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Cardus Education Survey Australia

Australian Schools and the Common Good

Albert Cheng and Darren Iselin

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Albert Cheng and Darren Iselin

Foreword

Good education is critical and reflective and good educators know that it is necessary to model these qualities in their own practice. It takes courage to come together with mutual differences and ask the deep questions about what education is for and reflect on whether an education forms graduates in distinctive ways. This is what the CES Australia project has done. The project humbly asks these questions on behalf of education in Australia as a whole, reporting on the Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian school sectors. This research rightly proposes that academic excellence and economic utility should not be the only priorities for education but that civic, religious and spiritual formation of graduates is critical to the common good.

Australia has a diverse education system often heralded for the school choice policies which underpin its pluralist society. All schools in Australia typically enjoy a greater level of public funding than their counterparts in North America. Over a decade ago Cardus Education began to compare school sector graduate outcomes in the U.S. and Canada with a particular emphasis on Catholic, independent non-religious and independent religious schooling. This robust instrument has rapidly become a benchmark for measuring the impact of the independent school sector (religious and non-religious) in North America; it was definitely time to add Australia to the suite of CES reports.

The CES Australia extends the research to another large and unique educational jurisdiction in which the Christian school sector has a strong legacy with over 50 years of continuous growth. Australia's social context and educational trajectory has similarities and key differences when compared to the U.S. and Canada. This report prompts helpful comparisons of education policy, the impact of secularism on Christian education and supports an exploration of such global themes as social isolation and well-being.

Paying attention to a broader set of graduate outcomes benefits all school sectors. For educators with a particular commitment to the Christian tradition and its attendant practices of faith formation, it is essential. The fact that this report finds such closely woven ties between school, family, church and community in the formation of belief and practice of graduates only re-enforces the importance of fostering a principled pluralism in which religious faith remains a trusted voice in the public square. Critical reflection is an important way to earn trust. The willingness to offer this analysis to the conversation is a gift to Australian education and society and a demonstration of the commitment of Christian education in Australia to the common good.

Dr. Beth Green

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Executive summary

The Cardus Education Survey (CES) Australia analyses the influence of the Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schooling sectors in Australia on the academic, vocational, social and civic development of their graduates. This report builds upon the corpus of Cardus Education Survey research from the USA and Canada compiled since 2011. This corpus has documented the contribution of secondary school graduates to civil society and the common good.

Education for the common good, that is, a functioning and flourishing society, is orientated towards the cultivation of character and commitment in the hearts and minds of students. It is hoped that schools shape young people into the kind of people who enrich and benefit their neighbours and the community.

To investigate the formation of young Australians, a survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 4913 Australians ages 25 to 39 who completed secondary school between 1998 and 2011. Based on this data collected between October and December 2019, this report identifies six major themes regarding the later-life outcomes of Australians educated in four of the nation's schooling sectors: Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools:

- Formation: Reflections on school and educational experiences
- Work: Educational attainment, employment, vocational pathways and income
- Belonging: Involvement in associations, groups and causes
- Generosity: Giving through donations and volunteering
- Family: Marriage and relationships
- Religion: Faith commitments and spiritual practices

The findings of the Cardus Education Survey Australia reveal that, across all sectors within Australian education, graduates contribute to the common good and sustain civic life in varying degrees and various ways. Some key findings include:

1) **Graduates' respective experiences of school were not exactly the same. Different types of schools emphasised several educational goals to various extents, though there were some similarities across the school sectors.** Catholic, Independent and Christian school graduates reported similar levels of emphasis within their schools on academic excellence, character development and preparation for university or career success. Over 70 percent of Christian school graduates believed their school prepared them to find a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life as well as equipped them to deal with the problems of life. About 50 to 60 percent of graduates from other sectors gave the same assessment.

2) **Different educational experiences appeared to translate into different life paths in terms of further education, employment and income.** Independent school graduates were most likely to complete post-secondary study. Almost half of them obtained at least a bachelor's degree compared to just over one-third of the population. Whilst Catholic school graduates reported the highest household incomes, Christian school graduates reported the lowest household incomes despite also reporting the lowest unemployment rates. Within all four schooling sectors, levels of educational attainment, employment and income were much lower for individuals who grew up in non-metropolitan locales compared to individuals who grew up in metropolitan areas. Notably, these disparities were least pronounced in Government schools.

3) **Schools play some role in enriching the social fabric and cultivating membership or participation in a variety of civic associations.** Australian 25- to 39-year-olds belong to a variety of groups. Membership in a sporting, leisure or cultural group was most

common (32 percent of respondents belonged to such a group) whilst membership in a political party or trade union was much less common (9 and 12 percent of respondents belonged to those groups, respectively). Christian school graduates were comparatively more likely to belong to a trade union (20 percent), a political party (20 percent) or a church or religious group (45 percent). Independent school graduates were most likely to belong to a business or professional organisation (35 percent).

4) **Australian 25- to 39-year-olds were almost twice as likely to donate money than to conduct volunteer work. These forms of civic engagement varied across graduates from different school sectors.** One in three of these Australians have done volunteer work within the past 12 months compared to the three in five individuals who have donated money over the same time period. Volunteering was most common among Christian and Independent school graduates. About half of Christian school graduates and two in five Independent school graduates reported volunteering. These graduates appeared to volunteer for a variety of organisations including religious, environmental, arts and culture, and political organisations as well as groups dedicated to helping the poor. In contrast, Christian and Independent school graduates gave at similar rates as Catholic and Government school graduates.

5) **Graduates across the four sectors demonstrated different patterns of family formation.** About half of Australian graduates aged 25 to 39 were married. Of these graduates, 15 percent have divorced at some point. Christian school graduates were most likely to marry and never divorce; 53 percent of them have done so, a rate that is about 10 percentage points higher than graduates of other school sectors.

6) **Schools take different approaches and place different emphases on the importance of fostering a sense of the transcendent. Graduates from the four sectors had differing views of God, spiritual commitments, and rhythms of religious practice.** One quarter of Catholic and Independent school graduates believed that "God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today", and another quarter believed that "God does not exist." Forty-five percent of Christian school graduates agreed with the former position. One in five Government, Catholic and Independent school graduates reported not knowing what to think about God. Prayer is the most common form of religious practice among Australian 25- to 39-year-olds, followed by attending a religious service and then engaging with a religious text. Engagement with these practices is most common among Christian school graduates followed by Catholic and Independent school graduates and then Government school graduates.

It is hoped that these findings from the CES Australia will provide a resource for further analysis as well as important discussions — both within and across school sectors — regarding the purpose and practice of education for the common good in Australia.

Section One

Introduction: The Cardus Education Survey Australia Project

"Education is a field that is crucial to the wellbeing and functioning of Australia as a whole and every local community in it. Through education, individuals are given the opportunity to fulfil their potential, as well as develop the capacities needed to contribute to the economy and be active and productive citizens and members of social and cultural communities."[1]

A quality school education, in partnership with the home and wider community, shapes the lives of young people. Education for the common good, that is, a functioning and flourishing society, is orientated towards the cultivation of character and commitment in the hearts and minds of students. Through education, young people are prepared and shaped into the kind of people who enrich and benefit their neighbours and the community.

For nearly a decade, Cardus, a Canadian independent think tank with intellectual hubs located across North America dedicated to the renewal of social architecture, has gathered and analysed data about the ways secondary school graduates contribute to and engage with the common good in early adulthood. The survey, called the Cardus Education Survey (CES), has been administered in the United States in 2011, 2014 and 2018 as well as in Canada in 2012, 2016 and 2018. Data from the CES has become the foundation of a growing corpus of numerous reports about the educational contribution from a variety of schooling sectors – including Government, Catholic, non-religious Independent and religious Independent schools.[2] The data have been used to influence school practice, educational reform and public policy across North America.

Convinced of the importance of the CES findings and the robustness of the survey instrument, a consortium of Australian Christian school associations came together in 2019 to implement the CES in Australia, leading to the formation of the CES Australia Project. Whilst the project was overseen and licensed through Cardus and their senior research fellows, the Australian implementation of the CES was entirely funded and coordinated by a project team representing a consortium of six Australian Christian school associations: Adventist Schools Australia (ASA), Associated Christian Schools (ACS), Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS), Christian Education National (CEN), Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA).

Educating for the Common Good: The Australian Education Context

Along with many other educators, these associations maintain that all Australian schools – whether government or non-government, religious or secular — share responsibility for the flourishing of Australian society. This task requires a commitment to not only academic learning but also shaping citizens and character development. In this sense, all education is public—and should be, as some contend, publicly funded—because it advances the public good. Schools play a critical

[1] Reid, 2019, p. ix.
[2] Casagrande, Pennings, & Sikkink, 2019; Green, Sikkema, Sikkink, 2018a; Green, Sikkema, Sikkink, 2018b; Green, Sikkema, Sikkink, Skiles, & Pennings, 2016; Pennings, Sikkink, Berner, Dallavis, Skiles, & Smith, 2014; Pennings, Sikkink, Van Pelt, Van Brummelen, & von Heyking, 2012; Pennings, Sikkink, Wiens, Seel, & Van Pelt, 2011.

role in sustaining our shared way of life and wellbeing.

Such a commitment requires schools to inculcate values, norms and civic responsibilities oriented towards the common good. These formative efforts may be expressed differently across educational models and schooling sectors, but they are affected by educational practices and public policies.

Indeed, common educational values and purposes have long been espoused in Australian educational documents and, because of government funding conditions, *all* schools currently subscribe to Australian Curriculum (or equivalent) aims and aspirations. Furthermore, all schools are expected to adopt common goals in documents that are explicated in the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. These goals affirm a shared aspiration for all Australian children to "become confident and creative individuals" and "successful lifelong learners."[3] There is also a desire to form "active and informed members of the community who have empathy for the circumstances of others and work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments."[4]

A commitment to the common good also recognizes 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.

Educational leaders Lyndsay Connors and Jim McMorrow propose that such national documents reinforce individual, economic and democratic purposes that seek to align education with Australia's egalitarian tradition. These national policies provide Australian schools across all sectors with a framework of universal opportunity whereby "students from every social group achieve their personal best, while the rights of one are grounded in a common commitment to the rights of all."[5] At the same time, these national documents recognise the concept of the common good, which acknowledges that the benefits accruing to a community are more than the sum of the benefits to individuals within the community.

The relative emphasis placed on individual, economic and democratic purposes ebbs and flows over time. For example, the importance of democratic equality has been, in varying degrees, a dominant lens through which a vision of the common good has been expressed within schooling communities. There is a national aspiration to provide all children with access to educational opportunities. However, over the past forty years, public policy debates and educational initiatives have increasingly reinforced another educational vision that has shifted the purpose of education towards more utilitarian and economic ends.[6]

Since the 1980s, many argue that the ideology of neoliberalism has redefined education policy and the subsequent educational purposes within Australian schooling. Within this view, education's main function is to improve social mobility and an individual's economic or psychological wellbeing. Schools are at their best when they successfully provide students (at lowest cost) with the skills necessary to be employed and an economically productive member of society. Efforts to improve teaching, learning, and educational leadership are cast as technical questions of efficiency and efficacy rather than moral or civic questions. Attachments and

[3] Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019, p.6.
[4] Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019, p.8.
[5] Connors & McMorrow, 2015, p.6.
[6] Peters, 2020; Biesta, 2020.

obligations to neighbour, community, city, or nation are downplayed. Common good is understood as the sum of the private goods of discrete individuals.

Individual rights, equal dignity, and free enterprise benefit our shared lives in innumerable ways and are constitutive of the common good. However, we wish to temper the prevailing individualistic ideology by describing a conception of the common good that presupposes that one's good is dependent on and bound up in the good of his or her neighbour. That is, a member of a community and the community itself cannot be said to be flourishing if another member is not. Such a vision reflects both the individual and social nature of humans. 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.[7]

Any absence of this broader vision of the common good affects the way education is conceptualised. Its absence narrows educational purpose to economic and utilitarian ends, which in turn, narrows the educational outcomes that are explicitly measured and cited. It should not be surprising that metrics such as educational attainment, employment, income and individual subjective well-being carry the most weight in public discourse about education. Yet a broader vision and reimagining of education may be what is needed to fulfil the longings we share for our loved ones, communities and nation. As Alan Reid, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of South Australia, recently lamented: "At a time when Australian society needs a more caring, generous, compassionate and respectful community, education policy is based on a suite of policy assumptions that focus on self-interest and individuals".[8]

Repurposing a more holistic and compelling educational vison within Australian schools, consistent with the attainment of the goals in the Mparntwe Declaration, requires a renewed commitment to measure what we value within a complex, diverse, pluralistic society that goes beyond economic productivity and solely privatised aspirations. This necessitates identifying and celebrating the multifaceted ways in which young people who leave their school communities contribute to the flourishing of the communities they inhabit and whether these contributions are still evident many years after they graduate.

The Cardus Education Survey Australia

For these reasons, since 2011, the CES has collected not merely income and employment metrics of secondary school graduates, but also their behaviours and values that enrich and sustain a vibrant public square. It provides a snapshot of how schools cultivate and engage with a range of social, civic, cultural, academic and spiritual outcomes.

The CES was adapted for the Australian context and administered between October and December 2019 by ORIMA Research to a nationally representative sample of 4913 adults ages 25 to 39 who attended secondary school in Australia. These individuals are members of graduating classes from 1998 through 2011 and popularly termed "millennials".

This age range of 25 to 39 years is intentional. Respondents would be far enough removed from their secondary school settings to have had experiences in a myriad of other educational, familial, community and vocational contexts. Yet

[7] Casagrande, Pennings, & Sikkink, 2019.

[8] Reid, 2019, p. xxi.

they would be close enough to their secondary schooling experience to allow for some maturity, reflection and recollection on their formation and development during those years.

In all, 3913 respondents completed the survey online and another 1000 respondents completed it via computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology. Smaller segments of the population, such as graduates from Christian schools, were oversampled in order to boost the sample sizes and decrease margins of error in the analyses. In results shown below, survey weights are implemented so that the results remain nationally representative.

A full-length documentation of the sampling methods, survey administration, creation of weights and other initial steps to clean the data are provided in online supplementary material that can be found at https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/research/.

Emergent Themes in the Cardus Education Survey Australia

The CES Australia data reveal how millennials from across the full spectrum of Australian secondary schools contribute to the common good within contemporary Australian society. In the subsequent sections, this report covers six dimensions of this contribution:

- Formation: Reflections on secondary school and educational experiences
- Work: Contributions to society through employment, vocational pathways and level of income
- Belonging: Involvement in a diverse range of associations, groups and causes, including social, political, cultural and religious ones
- Generosity: Giving through donations and volunteering
- Family: Marriage commitments and relationships
- Religion: Faith and spiritual commitments and practices

In the subsequent sections when we describe specific findings, the results are disaggregated by graduates from each sector. We present the results in this fashion to showcase the unique ways that graduates from each of these types of schools contribute to the common good.

Results for all of the analyses can be accessed in a supplementary online appendix at https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/research/. This report, for the sake of brevity, focuses on a selection of results that convey the general tenor of all of the findings. Readers interested in more detailed examination of the results are directed to the website.

This report presents two sets of results based on different samples. The first set of results, referred to as the "full sample" in this report is based on all 4913 of our respondents. The second set of results, referred to as the "online sample" in this report, is based only on the 3913 respondents from the online version of the survey and excludes the 1000 respondents who completed the CATI version of the survey.

Because we were able to administer a longer version of the survey online, we have additional demographic information about respondents in the online sample but not in the full sample. For example, respondents in the online sample reported their financial situation during childhood, whether they grew up in a religious household, whether they grew up with both biological parents and the extent to which their parents emphasised academic success.

Consequently, the results based on the full sample are raw averages of the Australian population. The results based solely on the online sample adjust the raw averages to account for differences in demographic background characteristics that influence graduate outcomes.

The analysis based on the full sample provides a descriptive snapshot of Australian millennials from Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools on a variety of outcomes. In contrast, results based on the online sample provide a similar picture that adjusts results for the influence of other background characteristics to reflect the ways that school, family and other associations throughout adolescence jointly shape a new generation of Australian adults from each school sector. Although adjusting for background characteristics does not, in all likelihood, completely remove the impact of all background characteristics and distil results to a school sector's causal effect, it attempts to account for some non-school factors that may explain some of the differences between Australian adults. That said, results from both samples are mostly similar but in subsequent sections, we will point out distinctions when relevant.

Data Situated Within a Story

The data tell stories of how graduates from the Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian school sectors contribute to the common good. At times, we offer commentary on the statistical significance of various results as it is always possible that observed differences are not material but simply due to random chance. Statistically significant results suggest that differences between school sectors are meaningful and not arbitrary because they exceed conventional margins of error associated with any type of survey. Indeed, we add 95 percent confidence intervals to all of our figures that depict educational outcomes across the sectors.

That said, we encourage readers to not be solely focussed on statistical significance per se, but to consider how substantive patterns tell potential stories about schools from each educational sector and their relation to the common good. These stories both validate and underscore that all education has a public dimension and also challenges other dominant and, at times, competing stories regarding the public-private education binary in Australian public policy discourse.

An aim of this report is to enable reflection and discussions about assumptions and new possibilities. Thus, the findings, though presented separately by sector, are not intended as competitive claims between sectors within Australian education. Whilst the study has been financially supported by six Christian school associations, the CES Australia project has been conducted in a manner to ensure independent analysis that will be of benefit to all Australians. We hope that identifying differences across sectors will assist each sector to understand their own story within the wider story of Australian millennial graduates and stir up new ways to imagine what constitutes a good education in the pluralistic yet shared social architecture that is contemporary Australian society.

Section Two

Overview: Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian Schools

Before presenting our findings from the CES Australia in subsequent sections, we provide some history and other contextual details about the Australian education system in this section. Australia is characterised by a range of school offerings — Government, Catholic, and Independent schools.

Historically, education for the common good was seen as the responsibility of schools that aimed to instil civic virtues which transcended mere self-interest and personal benefit. In decades past, however, there were many groups of students who were denied access to schooling in Australia — for example, girls, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children living with a disability, migrant children, those who were poor and those living in rural or remote locations. The vision of education for a common good, was not always readily accessible, or seen as good for all.

Even so, schools have played a significant role in Australia's nation building and civic development with educational historians Craig Campbell and Helen Proctor proposing that schools "have played an important part in the national story—culturally, socially, economically and even politically. There is no civic institution that has had a greater impact on social and family life."[9] Schooling in Australia has powerfully shaped communities and values and helped form a sense of identity as a nation.

A Long History of a Plurality of Australian Schooling Options

A rich schooling tapestry incorporating a plethora of educational threads has shaped Australian education. Commencing with the early Church of England (now referred to as Anglican) schools of the colony and the missionary-minded Methodist and Presbyterian schools, the establishment of schools provided institutions for character development and rudimentary academic learning based on a foundation of Protestant theology.[10] The founding of Catholic schools from the 1820s provided a distinctly Catholic alternative, often serving poor, marginalised groups who did not fit within the Protestant hegemony that existed at the time.[11] By the mid-19th century, the Grammar school models provided a comprehensive education model for the wealthier classes from a predominantly Church of England background.

Ambitious and visionary social experiments pertaining to educational reform in the mid-19th century gave rise to the Public Instruction and Education Acts, which championed free, compulsory and secular education for all Australians and were seen as a response against the sectarian church-run models of schooling of the time.[12] These reform initiatives underscored the importance of shared commitments pertaining to the common good and resulted in the flourishing of the public or Government education sector.

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[9] Campbell and Proctor, 2014, p. 248-249.
[10] Barcan, 1980; Shellard, 1983.
[11] Barcan, 1988; Clark, 1988; Evers & Chapman, 1995; Justins, 2002.
[12] Barcan, 1988; Marginson, 1997.

Further important contributions were later added by the Lutheran and Seventh-Day Adventist denominational schools of the late 19th century. Christian parent-controlled schools arose from post-World War Two immigration, often of Dutch Reformed heritage and the predominantly local church-based Christian Community schools, encompassing Baptist, Pentecostal and other evangelical schools. These schools were established in the 1970s and 1980s. The creation of Jewish, Islamic schools, non-denominational independent, alternative schooling movements and home-schooling programs have also contributed to this historical mosaic of diverse schooling options that have shaped Australia's educational narrative.

Such pluralism and diversity have shaped Australian contemporary education, demonstrating a commitment to preparing Australian school graduates to uphold shared commitments that include active civic participation and democratic ideals. At the same time, each of these educational models and systems have maintained a distinctive educational ethos, form and function.[13]

Contemporary Australian Schools

In most Australian survey data collections related to schools, three dominant sectors are represented: Government (state or public) schools and two major groups within the non-Government (private) sector, namely, Catholic schools and Independent schools. For the purposes of this inquiry, we also explore a fourth category, Christian schools, which have historically been represented as a range of Protestant denominational sub-categories within the Independent schools' sector.[14]

We present a brief overview of each sector represented in the CES Australia project, also describing the demographic makeup of each sector's graduates who are represented in our sample. These individuals completed secondary school in Australia between 1998 and 2011 and are now between the ages of 25 and 39.

Government Schools

The Government school sector in Australia remains the largest sector within Australian education with over 65 percent of Australia's nearly 4 million school-aged students attending a Government school. There are currently 4786 Government primary schools, 1043 Government secondary schools plus 497 combined primary and secondary schools in Australia and an additional 333 special schools.[15] Recent trend data indicates growth in new student enrolments in excess of 6 percent over the last five years.[16] Government schools are administered by departments of education within each state and territory by a director-general or equivalent and are almost entirely publicly funded.

According to the CES Australia data, Government school graduates aged 25 to 39 typically came from nonreligious family backgrounds. Only 13 percent of them reported that their family thought religion was "very or extremely important." This was a lower rate than the 20 to 40 percent of graduates from other sectors who came from religious families (see Figure 2.1).

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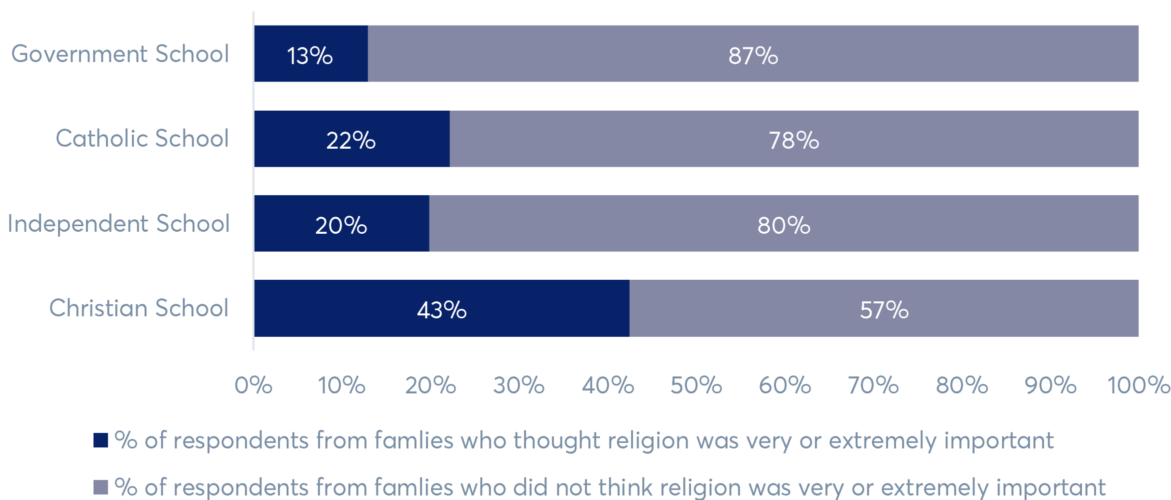
[13] Connors & McMorrow, 2015.
[14] Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.
[15] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.
[16] Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

Figure 2.1

Survey respondents who grew up in religious families



Based on other indicators on the CES Australia sample, Government school graduates were marginally more socio-economically disadvantaged during their childhood. As shown in Figure 2.2, 19 percent of graduates had mothers who had completed at least a bachelor's degree, whereas at least one quarter of graduates from other schooling sectors had mothers who possessed at least a bachelor's degree. About one-third of Government school respondents did not grow up with both of their biological parents compared with no more than one quarter of graduates from other school sectors (see Figure 2.3). Over one fifth of Government school respondents reported having financial struggles during childhood and one quarter indicated that their parents pushed academics "a fair amount or extremely"— rates that are similar to graduates from the Christian school sector (see Figure 2.4 and 2.5).

