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Are all schools uniform?

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Are all schools uniform?

Schools aim to assist students to gain knowledge and skills, develop their talents and self-confidence, and increase their ability to contribute to economic development. Schools are differentiated by the type and level of education they provide and their ownership and management.¹

Both government and non-government schools have existed in Australia since 1848. While government schools continue to educate the majority of Australian students, over the past decade the number of student enrolments and the number of teaching staff have grown at a faster rate in non-government schools than in government schools.

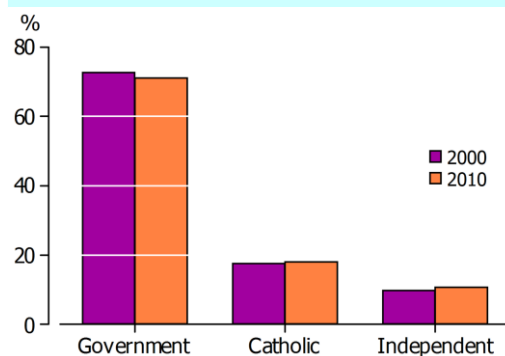
Australian schools have continued to generate public interest. In April 2010, the Australian Government announced the [Review of Funding for Schooling](#). The review will consider how schools are funded and lay the foundation for ongoing investment in the school sector.² There is also an increasing interest in student performance, partly driven by the advent of the [My School](#) website in January 2010. *My School* provides comparisons of school's students' performances and reports financial information for each school.³

This article examines changes over time in the number of government and non-government schools, student enrolments and teaching staff, as well as government school funding. It also explores education outcomes for young adults (15–24 years) who last attended government or non-government schools.

Schools

In 2010, there were a total of 9,468 schools across Australia, a decrease of 1.4% since 2000. Of these, seven in ten (71%) were government

Affiliation of schools



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

Data sources and definitions

Data in this article come mainly from ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0), the ABS 2010 Survey of Education and Work, the ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Training and the Productivity Commission [Report on Government Services 2011](#).

A *student* is a person, who on the date of the survey, is formally enrolled in a school and is active in a primary, secondary and/or special education program at the school.

A *full-time student* is one who undertakes a workload equivalent to, or greater than, that prescribed for a full-time student of that year level in a particular jurisdiction. The *full-time equivalent (FTE)* of a student is equal to 1.0.

The *full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff* value is a measure of staffing resources used. All full-time staff, employed full time and engaged solely on activities that fall within the scope of ABS Schools, Australia, have a FTE value of 1.0.

Full-time equivalent (FTE) student/teaching staff ratios are calculated by dividing the number of FTE students by the number of FTE teaching staff. They are an indicator of the level of staffing resources, not class size.

Government schools are those which are administered by a state or territory government.

Non-government schools include Catholic and Independent affiliations. The Catholic affiliated group is the largest non-government affiliated group in Australia. The Independent affiliated group is made up of schools affiliated with the Anglican schools system. Other schools have associations with religious or secular bodies, or are entirely independent.

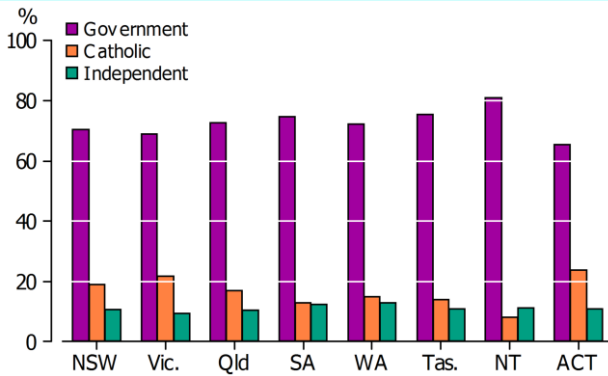
Remoteness Area is a structure of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC). It classifies areas sharing common characteristics of remoteness into broad geographical regions. In this article, Major Cities and Inner/Outer Regional Areas are examined.

schools. Three in every five (62%) non-government schools were Catholic and nearly two in five (37%) were Independent schools.

Over the past decade there has been a decline in the number of government schools in Australia, while the number of non-government schools has increased.

