepared them well for dealing with personal relationships (67%), and career success (61%)^{vi}



**Parents believe
removing Christian
schools would be a
loss for society**



Parents believe removing Christian schools would remove institutions that provide valuable holistic development and an important social benefit.

Christian school parents were given the opportunity to provide their own response to the question, *'If Christian schools were removed from Australia tomorrow, what do you think we would lose as a society?'*. The themes that emerged reveal the positive impact that Christian schools continue to have in Australia today across areas such as developing young people of good character, being a caring community and providing quality education.

Parents believe society would be losing a foundation on which children today learn good moral behaviour as well as a place that prioritises strong and supportive communities. Parents also believe that Christian schools provide a quality education option that promotes a holistic approach to student development.



"An education style that provides stability and certainty and assuredness in children's lives. Education that offers clear, constant values, which at its centre is the invitation to be better human beings, a better humanity."

"In terms of good, effective schools, it would be a loss of a safe, non-judgemental space where kids can be surrounded by others with shared values and a well-aligned moral compass."

"We would lose a critical part of establishing the values that a flourishing society requires."

"We would lose the option] of giving our children a holistic approach to their schooling and upbringing with strong and stable values."

"The sense of community and servant leadership that is instilled in the kids will only benefit them and society moving forward."

References

- i Independent Schools Australia, *The Vital Social Contribution of Independent Schools*, 2023
- ii Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022
- iii Independent Schools Queensland, 2023
- iv Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022
- v Associated Christian Schools, *Education for the Common Good*, 2020
- vi Associated Christian Schools, *Education for the Common Good*, 2020
- vii Cardus, *Australian Schools and the Common Good*, 2020



