mccrindle

Social Capital Study

Measuring the social impact of independent education in Australia

AHISA

October 2019

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Research objectives

In December 2018, AHISA commissioned McCrindle to explore how independent schools contribute to their local communities. The purpose of this research is to identify how independent schools generate social capital and enhance community productivity and cohesion.

The key objectives include:

Define the independent education market in Australia

Understand the culture and values of independent schools

Measure the benefits of service learning and student leadership

Assess the extent to which independent schools engage with global communities

Quantify the value of social capital contributed by independent education in Australia

Research methodology

The AHISA Principal Survey 2019 is the collation of quantitative data collected through an online survey of independent school principals around Australia.

The survey was deployed via email to AHISA's association members. The survey was in field from 1 May 2019 to 1 August 2019. The survey recorded 116 starts and 101 survey completes. Based on the present deployment method and the assumption of Simple random sampling, the survey results were extrapolated based on Schools data to represent all independent schools in Australia.

Schools data

Data relating to the number of independent schools and students in Australia comes from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Schools Profile 2018.

Terminology

In this report, social capital has been defined as referring to 'the attributes and qualities of family, social and community networks that facilitate cooperation between individuals and communities'.[1]

Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded and may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph) which have then been rounded once combined.

Executive summary

The independent education sector in Australia consists of over 600,000 students and employs more than 80,000 staff.[2] With a median annual school fee of $5,330, the sector currently saves the Australian Government $4.5 billion per annum.[3]

These metrics, however, belie the larger social impact that the sector has on Australian society. The independent sector values holistic student development, social responsibility, fostering global perspectives, collaboration with other communities and championing diversity. New measures found in this study quantify these previously intangible benefits.

Each year more than one in ten Australians (11%) directly engage with the independent sector as a result of community engagement driven by individual schools. This represents 2.8 million Australians that engage each year with one of the 1,137 independent schools in Australia. These meaningful engagements, which impact local, national and global communities, are examples of positive social capital.

Independent schools' value holistic student development

A key component of building social capital is developing student character. In order to achieve this, almost all independent schools in Australia (98%) run specific programs (both in and out of the classroom) aimed at developing students' character. This includes supporting student voice and agency (98%) as well as building trust and reciprocity among fellow students (96%).

To further encourage student development, 80% of independent schools have introduced formal service-learning programs such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or the International Baccalaureate (IB). Nationally, more than 500,000 independent school students participate each year in formal volunteering and student learning activities which positively impact Australian communities.

Developing social responsibility

Not only do independent schools encourage their students to engage with service learning but they also develop their students' social responsibility.

Almost all independent schools (96%) provide opportunities for their students to serve their local community by hosting events or by fundraising. A similarly large proportion (93%) encourage students to raise awareness for those in need. As a result of these service-learning initiatives, each year 454,800 independent students participate in service learning in support of their local communities.

Fostering global perspectives

The social capital built by independent education is not only focused on local communities. Independent schools also develop their student's sense of global citizenship. Four in five independent schools develop their student's global focus by offering international service trips (81%), running events and fundraisers for international charities (80%) or by raising awareness of disadvantaged communities overseas (77%).

Students of independent schools are actively encouraged to positively impact communities through civic engagement. Just over seven in ten independent schools (71%) have invited Members of Parliament (or other parliamentarians) to their school while three in five schools (61%) facilitate student-run social justice groups. Each year nearly three in five independent students (57%) actively participate in civic engagement.

Collaborating with communities across Australia

Independent schools in Australia are highly collaborative, encouraging students and staff to engage with people outside of their immediate networks.

Three in four schools (75%) participate in collaborative ventures across other education sectors (Catholic and government). Three in five (61%), meanwhile, actively collaborate with schools with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Champions of diversity

Independent schools in Australia enhance social cohesion by championing diversity, encouraging students to engage with different communities and cultures. Nine in ten schools ensure they actively incorporate Indigenous and other cultural events into their school calendar (91%).

Increasing cultural diversity is a significant demographic trend currently shaping Australia, with 29% of Australians born overseas.[4] This increased cultural diversity is actively pursued by more than half of independent schools in Australia. One in two independent schools have an explicit aim to increase the cultural diversity of their student populations (51%) while a similar proportion are also seeking to increase the diversity of their staff (47%).

The sector's passion for diversity has resulted in nearly 57,000 scholarships/fee reductions/bursaries being offered to low income households and refugees. The estimated value of this financial support is $645 million each year.

Snapshot of independent education in Australia

There are 1,137 independent schools in Australia, representing 612,462 students and 80,693 staff.

Fastest growing education affiliation

Over the past decade, the independent education sector has been growing faster than both the government and Catholic sectors. According to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the number of independent school students has grown at a ten-year rate of 22%, which compares to 17% growth in government students and 12% growth in Catholic students.[5]

The number of independent schools has also been increasing. Over the past decade, the total number of independent schools in Australia has grown at a rate of 15%. This growth has occurred at a rate three times faster than Catholic schools (5%) and five times faster than government schools (3%).[5]

A diverse educational landscape

Not only is independent education the fastest growing education affiliation in Australia, but it is also increasingly diverse. On average, nearly one in every four (24%) students in an independent school has a language background other than English.[5] Further to this, 38 independent schools have an Indigenous enrolment rate of 50% or higher.[6]

Independent education in Australia also offers a diverse range of educational options. While most independent schools are co-educational (90%), one in ten independent schools (10%) focus on single-sex education.[5] This includes 6% of independent schools which are dedicated to educating girls only and 4% which cater to boys only.[5]

The independent education landscape stretches right across Australia. Two out of three independent schools are located within a major city (66%).[5] A further three in ten (31%) are in regional areas and 3% are in remote Australia.[5]

Insights into social capital created by independent education

Research results

Culture and values

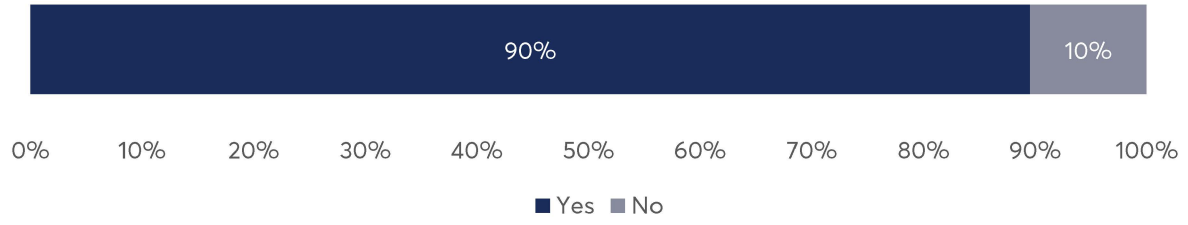
Independent schools in Australia are culturally and religiously diverse.

The great diversity of the independent education sector reflects the rise of cultural and religious diversity in Australia.