Between 2000 and 2010, government schools decreased by 223 – including a comparatively large drop of 59 schools between 2009 and 2010. Part of this decrease can be attributed to decisions affecting structural changes of schools, for example, amalgamations of secondary schools so that there are two campuses for one school rather than two

Affiliation of schools in each state and territory – 2010



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

schools. So while the number of government schools has decreased, the number of students enrolled in government schools has still increased over the past decade (by 1.3%).

Over the same period, the number of non-government schools increased by 91, mainly driven by the rise in numbers of Independent schools (79 since 2000). However, there has been a slight decrease in Independent schools since 2008 (from 1,024 to 1,017).

...state and territory differences

Between 2000 and 2010, the number of government schools decreased in most states and territories, while the number of non-government schools increased.

In 2010, the Australian Capital Territory had the greatest proportion of non-government schools (35%), followed by Victoria (31%). This was mainly driven by the high proportion of Catholic schools in both the Australian Capital Territory (24%) and Victoria (22%). Independent schools made up around 10–13% of schools across all the states and territories. The Northern Territory had the lowest proportion of non-government schools (19%). This reflected the same pattern a decade earlier.

Seven in ten school students were enrolled in government schools, two in ten in Catholic schools and one in ten in Independent schools.

Students

In 2010, there were 3.5 million students formally enrolled in all Australian schools (an increase of 7% since 2000). Of these students, seven in ten (66%) were enrolled in government schools, two in ten (20%) in Catholic schools and one in ten (14%) in Independent schools (compared with 69%, 20% and 11% respectively in 2000).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

In 2010, there were around 163,000 students who were identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander enrolled in Australian schools – an increase of 3.9% since 2009. In comparison, non-Indigenous students increased by less than 1%. The increase in Indigenous student enrolments may partly be due to increases in the propensity for Indigenous students to identify as such, or improvements in Indigenous data collection.

In 2010, 15% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in non-government schools compared with 35% of non-Indigenous students.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in non-government schools accounted for 0.4% to 1% of the total student population in each state and territory, except for Victoria (0.1%) and the Northern Territory (7.5%). The majority of Indigenous students attending non-government schools in the Northern Territory were attending Catholic schools.

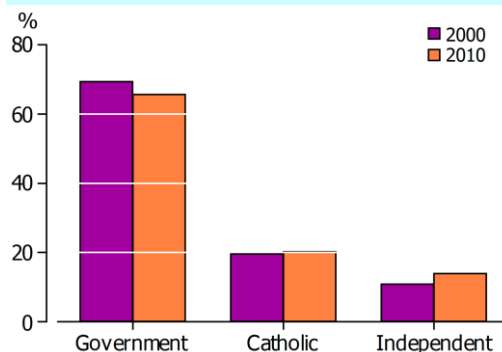
Although government schools continue to educate the majority of students in Australia, the number of students enrolled in non-government schools has been increasing at a faster rate over the last decade. Since 2000, Catholic and Independent schools had the largest proportional increases in the number of students (11% and 37% respectively) while the number of students in government schools increased by only 1.3%.

In 2010, there was little difference between the proportions of male and female students enrolled in government and non-government schools.

...disability or health conditions

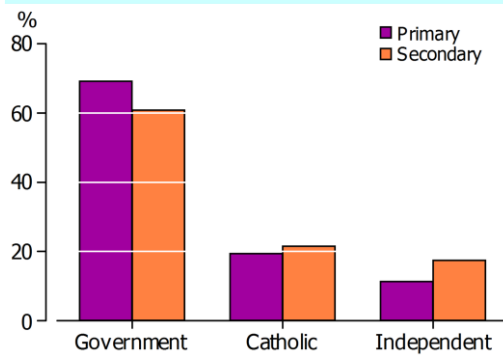
The ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Training estimated that there were around 135,000 students, aged 15 years and over, who had a disability or long term health condition, for example asthma or a mental health condition.

School affiliation of students – 2000 and 2010



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

Students at primary or secondary school by school affiliation – 2010



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

There was no significant difference between these students attending government schools (17%), Catholic schools (14%) or Independent schools (12%).

...in primary and secondary schools

In 2010, around two million students were enrolled in primary schools and around 1.5 million students were enrolled in secondary schools. A higher proportion of students were enrolled in government primary (69%) and secondary (61%) schools than students enrolled in non-government primary and secondary schools. The proportion of students enrolled in Catholic and Independent schools was lower in primary schools (19% and 11% respectively) compared with secondary schools (22% and 17% respectively).

