

2 May 2023

Commissioner Alex Robson  
Deputy Chair, Productivity Commission  
4 National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600

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Dear Commissioner Robson,

## Philanthropy Inquiry

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA Ltd) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Philanthropy Inquiry.

There are very few for-profit schools in Australia serving primary and secondary students. As for-profit organisations, such schools are not eligible for government funding. Most independent schools, being not-for-profit, rely on both government funding and fees paid by the families of students attending the school to cover general recurrent operational costs. Most independent schools also rely on donations, especially for capital development and the underwriting of scholarship programs. Philanthropy is therefore a topic of deep interest to independent schools in terms of their day to day and long-term operational health.

Philanthropy is also a key concern for independent schools in relation to the holistic education of their students, and is typically a component of programs designed to teach what are variously referred to as civic virtues or character values and which are often found bundled under the umbrella term 'service learning'. Such programs are a prominent feature of student formation in independent schools and it is this educational interest that we address here.

In 2019 AHISA undertook a project managed by McCrindle Research to investigate how independent schools contribute to building and sustaining social capital in Australia through service learning programs and other school activities. Given that the Commission is tasked with analysing trends in philanthropic giving and the drivers of these trends, we believe findings from our social capital project will be of interest to you and may help identify any role schools might play in developing opportunities for increased philanthropic giving in Australia. Findings of direct relevance to the Commission's inquiry are presented below, and the full report prepared by McCrindle Research is attached for your information.

AHISA welcomes any inquiries the Commission may have about this submission. These may be directed to me

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Chris Duncan**

AHISA Chief Executive Officer

## ABOUT AHISA

AHISA Ltd is a professional association for Heads of independent schools.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunity for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

AHISA's 460 members lead schools that collectively account for over 450,000 students, representing 70 per cent of Australia's independent sector enrolments and over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments. AHISA members' schools also educate a significant proportion of senior secondary students: 20 per cent of Australia's Year 12 students attend AHISA members' schools.

AHISA's members lead a collective workforce of over 44,000 teaching staff and almost 30,000 support staff.

Over 80 per cent of AHISA members lead schools with a single religious affiliation, including schools affiliated with the major Christian denominations, Jewish schools and Islamic schools. A further 16 per cent lead schools that identify as non-denominational, inter-denominational or ecumenical. Anglican (31 per cent) and Catholic (21 per cent) affiliations account for over 50 per cent of AHISA members' schools. Less than 1 per cent of AHISA members' schools formally identify as secular.

The socio-economic profile of AHISA members' schools is diverse. Over 20 per cent of members lead schools serving low- to very low-SES communities. The geographic spread of members' schools is also diverse, with schools located in major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas. School size varies from less than 200 students to over 3,000 students, with most members' schools falling within the range 600 to 1400 students.

AHISA believes that a high-quality schooling system in Australia depends on:

- Parents having the freedom to exercise their rights and responsibilities regarding the education of their children
- Students and their families having the freedom to choose among diverse schooling options
- Schools having the autonomy to exercise educational leadership as they respond to the emerging needs of their communities in a rapidly changing society.