Figure 2.2

Mother's highest level of education

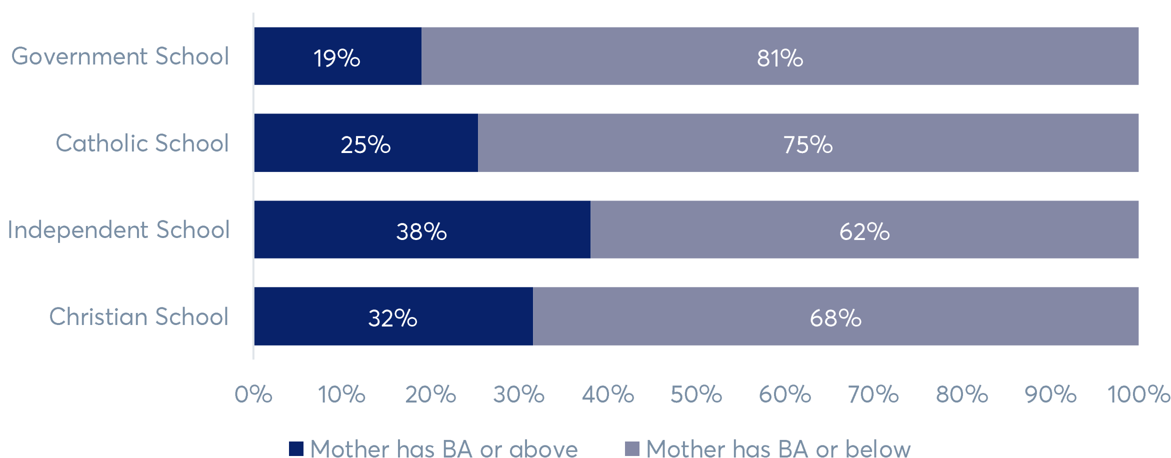


Figure 2.3

Family structure during childhood

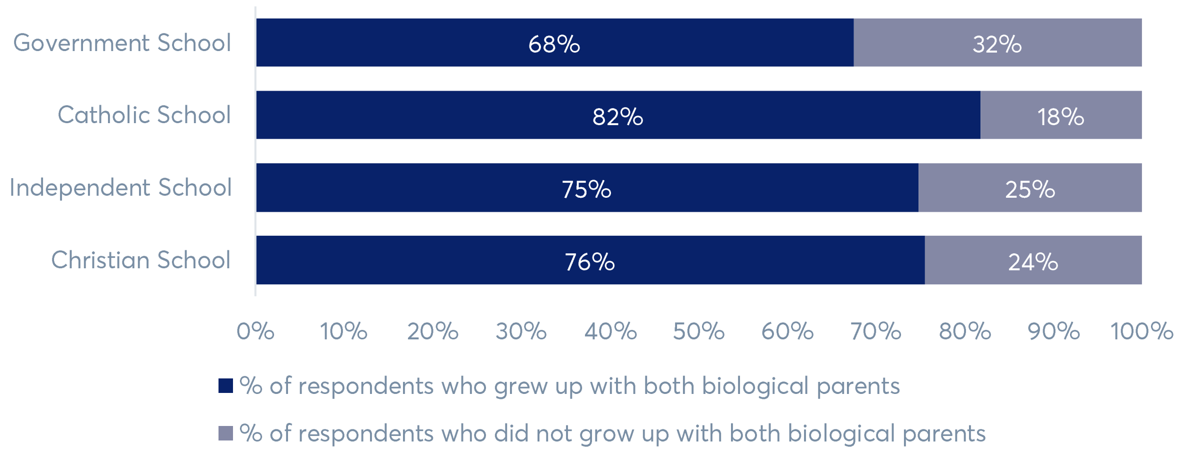


Figure 2.4

Respondents whose perception of their family growing up was financially challenging

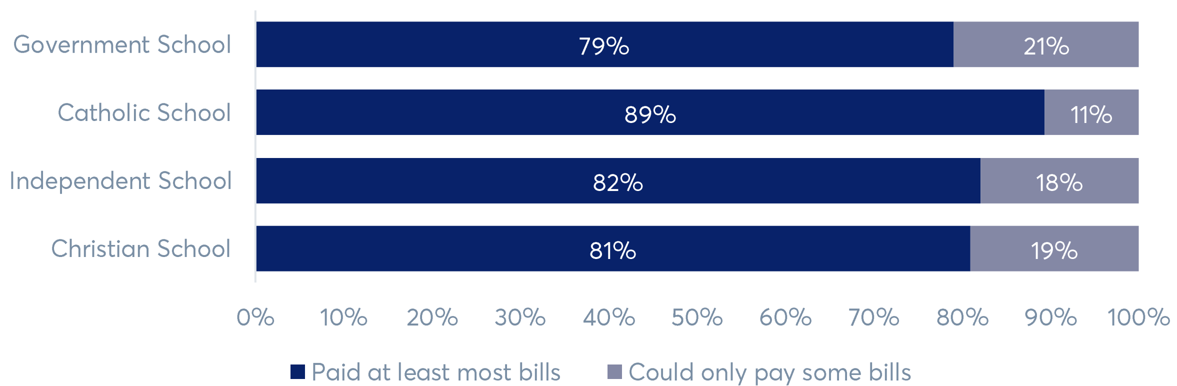
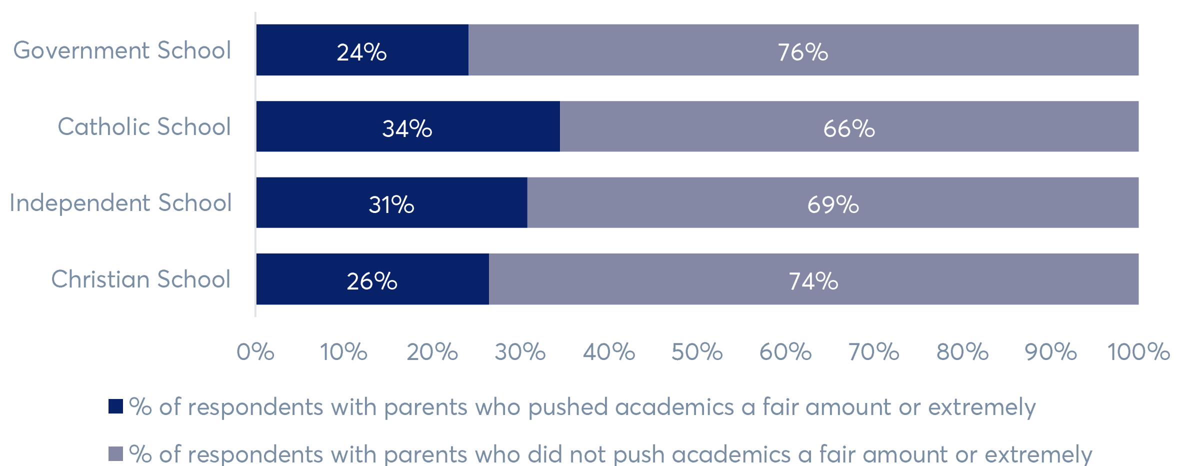


Figure 2.5

Respondents whose parents emphasised academics



Catholic Schools

The Catholic school sector is the second largest sector of schooling Australia with 20 percent of the nation's total school enrolments. Catholic schools vary widely in educational culture and incorporate teaching orders with a specific mission of education which bring a distinct character to each Catholic school. The ethos of most Australian Catholic schools is based on morality or faith and historically has also been underpinned by a commitment to social mobility and social advancement.[17]

The sector incorporates both low fee-paying schools that are established in socially disadvantaged regions right through to high fee-paying elite schooling options. Almost all Catholic schools (96 percent) are administered within the Catholic system. There are also a small group of schools that operate independently yet identify within the Catholic sector.

Currently in 2020, 1248 Catholic primary schools, 319 secondary schools and an additional 149 combined primary and secondary schools operate in Australia. Secondary enrolment trends indicate that 63 percent of total enrolment growth in Catholic schools occurred between 1985 and 2018. Nearly 40 percent of all Catholic schools are located outside of major metropolitan areas.[18] Catholic schools are classified as a system because funding and governance decisions are centralised either through a diocesan or state office.[19] The National Catholic Education Commission is responsible for policy and advocacy at the national level.

Data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that in 2017, for the first time in 12 years, the proportion of students in the Catholic school system fell below 20 percent. The data also indicated that the absolute number of children enrolled in Catholic schools in 2017 was less than the previous year, reversing a decades long trend of growth within the Catholic schools sector.[20] Historically, the Catholic schools sector has been robust and for nearly 200 years has consistently established an important and integral role within the Australian educational landscape.

Catholic school graduates in the CES data by and large came from religious families. Almost two-thirds of these graduates currently self-identified as Catholic or of any other Christian denomination, though we were unable to discern from the results whether this was their religion during childhood as well. Nevertheless, 22 percent of Catholic school graduates said that they came from families who thought religion was "very important" or "extremely important" (see Figure 2.1).

Religion, however, was not the only important value reported by Catholic school graduates during their childhood. Out of all sectors, these graduates were most likely to grow up with parents that emphasised academic success "a fair amount or extremely." As shown in Figure 2.5, over one third of Catholic school graduates in this sample had such parents.

Catholic school graduates also reported the highest levels of financial stability during childhood among all other survey respondents. About one-fifth of graduates from non-Catholic schools reported their family only being able to pay some of their bills during their childhood. Catholic school graduates were half as likely as other graduates to be in the same childhood financial situation. Catholic school graduates were most likely to grow up in an intact family with 80 percent of them reporting that they grew up with

[17] Freund, 2001.
[18] National Catholic Education Commission, 2019b.
[19] National Catholic Education Commission, 2019a.
[20] National Catholic Education Commission, 2019a.

both biological parents. These findings are depicted in Figures 2.3 and 2.4.

Independent Schools

Whilst there is considerable diversity within the Independent school sector, close to 85 percent align with some religious tradition.[21] Nearly a quarter of the sector are Anglican church-affiliated schools, whilst nearly 8 percent of all Independent schools are affiliated with the Uniting Church in Australia. The sector also includes a number of Islamic schools (6 percent) and Lutheran schools (6 percent). Seven percent of the sector are Catholic in their denominational affiliation but choose to be aligned with the Independent sector instead of a Catholic system.[22] The sector also includes a large percentage of non-denominational schools (14 percent) as well as a host of alternative schooling models including a growing group of special assistance schools.

Whilst the majority of Independent schools are located in major cities, nearly a third of all Independent schools are located in regional areas. There is considerable variation in enrolment patterns for such a broad range of schooling choices incorporating open enrolment and, in a small selection of Independent schools, selective enrolment options. Similarly, fee structures include low fee-paying schools right through to elite, high fee-paying Grammar school alternatives.

Based upon 2019 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, there are 211 independent primary schools, 54 independent secondary schools and 713 combined primary and secondary independent schools in Australia. The Independent sector also boasts a proportionally high 110 special needs schools. Over the past five years, the Independent schools sector has recorded the largest enrolment growth of any schooling sector in Australia. Since 2015, Independent schools have seen enrolment increase by 8 percent, a figure larger than the growth rates for Government schools (6 percent) and Catholic schools (1 percent).[23]

What kinds of families belonged to Independent schools? According to the CES Australia, one distinctive characteristic of Independent school graduates was their greater likelihood of coming from families with high educational backgrounds. Nearly 40 percent of these graduates had mothers who have completed a bachelor's degree (see Figure 2.2). This is in contrast to mothers of graduates of Government and Catholic school graduates, 19 and 25 percent of whom reported having mothers with the same level of education, respectively.

Independent school graduates, like Catholic school graduates, were also relatively more likely to come from families that emphasised academic success (see Figure 2.5). They were also just as likely as Catholic school graduates to come from families that emphasised religion, although not as strongly as the Christian school sector (see Figure 2.1).

Christian Schools

Over the past five decades, there has been consistent growth in a specific range of local, faith-based Independent schools and the emergence of what has become known as the Christian schools sector.[24] In the CES Australia, we explored these specifically termed "Christian schools" that have historically been represented as a range of denominational subcategories within the Independent schools category in all government and academic literature. Throughout the remainder of the report, we treat Christian and Independent school sectors as mutually exclusive.

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[21] Connors & McMorrow, 2015.
[22] Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020.
[23] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019.
[24] Etherington, 2008, p. 112.

Results for these two sectors are always reported as separate, non-overlapping categories.

The sector is difficult to define due to the diversity of denominational expressions and doctrinal emphases but commonly these schools are affiliated within Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Reformed traditions and denominations. Typically, these schools are locally governed and often begin as schools drawing on a network of church families from a local community. At the time when graduates involved in the CES Australia sample were completing their schooling (1998-2011), a large portion of these Christian schools were in the relatively early stages of their growth and development. Unlike the other sectors, significant infrastructure was still to be developed, both within the schools and often also in the surrounding communities. A number of these schools were commonly on the then-suburban fringes or in regional centres.

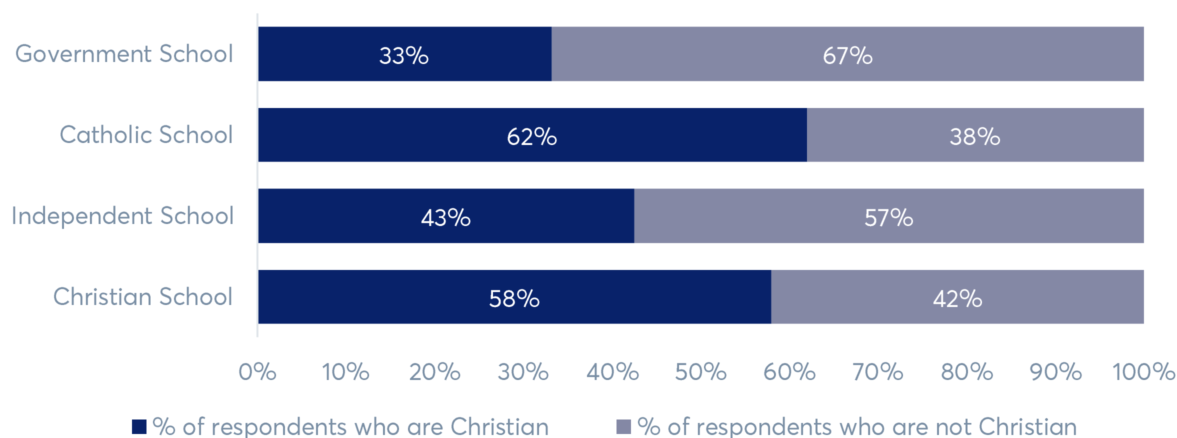
Christian schools are often also differentiated by a requirement for employees to adhere to a clear statement of Christian faith. However, it is not the case that their students all share the same religious tradition. This is possibly the result of many non-religious families purposefully seeking enrolments in these schools because of broad assent to common values, perceived affordability or local availability.

In fact, according to the CES Australia data, 42 percent of Christian school graduates did not self-identify as Christian (see Figure 2.6). In contrast, 67 and 57 percent of Government and Independent school graduates, respectively, did not currently self-identify Christian. The proportion of Christian school graduates who did not self-identify as Christian is 4 percentage points higher than the 38 percent of Catholic school graduates who did not self-identify as Christian. Meanwhile, 43 percent of Christian school graduates came from families that thought religion was "very or extremely important." This was nearly twice as high as the any other sector (see Figure 2.1).

Regarding other family background variables, Christian school graduates were similar to other graduates. For example, they were as likely as graduates from government schools to come from families that pushed academics "a fair amount or extremely." This pattern was in contrast to the Catholic and Independent sectors where the proportion of these families was higher (see Figure 2.5). Christian, Government and Independent school graduates were also equally likely to come from families that experienced financial instability (see Figure 2.4). However, Christian school graduates were more likely than Government school graduates to grow up with both biological parents and have mothers that possessed at least a bachelor's degree (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Figure 2.6

*Respondents who self-identify as Christian**



Note: Christian in this response includes respondents who identified their religion as one of the following: Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church, Presbyterian and Reformed, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, Oriental Orthodox, Salvation Army, Churches of Christ.

Membership in Christian school associations include well over 320 schools from every state and territory across Australia and represent a schooling sector within Independent schooling that provides education to over 145,000 students and employ approximately 20,000 staff. Given the significant size and continued growth of these schools, the CES Australia investigates these schools as a separate sector for the purposes of this report.

We begin in the next section with a discussion on the reflections of graduates from each of Australia's four schooling sectors on their secondary school experience.

Section Three

Formation: Reflections on School and Educational Experiences

The concept of formation refers to the way that schools shape the values and character of young people. Formation occurs through formal curriculum choices as well as the relationships and norms of the school community. Schooling is about formation, not just about passing information. Civic education, for instance, includes instruction in how the Australian Government is organised and ensuring that students are familiar with the content of legal documents or democratic procedures such as elections and how legislation occurs. But civic engagement also entails forming a kind of student that cares for the civitas — the people that make up the community in which students find themselves — and actively participates in the community to seek its good. Both the formal curriculum and school-community engagement initiatives shape the kind of people that students become.

No school is truly neutral to ultimate questions about the purpose of education and normative questions about the kinds of people their students should become. These are questions of ideals and value — moral questions.

Some of this education is explicit. All schools have answers to the question of what is worthy or unworthy of attention. Priorities can be discerned from what schools espouse through the content of the curriculum or the formal rules that govern the life of the school.

Much of education also occurs implicitly. Priorities can also be discerned from what is *not* covered in the curriculum. There are unspoken rules that guide the ways teaching and learning is practiced within schools. For example, the way a teacher treats their students, parents or colleagues is governed not just by formal principles listed in a faculty handbook but by underlying norms within a school community.

No school is truly neutral to ultimate questions about the purpose of education and normative questions about the kinds of people their students should become. These are questions of ideals and value — moral questions. School practices thus must be seen as embodiments of the answers that school communities provide to these ultimate questions. More importantly, these practices make a lasting impression on students in terms of how they ought to relate to others once they graduate.

Schools are but one part of the larger moral ecosystem whereby shared commitments can be learned and where all young people can flourish. The family plays an important role as do the other communities and individuals with whom students are associated. Friendships, work, sporting activities, television shows, the internet and other media are all influential. Education, whether it comes from schools or other sources of influence, shapes how young people relate to others and cultivate virtues for common life. Schools are one of society's critical institutions for the development of skills, attitudes, values and habits.

Through the CES Australia, we investigated the formational practices in Australian schools. The survey asked respondents to reflect on their school's cultural emphases and distinctives, their levels of satisfaction with their school and how well they felt their school prepared them for life within

contemporary Australian society. We used this data to examine millennials' perceptions of their past schooling experiences in order to consider how these experiences might influence their lives today.

Schooling Emphases

We begin with respondents' perceptions about what their secondary school emphasised. We obtained this information by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a variety of statements describing their respective school's emphasis on academic excellence, leadership and character development, autonomy and self-expression, community service and religious values.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a majority of respondents from across all sectors expressed agreement with the statement: "Academic excellence was emphasised by my school community." Whilst 61 percent of Government school graduates in the full sample assented to this statement, the proportion is 10 to 20 percentage points higher among graduates from the Catholic, Independent or Christian sectors. These percentages were quite similar when we adjusted for background characteristics using the online sample. These results are shown in Figure 3.1.

We additionally asked respondents whether schools emphasised leadership development, character development and community service. We found patterns similar to the results regarding academic excellence where the proportion of non-Government school graduates who agreed that their school emphasised these other aims was up to 20 percentage-points higher than the proportion of Government-school graduates who shared the same opinion.

In contrast, we found no differences across each of the four sectors when we asked respondents whether their school emphasised autonomy and self-expression.

Other results highlighted the uniqueness of Catholic and Christian sectors. Graduates from those schools were more likely than graduates of Independent and Government schools to agree that spiritual and religious values were a significant emphasis. As shown in Figure 3.2, at least eight out of every 10 graduates from

Figure 3.1

Percentage of respondents who agree that academic excellence was emphasised in their school.

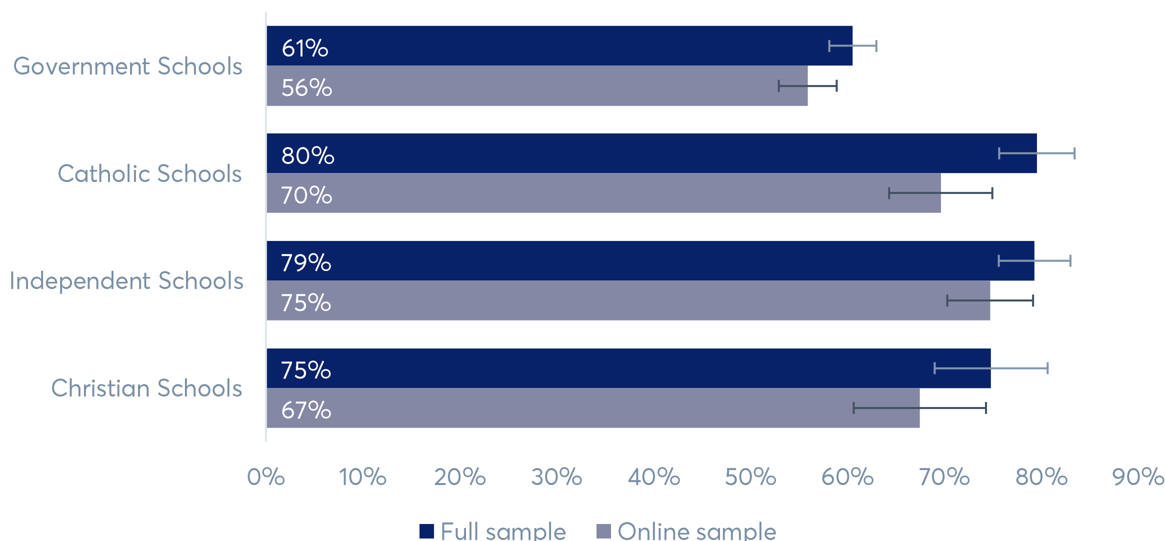
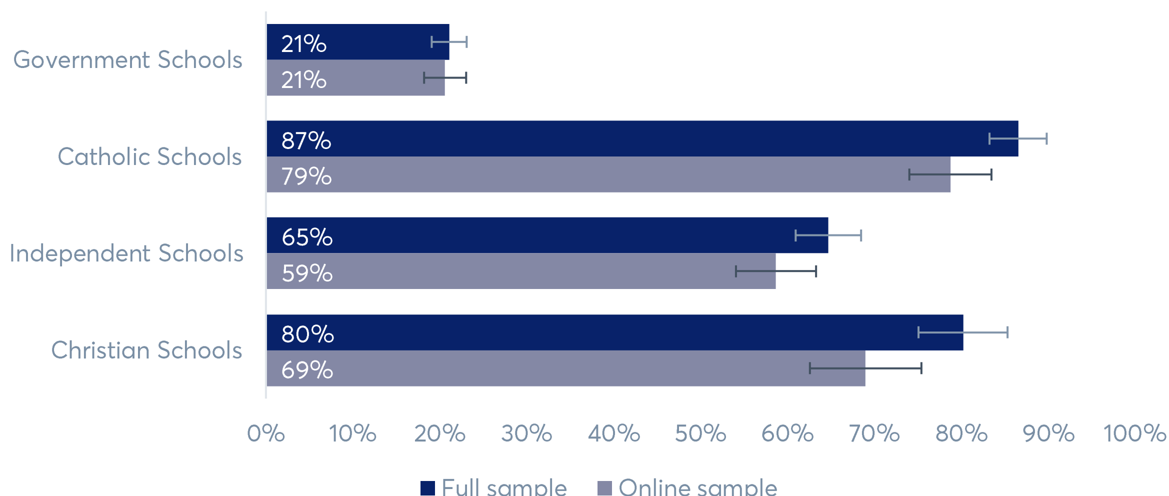


Figure 3.2

Percentage of respondents who agree that spiritual and religious values were emphasised in their school.



Christian schools and Catholic schools, agreed that "spiritual or religious values were a very important feature of my school community." Only two out of every 10 Government school graduates shared the same opinion, and six out of every 10 Independent school graduates did likewise. One might find the comparatively low rate of agreement that spiritual or religious values were emphasised in Independent schools relative to Catholic and Christian sectors surprising, given the overwhelming majority of Independent schools that are aligned with some religious denomination or tradition.[25]

Notably, academic excellence was reported as the value that was given highest priority within Government and Independent schools. Among Government and Independent school graduates, the proportion of respondents who agreed that their school emphasised academic excellence was between five and 20 percentage points higher than the proportion of respondents who agreed that their school emphasised any other aspect such as leadership development, character development, community service and autonomy or self-expression. All this suggests that academic quality, though it certainly was not the only priority, was the highest priority in the Government and Independent schools attended by respondents in the CES.

Catholic and Christian schools, however, seemed to place more emphasis on spiritual and religious values than on academic excellence, though again it is not as if they did not strongly emphasise the latter. The proportion of Catholic and Christian school graduates who agreed that spiritual and religious values were an important feature of their schooling was five to 10 percentage points higher than the proportion who agreed that academic excellence was emphasised to a similar extent.

School Satisfaction

To evaluate whether graduates were satisfied with the education they received in their respective schools, we queried respondents about their satisfaction on five aspects of their schooling experience: the quality of extracurricular activities,

[25] Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2020.

discipline, relationships with teachers, relationships with students and spiritual or religious discussions.

Across all sectors, respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction. Between 70 and 90 percent of all graduates regardless of sector indicated that they were satisfied with each of the five respective aspects of their schools.

We note some minor cross-sector differences, however. At about 90 percent, Independent school graduates were most likely to express satisfaction with the quality of extracurricular activities, whereas 80 percent of Christian and Government school graduates shared the same sentiment. These results are shown in Figures 3.3.

Differences in satisfaction with extracurricular opportunities within the Christian sector were more pronounced between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' classification system, we compared responses of individuals who attended school from each of these two areas. As shown in Figure 3.4, although 84 percent of graduates from Christian schools located in metropolitan locales were satisfied with their extracurricular offerings, 74 percent of Christian school graduates from non-metropolitan locales shared the same opinion. However, we note that the difference was not statistically significant and simply raise the possibility of differences in educational access, subject offerings or resource constraints among schools from different locales, an issue that seems most noticeable within the Christian school sector. Government schools were the only sector where non-metropolitan graduates reported being more satisfied with extracurricular offerings than their metropolitan counterparts though the difference was small.

Turning to other aspects about their schools, about 75 percent of Government school graduates reported being satisfied with the quality of discipline and order at their school. This rate was about 10 percentage points lower than the rate in the non-Government sector.