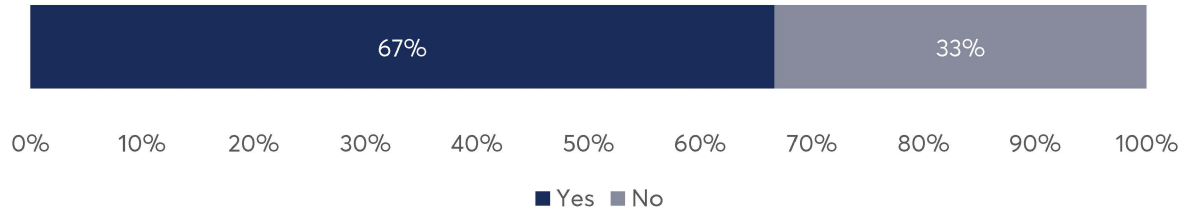
Nine in ten independent schools in Australia (90%) have a religious affiliation and two in three (67%) are directly connected to a religious institution in the local community.

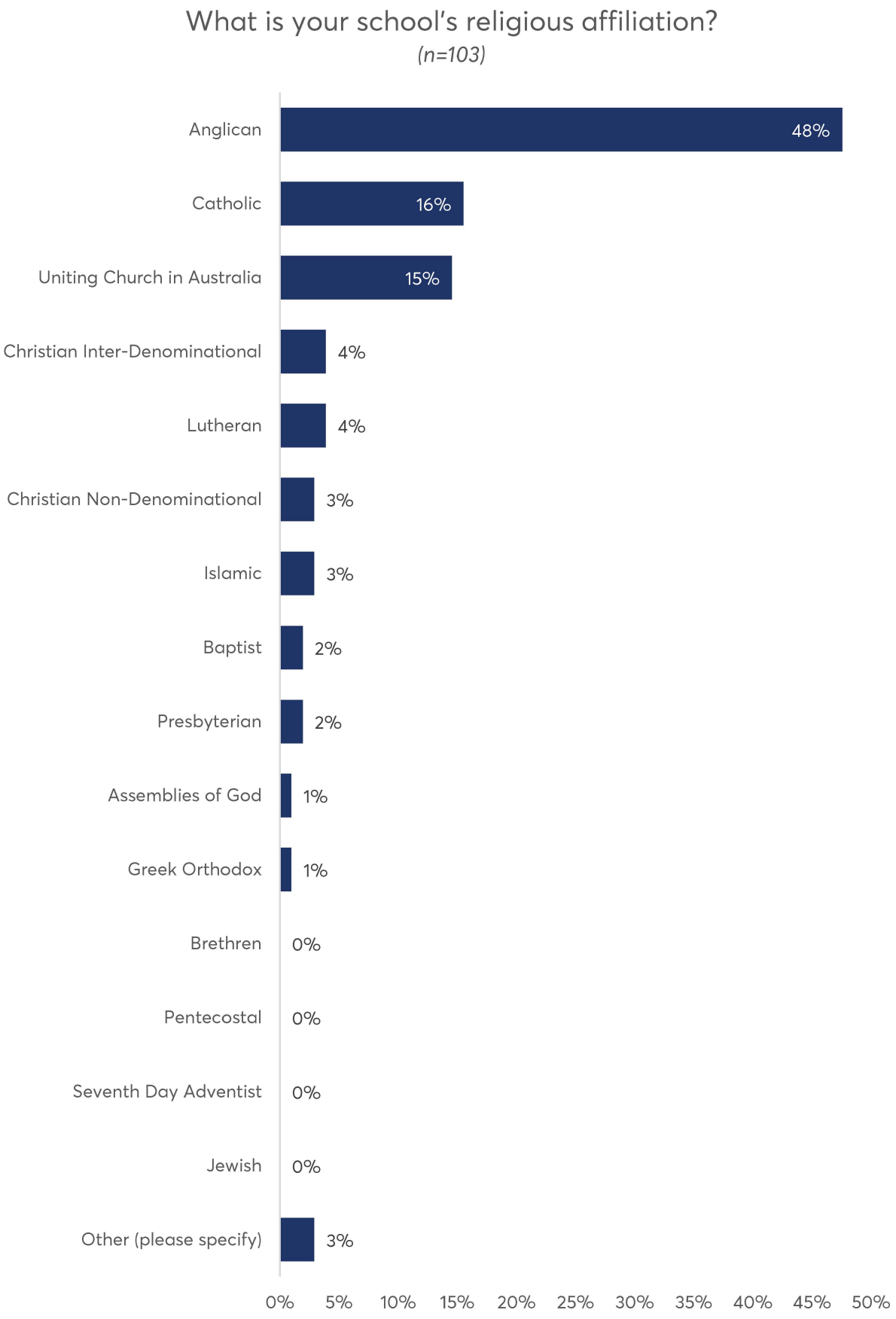
The majority of religious schools are affiliated with Christianity, with Anglican schools representing the largest proportion of religious schools (48%). The second largest Christian affiliation is Catholic (16%), followed by the Uniting Church (15%).

Does your school have a religious affiliation?
(n=115)



Is your school directly connected to a religious institution in your local community?
(n=102)




What is your school's religious affiliation?
(n=103)
Anglican
48%
Catholic
16%
Uniting Church in Australia
15%
Christian Inter-Denominational
4%
Lutheran
4%
Christian Non-Denominational
3%
Islamic
3%
Baptist
2%
Presbyterian
2%
Assemblies of God
1%
Greek Orthodox
1%
Brethren
0%
Pentecostal
0%
Seventh Day Adventist
0%
Jewish
0%
Other (please specify)
3%
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%
45%
50%