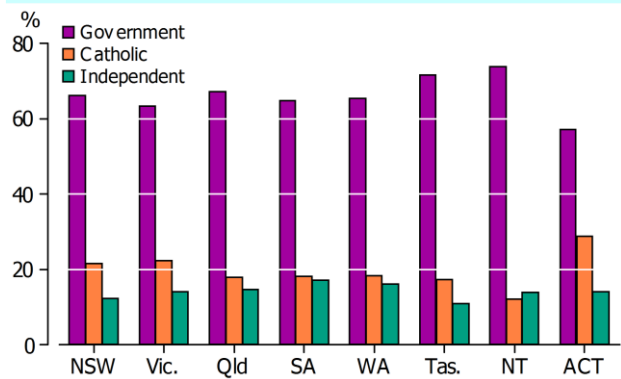
Many students may not remain in one particular type of school (government or non-government) for their entire schooling. For example, some students may attend a government primary school and complete their education in a non-government secondary school.

...state and territory differences

In 2010, student enrolments varied across the states and territories by school affiliation. Reflecting the proportion of government and non-government schools in the states and territories, students were most likely to be enrolled in government schools in the Northern Territory (74%) and least likely to be enrolled in government schools in the Australian Capital Territory (57%).

Students in South Australia were the most likely to be enrolled in Independent schools (17%), while students in the Australian Capital Territory were the most likely to be enrolled in Catholic schools (29%).

School affiliation of students by state and territory – 2010



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

Staffing

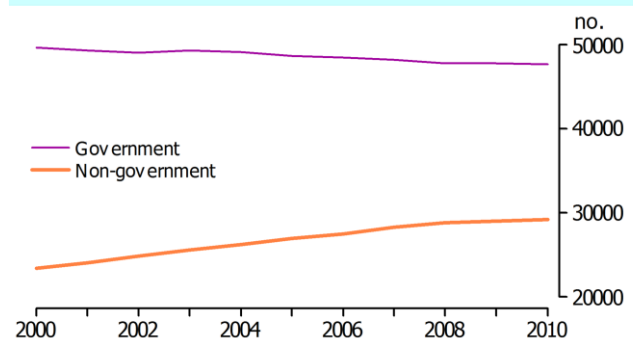
As school student numbers have increased, so too have the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff. In 2010, there were around 251,000 FTE teaching staff, representing an increase of 15% since 2000 (218,000).

Reflecting student enrolment patterns, the rate of increase of FTE teaching staff between 2000 and 2010 was higher in non-government schools (30%) than in government schools (9%). For secondary schools, the increase of FTE teaching staff in non-government schools was five times greater than in government schools (30% compared with 6%).

For secondary schools, the increase of FTE teaching staff in non-government schools was five times greater than in government schools.

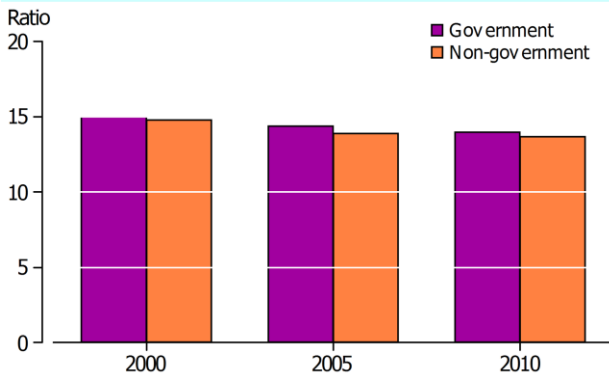
Since 2000, there has been a small increase (5%) in the overall number of male FTE teaching staff across all schools. However, the increase only occurred in non-government schools. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of male FTE teaching staff increased by almost one-quarter (24%) in non-government schools, compared with a decrease of 4% in government schools.

Male teachers by school affiliation – 2000 and 2010



Source: ABS [Schools, Australia, 2010](#) (cat. no. 4221.0)

FTE(a) student to teaching staff ratios by school affiliation – 2000, 2005 and 2010



(a) Full-time equivalent.