Curiously, there were no differences in satisfaction with the quality of spiritual and religious discussions across school, despite the greater emphasis on spiritual and religious values in Catholic and Christian schools. This finding may be an indication of the varying educational priorities among different families. Some families regard religious instruction as an essential component of education while others do not. The diversity of schooling options appears to offer families a type of education consistent with their commitments and values, underscoring a benefit of educational choice.

Figure 3.3

Percentage of respondents who were satisfied with the quality of extracurricular activities at their school.

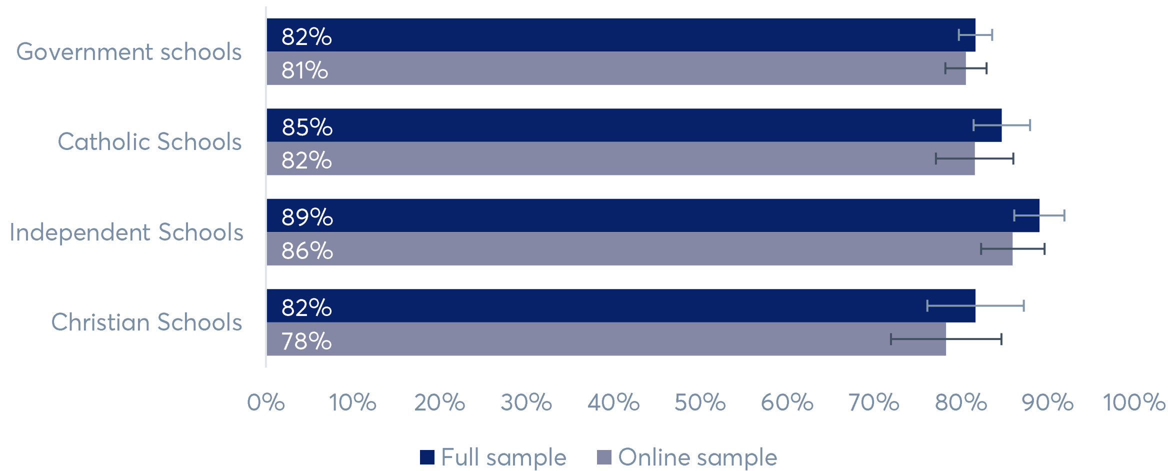
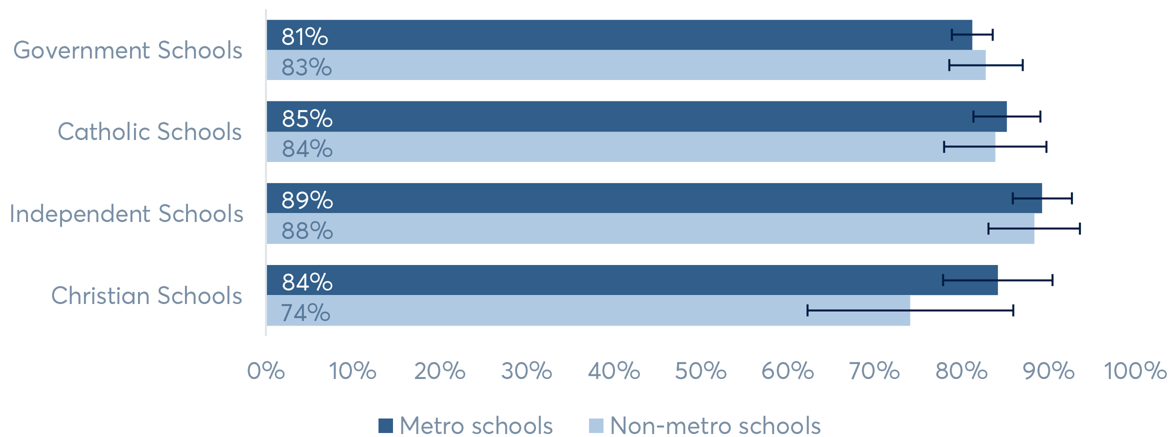


Figure 3.4

Percentage of respondents from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas who were satisfied with the quality of extracurricular activities at their school.



School Preparation

In our final set of questions that asked respondents to reflect on their past schooling experiences, we solicited opinions about how well respondents felt that their school had prepared them for life after graduation. For example, did respondents feel that their schooling had prepared them for success in a job or career? Or did their schools sufficiently prepare them for academic success at the university level?

Regarding these items, we found several differences across sectors. Many of these differences were consistent with the specific emphases of each sector reported earlier. For example, as shown in Figure 3.5, 60 percent of Government school graduates felt “somewhat prepared” or “very prepared” for university-level

academic success. In contrast, over 70 percent of graduates from non-Government schools gave their schools the same assessment. These differences based on the full sample are statistically significant.

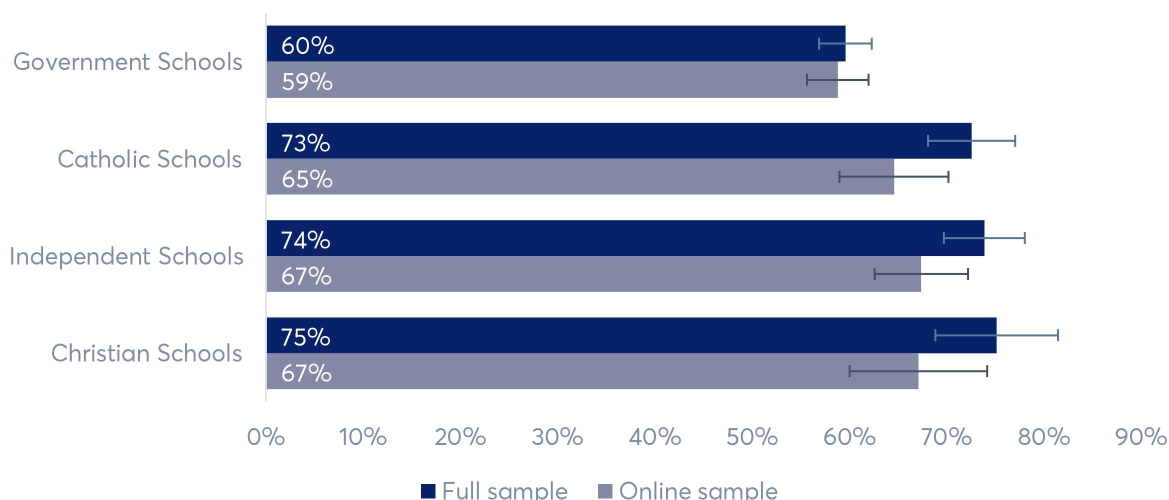
These differences attenuated when we used the online sample to account for other background characteristics such as whether respondents' parents pushed them towards academic success. This result suggests that family background contributes to the quality of academic preparation that students receive.

Despite the attenuation of the results after controlling for family background characteristics, the difference between Government school and the Independent school sector graduates remained statistically significant — a result consistent with the stronger emphasis on academic excellence in the Independent schools sector (see Figure 3.1). In other words, based on the assessments of the CES respondents, Independent schools appear to excel at preparing students for university-level academic work at least relative to Government schools.

Not every student has the intention of attending a university. As we discuss in greater detail in Section 4, about two-thirds of the CES sample does not have a bachelor's degree, opting to pursue vocational pathways and careers that do not require a university-level education. As a result, we asked respondents to also assess how well their secondary schools prepared them for career success. The results are presented in Figure 3.6. As with preparation for university-level academic success, respondents from non-Government sectors were more likely to feel "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared" for career success, with graduates from Independent schools most likely to have expressed this opinion. About 60 percent of graduates from non-Government schools reported feeling prepared for career success compared to just over half of respondents from Government schools, though differences attenuated once we adjusted for other background characteristics.

Figure 3.5

Percentage of respondents who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for academic success in university.



We further compared respondents who attended school in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Some noticeable patterns arose in this regard. As shown in Figure 3.7, 70 percent of graduates from Christian schools in non-metropolitan areas reported feeling "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared" for career success. This rate was just over 10 percentage points higher than Christian school graduates from metropolitan areas, suggesting different emphases among Christian schools across locales. The same may be true for Government schools, but the pattern is reversed among Independent schools where graduates from metropolitan areas felt more prepared for career success. However, we could not conclude that any of these differences was statistically significant. Whether these trends translate into different rates of employment is a topic we will address in Section 4.

Figure 3.6

Percentage of respondents who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for career success.

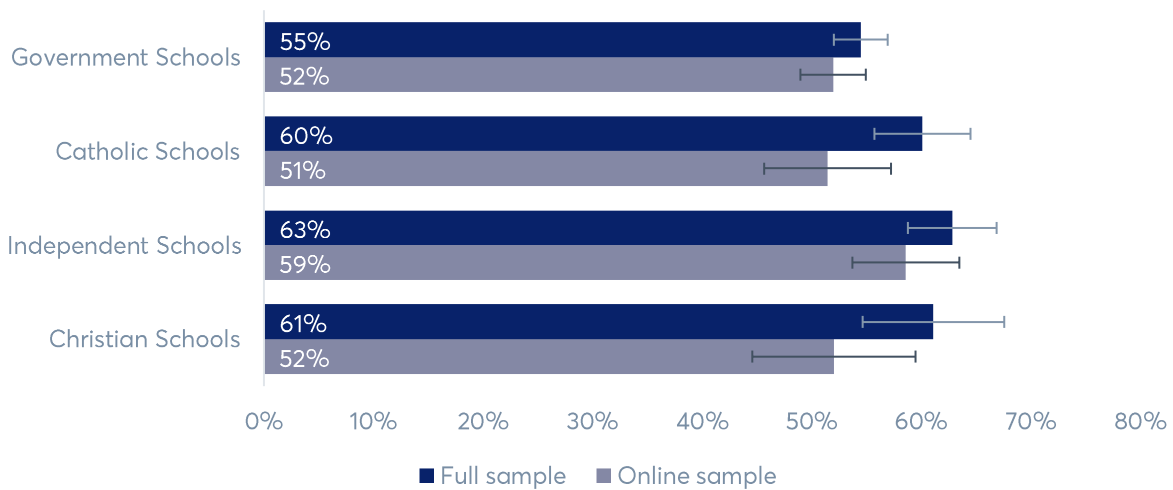
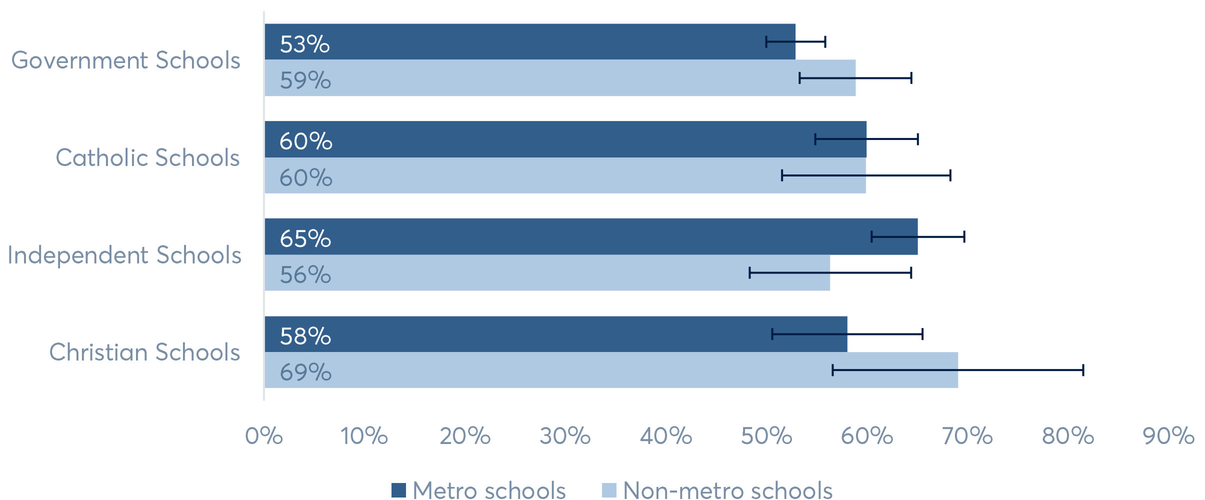


Figure 3.7

Percentage of respondents from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for career success.



In another item on the CES, we asked respondents how well their schools prepared them to interact with culture and society. We found no cross-sector differences, with 60 to 70 percent of respondents in the full sample feeling "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared" for this aspect of life.

Graduates of Christian schools were noticeably more likely to feel prepared for "finding a sense meaning, purpose and direction in life"; "dealing with the problems of life" and "dealing with personal relationships." Almost three-quarters of these respondents expressed these opinions compared to half to at most two thirds of respondents in the other sectors. These results are displayed in Figures 3.8 through 3.10.

The emphasis on finding purpose in life, dealing with life's problems and dealing with personal relationships, especially in Christian schools, underscores the ways in which some schools focus on a wider range of aims. These aims are likely critical for the wellbeing of individuals and communities, especially given rising rates of mental health issues and social isolation — topics we discuss in greater detail in subsequent sections of the report. Whilst academic instruction is an essential function, these other aspects of formation that assist young people in navigating their lives, understanding their place in the broader world, and asking questions about a life worth living are likely at least as important.

Figure 3.8

Percentage of respondents who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for finding purpose, meaning and direction in life.

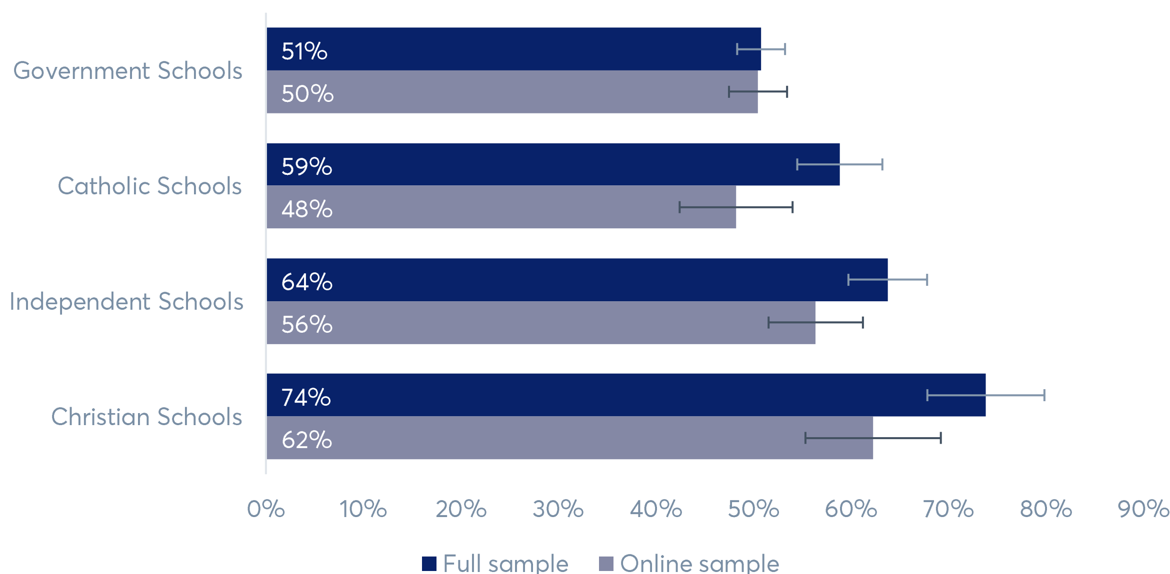


Figure 3.9

Percentage of respondents who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for dealing with problems of life.

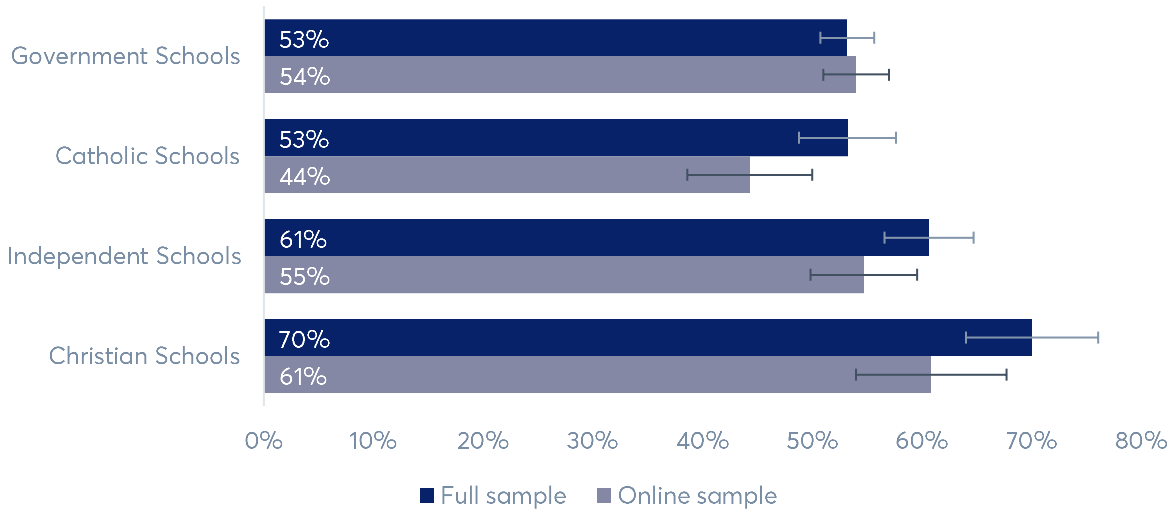
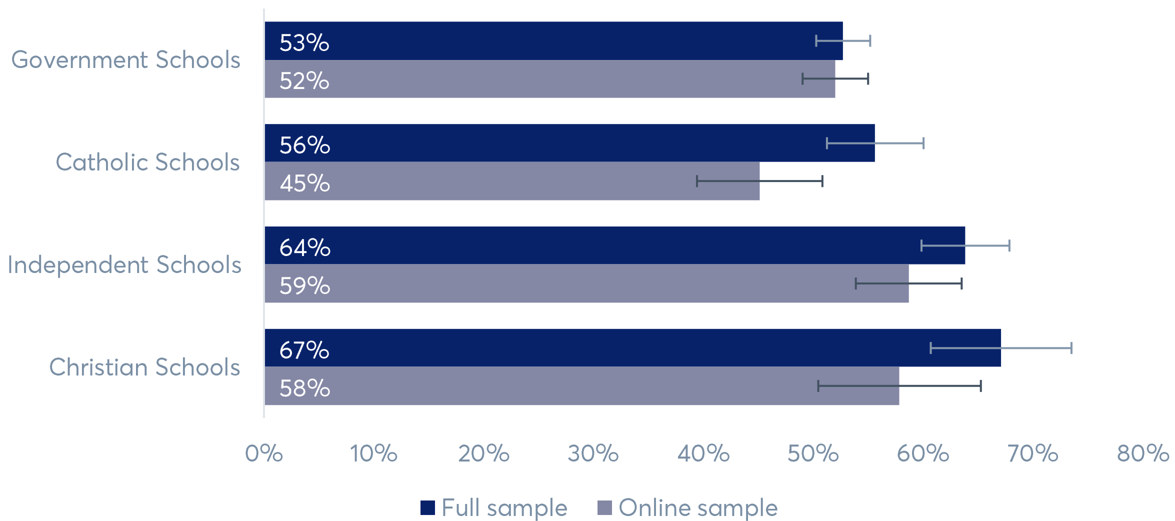


Figure 3.10

Percentage of respondents who felt somewhat or very prepared by their school for dealing with personal relationships.



Summary and Conclusions

In recent times, education has been framed almost solely around job preparation for social mobility and social efficiency. These elements — typically embodied in secondary schools through a focus on further education or employment — are constitutive of flourishing but not the entirety of it. In the results just presented, schools clearly emphasise academic learning, career preparation and university preparation but it is hardly all that they do. As our respondents seemed to attest to, schools prepare them for the common good, expressed not only economically but also civically, socially and religiously.

The CES data suggest that students' respective experiences of school are not exactly the same across school sectors. Different types of schools emphasise several educational goals to various extents. For instance:

- Independent school graduates recognised a greater emphasis on academic excellence, career readiness and preparation for tertiary education, alongside educational goals such as leadership or character development.
- Catholic schools also appeared to share an emphasis on academic excellence and a greater emphasis on spiritual formation compared to the Independent sector.
- Christian school graduates reported similarly high emphases on academic excellence but also gave much attention to spiritual formation. Graduates were most likely to report that they felt their schooling prepared them well to deal with life's problems, deal with personal relationships and to find meaning, purpose and direction in life.
- At the same time, we found many similarities across all schooling sectors. Graduates of Government schools and the different types of non-Government schools expressed, for example, equal levels of satisfaction with the relationships they had with their teachers and other students. They also felt similarly regarding the extent to which their schools emphasised autonomy and self-expression.

All of these formative schooling experiences potentially shape students' character and the kind of person they become once they graduate. Is there some evidence of this claim? In the subsequent sections, we turn to describing these life trajectories for respondents of the CES.

Section Four

Work: Educational Attainment, Employment, Vocational Pathways and Income

In the previous section, we described the ways Australian 25 to 39-year-olds remembered their secondary schooling experiences. We focused on the kinds of educational emphases graduates from Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools identified. We also presented data regarding how satisfied these individuals were with their schools and whether they felt that their school sufficiently prepared them for aspects of life after graduation, including post-secondary education and work.

Do the different perceptions across school sectors translate into different life paths? In particular, do the different perceptions of how well schools prepared them for further education or work have any bearing on actual outcomes related to educational attainment, employment and income?

We wish to challenge the utilitarian approach to education that maintains a narrow focus on these outcomes. Instead we want to articulate a fuller conception of the aim of education, underscoring the different ways it contributes to the common good.

Without question, these outcomes are widely used to evaluate secondary school graduate outcomes and success. Consider a recent report about Australian tertiary education that argued that a series of reforms would "have the effect of increasing public and private returns to education and training by encouraging greater participation in tertiary education, enhancing the workforce, and promoting economic growth, while reducing the social costs of unemployment and underemployment. This in turn would generate more tax revenue for government and reduce its expenditure in dealing with unemployment and underemployment. This would justify an increased investment in tertiary education and training by governments, without imposing a fiscal burden."[26]

The acquisition of professional skills, employment and having a stable income are constitutive of flourishing both for individuals and the communities in which they live. We recognise that these indicators when used appropriately provide an important snapshot of secondary school graduate outcomes.

We would also argue that such data does not provide a complete picture. We wish to challenge the utilitarian approach to education that maintains a narrow focus on these outcomes. Instead we want to articulate a fuller conception of the aim of education, underscoring the different ways it contributes to the common good.

This section's discussion of work and income is but one important aspect of graduate outcomes. Habits of home and family life, engagement with civil society, practices of giving and cultivation of friendships are worthy of attention too. As we will discuss in subsequent sections, these other facets of adult life add to the picture of how graduates have—or have not—been formed by their schools to use whatever material assets they have acquired in service to their neighbours and communities.

[26] Dawkins, Hurley, & Noonan, 2019, p. 29.

Educational Attainment

We begin by describing the educational attainment of graduates of Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools. Research would confirm that how far one goes in school plays a major role in subsequent employment and earnings.[27] Some scholars estimate that a post-secondary qualification is associated with a 20 percent increase in income as well as improved living conditions, social advantage and overall wellbeing for individuals.[28]

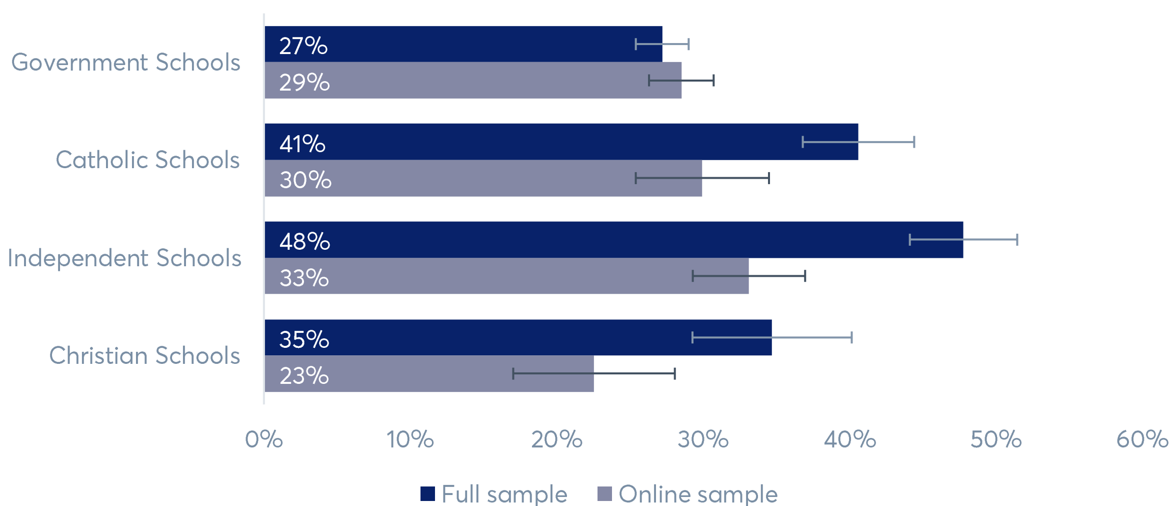
About three-quarters of 25- to 39-year-old Australians have some type of post-secondary credential: either a VET/TAFE award,[29] associate degree, bachelor's degree or a post-graduate qualification. There were no differences across the four school sectors with respect to the proportion of graduates having some type of post-secondary degree. Of respondents in the CES Australia, 39 percent of women and 31 percent of men have completed at least a bachelor's degree — estimates similar to OECD data on Australian graduates in 2017, which identified 45 percent of women and 34 percent of men aged 25 to 34 holding a bachelor's degree or higher.[30] These numbers represent an upward trend since 2000 when only 25 percent of women and 20 percent of men achieved a bachelor degree.[31] Key factors driving such increases were the Bradley Review,[32] which explicitly promoted increasing access and completion rates for higher education degrees in Australia, and educational policy initiatives that focussed on a renewed emphasis upon senior secondary school retention.