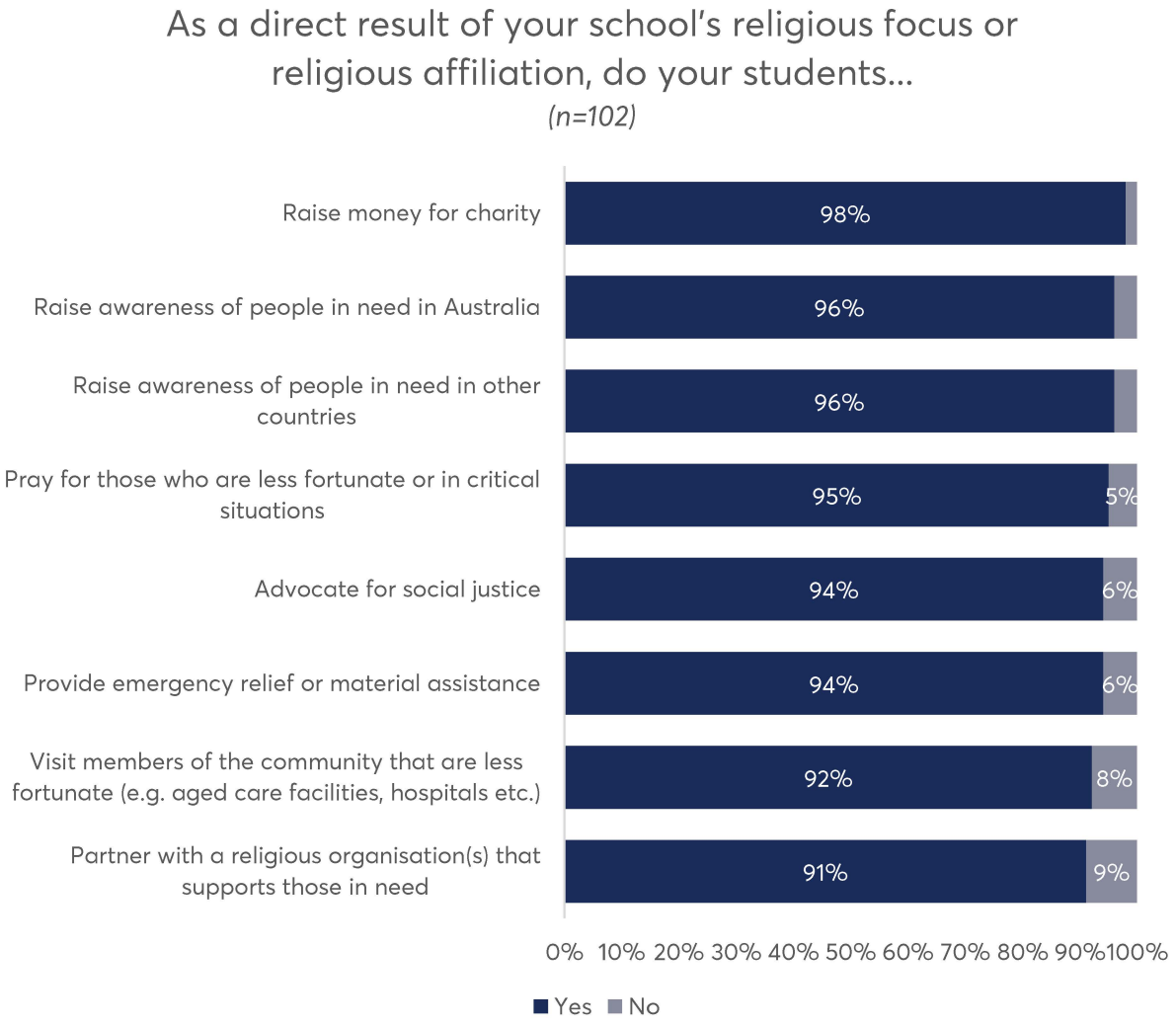
Religious focus or affiliation linked to social benefits.

Independent school principals report that the religious affiliations of their schools has direct benefits for their students and the wider community.

Nearly every religiously affiliated independent school encourages their students to raise money for charity (98%) as a direct result of their religious focus. A similarly large proportion also raise awareness for people in need in Australia (96%) and in other countries (96%) due to their religious affiliation.

More than nine in ten religious affiliated or focused schools reveal that they actively pray for those less fortunate (95%), advocate for social justice (94%) and provide emergency relief or material assistance (94%) because of their religious connection.

These religious schools are also very likely to be active in their local community. Nine of out ten principals shared that their school visits members of the community that are less fortunate (92%) and partner with religious organisations that support those in need (91%).



Independent schools value student development.

Almost all independent schools engage in specific classroom or co-curricular programs that are aimed at character development (98%). They also support student voice and agency (98%) and engage in a buddy or mentoring system of younger students (97%).

Independent schools help students build trust and develop values

Other common student development initiatives in independent schools include classroom or co-curricular activities that are aimed at building trust and reciprocity among students (96%) as well as instilling vision and values intended to develop students' character (96%). An equally large proportion of independent schools use their co-curriculum program to promote character development (96%), which is often achieved by inviting guest speakers to role model desired character traits (96%), developing programs aimed at building resilience (96%) or a house system/similar pastoral model (96%).

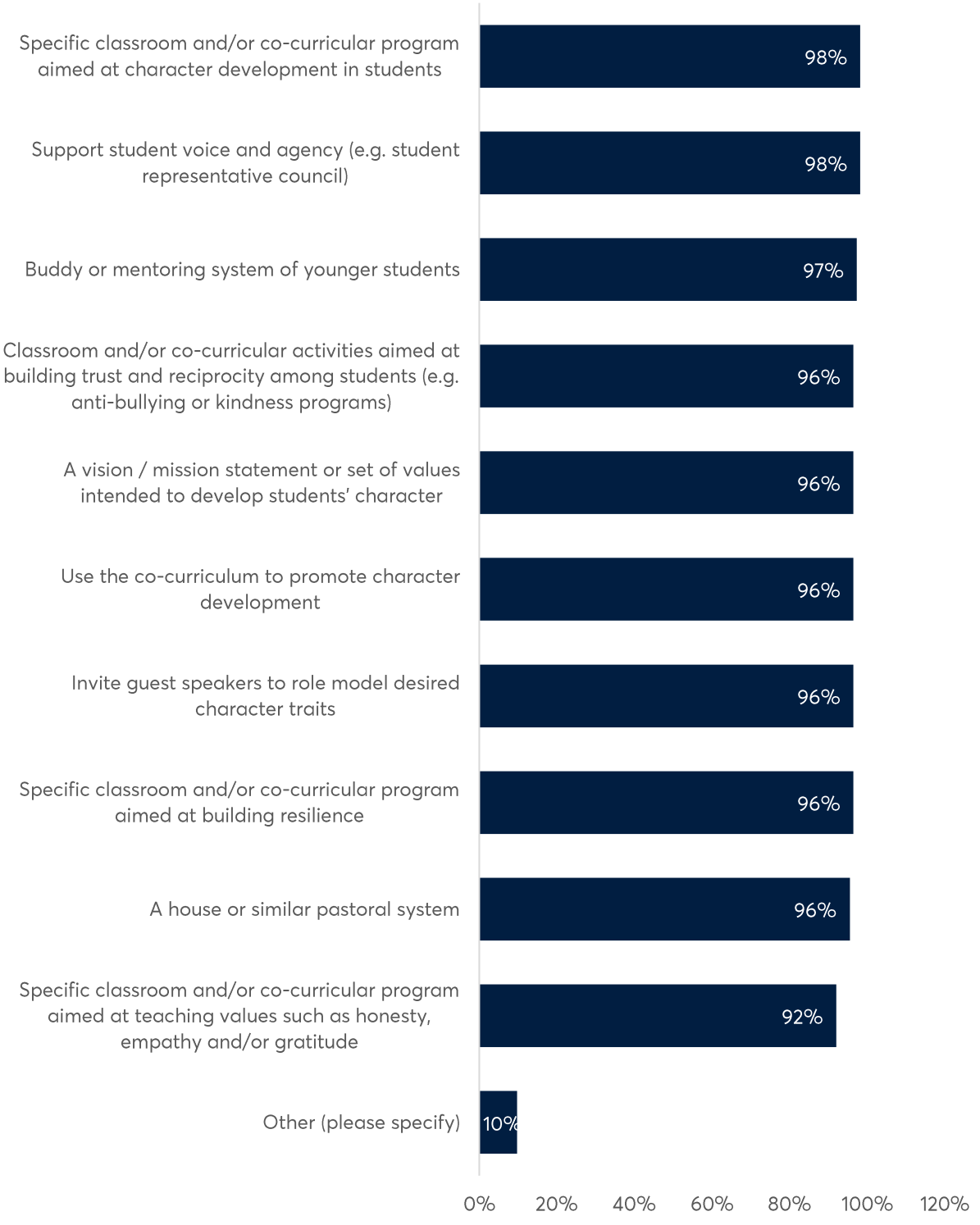
Sectoral focus on the whole student

Independent schools are not only focused on academic achievement, but also place high value on the holistic development of their students. More than nine in ten independent schools (92%) report specific programs directly aimed at teaching values such as honesty, empathy or gratitude.