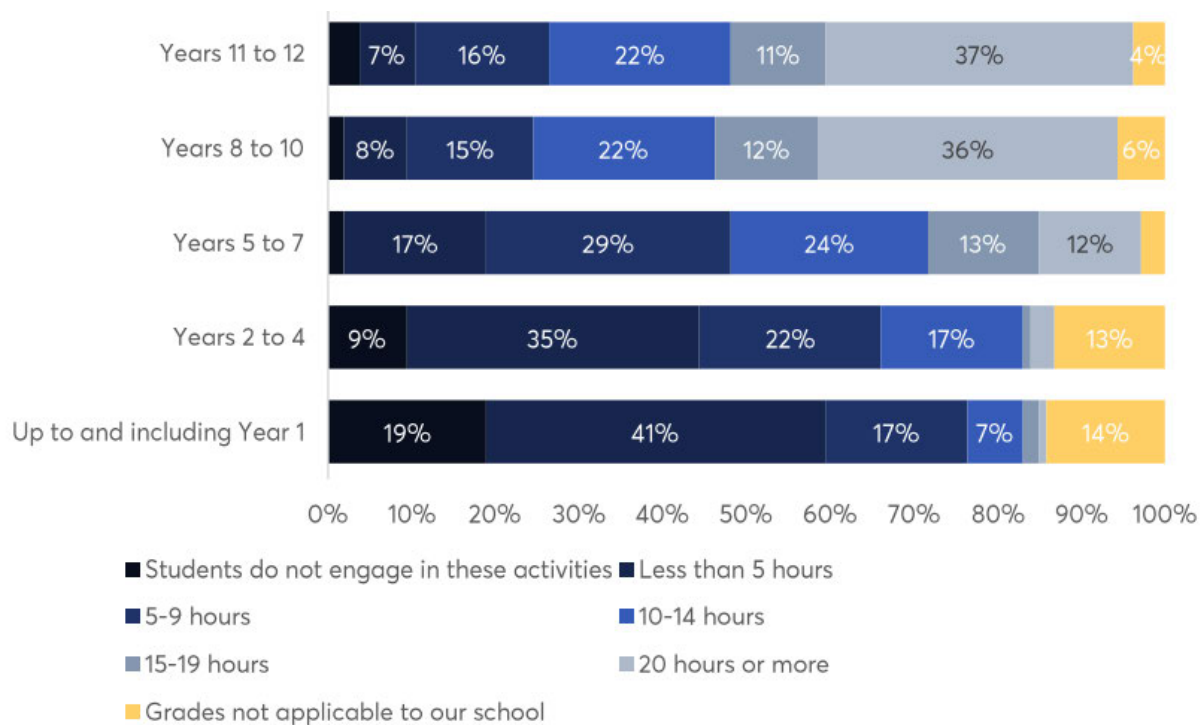
## INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS & THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC VIRTUES

AHISA's 2019 social capital survey examined the extent to which students at independent schools are encouraged to participate in philanthropic effort, whether that be through volunteer effort, fundraising effort, direct giving or donation of goods.

The survey found that nearly all students are engaged in service activities, particularly in secondary years. Participating schools reported that, even in Early Learning and Year 1, around 80 per cent of students engaged in some form of service learning or philanthropic effort.

As might be expected, students' age is related to time spent engaged in service activities. Across the year prior to the survey, Year 11 and 12 students and students in Years 8 to 10 were the most likely to have spent 20+ hours volunteering or engaging in community services.

**Chart 1. Approximate hours spent in the year prior to the survey by each student in volunteer/community service/community engagement activities managed by the school**



### Volunteering

AHISA's 2019 social capital survey reveals that volunteering is an important aspect of what might be broadly termed values education or more particularly service learning in independent schools and is encouraged in a variety of ways:

- 96 per cent of AHISA members' schools participating in the survey reported they recognise students for their volunteering effort, either through mentions in assembly or school newsletters or through the award of badges or annual prizes
- A third of schools award course credits for volunteering

- 80 per cent of schools offer formal service learning programs, including through the International Baccalaureate and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- Some 60 per cent of schools reported they had in place formal school-initiated service learning arrangements such as working with the local council, or engaging with organisations such as The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Anglicare
- Some schools reported allowing timetable flexibility to enable students to undertake community service.

### Fundraising & giving

Almost all schools (96 per cent) engaged in AHISA's survey reported that students were engaged in hosting events or fundraising for charities or causes in their local communities. McCrindle calculates that the high level of local community service among independent school students – either through volunteer participation or fundraising – means that 'every community of 100 people includes an average of two independent school students actively serving that community'.

Fundraising effort also meets national and international need:

- Some 90 per cent of schools encourage students to fundraise or organise events for national charities such as Clean Up Australia and the RSPCA
- Students in 83 per cent of schools had raised awareness for disadvantaged communities across Australia (such as those suffering from bushfire or flooding disasters) and students in 70 per cent of schools had provided emergency relief or material assistance for communities
- Some 70 per cent of schools reported that student effort supported a nationally focused religious group or organisation such as The Salvation Army
- Some 80 per cent of schools reported that students are also encouraged to engage with the global community, including through providing emergency relief and/or material assistance for overseas communities (53 per cent), or ongoing relationships with international charities such as Doctors Without Borders and Save the Children Fund (46 per cent) or through raising awareness for disadvantaged communities overseas (77 per cent).