There were some differences across sectors at particular levels of educational attainment. In Figure 4.1, the CES Australia data is disaggregated to indicate the proportion of 25- to 39-year-olds who have at least a bachelor's degree in each school sector. Catholic and Independent school graduates had the highest rates of bachelor's degree attainment at 41 and 48 percent, respectively, when considering the full sample. Meanwhile, 27 and 35 percent of Government and Christian school graduates respectively, attained the same level of education. The findings highlight that Independent and Catholic schools produced bachelor's degree level graduates at a much higher rate than other sectors.

[27] Becker, 1964.
[28] Gonski et al. 2011, p.29.
[29] VET stands for Vocational Education and Training and TAFE stands for Technical and Further Education.
[30] OECD, 2019.
[31] Pilcher & Torii, 2018.
[32] Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008.

Figure 4.1

Percentage of respondents who have completed a Bachelor's degree.



At the same time, when we used the online sample to adjust these rates for demographic and socioeconomic background characteristics, these differences almost completely disappeared, though Christian school graduates still had the lowest levels of bachelor's degree attainment. Indeed, numerous researchers have identified the explicit links between socio-economic advantage and educational attainment within Australian schools.[33] These results based on the online sample suggest as much. As we discussed earlier in Section 2, Catholic and Independent school graduates were more likely than Government or Christian school graduates to have parents who pushed academic success "a fair amount" or "extremely." These results highlight the combined influence that school and home contribute throughout the educational journey.

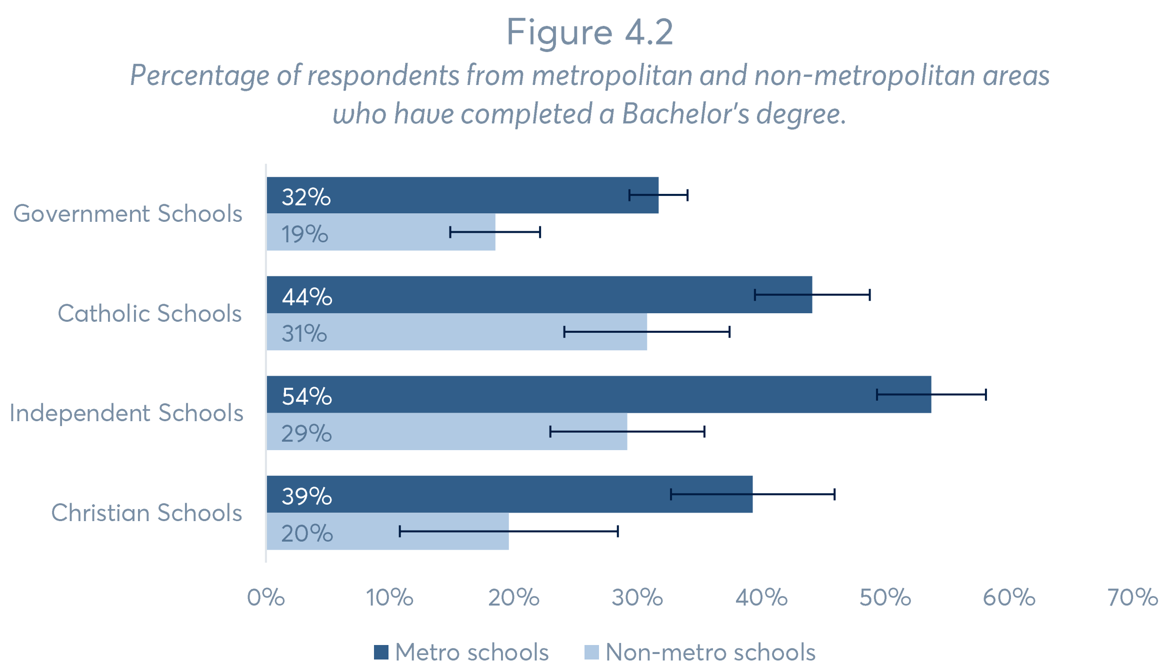
Equitable and accessible pathways for all Australian students irrespective of their postcode or region is a key area to address in ensuring shared commitments to the common good are worked out within all communities and regions.

Differences in bachelor's degree attainment rates were greater when respondents who grew up in metropolitan areas were compared with respondents who grew up in non-metropolitan areas. Not only did graduates from non-metropolitan areas potentially face different resource challenges but individuals from those areas may also have different employment and workforce-related opportunities than metropolitan school graduates. As displayed in Figure 4.2, bachelor's degree attainment rates were about 20 to 30 percent for respondents from non-metropolitan areas irrespective of school sector. These rates were 10 to 20 percentage points lower than rates for respondents from metropolitan areas. Within each sector, these differences were all statistically significant. Thus, the locale in which one grew up appears more influential for bachelor's degree

[33] Bonnor 2019; Connors & McMorrow, 2015; Gonski et al., 2011.

Figure 4.2

Percentage of respondents from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas who have completed a Bachelor's degree.



attainment than the school sector that one attends. Universities Australia reported similar findings, showing that the proportion of persons aged 25 to 34 years with a bachelor's degree or above decreased dramatically outside of major cities, though enrolments of undergraduate students from regional and remote areas have increased 50 percent since 2008.[34]

According to CES data, about three out of every 10 millennials grew up outside metropolitan areas. Equitable and accessible pathways for all Australian students irrespective of their postcode or region is a key area to address in ensuring shared commitments to the common good are worked out within all communities and regions.

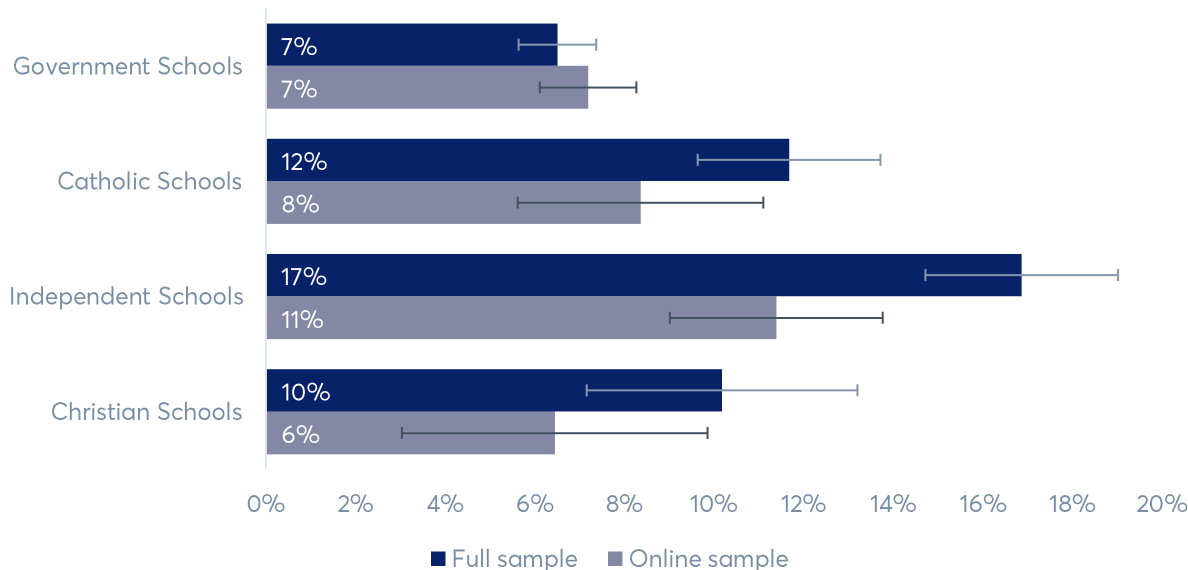
Figure 4.3 displays the proportion of respondents who have attained more than a bachelor's degree. Graduates of Independent schools stand out with 17 percent of them earning more than a bachelor's degree, according to results based on the full sample. The difference in bachelor's degree attainment rates between Independent schools and other sectors is not only substantively significant — it is 5 to 10 percentage points higher than the rate for other sectors — but also statistically significant. These differences do become less stark when we account for demographic background variables, but Independent school graduates still attain a degree beyond a bachelor's degree at noticeably higher rates.

On a more speculative note, we noted in the previous section that Independent school graduates were quite likely to agree that academic excellence was emphasised in their schools and to feel "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared" for university-level academic as well as career success. Although those differences across other sectors were less pronounced than the differences in bachelor's and post-graduate degree attainment, it does appear that the relatively strong emphasis on academic success and post-secondary education in Independent schools may contribute to the attainment of higher education degrees.

[34] Universities Australia, 2019.

Figure 4.3

Percentage of respondents who have completed more than a Bachelor's degree.



Employment

Educational attainment is closely tied with employment rates. Four out of every five respondents in the CES Australia who completed secondary school were employed, a rate that the OECD has also reported elsewhere.[35] However, among those who did not complete secondary school, the employment rate was much lower, only 36 percent.

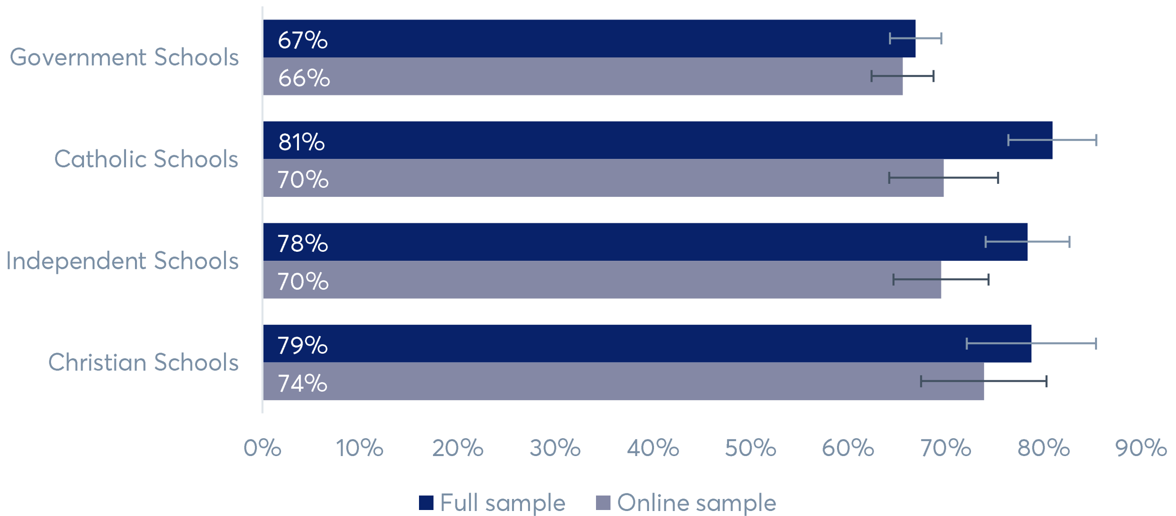
Despite the higher educational attainment levels among Independent school graduates, they were not necessarily more likely to be employed than Catholic or Christian school graduates. Employment rates for graduates from these three sectors was about 80 percent (see Figure 4.4).

Before adjusting for background characteristics, there were lower employment rates among Government school graduates. The difference was statistically significant and sizeable, approximately 10 percentage points. This result appeared to be driven largely by differences in other demographic background characteristics between Government and non-Government school graduates. When adjusted for these characteristics, the sector differences were no longer statistically significant.

[35] OECD, 2019.

Figure 4.4

Percentage of respondents who are currently employed.



We note that differences observed in overall employment rates seemed to be driven both by differences in full-time and part-time employment rates. There was some suggestive evidence that Catholic school graduates were most likely to be employed full-time compared to graduates from other sectors. As shown in Figure 4.5, 64 percent of Catholic school graduates were employed full-time compared to 49 and 57 percent of Government and Christian school graduates. Full-time employment rates were slightly lower for Independent school graduates at 61 percent.

Conversely, part-time employment rates were lowest among Catholic school graduates (see Figure 4.6). Christian graduates, meanwhile, were most likely to be employed part-time. Just over 20 percent Christian school graduates were employed part time compared to 16 to 18 percent of other graduates.

Figure 4.5

Percentage of respondents who are currently employed full time.

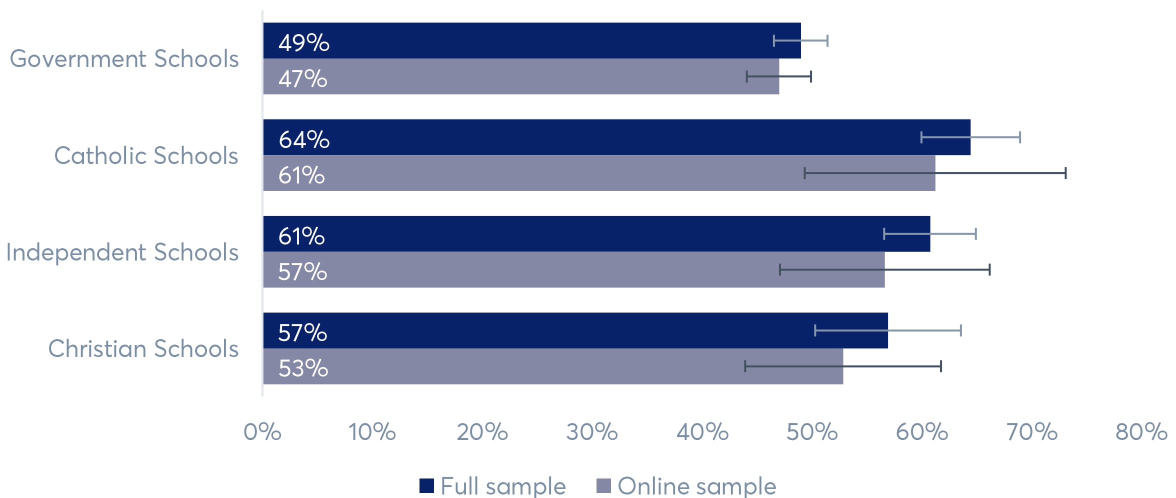
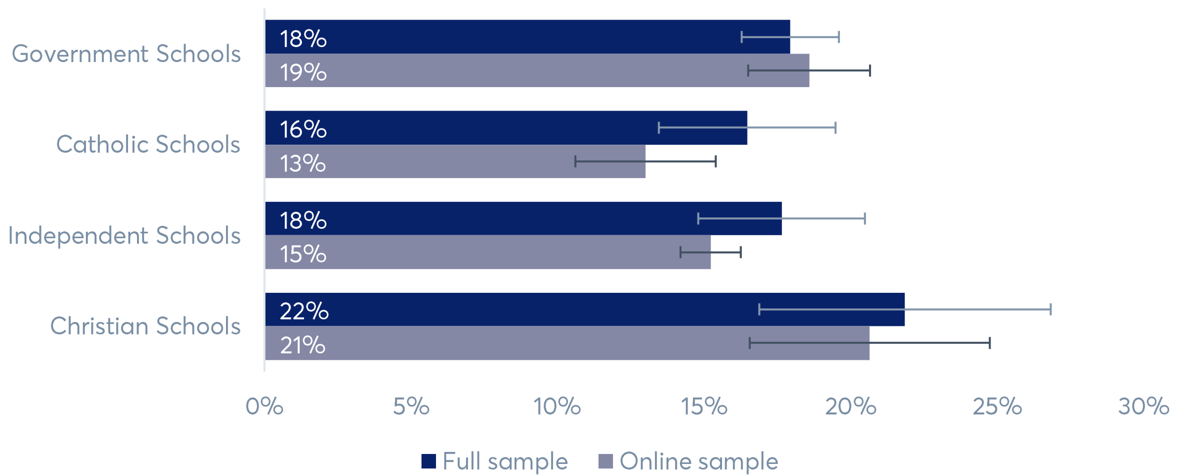


Figure 4.6

Percentage of respondents who are currently employed part time.

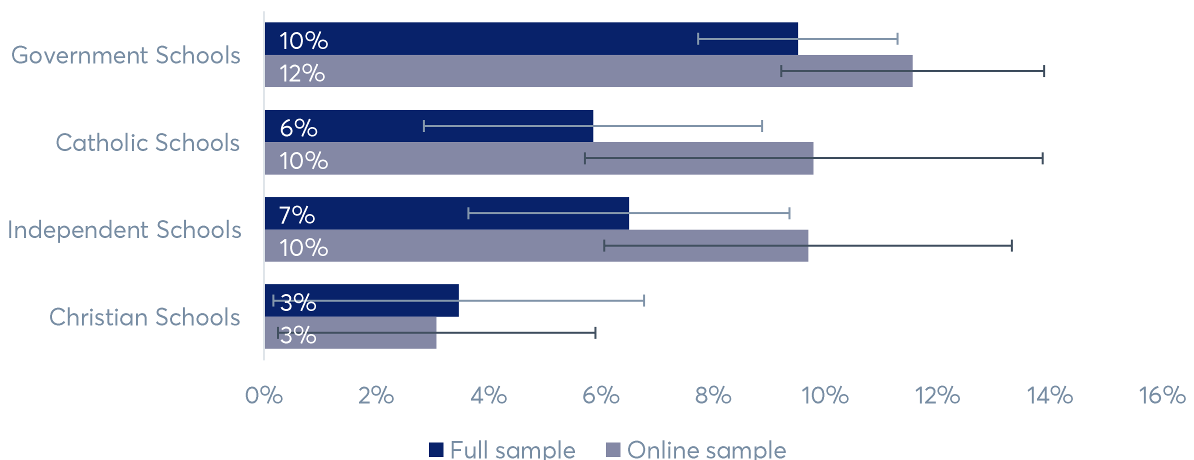


The noted cross-sector differences in employment, whether part- or full-time, generally persisted even after adjusting for background characteristics, including gender. These adjusted results suggest that differences across school sector in employment outcomes were not merely explained by differences in gender or other observable background characteristics across the school sectors.

Nor did we find significant differences in the rates at which graduates from each sector chose to be a stay-at-home partner, experienced a temporary layoff or were not working because they chose to undertake further study. However, findings seemed to suggest a comparatively low proportion of unemployed Christian school graduates. As shown in Figure 4.7, only 3 percent of Christian school graduates reported being unemployed. The unemployment rates were two to three times higher in the other sectors, even if we could not conclude that the results were statistically significant.

Figure 4.7

Percentage of respondents who are currently not in paid employment and looking for work.



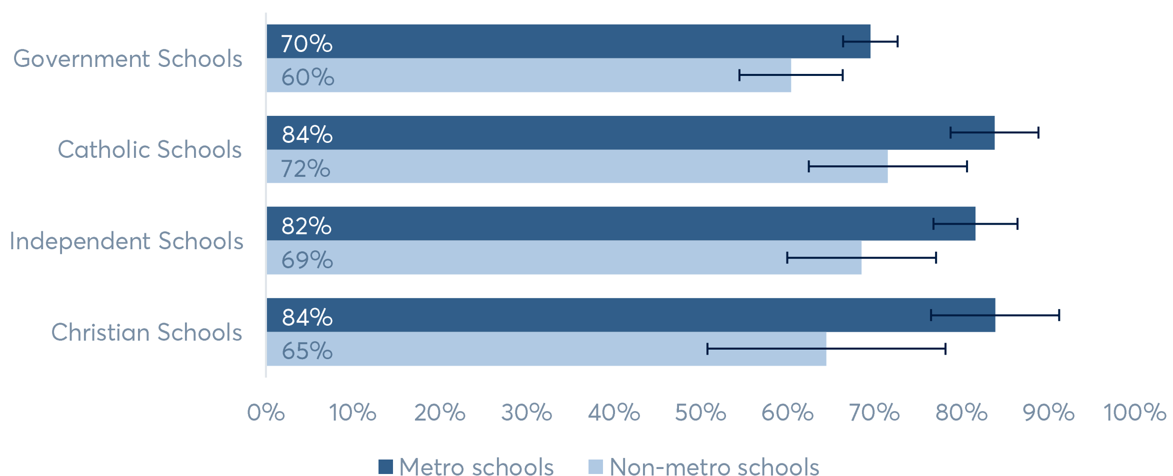
In the survey we additionally asked employed respondents to indicate the field in which they worked. Respondents chose from 19 job categories used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Our sample was not large enough to detect statistical differences across a range of options. But it did appear that Independent school graduates were more likely to enter occupations that offer professional, scientific and technical services. Government school graduates were more likely than other sectors, particularly Christian school graduates, to enter the public administration and safety sectors. Christian school graduates were overrepresented in fields like manufacturing and administrative support services. They were also more likely to seek vocational career pathways immediately upon leaving school at higher rates than the Catholic and Independent sectors.

As with the results concerning bachelor's degree attainment, whether the respondent grew up in a metropolitan or non-metropolitan locale seemed to influence employment rates more than school sector. Results are presented in Figure 4.8. When employment rates were disaggregated by respondents from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, employment rates were consistently lower by 10 to 20 percentage points regardless of school sector among respondents from non-metropolitan areas — a statistically significant gap. Finding stable work appears to be a key challenge in non-metropolitan areas and deserves more attention. Research suggests that demographic changes related to the flow of young people to major Australian cities has increased closures of services, industry and commercial facilities located in many non-metropolitan areas.[36]

The gap between respondents who grew up in metropolitan areas and respondents who did not was present even among Christian school graduates, despite the higher proportion of respondents from non-metropolitan areas who felt "somewhat or very prepared" for career success (see Figure 3.7). Granted, this difference in self-reported career preparedness between Christian school graduates from different locales was not statistically significant.

Figure 4.8

Employed respondents who grew up in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.



[36] Halsey, 2017.

Income

Finally, we approximated the respondents' personal earnings by asking them to report their household income. On this measure, Catholic school graduates reported having the highest household income among all four school sectors. Based on averages computed from the full sample, Catholic school graduates earned nearly $100000 per year. This was $10000 higher than Independent school graduates and $15000 higher than both Government and Christian school graduates. These findings are displayed in Figure 4.9.

We again found differences in income between graduates from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, particularly within the non-Government sector (see Figure 4.10). Differences between respondents from different locales within each sector ranged from $10000 in the Catholic sector to over $20000 in the Christian and Independent sectors. Notably, the difference in income between respondents who grew up in metropolitan areas and those who did not was statistically insignificant for the Catholic sector. But income differences between respondents who grew up in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas were statistically significant for the Christian and Independent sectors. These findings are worthy of further investigation and suggest that non-metropolitan Catholic school graduates (which significantly are nearly 40 percent of the entire Catholic sector)[37] might be formed in certain ways that are enhancing the capacity to earn proportionately higher incomes, at least relative to similarly-situated Independent and Christian school graduates.

Of particular interest is the lack of noticeable differences between respondents who grew up in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas within the Government sector, where annual household incomes were $88,000 and $81,000 respectively. It appears that there is a greater degree of equity across metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas within the Government school sector compared to the non-Government sector in terms of later-life earnings — an observation that warrants more discussion and inquiry.

[37] National Catholic Education Commission, 2019b.

Figure 4.9

Annual household income of respondents in Australian (AUD) dollars.

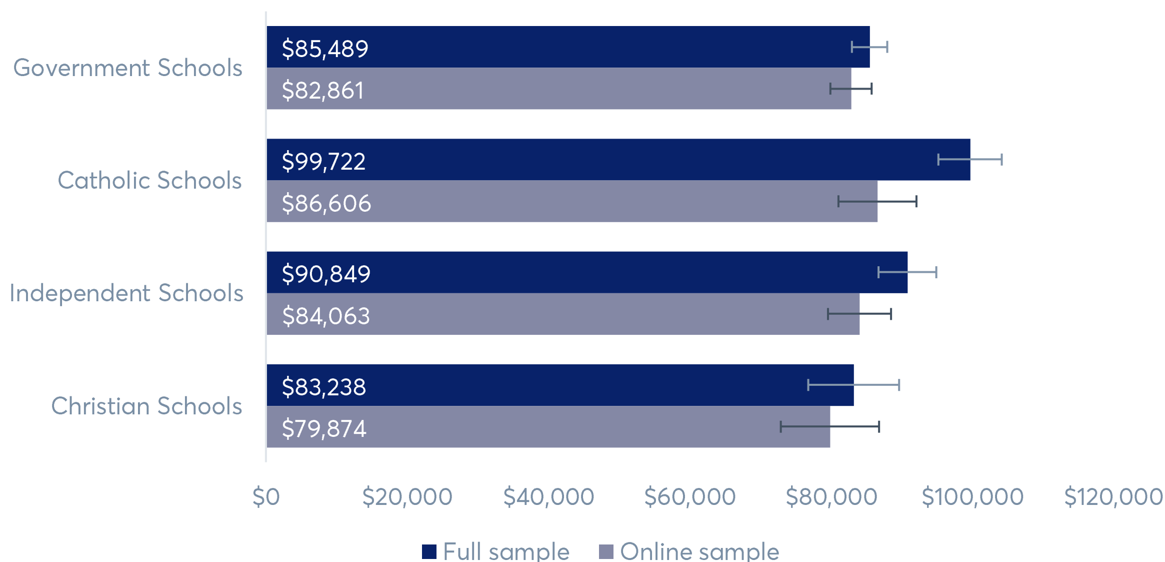
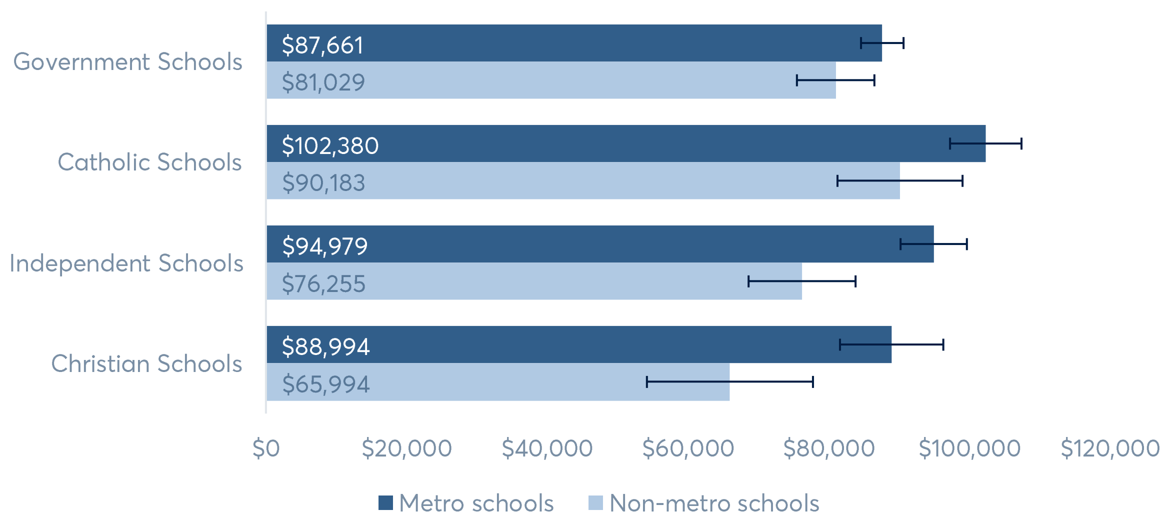


Figure 4.10

Annual household income of respondents in Australian (AUD) dollars.