Principals also report other student development engagements, such as respectful relationships programs, leadership programs, outdoor education programs, service trips, immersion experiences and a school-wide framework focused on building students.

In relation to student development, does your school engage in any of the following...

Please select all that apply.
(n=113)



Service learning

Independent students are encouraged to learn by serving their school and local community.

Almost all independent schools (96%) recognise students for their volunteering effort, either through mentions in assembly, school news, badges or annual prizes.

In order to encourage participation in service learning, four in five schools (80%) have introduced a formal service-learning program such as the service learning component of International Baccalaureate (IB) or the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

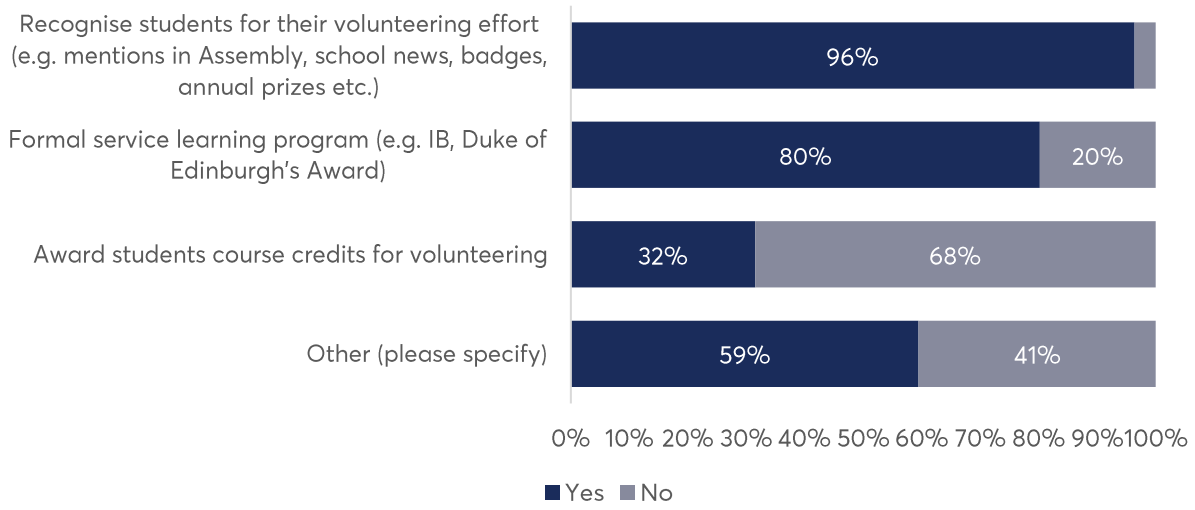
One in three schools (32%) further prioritise service-learning by awarding students course credits for volunteering. Other service-learning undertakings (59%) include school-specific programs, working with local council, engaging with organisation such as The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Anglicare that serve the community. Some schools also provide volunteering and advocacy opportunities and allow timetable flexibility for students to serve.

More than two in five students nationally engaged in service-learning

According to principals, 450 students (median) per school participate in service-learning. This extrapolates to 511,650 students volunteering and in service-learning across Australia.

Students who engage in service-learning and volunteering during their formative schooling years are able to develop a foundation of generosity and a pattern of giving, contributing to the 3.3 million volunteers who are active in the Australian charities and not-for-profit landscape.[7]

In relation to service learning, does your school engage in any of the following...
(n=111)



Students are highly engaged in their local community.

Independent school students serve their local community in a variety of ways. Almost all schools (96%) report that students serve their local community by hosting events or by providing fundraising for local charities.

Raising awareness for those in need in the local community is another way that students serve the local community (93%). Nine in ten schools have student-led community engagement initiatives (90%) and a similar proportion partner with local community organisations (87%).

Independent schools are also likely to encourage their students to engage with their local community in other ways. These include being encouraged to care for the environment (86%), participate in sports programs (85%) or support local religious groups and organisations (81%).

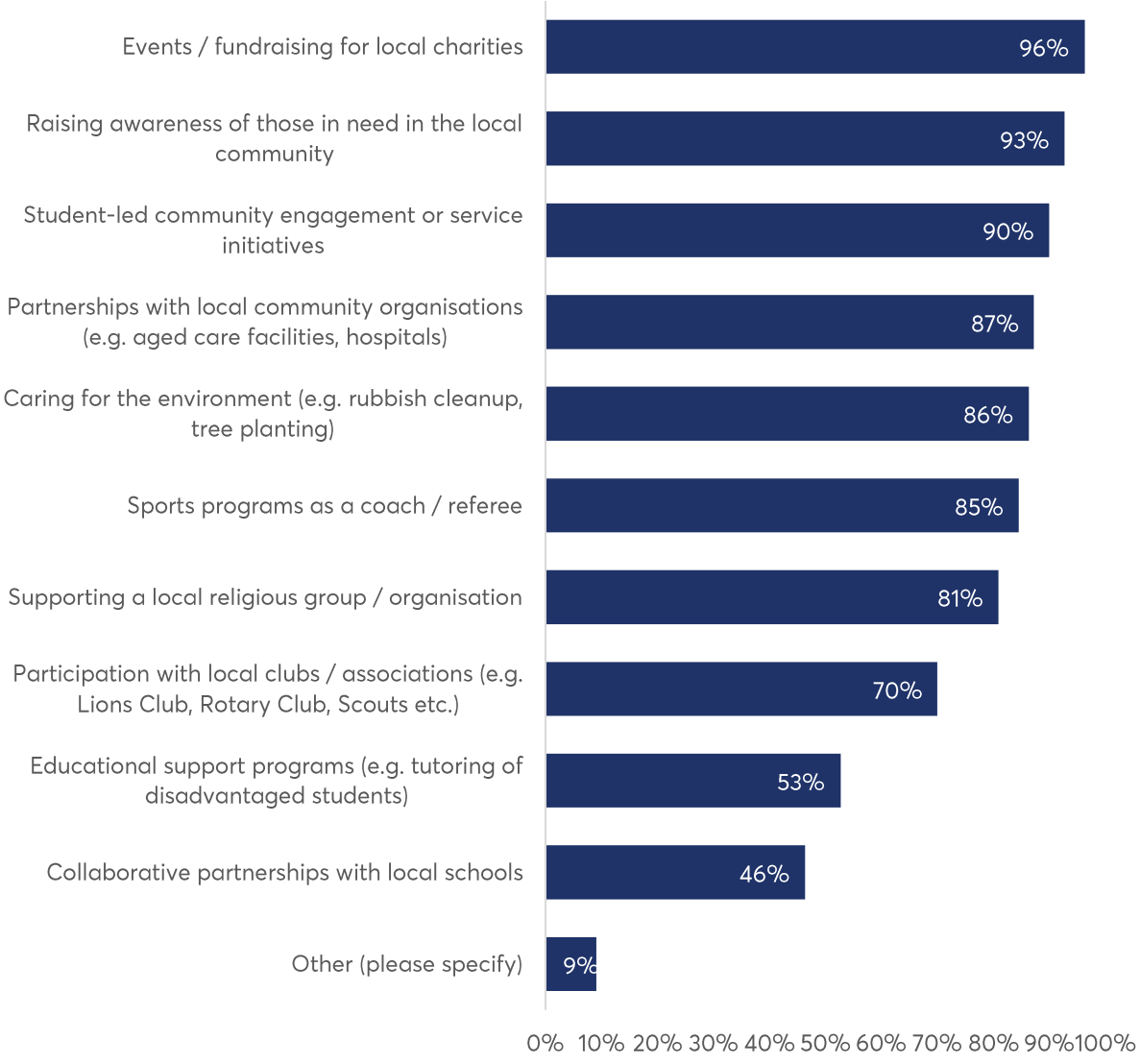
Nearly half a million independent students serve local Australian communities