The funds raised and/or personally donated by students through school-based or school-sponsored services and philanthropic activities are substantial. Based on schools' reports of the funds raised in the year prior to the survey, a median amount of \$25,000 was calculated, from which McCrindle extrapolated that students across all independent schools raised some \$28.5 million for charities or other community needs in that year.

### The longer-term impact of school-based development of civic virtues

Almost all principals engaged in AHISA's survey agreed that they are motivated to increase the social impact of their school and that they believe that student engagement with the community through service and fundraising efforts is an important way schools develop the confidence of students to engage with others beyond their school community and family circle.

These views sit comfortably with the generally held belief that education promotes a civil society. In his seminal study of social capital in the United States of America, RD Putnam argues that:

Education is one of the most important predictors – usually, in fact, the most important predictor – of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee to hosting a dinner party to giving blood. The same basic pattern applies to both men and women and to all races and generations. Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement.<sup>1</sup>

A recent study conducted by the London School of Economics and Political Science and the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, which tested the hypothesis that schools can transmit civic virtues across generations, found that citizenship projects conducted in three European schools significantly increased students' altruism, political self-efficacy, the quality of their relationship with their classmates and their respect for the rules of school life.<sup>2</sup>

Research focused on school-based service learning programs has claimed these to be effective in 'building interpersonal and communication skills, problem-solving abilities, complex thought processes, collaborative skills, ethical reasoning, and social and political understanding'.<sup>3</sup> Research has also associated service-learning with a range of positive outcomes for students, including greater sensitivity and empathy, increased commitment to social justice, improved cultural competence or multicultural skills and stereotype reduction. At the same time, research also indicates that service-learning experiences which entail only superficial, short-term contact between groups can entrench stereotyping.<sup>4</sup>

AHISA's survey results indicate that while schools encourage and support student service activity – including fundraising and giving – in response to emergency situations, they also engage in long-term relationship building within their local communities, with other communities nationally (such as remote Indigenous communities) and with schools and communities overseas as well as with state-based, national and international charitable organisations. AHISA's survey demonstrates that schools are not only active in promoting civic virtues but that their approaches to service learning are those most likely to reap positive outcomes for students.

While research confirms the value of service learning programs to students at school, evidence on the long-term influence of school-based service learning and philanthropic programs on adult behaviours is scant. An exception is recent research undertaken by Canadian-based research group Cardus in conjunction with six Australian Christian school organisations.<sup>5</sup>

The Cardus Education Survey Australia project entailed a survey by Cardus in October 2019 of a nationally representative sample of almost 5000 Australians aged 25 to 39 years who had completed secondary school between 1998 and 2011. The survey report, *Australian Schools and the Common Good*, which was released in 2020, analyses the survey data by four school sectors: government, Catholic, independent and Christian.

The project explored young adults' perceptions of the civic virtues and values promoted by their secondary schools and also their civic behaviours as adults. While not able to fully map a causal relationship between school-based education and formation in civic virtues and the practice of these by alumni as adults, the Cardus research does offer valuable insights on the role schools play in fostering civic virtues, some of which are explored here.

Of particular interest for the Commission's inquiry is that, among the range of themes associated with the common good that were explored by the Cardus Education Survey Australia project was the theme 'generosity', which is expressed as giving through donations and volunteering. In addition to the theme of 'generosity', the project report also discusses the theme of 'belonging',

and whether schools foster civic attachments, expressed as engagement in associations which 'nurture commitment, self-sacrifice and care for others' (page 44).

The report does not venture to draw links between civic attachments and volunteering and making monetary donations, but the greater propensity of those who attended independent and Christian schools to be members of groups – including political parties, trade unions, business and professional associations and sporting, leisure and cultural groups – and their greater likelihood to also volunteer for organisations supporting the elderly and the poor suggest that civic attachment and philanthropic interests are inter-related.