Source: ABS *Schools, Australia, 2010* (cat. no. 4221.0)

...student to teaching staff ratio

Full-time equivalent (FTE) student to teaching staff ratios are calculated by dividing the number of full-time students by the number of full-time teaching staff. They are an indicator of the level of staffing resources used in schools and are not a measure of class size. Theoretically, the lower the student to teaching staff ratio, the higher the availability of teacher services to students.⁴

In general, the student to teaching staff ratio has decreased across all affiliations in the previous 10 years. In 2010, student to teaching staff ratios were lower in government primary schools than non-government primary schools

(15.4 compared with 16.5). For secondary schools, the opposite was the case, with lower student to teaching staff ratios in non-government secondary schools (11.7) compared with government secondary schools (12.3).

Government funding

All schools receive funding from both the Australian and the state and territory governments, with the proportion of funds received varying between school sectors. Overall, the majority of total public expenditure is allocated to government schools.⁵

...government schools

Under constitutional arrangements, state and territory governments have the responsibility of providing funding for all Australian children of school age. State and territory governments provide the majority of funding to government schools and the Australian government provides supplementary funding under the *National Education Agreement (2008)*.

In 2008–09, total government recurrent expenditure on all schools was \$38.9 billion. Of this, \$30.9 billion was provided to government schools, representing 79% of total government recurrent expenditure on all schools. This was similar to the pattern in 2004–05, where total government recurrent expenditure on government schools represented 78% of total government recurrent expenditure on all schools.

Government recurrent expenditure on school education(a) – 2008-09

	NSW	Vic.	Qld	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Aust.
	(\$ million)								
Government schools									
Australian government	1 119	807	690	260	346	91	76	53	3 441
State and territory governments	8 643	5 849	5 718	1 862	3 604	690	505	543	27 415
Total	9 762	6 656	6 409	2 122	3 950	781	581	596	30 856
Non-government schools									
Australian government	1 823	1 456	1 146	457	605	121	70	109	5 787
State and territory governments	797	471	497	136	278	44	31	43	2 297
Total	2 620	1 926	1 643	594	884	165	101	152	8 084
All schools									
Australian government	2 942	2 263	1 836	717	951	212	146	162	9 227
State and territory governments	9 441	6 319	6 215	1 999	3 882	734	536	586	29 713
Total	12 382	8 582	8 051	2 716	4 833	946	682	748	38 940

(a) See source for advice on caveats and further interpretation of the data.

Source: Productivity Commission, 2011, *Report on Government Services 2011*

In 2008–09, state and territory governments provided 89% of total government recurrent expenditure on government schools and the Australian government provided 11%.

...non-government schools

The Australian government provides the majority of funding for non-government schools. Under the *Schools Assistance Act (2008)*, based on the funding model introduced in 2001, the Australian government allocates funding according to the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school community. Recently, the equity of this funding model has been the source of public debate, and in mid-2010 the Australian government announced a *Review of Funding for Schooling*. In March 2011, legislation was passed extending existing non-government school funding to the end of 2013.⁶

In 2008–09, total government recurrent expenditure on non-government schools was \$8.1 billion, representing 21% of total government expenditure on all schools. This reflected a similar pattern seen in 2004–05.

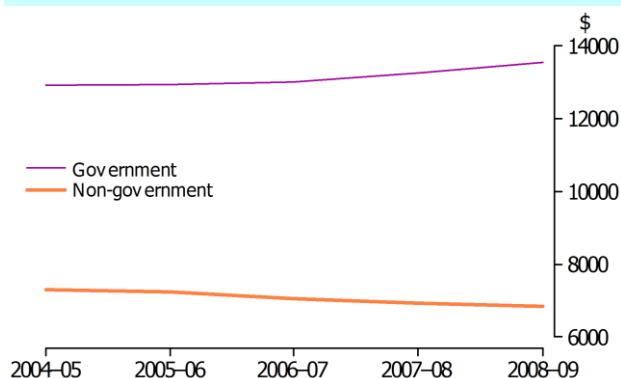
Nearly three-quarters (72%) of government recurrent expenditure on non-government schools was provided by the Australian government in 2008–09, with the state and territory governments providing 28%.