Across the independent school sector, the number of students engaged in serving the local community per school is 400 students (median). This represents a national total of 454,800 independent students. Nearly two in five of these students (38%) are involved in initiatives that are led by their fellow students, highlighting the passion with which students serve their local communities.

The high level of community service observed across independent schools in Australia means that every community of 100 people includes an average of two independent school students actively serving that community.

In what ways are students in your school encouraged to serve in the local community?

Please select all that apply (n=110)

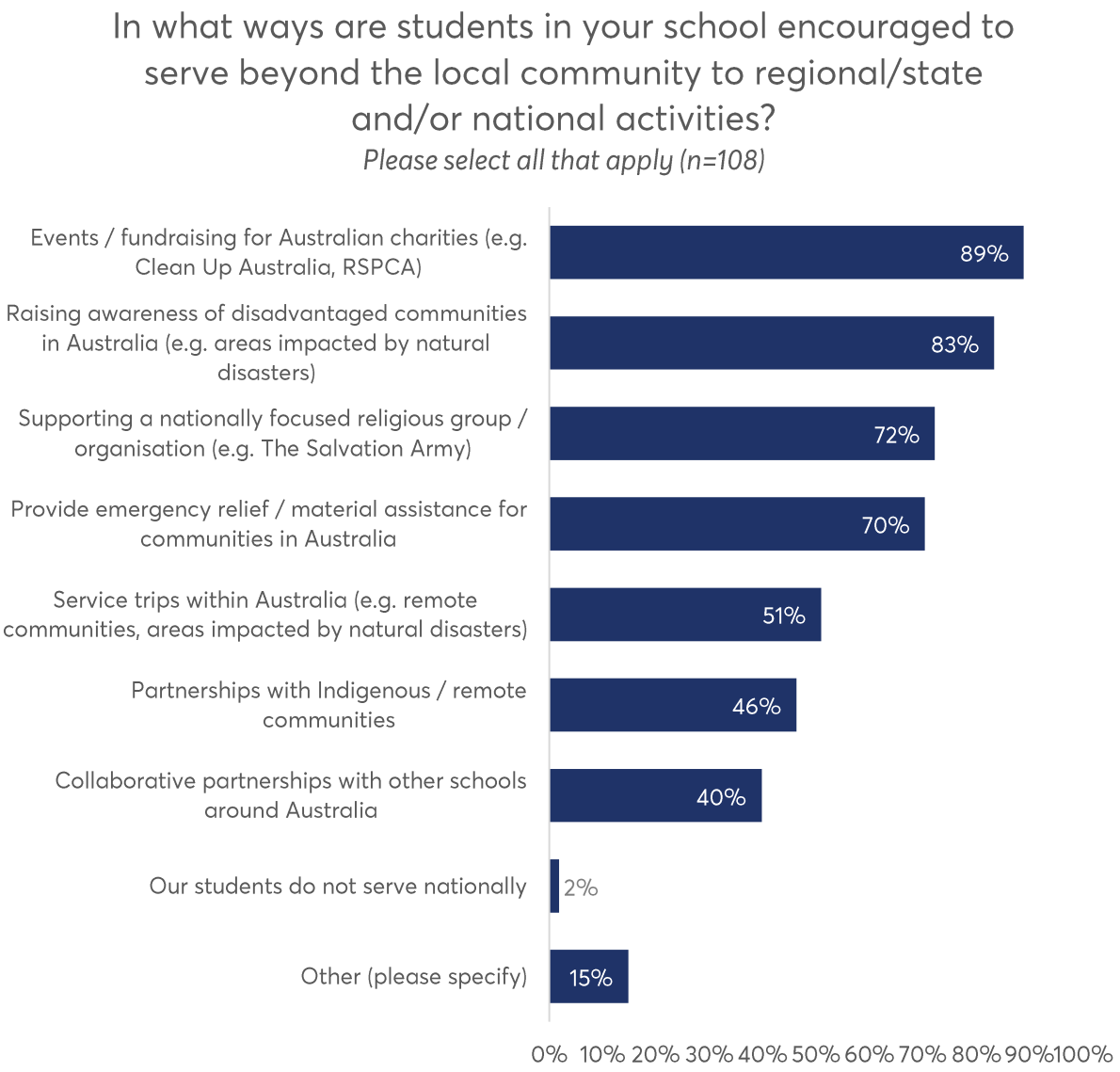


Nine in ten independent schools raise funds for Australian charities.

Independent school students are also encouraged to serve beyond the local level by engaging with Australia-wide charities. Almost nine in ten schools (89%) encourage students to fundraise or organise events for charities on a national level. Positively, more than five in six schools (83%) have students raise awareness for disadvantaged communities across Australia.

Other popular forms of national support include supporting nationally based religious charities (72%), nation-wide emergency relief organisations (70%) and service trips (51%). Only 2% of independent schools report that their students do not serve the community at a national level.

Based on a median student engagement of 200 students per school, it is estimated that nationally 222,852 independent students are engaged in serving, advocacy or fundraising at either a regional or a national level.



Independent schools develop global perspectives.

Around four in five independent schools in Australia encourage their students to engage with the global community. This is achieved either by offering international service trips (81%), running events and fundraisers for international charities (80%) or raising awareness for disadvantaged communities overseas (77%).

Many independent schools also have direct international partnerships. Almost two in three independent schools (64%) have ongoing partnerships with organisations internationally and more than half (57%) also have collaborative partnerships with schools overseas.