The project report challenges easy assumptions that might be made about the universality of service learning/civic virtues programs in schools and the influence of religious affiliation. For example, the discussion of volunteering in Section 6 of the report notes that while former students of independent schools were less likely to agree that spiritual and religious values were emphasised in their school than former students of Catholic and Christian schools, they were almost as likely as their Christian school peers and more likely than their Catholic school peers to make similar choices on where to expend their volunteer effort in terms of the poor and elderly, although their volunteering was not as often conducted through religious organisations (page 59).

Similarly, volunteering rates were lowest among Catholic school graduates, although a high proportion of Catholic school graduates reported that community service was a strong emphasis in their schools. Of note is that Catholic school graduates reported high frequencies of giving, although much of the giving was not to religious or political causes.

The number of those reporting they volunteered in a church or religious group and those reporting they volunteered with organisations helping the elderly or poor suggests that further research is required to investigate the relative strengths of religious affiliation and education as drivers of volunteering effort and where that effort is expended. For example, there was little difference by school sector of those volunteering in organisations assisting children and youth, yet school sector differences were marked in relation to volunteering for organisations assisting the elderly and the poor.

While the Cardus Education Survey Australia project demonstrates that school experiences may influence the ways in which adults express civic virtues, it also demonstrates that the influences of school-based experiences are hard to isolate from family and religious influences.

The perspectives of principals in the United Kingdom, recently published by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham<sup>6</sup>, affirms the findings of AHISA's social capital survey – that principals are "committed to the view that schools play a vital role in cultivating citizens of character". Certainly, for AHISA members, such a view shapes their schools' curriculum and co-curriculum offerings. While school leaders are unlikely to change their minds or dilute the efforts of their schools to promote the development of civic virtues in their students, it is important that we understand more about how such virtues are formed and expressed by young people. If the role of the family and of religious adherence in the generational transfer of civic values are not properly understood, it is likely that unrealistic demands will be made of schools.

The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtues is currently conducting a project, Civic Virtues Through Service to Others.<sup>7</sup> One of its three main research questions is: How can civic virtues be

educated and placed more centrally within the work of youth-serving organisations, including schools?

AHISA's social capital survey indicates that Australian schools hold a wealth of information about how civic virtues can be taught and integrated in the work of schools. It may be timely, given the UK project underway, that the Productivity Commission recommends as a result of its inquiry that the Australian Government commission research to map how civic virtues – or vices – are taught and caught in Australia – at schools, in homes, in community organisations, via governments and civic events, via public and private institutions and through the media. We all have a role to play in the generational transfer of civic virtues, and in a world of rapid change, it is increasingly important that we are all aware of what is expected of us in facilitating that transfer. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Putnam RD (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster, New York; page 186. Quoted in Campbell DE (2006) What is education's impact on civic and social engagement? In *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement: Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium*. OECD: Paris, pages 25-126 and accessed in pdf form at <https://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/37425694.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Briole S, Gurgand M, Maurin E, McNally S Ruiz-Valenzuela & Santín D (2022) *The making of civic virtues: A school-based experiment in three countries*. Centre for Economic Performance Discussion Paper No 1830. Accessed at <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1830.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Discussed in Conner J & Erikson J (2017) When does service-learning work: Contact theory and service-learning courses in higher education. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 23(2). Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.3998/mjcsloa.3239521.0023.204>.

<sup>4</sup> Sharma L (2016) Service learning in schools. *Teacher*, 26 April 2016. ACER: Melbourne. Accessed at [https://www.teachermagazine.com/au\\_en/articles/service-learning-in-schools](https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/service-learning-in-schools).

<sup>5</sup> National and state-based reports produced by the Cardus Education Survey Australia project are posted at <https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/research/>.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson A & Civil D (2021) *Educating for civic virtues and service: School leader perspectives*. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham. Accessed at <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/projects/CelebrationBritain/CivicVirtues/EducatingforCivicVirtuesandServiceInitialInsights.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Further information about the Jubilee Centre's project is posted at <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/2934/projects/civic-virtues-through-service-to-others>.