Summary and Conclusions

In this section we described graduates of Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools in terms of their educational attainment, employment and earnings.

According to 2019 OECD data, 31 percent of Australian 25- to 34-year-olds have completed a bachelor's degree, which is comparatively high compared to the OECD average of 24 percent.[38] Although the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree is relatively high, the data from the CES Australia data highlighted some differences by school sector and locale. These differences across school sector also translated into differences in employment and income.

- Catholic school graduates earned bachelor's degrees at comparatively high rates and also tended to have the highest household incomes relative to graduates from other school sectors. Many of these distinctive outcomes were attributable to both the influence of school and family background as differences attenuated when we statistically adjusted for the latter.
- Independent school graduates, like their Catholic school peers, also completed bachelor's degrees at comparatively high rates. What is more, Independent school graduates were most likely to complete post-graduate study. These higher levels of educational attainment were likely related to the greater propensity among Independent school graduates to enter jobs that provide professional, scientific and technical services. Their household incomes were also relatively high, only lower than the incomes of Catholic school graduates. Again, however, we note that it is a combination of school and family background that contributed to these outcomes.
- Christian school graduates attained lower levels of bachelor degree completions and had lower household incomes than Independent and Catholic school graduates. But once again, family background accounted for some of these differences. Employment rates were not markedly dissimilar from the rates of other sectors. It is likely that they were seeking employment in different vocational areas. The unemployment rates of Christian school graduates were markedly lower than other sectors although the smaller sample size of this sector should be treated cautiously.
- Government school graduates were most similar to Christian school graduates in terms of their educational attainment and labor-market outcomes. In terms of vocation, however, the data suggested that Government school graduates were more likely than anyone else, especially Christian school graduates, to enter industry fields in public administration and safety. We also point out that Government schools exhibited the greatest levels of equity across metropolitan and non-metropolitan locales. Whilst educational attainment, employment and earnings levels were much lower for graduates from non-metropolitan locales, these disparities were less pronounced among Government school graduates.

On this note, the disparities between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas certainly warrants more discussion and attention. Schools across these locales face specific challenges. However, we caution against reading too deeply into the data. Whilst there may have been large gaps in bachelor's degree attainment between these locales, disparities in employment rates were not as large. It seems that graduates from non-metropolitan areas still found paths into stable employment even if the employment rates were noticeably lower than those in metropolitan areas.

[38] OECD, 2019.

Moreover, the household income estimates did not adjust for different costs of living, so caution should be exercised in interpreting them. In sum, we hope this data raises more conversations about how to pursue the flourishing of individuals and their communities in non-metropolitan and metropolitan locales alike.

We began the section reminding readers that educational attainment, employment and income are but one set of many other educational outcomes. Though they have a significant bearing on the wellbeing of Australian communities, there are a plethora of other educational goals and outcomes that are constitutive of the common good. For example, individuals need to experience welcome and belonging. They need to form connections to others. Communities similarly need the sustaining power and support of networks and voluntary associations formed by individual citizens. We turn to this topic in the next section.

Section Five

Belonging: Involvement in Associations, Groups and Causes

In 2019, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released a report documenting the prevalence of social isolation and loneliness in the Australian population. They defined social isolation as having little social contact with others and loneliness as the negative subjective feelings one experiences due to having less social contact than desired. Data summarised in the report indicated that one in ten Australians ages 25 through 39 reported experiencing social isolation, and approximately 16 percent reported experiencing loneliness. Whether these rates have increased with social distancing and quarantining measures to combat COVID-19 remains to be seen. Nonetheless, scholars have documented the unraveling and thinning of our social fabric since the 1980s.[39]

Reducing loneliness and social isolation have become salient public policy goals for two main reasons. Public health research suggests that social isolation and loneliness are connected with several indicators of wellbeing including premature mortality, anxiety and low feelings of subjective wellbeing.[40] Other scholars have pointed out that social networks are useful for additional instrumental reasons. An individual's career and educational success, for example, have been shown to be dependent on the personal connections that are developed and nurtured. Membership also enhances a sense of belonging within a local community, expands social networks and facilitates civic participation. In other words, participation in associations, clubs, groups and causes sustains social and economic efficiency.[41]

By grounding concerns regarding social isolation and loneliness in these psychic or economic reasons, policymakers approach the issue through an individualistic lens. This is perhaps only natural given the elevation of the individual in modern Western culture. We do not dispute this construal of social isolation and loneliness. After all, physical health, emotional health and having sufficient wealth are indeed constitutive of flourishing.

Belonging, being known and knowing others, committing to one another and being welcomed into communion with others are consequently intrinsic goods. They are not good merely for economic and psychic reasons. They are constitutive of our good as humans.

However, we contend that addressing social isolation and loneliness from a fundamentally individualistic and instrumental lens is an impoverished approach. We instead suggest that humans are by nature social creatures. Belonging, being known and knowing others, committing to one another and being welcomed into communion with others are consequently intrinsic goods. They are not good merely for economic and psychological reasons. They are constitutive of our good as humans.

Schools play an important role in fostering this type of connection. Schools enhance social networks by virtue of bringing families together with other families and community members.

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[39] Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000.
[40] Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Shankar et al. 2015.
[41] Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 2000.

Schools create a sense of place, a common and meaning-filled space for families to cross paths.[42]

We additionally suggest that schools convey values and norms that shape how children make sense of those around them. Schools foster civic virtues and help to form young people into particular kinds of people with respect to the way they relate to others. The ways in which young people form friendships and give regard for other individuals when they become adults can be cultivated and practiced in the ways they relate to other students, their teachers and other members of the school community.[43] Moreover, these civic outcomes likely differ across schools because each school is uniquely situated in the broader community and draws upon distinct conceptions of civic values.

In Section 6, we discuss how schools might cultivate these civic dispositions and steer students to embody them through volunteerism and charitable giving. In this section, we focus on the kinds of civic attachments that characterise the respondents in the CES Australia and whether they have been formed by their school sector to engage in associations that nurture commitment, self-sacrifice and care for others.

Civic Ties among Millennial Graduates

To explore these important agencies for contributing to the common good, the CES asked respondents whether they formed civic ties to associations including political parties, religious groups, trade unions, sports, leisure or cultural groups, and professional organisations.

We begin by reporting what percent of our respondents belonged to a variety of associations and groups. These results are displayed in Table 5.1.

There was proportionally low engagement across all schooling sectors with reference to belonging to a political party (9 percent). This was the lowest rate of participation among the five types of associations and groups we presented in the CES. These results are consistent with findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which noted a decline in active involvement in civic and political groups (19 percent in 2010 compared to compared with 14 percent in 2014) within Australia.[44] Some scholars argue that a low rate of membership in political parties may reflect a shift in educational purposes towards self-interest and privatisation, altering millennials' perceptions of public office and political campaigning.[45] Other researchers have suggested that this declining trend is perhaps more indicative of millennials' disillusionment with the current political landscape, and whilst they are not anti-political per se, they would classify themselves as anti-establishment and often feel ostracised or excluded from current political discourse around issues important to them.[46]

At 12 percent, the membership rate in trade unions was slightly higher than the membership rate in political parties. This figure aligned closely with the union membership rate of 14 percent reported in 2016 for the overall population and reflects a sharp decline in union membership from as high as 51 percent in 1976. Possible reasons for this decline include structural factors that have impacted employment in specific industries, along with increasingly flexible forms of employment.[47]

[42] Coleman, 1998.
[43] McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010.
[44] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015.
[45] Reid, 2019.
[46] Stoker, Evans, & Halupka, 2018.
[47] Gilfillan & McGann, 2018.

Table 5.1: Millennials' Membership in Selected Groups

Group	Percent Belonging to Group
Political Party	9
Trade Union	12
Church or Religious Association	22
Business or Professional Association	24
Sporting, Leisure or Cultural Group	32

Just over one-fifth of respondents reported belonging to a church or religious association. We describe religion in detail in Section 8. For now, it is important to note that religion still plays an important socialising role in public life for belonging and civic participation within contemporary Australian society.[48]

One quarter of respondents reported belonging to a business or professional association. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly given Australia's cultural landscape, participation in a sporting, leisure or cultural group was the most common activity of civic participation among all five groups. Nearly one-third of respondents reported belonging to such a group.

Civic Ties across School Sector

In the next set of figures, we report these rates of civic participation by school sector.

Independent (16 percent) and Christian (20 percent) school graduates were two to three times more likely to belong to a political party compared to Government and Catholic school graduates (see Figure 5.1). In contrast, only about 7 percent of Government and Catholic school graduates reported belonging to a political party. Notably, the differences attenuated when adjusting for demographic background characteristics, but the contrast between Independent and Christian school graduates remained statistically significant relative to Catholic school graduates. This is perhaps a surprising result given the long history of active political engagement by Catholics within Australian political life and service.[49]

As shown in Figure 5.2, trade union membership was also higher among Independent and Christian school graduates, though the differences were less pronounced than the differences regarding membership in a political party. Ten percent of Government school graduates and 12 percent of Catholic school graduates reported belonging to a trade union, which again was up to half the membership rates for graduates from Christian schools (20 percent).

The link to higher rates of trade union involvement for Christian school graduates may be related to their tendency to enter particular job sectors. As mentioned in Section 4, they appeared to enter fields such as manufacturing instead of scientific or technical services at relatively higher rates.

[48] Korrt, Dollery, & Grant,

[49] Brett, 2002; Rydon, 1986.

Figure 5.1

Percentage of respondents who belong to a political party.

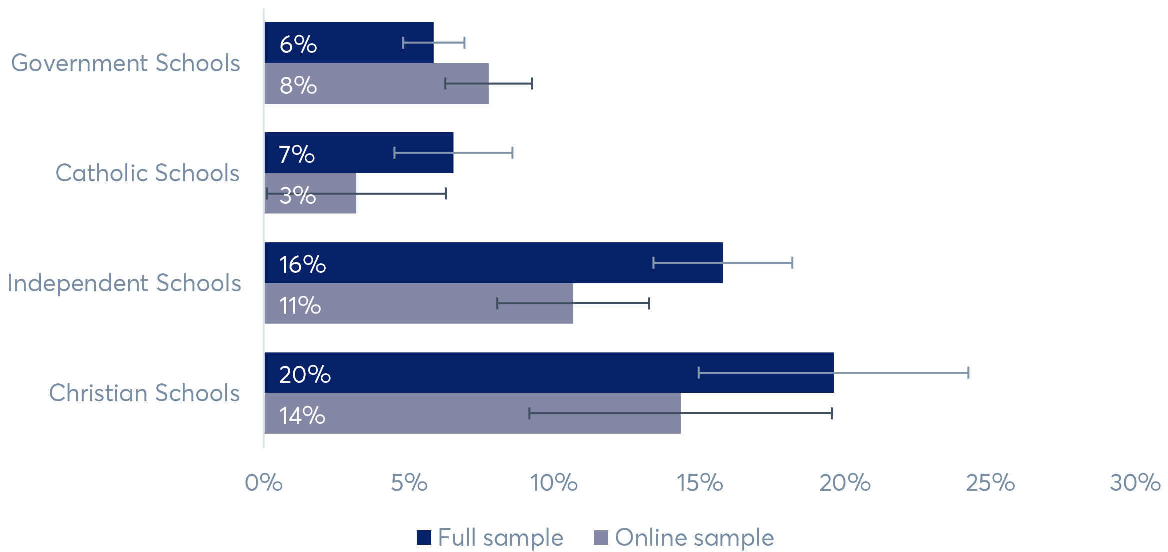
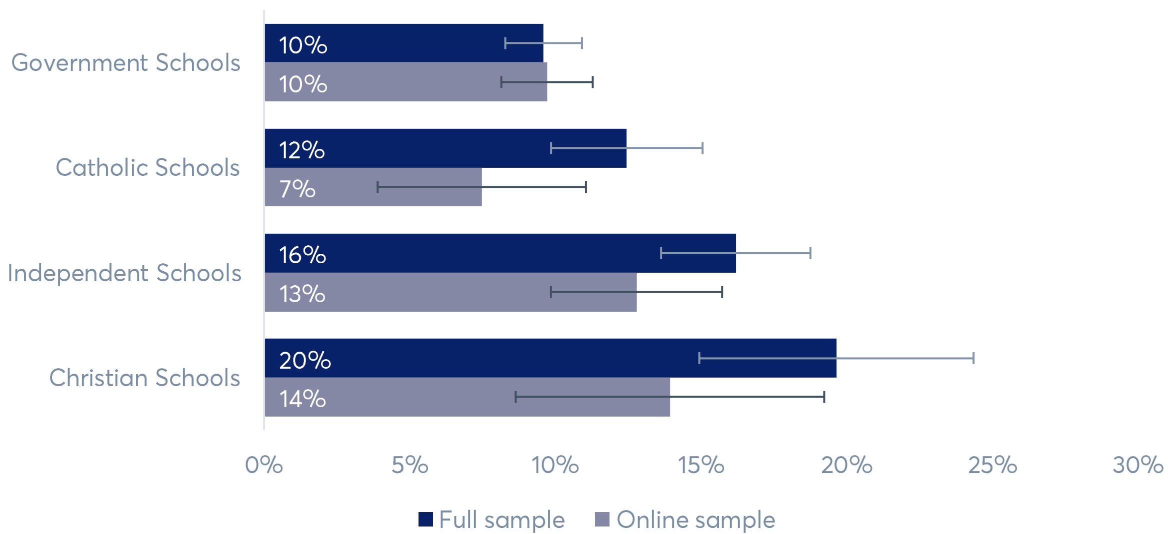


Figure 5.2

Percentage of respondents who belong to a trade union.

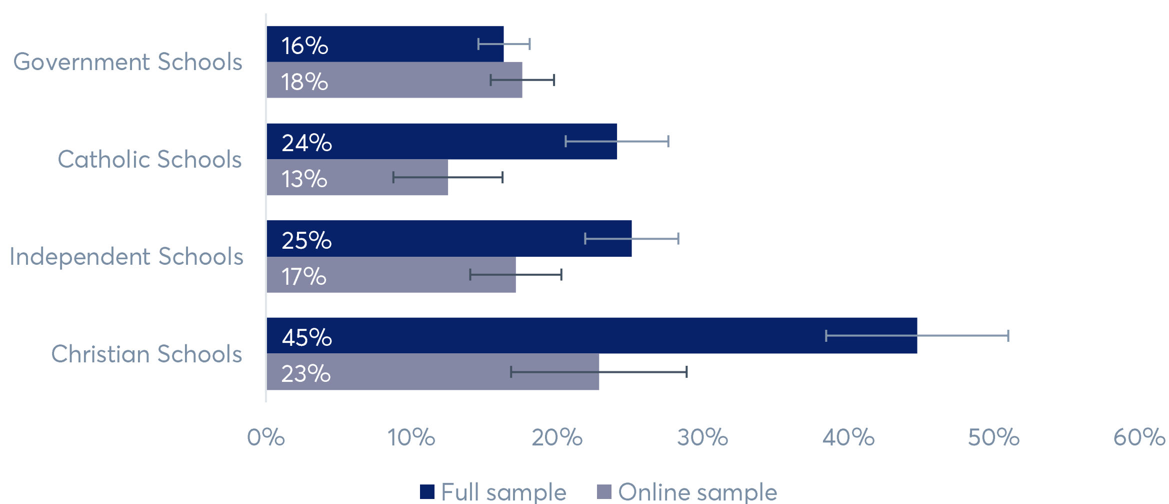


Turning to religious associations, the findings displayed in Figure 5.3 indicated that Christian school graduates were by far most likely to belong to a church or religious group. Forty-five percent of Christian school graduates were members of a church or religious group. One quarter of Catholic and Independent school graduates reported the same. All of these rates were higher than and statistically distinguishable from the rates for Government school graduates where 16 percent of graduates reported belonging to a church or religious group.

These patterns may reflect the shared values and beliefs of parents who chose schools that would presumably inculcate formative practices that promote religious group membership later in life.

Figure 5.3

Percentage of respondents who belong to a church or religious association.



Indeed, respondents who attended Catholic, Independent and Christian schools were more likely than respondents who attended Government schools to come from families who felt religion was "very important" or "extremely important" (see Figure 2.1). Statistically adjusting for this and other background characteristics decreased differences in the rate of belonging to a church or religious group, underscoring the important role of family in shaping civic behaviour and participation.

As mentioned in the previous section, Independent school graduates appeared more likely than any other graduates to have a job that offers professional, scientific and technical services. It may then be unsurprising to also find higher membership rates in business or professional associations among them (see Figure 5.4). Over one third of Independent school graduates reported belonging to such an association. About 29 and 25 percent of Christian and Catholic school graduates also indicated membership in business or professional associations, respectively. Membership rates among Government school graduates were just under 20 percent.

The difference in membership rates for business or professional associations between graduates from Independent schools and graduates from Government or Catholic schools remained statistically significant, even after adjusting for demographic background characteristics. The difference relative to Christian schools is not statistically significant, but this result may be due to a lack of statistical power from the smaller sample size for Christian schools. After all, participation rates in business or professional associations among Christian and Government schools were quite similar once adjusting for demographic background characteristics. Reasons why Independent schools have more graduates participating in business or professional associations may include vocational choices and more active alumni networks within the field.

The CES identified sports, leisure or cultural groups as the most common form of association for Australian 25- to 39-year-olds. There were smaller differences in membership rates across school sector (Figure 5.5). Nearly 40 percent of Independent and Christian school graduates reported belonging to these groups. Participation rates among Catholic school graduates were similar although slightly less at 34 percent. Government school graduates were least likely to belong to these groups, but the gap was not as pronounced as in some of the other results presented so far.

Figure 5.4

Percentage of respondents who belong to a business or professional association.

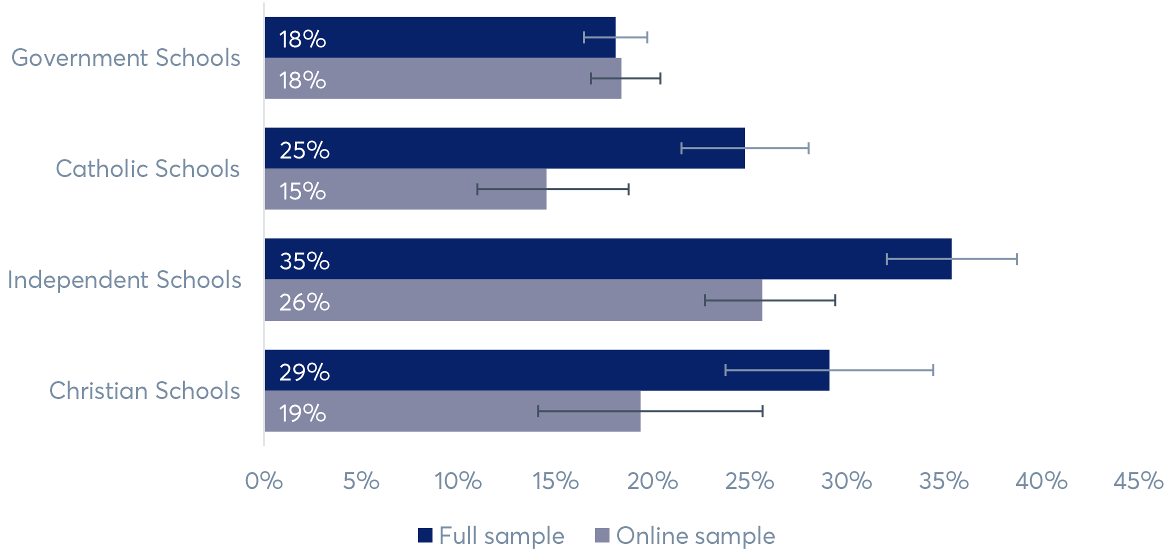
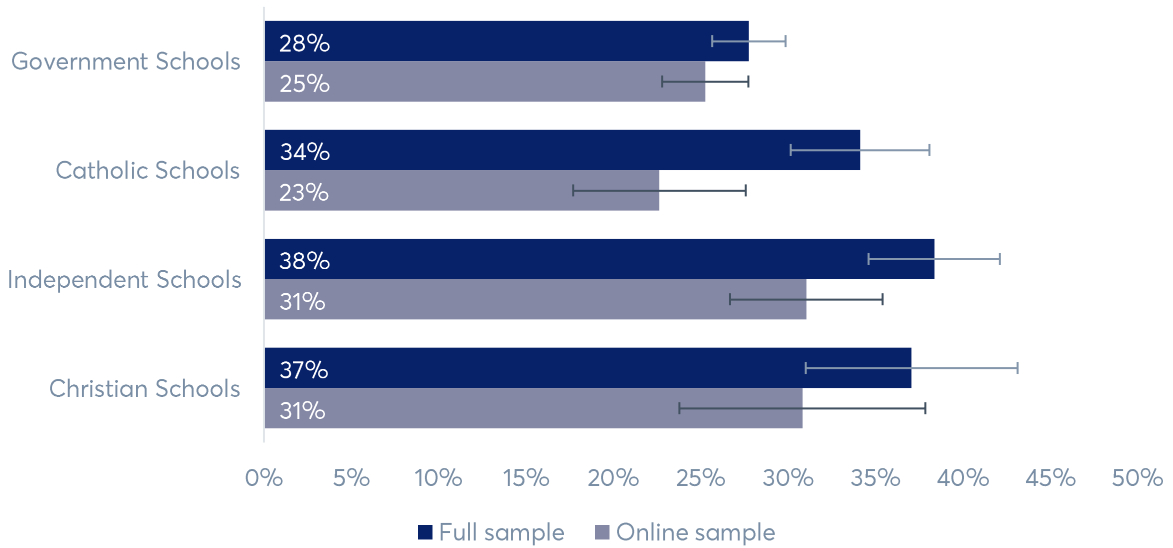


Figure 5.5

Percentage of respondents belong to a sporting, leisure or cultural group.



Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, it appears that there is an association between each school sector and the kinds of associations that their graduates eventually form in adulthood.

- Independent schools appeared to increase the likelihood that their graduates participate in business or professional associations. They not only tended to enter highly technical, scientific or professional job fields (see Section 4) but also committed to associations that sustained these vocations and enhanced professional practice.
- Relatively more Christian school graduates indicated a commitment to churches and religious groups, though the CES data also underscored the role that graduates' families unquestionably played. Christian school graduates also reported belonging to a variety of other groups including proportionally higher rates of involvement in political parties and trade unions, demonstrating that that their civic engagement is not only through religious organisations.
- Government and Catholic school graduates did not tend towards particular types of associations. Of course, there may be other kinds of associations that those respondents may belong to but were not included in the survey.

These results suggest that, independent of family background, schools play some role in enriching the social fabric and cultivating membership or participation in a variety of civic associations. In a time when social isolation, loneliness and their consequences are becoming more salient, it is important to recognise the ways in which schools as civic institutions themselves contribute to the common good by fostering social connectedness. If social connectedness is a good that we all share, then all of these schools serve a public purpose by cultivating it.

On the other hand, we would be remiss if we did not question whether these overall rates of association are indicative of broader trends of decreasing social connectedness and belonging. The most popular form of association according to our data was sports, leisure or cultural groups, and only one-third of all respondents reported belonging to such group. There are other forms of associations of which we did not inquire on the CES. Nonetheless, there may be value in considering how schools — whether Government, Catholic, Independent or Christian — might better foster the kinds of social bonds their students need in adulthood. These bonds are necessary for the wellbeing and flourishing of Australian communities at large.

Section Six

Generosity: Giving and Volunteering

In Section 4, we described the life trajectories of Australian millennials as they pertained to post-secondary education, employment, and income. Developing marketable employment skills, experiencing the dignity of work and earning a sufficient wage are key indicators of flourishing. A flourishing life additionally includes a life where generosity to others through giving or volunteering contributes to the common good.