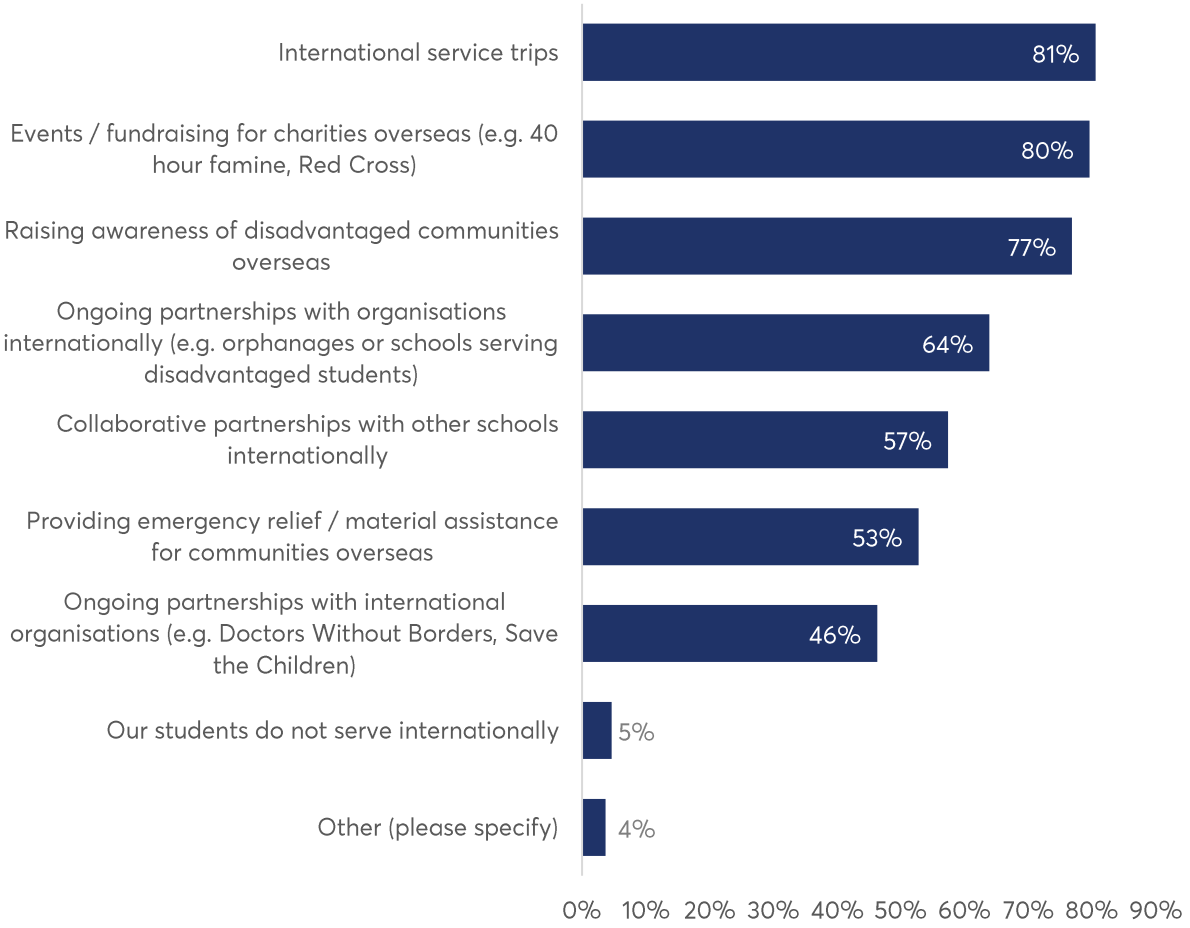
Only one in 20 schools (5%) do not have students who serve the international community.

Independent schools support Australia's future international involvement

In each school there are 75 students (median) that have directly engaged in international service over the past year. Overall, this represents 13% of independent students that are globally focused and have the desire and opportunity to serve the global community.

In what ways are students in your school encouraged to serve internationally?

Please select all that apply (n=108)



Older students spend more time in school-managed community service.

Overall, only a small proportion of students do not engage in school-managed community service activities (7%).

As students mature, they are more likely to become active in community service. One in five (19%) ELC to Year 1 students do not serve, however this reduces to 2% in Year 8 to 10 and 4% in Year 11 to 12.

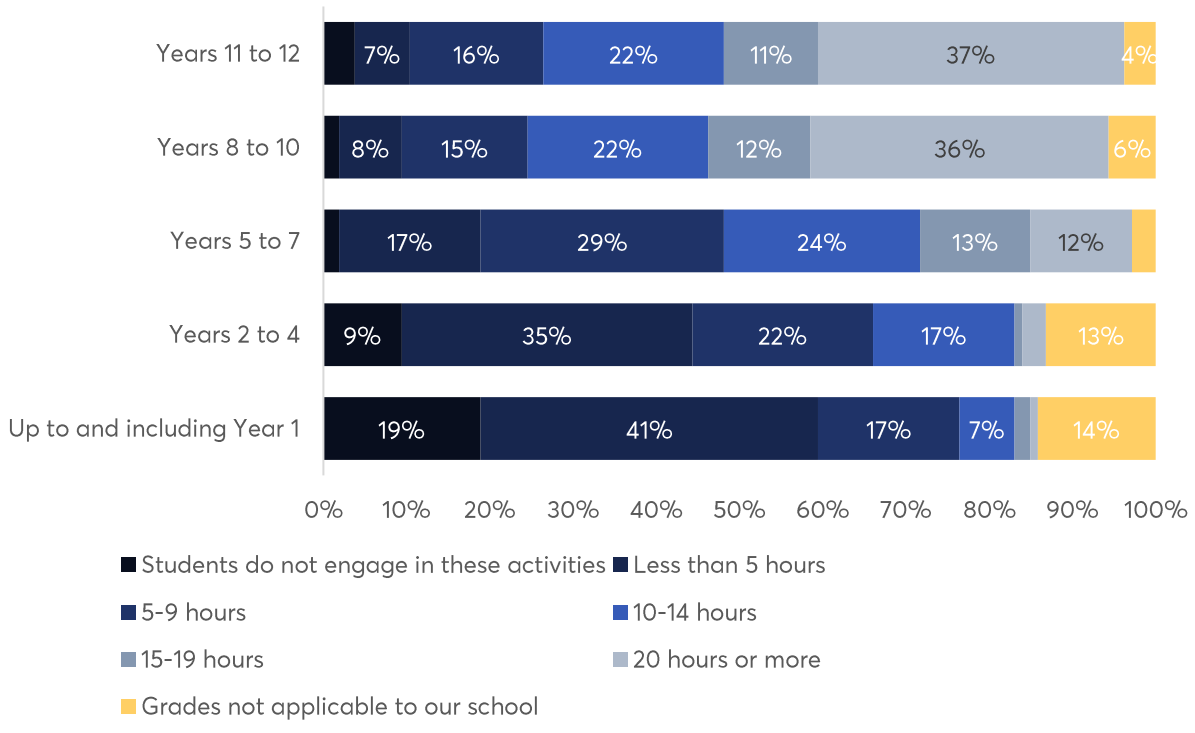
The oldest age groups are the most likely to be engaged serving different communities. Among those who are engaged, Year 11 and 12 students are the most likely to have spent 20+ hours volunteering or engaging in community services during the past year (37%). This is followed by Year 8 to 10 (36%) that are equally engaged in community action.