...private funding

Along with government funding, non-government schools also receive significant income from private sources, including fees, charges, donations and income.⁷

In 2008, private sources accounted for 43% of total non-government school income. In Catholic schools, private sources accounted for 29% of total school income and in Independent schools, private sources accounted for 58% of total school income.

Government recurrent expenditure per FTE(a) student by school affiliation(b) – 2004-05-2008-09



(a) Full-time equivalent.

(b) In 2008-09 real dollars.

Source: Productivity Commission, 2011, *Report on Government Services 2011*

Pathway definitions

Year 12 marks the completion of the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. Entry to this level is usually the completion of Year 11 or equivalent and the duration is usually one year of full-time study.

Non-school qualifications refer to qualifications at the Postgraduate degree level, Master degree level, Graduate diploma and Graduate certificate level, Bachelor degree level, Advanced diploma and Diploma level and Certificates I, II, III, IV level and certificate not further defined.

...funding per student

Government recurrent expenditure per full-time equivalent (FTE) student is measured by dividing total government recurrent expenditure by the total number of FTE students. Holding other factors constant, a low or decreasing government recurrent expenditure per FTE student may represent better or improved efficiency.¹ Since 2004–05, government expenditure per FTE student has increased in government schools and decreased in non-government schools.

In 2008–09, government recurrent expenditure per FTE student in all schools was \$11,260, an increase (in average annual real terms) of 0.4% per year since 2004–05.

Government expenditure per FTE student in government schools was \$13,544, an increase of 1.2% per year since 2004–05. In comparison, since 2004–05, government expenditure per FTE student in non-government schools decreased by 1.6% per year to \$6,850 in 2008–09.

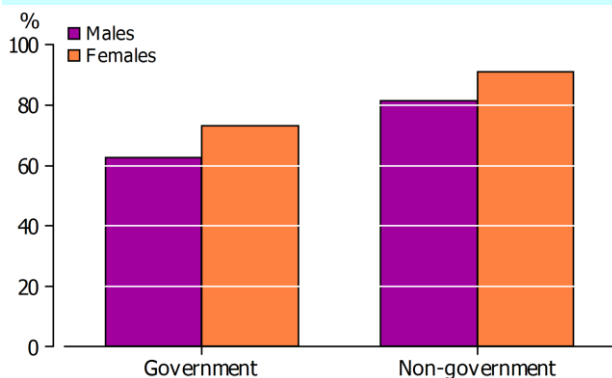
On average, total private sources across all non-government schools amounted to \$5,400 per student.

Pathways

Student outcomes are not exclusively determined by the type of school they attended. They may be affected by several factors that lie outside the influence of the school system, such as student commitment, family environment and the proximity of the school to other educational facilities.¹ However, there is some argument that the distribution of engaged and achieving students is linked to the better resourcing of some schools over others and the public and parental perceptions of particular schools and sectors.⁸

The following analysis uses the 2010 ABS Survey of Education and Work to look at the educational outcomes of young adults (15–24 years) who were not currently at school. This analysis only captures the school the young adult last attended and as such does not distinguish between those who may have attended a combination of government and non-government schools over their schooling life.

People aged 15-24 years with Year 12 by school affiliation(a) and sex – 2010



(a) Last school attended, excluding those still at school.

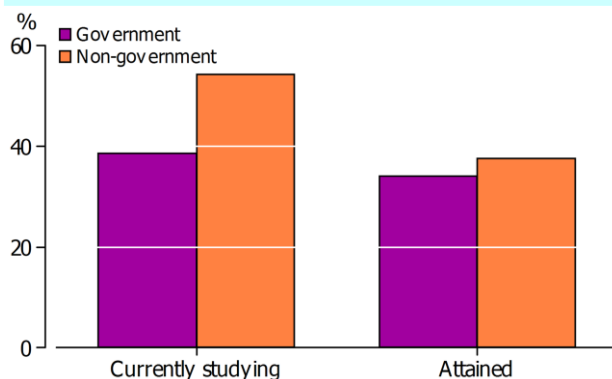
Source: ABS 2010 Survey of Education and Work

...Year 12 attainment

Research has shown that those who have completed Year 12 are more likely to continue on to further education as well as enter into the workforce.⁹ Looking at young adults not currently studying at school in 2010, those who had last attended a non-government school were more likely to have completed Year 12 than those who had last attended a government school (86% compared with 68%). There was little difference between those who last attended Independent schools (88%) and Catholic schools (84%).