Generosity may not be a value that is immediately associated with a modern culture that elevates individual autonomy. The ability to be self-sufficient and meet personal needs and wants is an essential aspect of autonomy. Indeed, the justification about pursuing further education is grounded in this narrative. Earning a university degree may be seen as the way to boost earnings potential to attain class mobility and obtain all the benefits that it confers.

Under an individualistic view, the common good becomes the sum of individual utility and positive externalities that spill over across individuals. Volunteering one's time to serve the community, donating one's material resources and generous acts are happy accidents that occur when individuals pursue their own self-interest.

An alternative conception of the common good highlights service and a less atomistic approach to wellbeing. Under this view, individuals cannot be said to be flourishing if their neighbours are not. Socioeconomic inequality is seen as a shared issue rather than an individual one. Giving oneself to the community, whether it be of time or money, is part of how individuals find meaning in society and seek the good of others with whom they are connected.

International surveys that ask respondents about the purpose of education find widespread agreement that schools should instil civic values and skills, not just provide academic preparation.[50] Whether schools successfully accomplish this civic aim is up for debate. Regardless, cultivating civic virtues including generosity and volunteering may be increasingly important as data from the Australian General Social Survey finds only 31 percent of Australians aged 15 or older participated in voluntary work in 2014. This rate is slightly lower than the 34 percent of the population who participated in voluntary work in 2010. According to recent research, a third of Australians have volunteered whilst more than one in five have been involved with fundraising for a specific charity or advocating and raising awareness. Almost half of those who volunteer do so at least once a month whilst about a quarter volunteer at least once every few months.[51]

Concerns about decreasing levels of civic engagement are not limited to volunteering one's time. Some data also suggest a downward trend in giving. A 2020 McCrindle report notes that over seven in 10 Australians give annually. The rate is quite high but also represents a five percentage-point drop since 2019. Whether this is just an aberration or signs of a consistent trend is unclear.[52]

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[50] Phi Delta Kappan, 2019.
[51] McCcrindle, 2020.
[52] McCrindle, 2020.

Schools play a significant role in forming citizens. But how do the various types of schools throughout Australia cultivate civic virtues? How prevalent is volunteering and giving among graduates from Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools? And among those who do give of their time or material resources, in what areas of civil society are they contributing?

Volunteering

We first turn our attention to our findings from the CES Australia regarding volunteering. In one part of the survey, we asked respondents: "In the past 12 months, have you done any other volunteer work, that is, work for a non-profit, charitable organisation or group for which you did not receive pay?"

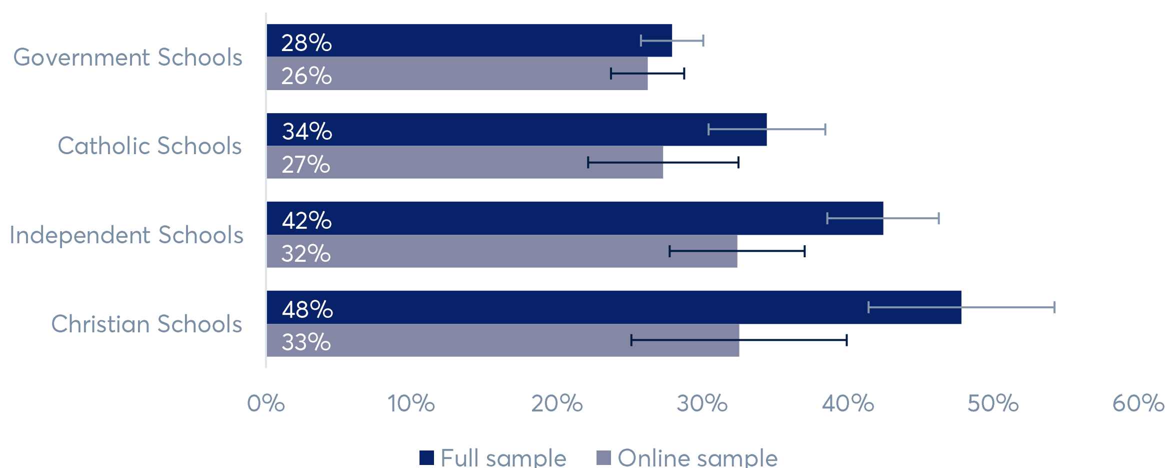
According our full sample data, 34 percent of 25- to 39-year-olds have volunteered within the past 12 months, an estimate that aligns with recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.[53]

When we disaggregate data by school sector, volunteering rates were higher than average among Christian and Independent school graduates. Results are shown in Figure 6.1. Nearly half of Christian school graduates reported volunteering within the past 12 months, and 42 percent of Independent school graduates did the same. Both of these estimates were substantively higher and statistically distinguishable from the volunteering rates among Catholic and Government school graduates where a respective 34 and 28 percent of respondents reported volunteering in the past 12 months. We note, too, that these differences shrunk to statistical insignificance when we adjusted for family background, suggesting that differences in volunteering rates were largely driven by demographic factors and underscoring the importance of the various sources of formation within the school and family nexus.

There are a variety of organisations and causes in which Australians can volunteer. Among respondents who have volunteered in the last 12 months, we inquired about where they were offering their time and effort. In the CES Australia,

Figure 6.1

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in the past 12 months.



[53] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015.

we asked respondents to indicate if they had served with a (1) church or religious group, (2) an organisation that helps children or youth, (3) an organisation that helps the elderly, (4) an organisation that helps the poor, (5) an arts or cultural organisation, (6) a sports or community interest group, (7) a political organisation or (8) an environmental group.

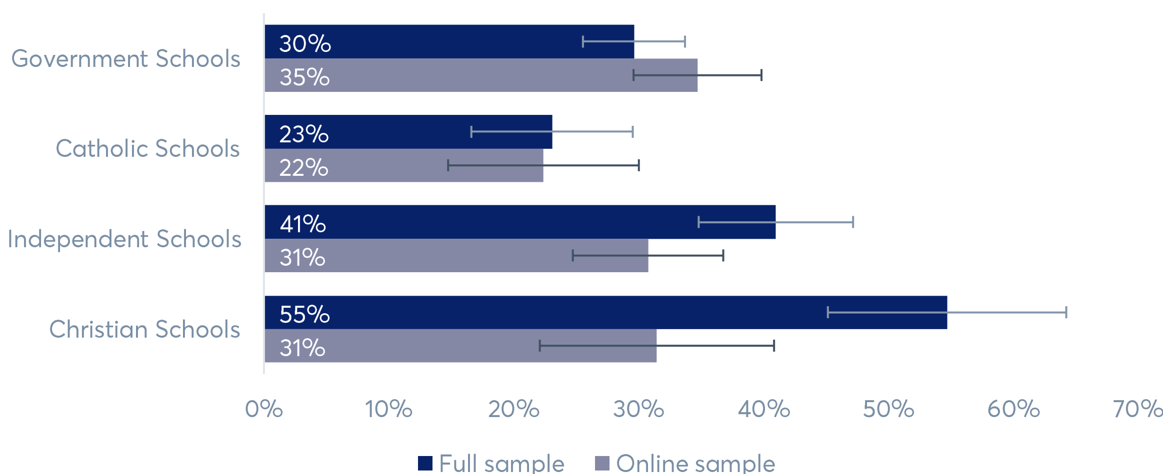
Prior research on volunteering, including rounds of the CES in the USA and Canada, suggested that graduates from non-Catholic religious schools were most likely to volunteer through their churches or other religious groups.[54] We found similar trends among Australians (see Figure 6.2). Among respondents who volunteered, 55 percent of Christian school graduates served through their churches or another religious group. Meanwhile, 41 percent of Independent school graduates also served in the same types of organisations. These rates were again much higher and statistically distinguishable than the rates for Government and Catholic school graduates (30 and 23 percent, respectively). However, once accounting for background characteristics such as the religiosity of the respondents' family during childhood, these differences disappeared.

Unlike prior CES results from the USA and Canada, Christian and Independent school graduates in Australia were also more likely to volunteer with organisations that help the elderly, environmental groups, political organisations, arts or cultural organisations and organisations dedicated to helping the poor. The results are shown in Figures 6.3 through 6.6.

For example, results based on the full sample indicated that just over one quarter of Government and Catholic school graduates who volunteered did so in an organisation that helps the elderly. In contrast, 39 and 45 percent of their Independent and Christian school counterparts did so, respectively. Though the overall levels of participation differed when considering those who volunteered in an arts or cultural organisation, environmental organisations and organisations that help the poor, the pattern of higher volunteering rates among Independent and Christian school graduates remained.

Figure 6.2

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in a church or religious group in the past 12 months.



[54] Cheng & Sikkink, 2020

Figure 6.3

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in an organisation that helps the elderly in the past 12 months.

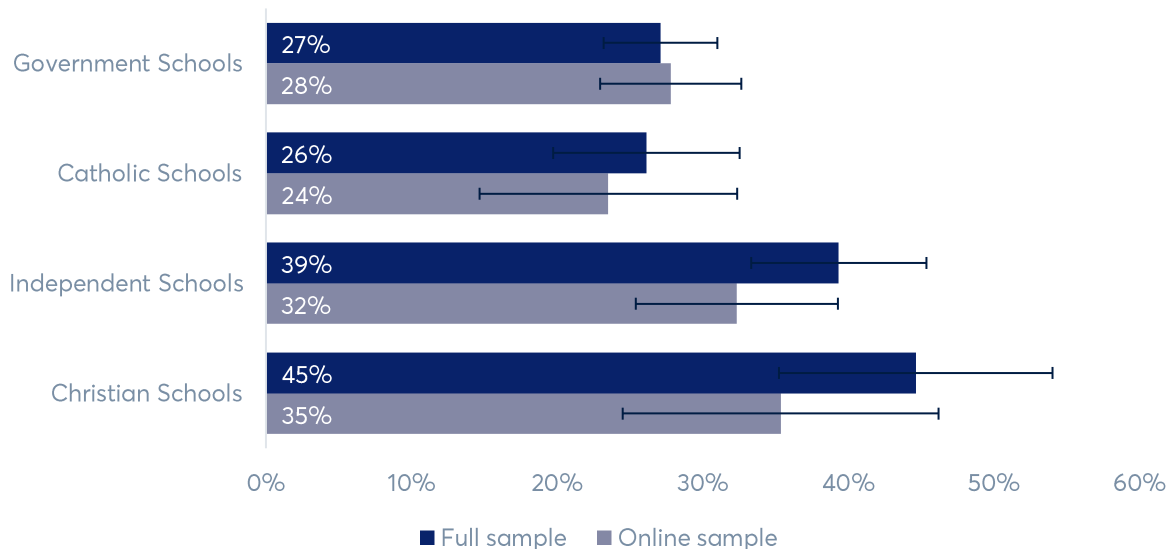


Figure 6.4

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in an arts or cultural organisation in the past 12 months.

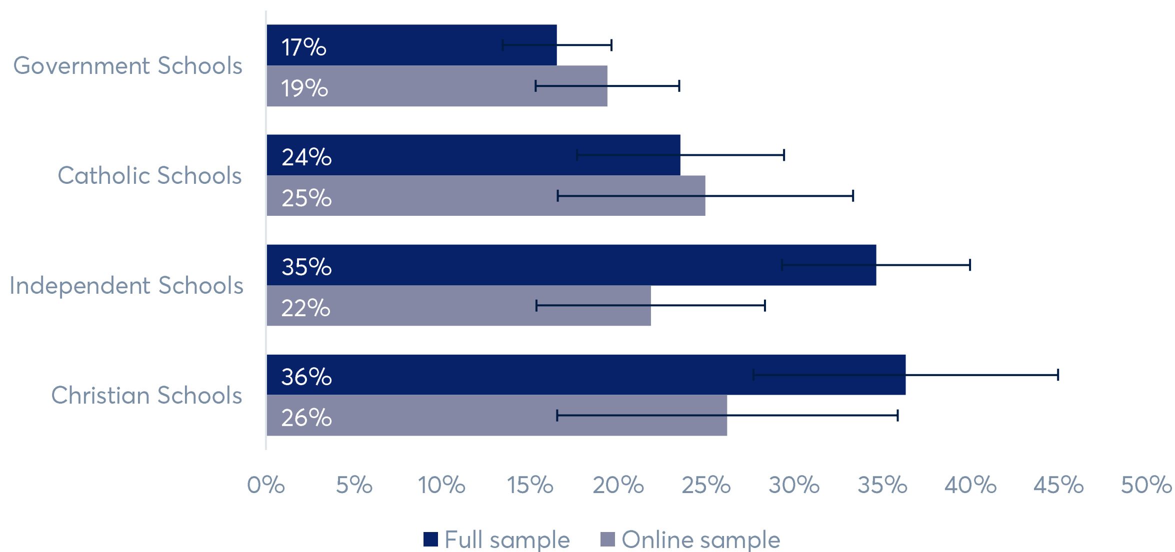


Figure 6.5

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in an environmental organisation in the past 12 months.

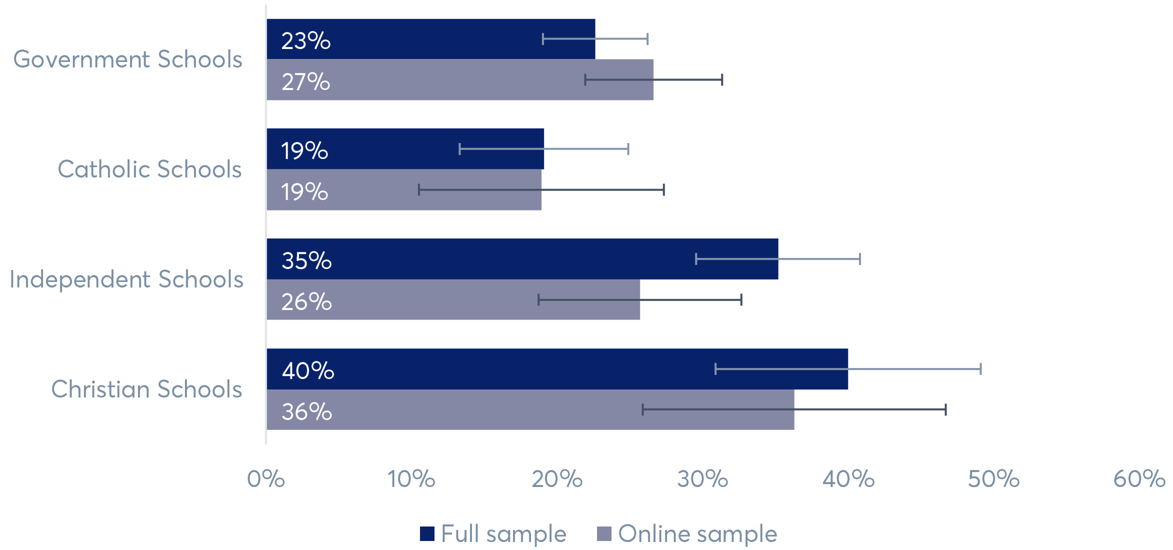


Figure 6.6

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in an organisation that helps the poor in the past 12 months.

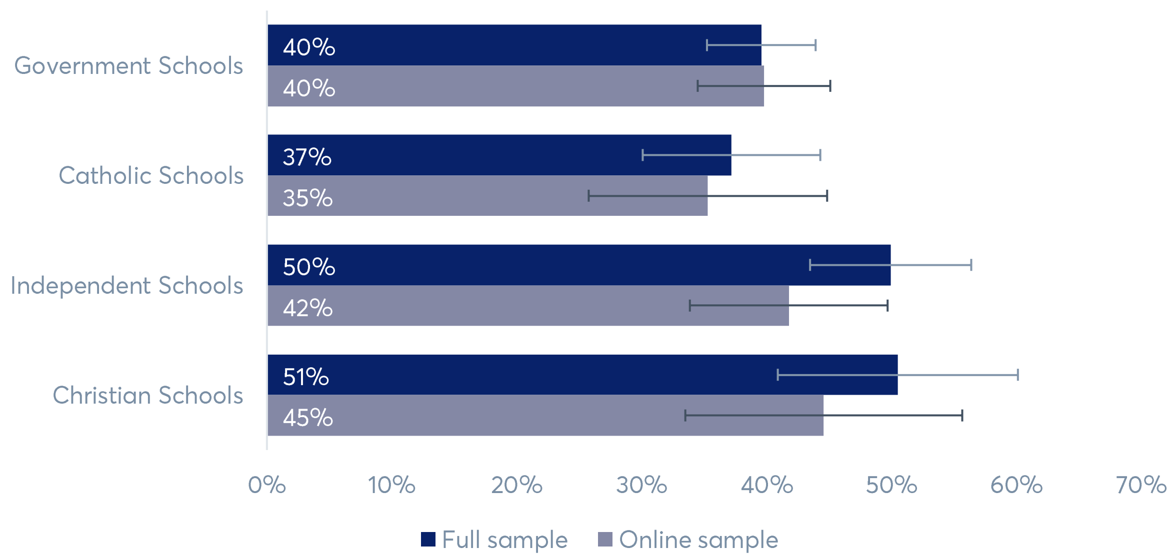
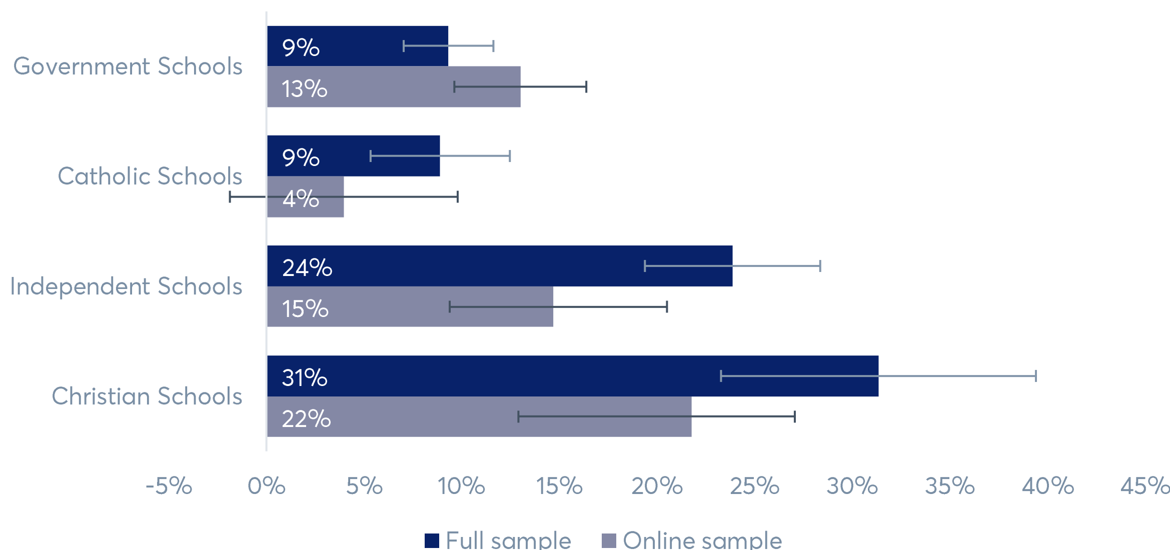


Figure 6.7

Percentage of respondents who have volunteered in a political organisation in the past 12 months.



Finally, as presented in Figure 6.7, volunteering in political organisations was much lower in general — about 17 percent of the proportion of all respondents who reported any volunteering within the past 12 months. Yet 31 and 24 percent of Independent and Christian school graduates who ever volunteered reported serving in political organisations. Just under 10 percent of Catholic and Government school graduates who volunteered in the past 12 months did the same.

When we adjusted these rates of volunteering in political organisations for family background characteristics, the differences across sectors attenuated. We could not conclude that the differences were statistically significant given that our sample sizes were much smaller as we restricted these analyses to the one third of the sample who reported volunteering in the past 12 months. However, some of the cross-sector differences are still sizeable, particularly among Christian school graduates where volunteering rates were higher by 10 to 20 percentage points.

In the remaining types of organisations in which respondents reported volunteering, such as groups that assist children and youth, we did not find statistically different rates of participation across school sectors. These results can be viewed in supplementary material which can be accessed online at https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/research/.

Giving

We now turn to describing the giving habits of Australian 25- to 39-year-olds. We asked respondents to the CES Australia: "In the past 12 months, have you ever donated your own money or goods to non-profit, charitable organizations or groups?" Sixty-five percent of respondents reported some form of financial giving within the past 12 months. As shown in Figure 6.8, Independent school graduates were most likely to give with 70 percent of them indicating that they have done so, though the rate was not dramatically higher than the rate in other sectors. Among Catholic and Christian school graduates, 68 and 64 percent, respectively, donated money to a non-profit charitable organisation in the past 12 months. Meanwhile, 62 percent of Government school graduates made similar donations; only the

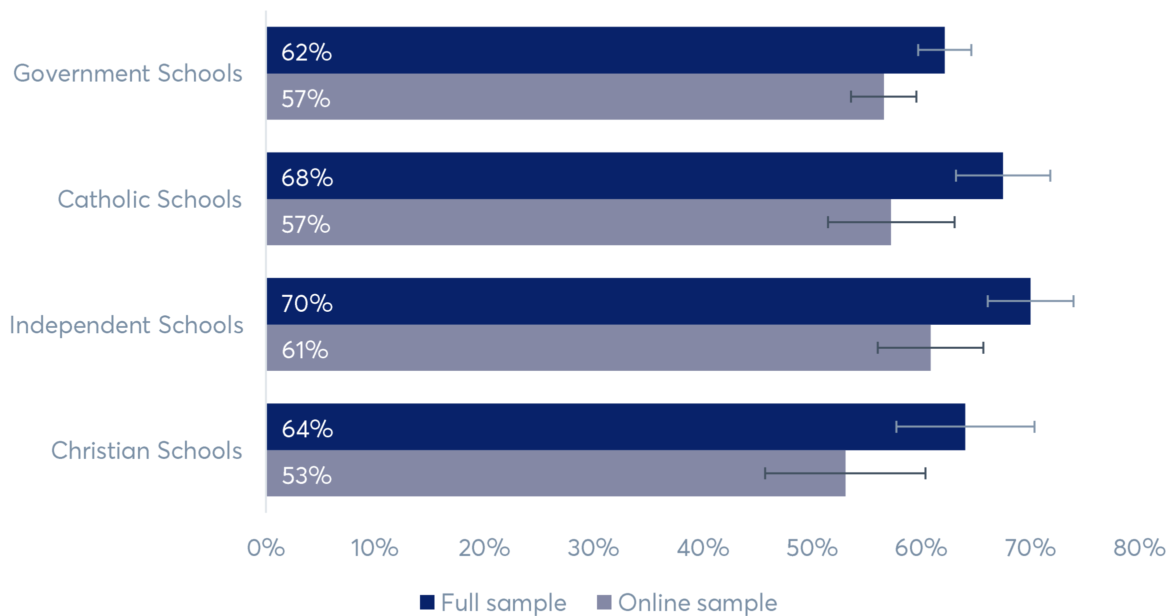
eight percentage-point difference between Government and Independent schools was statistically significant. Like volunteering, however, these cross-sector differences decreased when we controlled differences in demographic background characteristics.

We find the relatively high rate of giving among Catholic school graduates noteworthy. As we described in Section 3, Catholic school graduates, like their Christian school counterparts, reported similar levels of emphasis on community service and academic excellence. So, whilst Catholic school graduates did not volunteer at rates as high as Christian school graduates, they did give at similar rates. In other words, the dual emphasis of community service and academic excellence seems to be expressed in the ways Catholic school graduates steward their earnings after they complete their education and find employment. Indeed, Catholic school graduates have the highest household incomes across all sectors, but there are indications that formative experiences have led them to use their economic success to give to their communities.

Similar to our inquiry on voluntary work, we additionally asked respondents who gave about the kind of organisations that they gave to. We specifically examined giving to political organisations and church, synagogue, mosques or religious congregations. Consistent with the way respondents reported volunteering their time and effort, giving to political and religious organisations was quite high among Christian school graduates.

Figure 6.8

Percentage of respondents who have donated money or goods to a non-profit, charitable organisation or group in the past 12 months.



Among those who reported giving any money, 45 percent of Christian school graduates said that they gave to religious congregations. This result is presented in Figure 6.9. Just below 30 percent of Independent school graduates and 20 percent of Government or Catholic school graduates reported giving to a religious congregation.

Likewise, Christian school graduates appeared most likely to give to political causes, though Independent school graduates gave at very similar rates (23 versus 21 percent). Such giving was not as common among Government and Catholic school graduates at about eight percent. These findings are depicted in Figure 6.10.

Nine in 10 Government and Catholic school graduates gave to other charitable causes when they did give (see Figure 6.11). The same proportion of Christian and Independent school graduates also gave to other non-profit charitable organisations despite already being more likely to give to political causes and religious congregations.

Figure 6.9

Percentage of respondents who donated to a local church congregation, synagogue, mosque or temple in the past 12 months.