Independent schools combined raise nearly $30 million each year

With a median amount of $25,000 charitable giving per school last year, independent schools have raised close to $30 million ($28,425,000) for charities or other community needs.

In 2018, approximately how many hours would each student spend in volunteer/community service/community engagement activities that are managed by the school?

E.g. a student in ELC-Year 1 might engage in 12 hours per school year in activities such as Clea



Community leadership

Leadership is an important quality for all students to learn and develop.

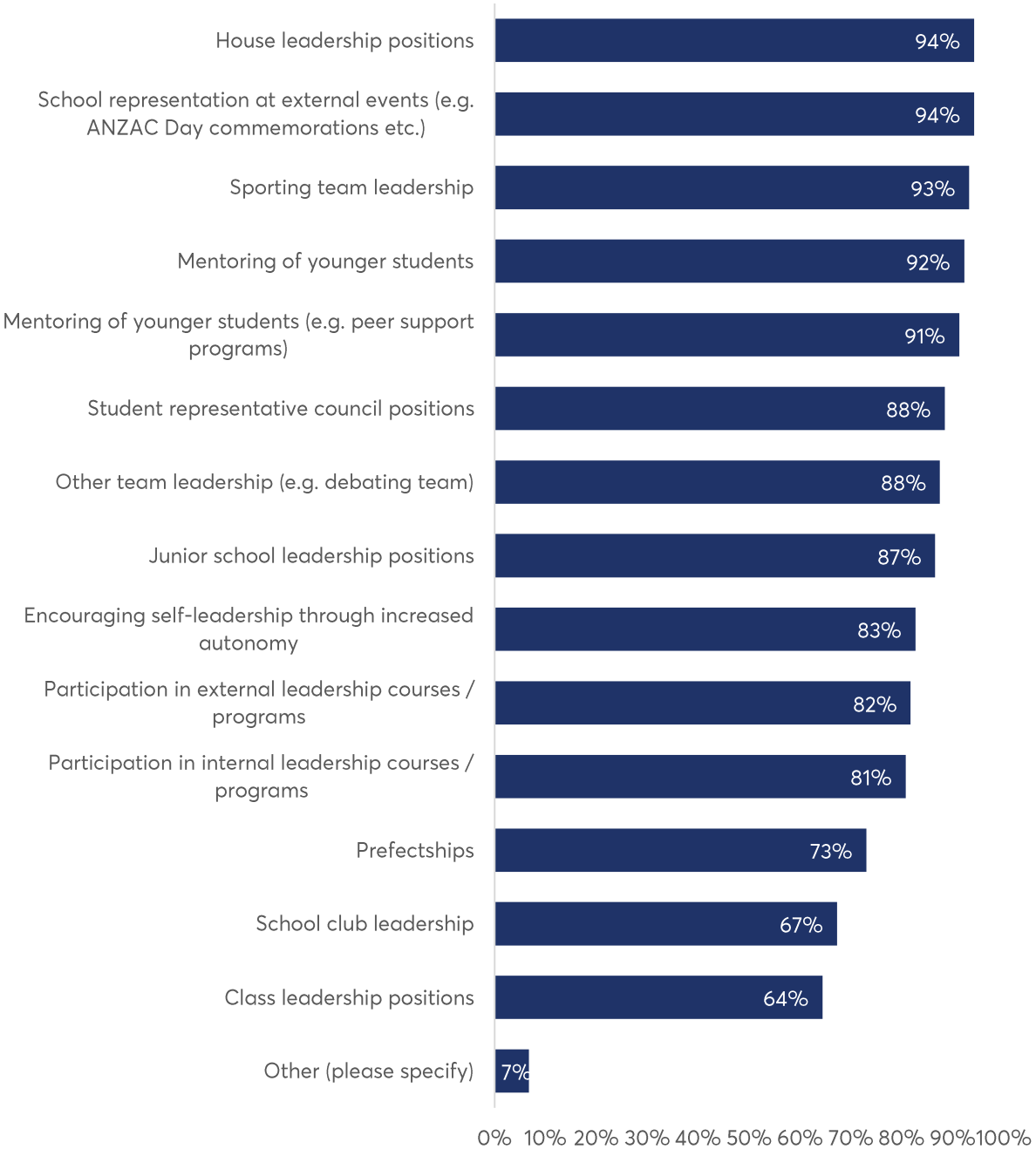
Independent schools undertake several key approaches to develop the leadership skills of their students. More than nine in ten schools develop leadership through house leadership positions (94%), school representation at external events (94%), sporting team leadership (93%) and mentoring of younger students (92%) such as peer support programs (91%).

More than four in five schools also have student representative council positions (88%), team leadership such as debating teams (88%), junior school leadership positions (87%) or encourage self-leadership through increased autonomy (83%) and external (82%) or internal (81%) leadership courses and programs.

A median of 150 students engaged in some form of student leadership in each independent school.

How does your school develop students' leadership skills?

Please select all that apply (n=104)



Civic engagement

Students from independent schools participate in civic engagements that grow their community.

Debating is the most likely way that students from independent schools participate in civic engagement (92%). This is followed by a similar proportion of schools that engage in initiatives that reduce and recycle waste (91%).