The same trend could also be observed across Major Cities and Inner/Outer Regional Areas. In Major Cities, young adults who had attended a non-government school were more likely to have attained Year 12 than those who last attended a government school (88% compared with 72%). In Inner/Outer Regional Areas, young adults who had last attended a non-government school were also more likely to have attained Year 12 than those who had last attended a government school (79% compared with 57%).

People aged 15-24 years who are studying for, or have attained, a non-school qualification by school affiliation(a) – 2010



(a) Last school attended, excluding those still at school.

Source: ABS 2010 Survey of Education and Work

Young men were less likely than young women to have attained Year 12, irrespective of the type of school they last attended. Amongst young adults who last attended a government school, 63% of men had attained Year 12, compared with 73% of women. Amongst young adults who last attended a non-government school, 81% of men and 91% of women had attained Year 12.

For further information on Year 12 attainment, please see [Year 12 Attainment](#) in *Australian Social Trends, March 2011* (cat. no. 4102.0).

Non-school qualifications

In 2010, young adults (15–24 years), who were not currently studying at school and who had last attended non-government schools were more likely to be currently studying for, or have already attained, a non-school qualification than those who last attended government schools.

...currently studying

Over half (54%) of young adults, who last attended non-government schools, were enrolled in study for a non-school qualification at the time of the survey. In comparison, under two-fifths (39%) of young adults who last attended government schools were enrolled in study for a non-school qualification.

There was little difference between the sexes in the proportion who were enrolled in study for a non-school qualification and last attended a government school (38% of men and 39% of women) or a non-government school (53% and 56% respectively).

...attained a non-school qualification

Young men were less likely to have attained a non-school qualification than young women. In 2010, 31% of young men who had last attended a government school had attained a non-school qualification compared with 39% of young women.

The level of non-school attainment was likely to be higher for those who last attended non-government schools compared with those who had not. For example, of those young adults who had last attended non-government schools and had attained a non-school qualification, 39% had attained a Bachelor degree or above, compared with 25% of those who had last attended government schools.

Looking ahead

The number of student enrolments and the number of schools have increased more in non-government schools than in government schools. While it has been suggested that this growth is due to the lack of 'public values'

being taught in government schools, others contend that non-government schools fail to protect these values, instead seeking exclusivity.¹⁰

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) confirmed in the [National Education Agreement \(2008\)](#) that all children should be engaged in, and benefit from, schooling. A sound education at the primary and secondary levels is expected to provide a solid base for further learning experiences and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce.

Endnotes

- 1 Productivity Commission, 2011, [Report on Government Services 2011](#), Chapter 4, *School Education*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 4.3.
- 2 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 9 July 2010, [Review of School Funding – Final Terms of Reference](#), <www.deewr.gov.au>.
- 3 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010, [My School](#), ACARA, Sydney, <www.myschool.edu.au>.
- 4 Caution should be used when interpreting the student to teaching staff ratio. A low or decreasing student-to-teacher ratio may reflect decreasing efficiency, but may also reflect a higher quality education system, if it is assumed that teachers have more time for each student and that this results in better student outcomes. Student to teaching staff ratio can be affected by several factors, including the proportion of special needs students and the degree to which administrative work is undertaken.
- 5 All data on government funding is sourced from: Productivity Commission, 2011, [Report on Government Services 2011](#), Chapter 4, *School Education*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- 6 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011, [School funding certainty a step closer](#), DEEWR, Canberra, <www.deewr.gov.au>.
- 7 Data on private funding is sourced from: Harrington, M., 2011, [Australian Government funding for schools explained](#), Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, pp. 22-23.
- 8 Bonner, C., 2011, [My School, PISA and Australia's Equity Gap](#), Australian Policy Online, Canberra, <www.apo.org.au>, p. 5 and Figure 2.
- 9 Foundation for Young Australians, 2009, *How Young People are Faring 2009*, Foundation of Young Australians, Melbourne, p. vii, <www.fya.org.au>.
- 10 Denniss, R., Macintosh, A. and Wilkinson, D., 2004, [The Accountability of Private Schools to Public Values](#), No. 71, The Australian Institute, Melbourne, p. 4.

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