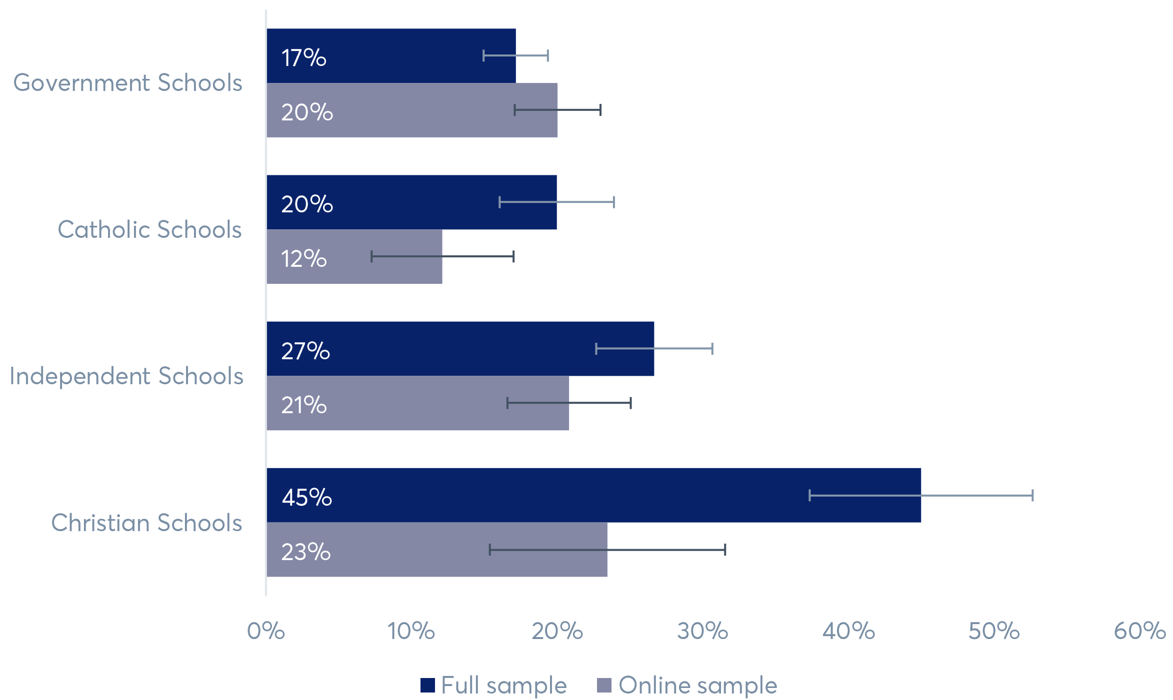


Figure 6.10

Percentage of respondents who donated to political causes in the past 12 months.

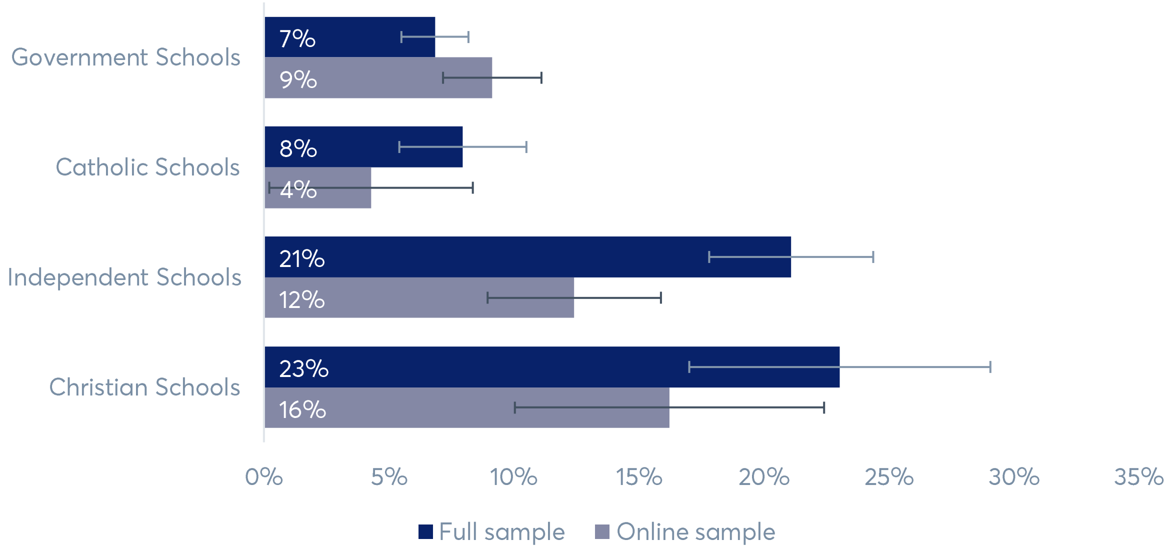
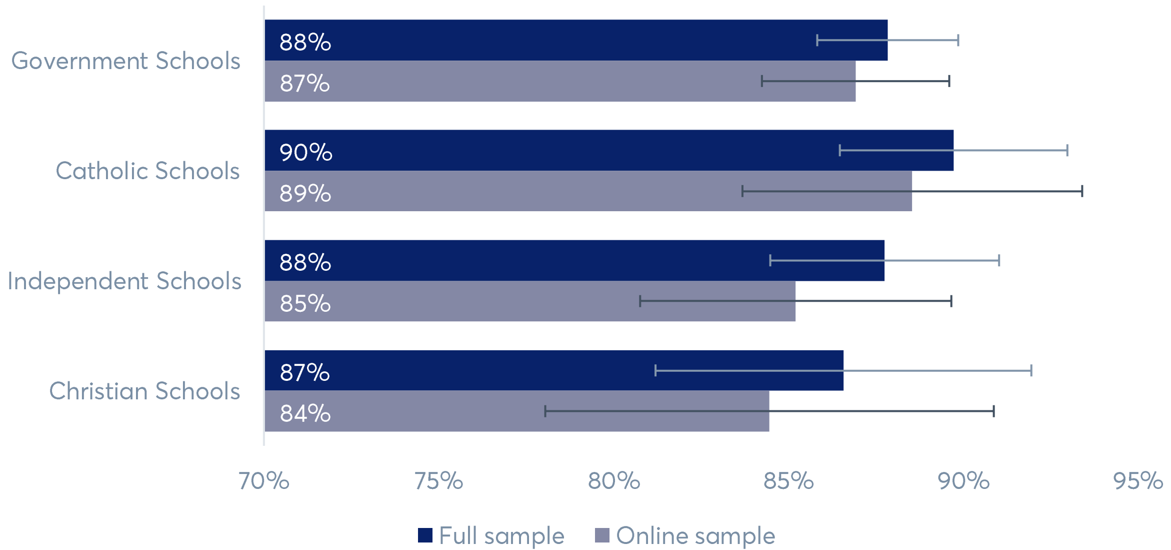


Figure 6.11

Percentage of respondents who donated to other non-religious organisations or causes in the past 12 months.



Summary and Conclusions

How generous are Australians with their time and finances? Do they participate in volunteer service or donate to charitable organisations? According to the respondents in our data, giving of one's finances was more common than giving of one's time to volunteer. One third of millennials reported volunteering, whilst two-thirds of them donated money.

Volunteering and giving habits were further differentiated by school sector. In Section 3, we mentioned that community service seemed especially emphasised in Catholic, Independent and Christian schools. This focus appeared to have some lasting impact among their graduates.

One third of millennials reported volunteering, whilst two-thirds of them donated money.

- Volunteering occurred most frequently among Christian school graduates. Though much of this volunteering effort occurred through churches or religious organisations, a significant portion was nonetheless dedicated to a range of other causes such as helping the elderly and the poor. Volunteering also happened through political, environmental, and arts and cultural organisations. Similarly, Christian school graduates did not merely give to their churches or religious organisations. They were just as likely as graduates from other sectors to give to nonreligious causes.
- Independent school graduates were also quite likely to volunteer their time and to give. Like Christian school graduates, they often volunteered their time to organisations dedicated to serving the poor and elderly as well as political and environmental groups. Unlike Christian school graduates, however, their volunteering was not as often conducted through religious organisations. Likewise, when compared to other graduates, Independent school graduates gave at equally high rates to nonreligious causes or groups.
- Volunteering rates were lowest among Catholic school graduates. On the one hand, this result appeared inconsistent with the high proportions of Catholic school graduates who reported that community service was a strong emphasis in their schools. However, we found high frequencies of giving among Catholic school graduates, and much of the giving was not to religious or political causes but to other ends. It appears that generosity among Catholic school graduates was mostly expressed through charitable giving. Thus, there seemed to be a connection between the emphasis on academic excellence and service among Catholic schools. That is, Catholic school graduates went on to attain proportionally higher levels of post-secondary education and the highest household incomes, but their giving underscored a unique outward-facing posture when it came to stewarding the resources they earned.
- Government school graduates appeared to be more akin to Catholic school graduates than Independent and Christian school graduates in their level of volunteering. They were less likely to volunteer than graduates from Independent and Christian schools. This may not be surprising given that, in absolute terms, the proportion of graduates reporting an emphasis on community service in school was lowest among the Government school sector. Nonetheless, the likelihood of charitable giving among Government school graduates was not markedly different than graduates from Catholic and Christian sectors.

We acknowledge that there are other forms of civic engagement beyond volunteering and giving. The CES Australia data cannot speak to these other forms, let alone how they may or may not differ across sector. Moreover, many of the cross-sector differences reduced significantly once we statistically adjusted for

background demographic characteristics. Such a pattern highlights the important role that the family plays alongside the schools in nurturing civic dispositions.

In closing, we remind readers that we began this section by citing other data on volunteering and charitable giving among Australians that expressed some concern about whether this type of civic behaviour is on the decline in the nation. Notwithstanding how severe of an issue this possible decline is, we have sketched out the ways in which graduates from different Australian school sectors were engaged through volunteering and giving. There is certainly evidence of a regard for this kind of engagement. On the other hand, we hope that the CES Australia data on this topic will spur additional thought among educators, civic leaders and others for how schools can better play their role in shaping their graduates to be even more generous with their time, money and other gifts.

Section Seven

Family: Marriage and Relationships

Upon asking CES Australia respondents to assess how well their secondary schooling prepared them for dealing with personal relationships, about two thirds of Christian and Independent school graduates reported feeling "somewhat prepared" or "very prepared" by their school. Meanwhile, just over half of Government and Catholic school graduates shared the same opinion (see Figure 3.10).

As we have discussed throughout previous sections, schools and families represent two parts of a broader moral ecosystem in which young people are formed. Conceptions of the good and the practices that embody those ideals are taught and reinforced within schools, families and other communities. Importantly, the school and family structures are mutually supporting; healthy schools need healthy families and vice-versa. Young people need both for their formation, growth and development into adulthood.

Importantly, the school and family structures are mutually supporting; healthy schools need healthy families and vice-versa. Young people need both for their formation, growth and development into adulthood.

In this section, we consider the potential role of schools in family formation. That is, what are the marital outcomes among students from Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian schools? Differences are possible given different emphases across the sectors in character development and religious or spiritual values, as discussed in Section 3.

There are a variety of reasons to consider marital outcomes. Recent meta-analyses undertaken by researchers at Harvard University report that marriage has profound effects on "health, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, and financial stability."[55]

Marriage additionally has a public purpose. Marriage relationships and the families formed around them are where virtues necessary for civic life like self-sacrifice, commitment, kindness, empathy and forbearance can be nurtured.[56] Families, like government, charitable organisations, friendships and neighbourhoods, are one of the many of supporting institutions and systems that sustain society.

According to our data, 51 percent of Australian 25- to 39-year-olds have married. Of the individuals who ever married, 15 percent of them divorced at some point in their lives. On the other hand, 49 percent of Australian 25- to 39-year-olds have never married, 36 percent of whom are living with an unmarried partner.

Disaggregating this data by school sector, we found that the proportion of individuals who ever marry but never divorce was higher among Christian school graduates compared to all the other sectors (see Figure 7.1). Just over 50 percent of graduates from Christian schools reported being married and never divorced, while 40 percent of

[55] VanderWeele, 2017a, p. 8152.
[56] Bellah et al., 1985; Wilcox, 2011.

graduates from Government, Catholic and Independent schools reported the same. The rate of being married and never divorced among Catholic and Independent school graduates is slightly higher than the rate among Government school graduates. So only the difference between Government and Christian school graduates is statistically significant.

However, after adjusting for background characteristics, such as whether the respondent grew up with both biological parents, the married but never divorced rate dropped to 45 percent for Christian school graduates and is not statistically distinguishable from the rate for graduates from other sectors. This suggests that this marital outcome is influenced by family background characteristics, not just schooling alone.

Given these results on marrying and never divorcing, it should come as no surprise that rates of never marrying were lowest among Christian school graduates. As displayed in Figure 7.2, about 37 percent of Christian school graduates reported never being married. In contrast, about half of Catholic and Government school graduates reported never being married. The rate among Independent school graduates was only slightly lower than these two sectors at 46 percent. As in the results concerning ever being married and never divorced, the difference between Christian school graduates and other sectors is statistically significant in the full sample. Yet once we statistically adjust for family background, the difference attenuates to about 10 percentage points and is not statistically significant.

Figure 7.1

Percentage of respondents who are married but never divorced.

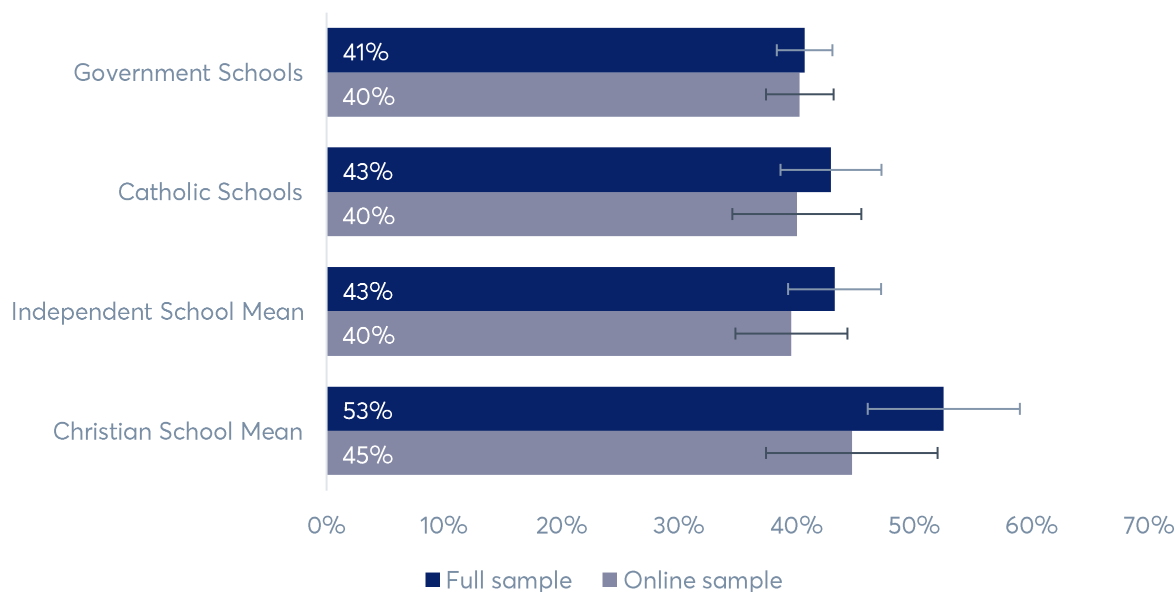
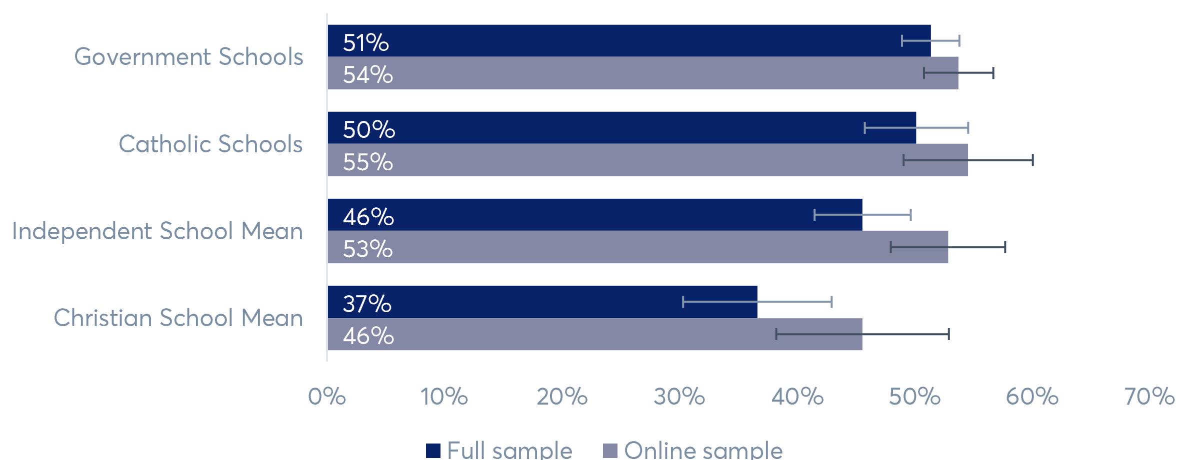


Figure 7.2

Percentage of respondents who have never married.



Regarding rates of divorce and living with unmarried partners, we did not find any differences across school sector. The rates for each sector generally reflect rates in the broader population.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, these results present a slightly different story for Christian school graduates. The findings indicate that Catholic, Independent and Government school graduates do not differ significantly from one another on marital outcomes.

With a higher prevalence of being married and never divorcing, Christian school graduates might be uniquely situated to form family structures that, according to a wide body of research, are beneficial for their children.[57] However, this is not to say that the other types of schools are not successfully preparing their students to form their own families and other social networks essential for their wellbeing. We do not have data on the nature of family life, so we are unable to speak to how well Christian school graduates might be flourishing in their relationships and raising their families despite higher marriage rates.

Moreover, it is important to reiterate that many of the differences among Christian school graduates were likely attributable to differences in the kinds of families that select into Christian schools. Once we adjusted for those background characteristics, the Christian-school difference decreased. Such a result underscores the importance of sustaining healthy families in which the kinds of virtues that are conducive to greater civic responsibility can be nurtured.

Cultivating a strong connection between home and school is, therefore, vital as both spheres make large imprints in the kinds of citizens that are ultimately formed. It is a lesson that all schools — Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian — can note as they seek to serve the common good.

[57] Wilcox, 2011.

Section Eight

Religion: Faith Commitments and Spiritual Practices

Australia's religious profile has shifted considerably in the past two decades. Australians are identifying less as Christian and an increasing number do not identify with any religion at all. This is reflected in the CES Australia data, with only about one in five respondents reporting that they grew up in families who thought religion was important. Other religions are growing within Australian society including Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim and Hindu religions.[58]

In this section, we consider whether schools play a role in fostering hearts that are attuned to the transcendent. In the CES Australia, we asked a variety of questions about beliefs about God, moral reasoning and religious practice. We are primarily interested in whether schools instil religious beliefs and practices broadly understood, not whether they instil beliefs and practices of particular religious traditions.

The vision for a common good as proposed in the CES points to the importance of a sense of the transcendent, which may go a long way to renewing our communities and seeking their flourishing.

We take it that becoming the kind of person that is sensitive to the transcendent is constitutive of human flourishing. In fact, empirical research has documented connections between religiosity and many indicators of wellbeing such as life satisfaction, mental and physical health, social connectedness and a sense of meaning or purpose. That research also suggests that religious individuals are more likely to forgive, be others-oriented and serve in their communities.[59]

Philosopher Charles Taylor famously characterised the modern western society as disenchanted.[60] Particularly before the late 17th century, people conceived the material universe as filled with meaning, directed by purpose and pointing to transcendent realities. Today, however, the universe is typically viewed as a set of mechanical laws with no ultimate purpose or reality beyond the observable, material world.

While all of our pre-modern ancestors might have found meaning, identity and fullness in transcendent sources offered by an enchanted cosmos, people today usually try to shield themselves from any references to transcendence and attempt to find meaning solely in what the material world offers. Instead of finding meaning, identity and fullness in a deity or religious tradition, individuals look to alternative sources such as work, politics, wealth, companionship, hobbies and media.

The vision for the common good as proposed in the CES points to the importance of a sense of the transcendent. Kindling the imagination, an eye for beauty and a taste for goodness may go a long way to renewing our communities and seeking their flourishing.

Whilst some scholars have concerns about indoctrination and whether religious instruction is

[58] Singleton et al., 2019.
[59] Korrt, Dollery and Grant, 2014; VanderWeele 2017b.
[60] Taylor, 2007.

consistent with liberal values of autonomy and democratic life, we also recognise the countervailing view that suggests religion provides foundations to not only cultivate the virtues necessary for democratic life but also for committing to an identity or way of life so that individuals can live out their autonomy. Civil liberties, rights and *freedom from* unjust authority are constitutive of the common good, but the *freedom to* submit to a spiritual authority and to commit to a transcendent reality beyond ourselves is also important.

Moreover, as in previous sections, we challenge the notion of the autonomous self or atomistic individual. Identity and sense of purpose are developed and discerned in relationship and dialogue with others. They are only made intelligible in the communities that individuals belong to. Indeed, as we alluded to in Section 3, a majority of millennials (57 percent) felt that their school prepared them to find "a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction in life" with upwards of three quarters of Christian school graduates sharing that sentiment. Interestingly, 80 percent of Christian school graduates also agreed that their schools emphasised religious and spiritual values and were satisfied with the nature of those discussions.

In other words, religion is, on one hand, instrumentally valuable because it provides individuals with a sense of purpose and associated benefits like physical and mental health — outcomes constitutive of the common good. On the other hand, it also provides the foundation for places of belonging and welcome; it sustains communities without which we might not be able to practically live out ideals of the common good.

Views on God

In the CES Australia, we first attempted to assess respondents' openness to transcendence by inquiring about their beliefs about God. We asked: "Which of the following views comes closest to your own view of God?" Respondents selected from five possible options:

1. God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today.
2. God created the world but is not involved in the world now.
3. God is not personal, but something like a cosmic life force.
4. God does not exist.
5. Don't know

We interpreted respondents who selected one of the first three answer options as having some sense of the transcendence beyond the material universe.

About one quarter of Australian 25- to 39-year-olds believed that "God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today." Another quarter believe that "God does not exist." Another 20 percent responded, "Don't know," whilst close to another 20 percent believed that God was impersonal, like a cosmic life force. The remaining 10 percent of respondents were split between preferring not to answer the question and believing that God created the world but was not involved in it now.

Response patterns were quite different across school sectors. As shown in Figure 8.1, 45 percent of Christian school graduates took the view that "God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today," and 27 percent of Catholic school graduates took the same view. Meanwhile, 19 and 24 percent of Government and Independent school graduates shared this view. The rate among Christian school graduates was statistically distinguishable from the rate for graduates from all other sectors, whilst the Catholic school difference was only statistically significant with respect to Government schools.

One in ten Christian school graduates, though they believed in God, did not seem to hold that God is relevant for the world. The proportion of Christian

school graduates holding this view was higher than the proportion of Government and Catholic school sectors (see Figure 8.2). Meanwhile, between 15 to 20 percent of millennials from all four school sectors viewed God as an impersonal cosmic force.

Figure 8.1

Percentage of respondents who think God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today.

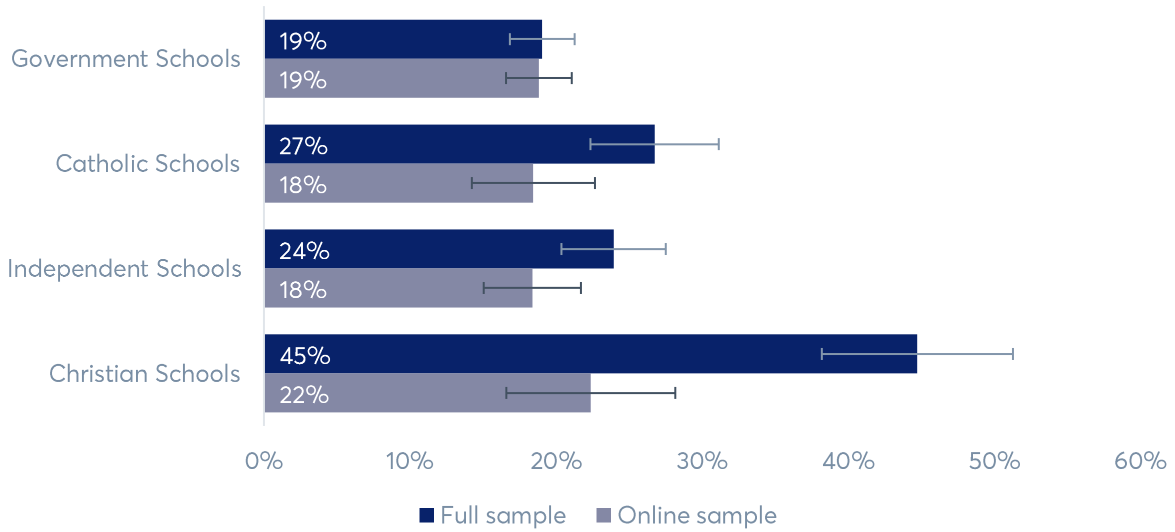
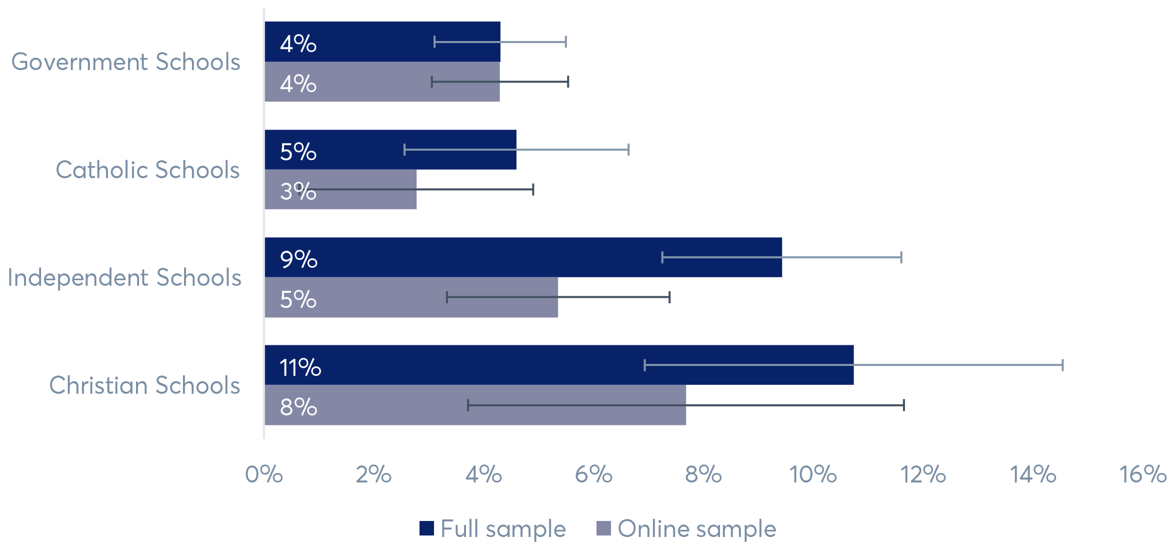


Figure 8.2

Percentage of respondents who think God created the world but is not involved in the world now.



As shown in Figure 8.3, just over one third of Government school graduates took the position that "God does not exist." The corresponding rate for Christian school graduates was just over 10 percent. At one quarter, the rates of believing that God does not exist among Catholic and Independent school graduates were higher than rates among Christian school graduates but lower than Government school graduates.

We found similar patterns in the proportion of people who indicated "don't know" when asked about their view of God. Findings are shown in Figure 8.4. One fifth of Government school graduates selected this response. Slightly lower proportions of Catholic and Independent school graduates (18 and 17 percent) held the same view. Christian school graduates were slightly less likely than Catholic and Independent school graduates to indicate "don't know"; 13 percent of them selected this response option.

Figure 8.3

Percentage of respondents who think God does not exist.

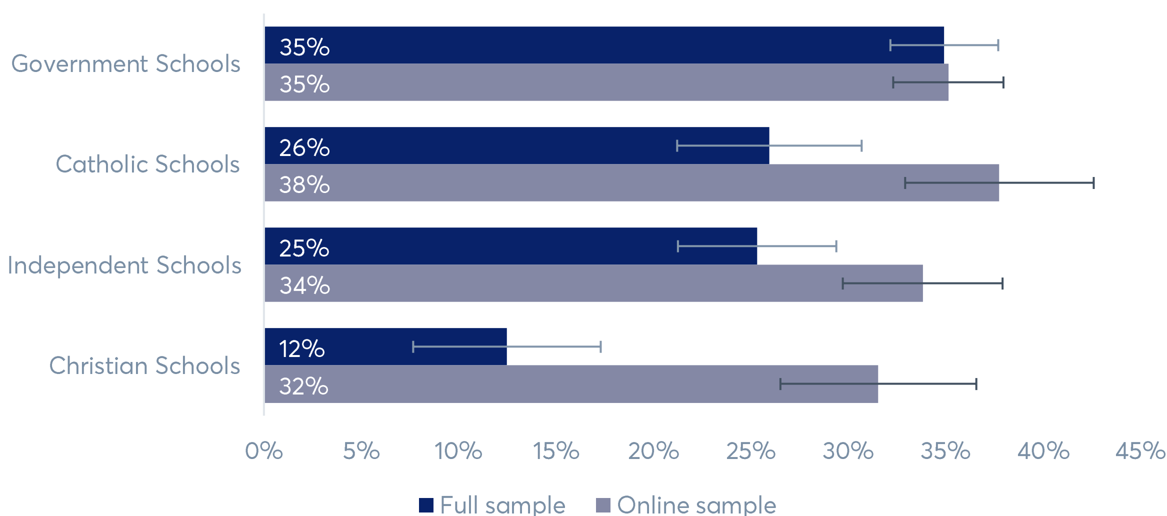
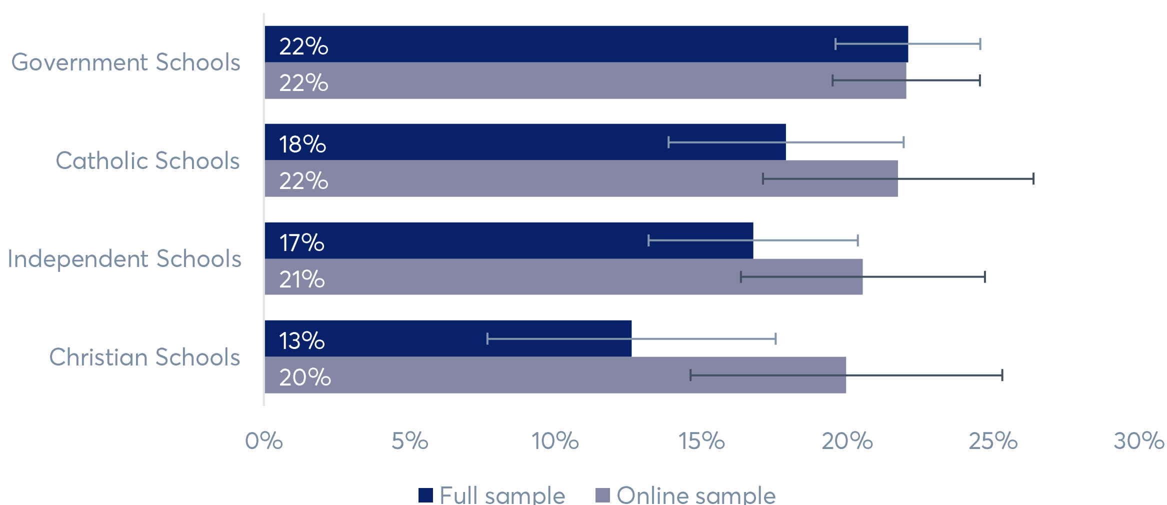


Figure 8.4

Percentage of respondents who don't know what to think about God.



However, we point out that cross-sector differences regarding views of God are largely influenced by family background. Upon controlling for respondents' characteristics such as the religiosity of their family growing up, the differences disappeared, once again underscoring the importance of school, family and a variety of other influences that might cultivate a sensitivity to spiritual things.

Engagement with Religious Practices

We then asked respondents to report on their own religious practices. We focus on religious service attendance, prayer and engaging with a religious text such as the Bible, Koran or Torah. The results are presented in Figures 8.5 to 8.7.

Government school graduates were most likely to indicate never engaging in any of these practices. Sixty-nine percent of these graduates reported never attending a religious service in the past 12 months. Sixty-three percent reported never praying, and 77 percent reported never engaging with a religious text over the same time period.

Figure 8.5

Percentage of respondents who never attended a church or religious service in the last 12 months.

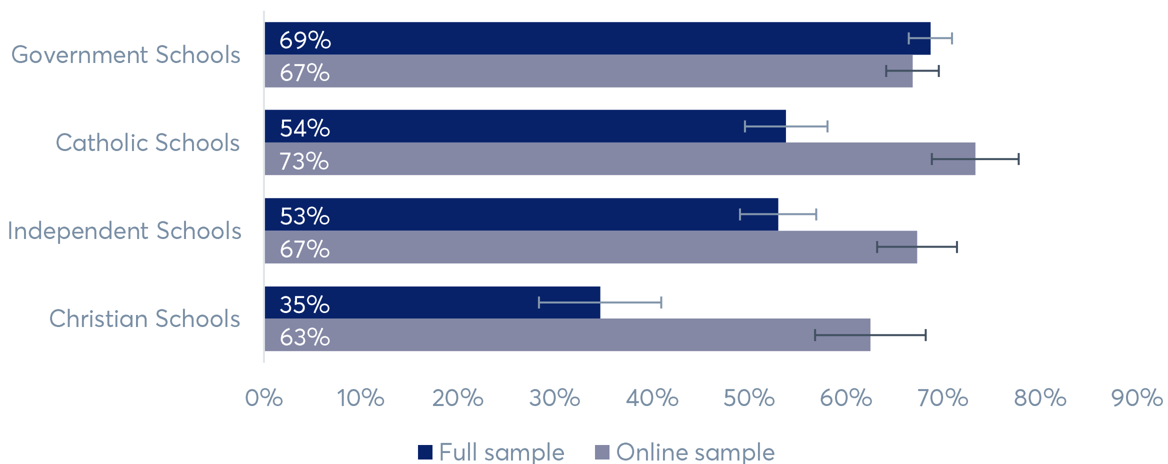


Figure 8.6

Percentage of respondents who never prayed in the last 12 months.

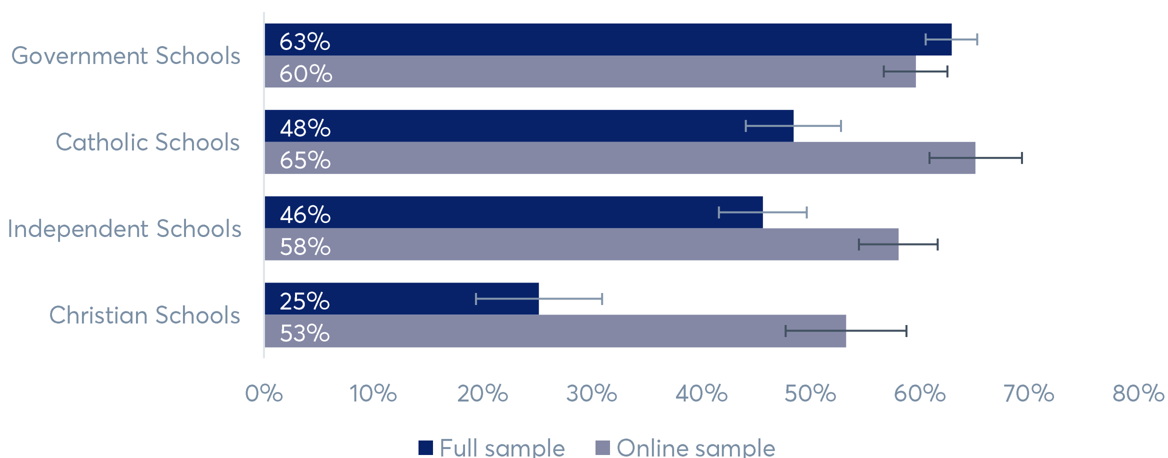
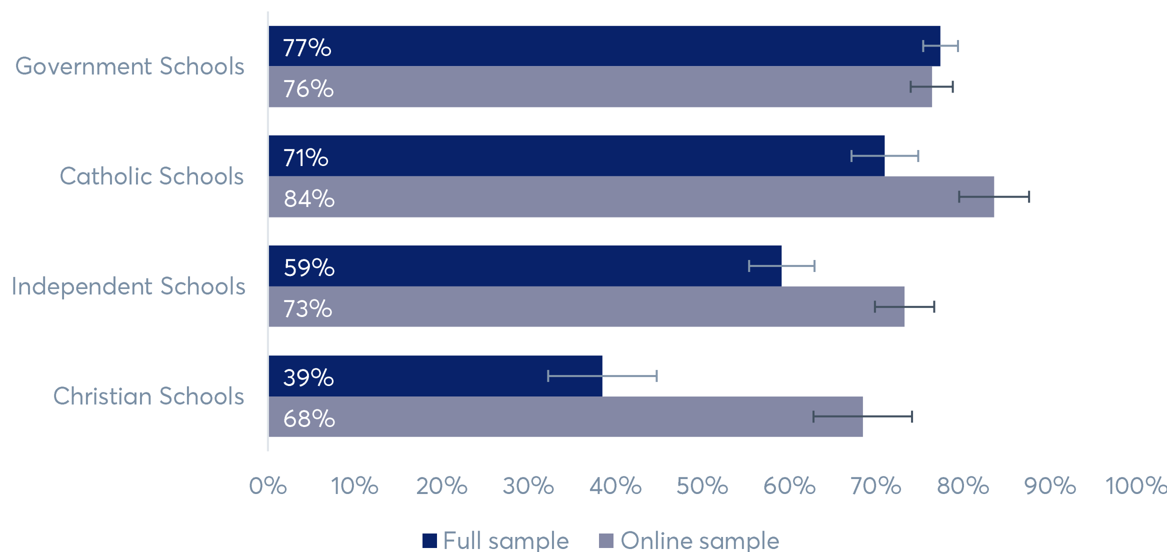


Figure 8.7

Percentage of respondents who never engaged with a religious text in the last 12 months.



Catholic and Independent school graduates were slightly more religious with rates of never attending a religious service in the past 12 months at about 54 percent and rates of never praying in the past 12 months at 48 percent. And although 71 percent of Catholic school graduates never engaged in a religious text in the past 12 months, the rate was slightly lower at 60 percent for Independent school graduates. Notably, differences between Government and these two school sectors are statistically significant.

Christian school graduates, however, more regularly engage in these religious practices. Only 35 percent of them reported never attending a religious service in the past 12 months. One quarter reported never praying, and 39 percent of them reported never engaging with a religious text over the same period. That is to say, Christian school graduates were at least 20 percentage points more likely to engage in these religious practices than Catholic and Independent school graduates — a sizable margin that is statistically significant.

In online supplementary material (available at https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/research/), we display the proportion of respondents from each school sector who participate in these religious practices on a weekly basis. Christian school graduates were much more likely to report engaging in these religious practices with that level of frequency. One quarter indicated attending religious services on a weekly basis. Nearly half prayed and about one-third engaged with a religious text with the same degree of regularity. Respective rates of engaging in these practices on a weekly basis among the other sectors were 10 to 20 percentage points lower.

For all of these results, cross-sector differences decreased dramatically, often times to statistical insignificance, once we adjusted for background characteristics such as the religiosity of the family in which the respondent grew up. Once again, this pattern highlights the critical role that family plays alongside the school in forming young people.

Summary and Conclusions

Contemporary Australia has been reported as one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world.[61] Nonetheless, religion remains a contested issue with Australia's secularised public square.[62] There is no easy solution to learning to navigate and live within a pluralistic society where connection to transcendence is seen as part of the common good.

Rather than eschewing religion, we began this section raising the question of how religion might be constitutive of the common good. We cited studies that have highlighted that various aspects of religious behaviour such as involvement in religious services and commitment to religious affiliations are positively associated with indicators of individual well-being.[63]

More than that, recultivating a sensitivity towards the transcendent and beauty might be valuable for renewing common life together. After all, no one is insulated from the realities of suffering and injustice. And as tempting as it may be to craft a reasoned explanation for the existence of suffering, it may be even more constructive to let the weight of transcendent and beautiful things help us to imagine a better future together. The traditional religious practices that we examined in this section are one possible way to cultivate the capacity to do just that.

However, we recognise that there are a variety of other religious practices besides religious service attendance, prayer and engaging in religious texts. In fact, one might critique the set of practices in the CES Australia as biased in favour of the most common religions in the West, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam as opposed to others. This bias may be the reason engagement in these religious practices is highest among Christian school graduates.

Furthermore, traditional religious practices are not the only way to cultivate a sense of the transcendent, and no faith tradition has a monopoly on aesthetics. Education in the visual arts, theatre, music and poetry of a variety of other cultures — an aspect of the curriculum of all schools — do just that. In addition, schools that are not founded upon the common Western religions may very well appeal to alternative conceptions of the transcendent to, say, educate their students to care for the natural world. These additional ways of cultivating a sensitivity to the transcendent are worth further investigation and discussion. More importantly, we hope that all schools will consider how to better position themselves to do this kind of cultivating work.

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[61] Bouma, 2016.
[62] Keddie et al., 2019.
[63] Korrt, Dollery & Grant, 2014; VanderWeele, 2017b.

Section Nine

Conclusion: Millennials' Contribution to the Common Good in Australia

The findings of the CES Australia reveal that, across all sectors within Australian education, millennial graduates contribute to the common good and sustain civic life in varying degrees and various ways. These graduates are not only employed, intelligent and competent in their chosen careers and work, but also exhibit a commitment to service and public life. These dispositions find expression in membership of associations and clubs, volunteer work in community groups, financial giving to social causes across a wide spectrum of organisations and demonstrating care and commitments to families and others within their wider community.

The aim of the CES Australia, was to highlight the importance of identifying and measuring educational outcomes that matter for the common good and human formation.[64] Indeed, our results underscore the important roles that schools play in preparing their students for common life understood not just for economic production and private self-interest but also for active, holistic and meaningful contribution in and for their communities — civically, socially and religiously. Schools play a critical role in assisting young people in navigating their lives, understanding their place in the broader world and asking questions about a life worth living.

Schools of all types — government and non-government, religious and secular — provide a public education, that is, an education that seeks to shape and form graduates for active participation and engagement in and for the good of society.

The results also describe the particular ways each Australian school sector educates for the common good. Schools of all types — government and non-government, religious and secular — provide a public education, that is, an education that seeks to shape and form graduates for active participation and engagement in and for the good of society.

These contributions are vitally important to our social fabric and integral to sustaining and promoting goods we might share in common.

Whilst there are a number of noteworthy differences across sectors, we hope these comparisons will activate reflection and discussion on how the distinctive characteristics in any given school sector might inform subsequent stewardship of schools within and across the Government, Catholic, Independent and Christian sectors in Australian education.

For instance, we highlight issues that threaten social ties across the nation such as the disparities between metropolitan and non-metropolitan communities. Respondents from non-metropolitan schools were less likely than their metropolitan counterparts to have completed bachelor's degrees and to be in fulltime employment with comparative income. These results raise concerns about accessibility, disadvantage and equity

[64] Biesta, 2009, p.10.

within these regions and require thoughtful conversations around suitable resourcing and provision for these non-metropolitan school communities.

However, these disparities are least pronounced in Government schools. What lessons can be learned for non-Government schools in light of this finding, especially in the provision of schooling models that recognise social disadvantage and stratification in these communities? The solution, moreover, is not just the responsibility of schools; it requires attending to the surrounding social infrastructure, industry and institutions that serve these communities in regional and remote areas. Could the ways in which Independent and Christian schools foster habits that encourage community service, entrepreneurship, charitable giving and belonging play a role in addressing these issues?

We also point out that our respondents all graduated secondary school between 1998 and 2011. Much about secondary schooling has changed since then, including the adoption of national curricular standards, national testing and an increasing reliance on digital technology. Time will tell if the outcomes we described throughout the report will persist or change for more recent cohorts of Australian graduates. We certainly hope that if there are any changes, they will be for better. Educators and educational leaders are encouraged to reflect upon these survey results and to consider how their schools are shaping the current generation of Australian secondary students.

These topics are but one of the many discussions that potentially arise from the CES Australia. To that end and in closing, we summarise some of the salient findings for each sector and schools overall:

Government Schools

For Government schools, the long Australian tradition of educating for the common good appears to be continuing to form active and informed citizens who contribute much to the public square. These findings are notable and need to be promoted more widely and intentionally.

As we just mentioned above, the relatively small gaps in educational outcomes between Government school graduates from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas is noteworthy. Government school graduates also felt nearly as prepared for career success as Catholic and Christian school graduates. Perhaps consistent with their public service and democratic orientation, Government school graduates appeared most likely to hold jobs in the public administration and safety sector.

Government school graduates were additionally quite satisfied with the availability of extracurricular programs and the quality of teacher and student relationships. They felt as prepared as graduates from the non-Government sector for dealing with personal relationships later in life and interacting with society and culture. Given those schooling experiences, it may be unsurprising to find that as adults, they were just as likely as graduates from other sectors to be actively involved in sports, leisure and cultural groups and to give to a range of causes and community groups. They were also just as likely to be married and never divorced as the Catholic and Independent school graduates.

Although academic excellence was an emphasis within Government schools, it was not emphasised to the extent as in the Catholic, Independent and Christian school sectors. Government school graduates were less likely than graduates from other school sectors to feel prepared for academic success at university and less likely to have completed a bachelor's degree than graduates from Catholic or Independent schools. As with all sectors, there are findings worthy of recognition and areas for further reflection.

Catholic Schools

Catholic school graduates also exhibited a shared commitment to a common good narrative. Their

schooling experiences included an emphasis upon both academic excellence and a strong focus on spiritual and religious values.

Community service was emphasised in Catholic schools to a similar extent as Christian and Independent schools. Although volunteering rates were comparatively lower than Independent and Christian school graduates, Catholic school graduates were just as likely to give to charitable organisations. The expressions of civic engagement may simply be different among these Catholic school graduates.

Notably, Catholic school graduates felt quite prepared for career and university success. Their household incomes were the highest among graduates from all the other sectors. It is possible that the connections between vocation, economic success and service are quite unique among Catholic schools. For the Catholic school graduate, finding work and making money are important alongside a commitment to serve others.

Catholic school graduates were as satisfied as graduates from other school sectors regarding the quality of spiritual and religious discussions during school. However, surprisingly we found low levels of religious practice such as attending services, prayer or engaging with a religious text among Catholic school graduates. What are the implications of these patterns for religious formation in Catholic schools? We raise this question for further consideration.

Independent Schools

For the Independent school sector, the CES Australia data demonstrated the important contribution that these schools make to public life. Like the Catholic school sector, these schools stressed academic excellence and community engagement, though the salience of academics was strongest in Independent schools compared to all the other sectors. This feature was most clearly borne out in the high levels of educational attainment among their graduates. Bachelor's degree and even post-bachelor's degree attainment rates were highest among Independent school graduates.

Independent school graduates appeared to enter technical, scientific or professional job fields at relatively high rates. Furthermore, they often committed to associations that sustained these vocations and enhanced professional practice. Their household incomes were also higher than that of Christian and Government school graduates.

At the same time, we found gaps in employment and bachelor's degree attainment between Independent schools across metropolitan and non-metropolitan locales. Communities across these locales face different challenges. It is difficult to suggest ways to address this gap simply based on the CES Australia data. We highlight these gaps for further consideration, not only for Independent schools but also for Catholic and Christian school sectors where these gaps were most apparent.

Aside from their employment and income, Independent school graduates volunteered and gave at levels similar to Christian school graduates. Independent school graduates gave to political associations and other types of organisations and volunteered their time for other causes such as helping the poor or the elderly. Like the Catholic schools sector, they may have less robust attachments to explicitly religious organisations and lower levels of religious practice such as attending services, prayer or engaging with a religious text compared to Christian school graduates. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see evidence of this type of civic engagement among Independent school graduates.

Christian Schools

And finally, the CES Australia provided a first-time glimpse of a growing network of schools: the Christian schools sector. Christian schools potentially shape their students in ways that enhance commitment to churches, religious

networks and religious practice. Students' families unquestionably played an integral part in this kind of formation as do the schools that promote these religious values and commitments.

The attention to the religious formation appeared to reflect a particular view of education in Christian schools. Indeed, as we detailed in Section 3, Christian school students were more likely than students in other sectors to agree that their schools emphasised "finding a sense meaning, purpose, and direction in life;" "dealing with the problems of life" and "dealing with personal relationships." The Christian religion certainly has much to say about these issues, but it is not the sole source of wisdom on such matters. Other school sectors might wish to consider how they can increasingly engage their students on issues regarding meaning, purpose and direction in life.

Each Australian school graduate is not merely an individual but a member of a community — a community that cannot be said to be flourishing if one of its members is not. This posture needs to be cultivated more widely in an increasingly self-interested and privatised public square.

Beyond their involvement with religious communities, Christian school graduates also belonged to a wide variety of other groups including political parties, trade unions and sporting and cultural groups. Furthermore, they gave to and volunteered their time and financial resources to a variety of organisations — religious and nonreligious alike. All this demonstrated engagement in a range of service and public involvement that was not solely through religious organisations alone, even if their motivating impulses may have been religious. The approach of civic engagement through belonging, volunteering and giving among Christian school graduates contrasts with the approach we found among Catholic school graduates, who seem to mostly engage through giving. Nonetheless, all of these approaches are ways to embody an outward posture towards community and culture which serve to sustain common life.

Whilst the findings of Christian graduate perceptions of preparation for academic success at university were high and academic excellence was perceived as a strong emphasis within this sector, rates of bachelor's degree attainment were low compared to Catholic and Independent sectors. Still, unemployment rates were noticeably lower suggesting that these graduates take particular vocational pathways. We raise such issues around higher education and vocational pathways to prompt additional reflection on how Christian schools can serve the common good and prepare their graduates for public life.

Education for the Common Good

In educating for the common good, there are important priorities to be considered regarding effective academic learning and a service orientation; between an inward development of skills for an individual's economic or psychological wellbeing and the formation of a kind of person that gives regard for neighbour; and between the internal principles of private purpose and the external practices of the common good.

Each schooling sector already separately considers the questions regarding the ends of education, school reform and their own practices of teaching and learning that form students to suitably contribute to the common good. The CES Australia survey was commissioned to stimulate conversations across all sectors within Australian education. International comparisons, especially with CES data from Canada and the US, regarding these important outcomes across school sectors would likely enrich those discussions. It is hoped that these conversations will contribute to the development and refinement of a narrative for education in Australia that provides the space for pluralism and difference across sectors whilst also

validating the values and commitments we share in common.

Each Australian school graduate is not merely an individual but a member of a community — a community that cannot be said to be flourishing if one of its members is not. This posture needs to be cultivated more widely in an increasingly self-interested and privatised public square. It requires a shift in cultural thinking to view the benefits that accumulate to individuals as a whole are actually greater than the sum of the benefits that individuals separately receive. It requires a shift in cultural imagination to envisage benefits that are not merely economic or psychological but more holistic as is warranted by our humanity. An aspiration of what life together might look like was the compelling story that shaped our country's identity and character toward nationhood. It most certainly needs to be the reimagined tale in years to come.

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