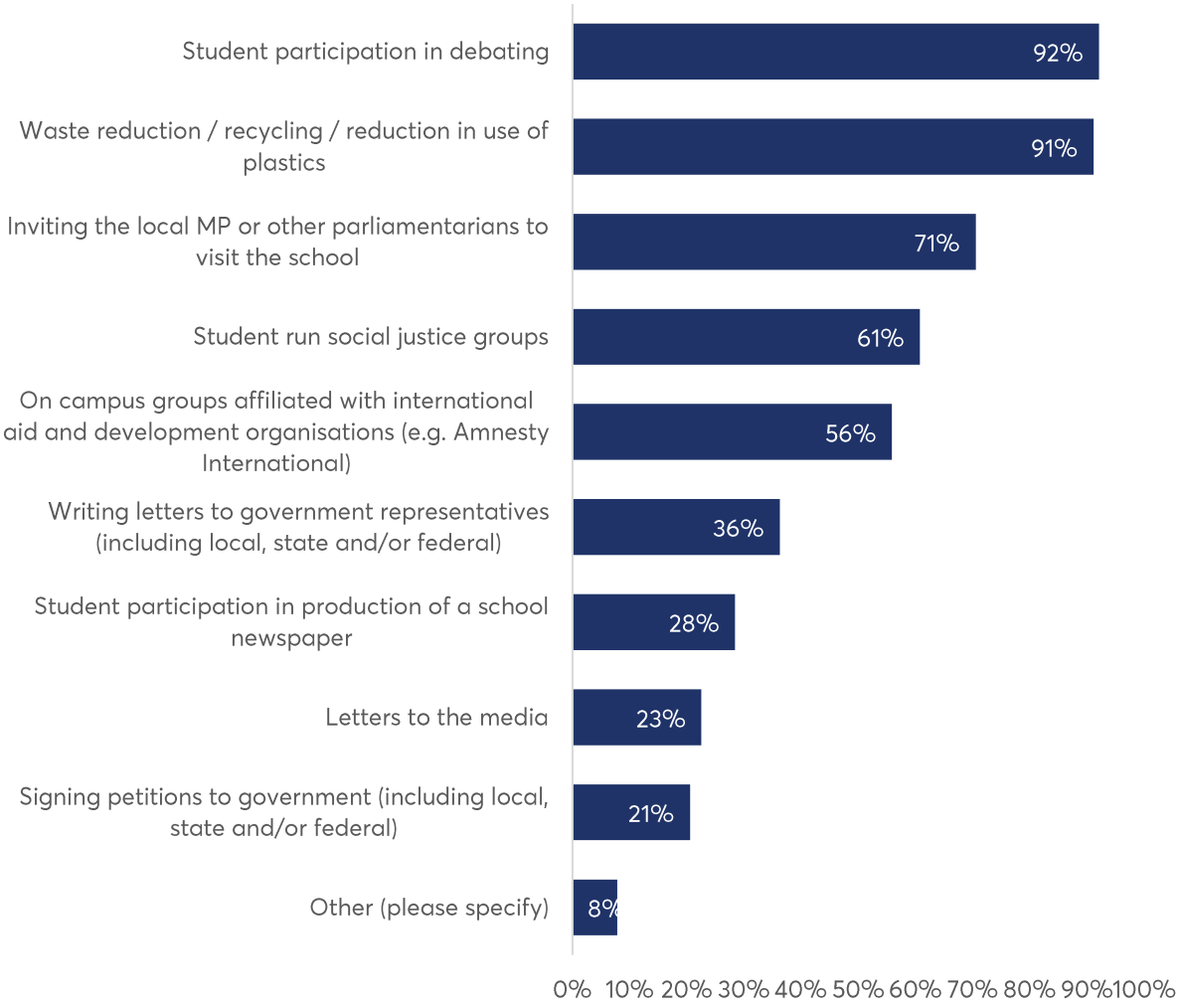
Independent school students are also engaged in politics and justice. Seven in ten schools (71%) have student bodies that invite local Members of Parliament or other parliamentarians to visit the school. Three in five schools have student-run social justice groups (61%) and on campus groups affiliated with international aid and development organisations (56%). A further one in three schools (36%) have students who write to government representatives.

The survey results further reveal that writing letters to the media (23%) and signing petitions to the government (21%) are the two least common forms of civic engagement among independent schools.

In each school 150 students (median) actively engage in civics each year. When extrapolated, this represents 170,550 students, which is nearly three in ten independent students in Australia (28%).

Does your student body participate in internal or external civic engagement in any of the following ways?

Please select all that apply (n=102)



Inter-school events and collaborative ventures

Independent schools are highly collaborative.

The overwhelming majority of independent schools participate in inter-school academic competitions (99%) and sporting competitions (96%). Most also encourage collaboration by having their staff participate in subject associations (95%).

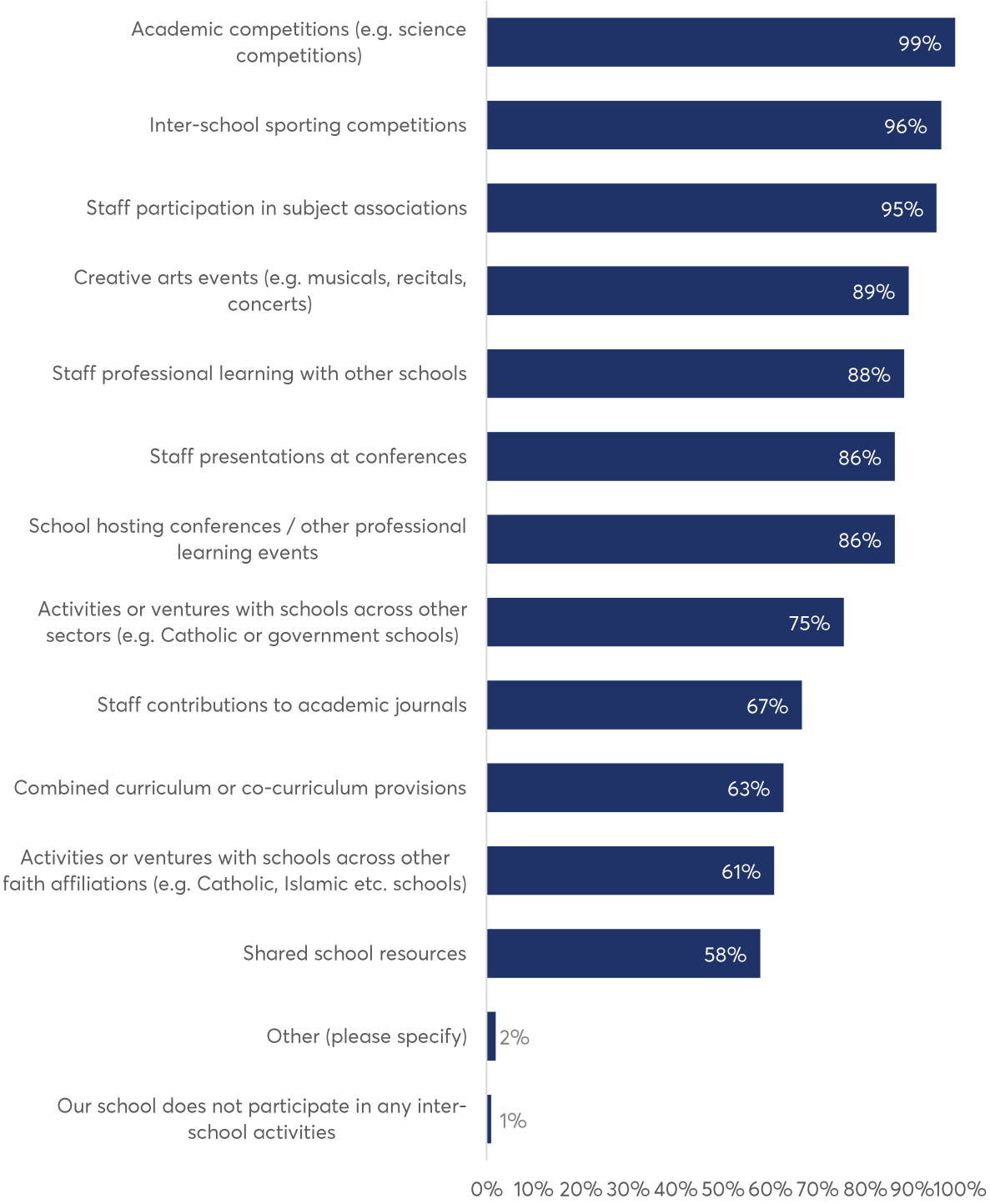
Nine in ten schools have inter-school creative arts events (89%), staff professional learning with other schools (88%) and presentations at conferences (86%). While 86% of schools send their staff to present at conferences, an equal proportion of schools host conferences and other professional learning events (86%).

Independent schools foster a culture of inclusivity

Interestingly, independent schools do not limit their collaboration to their own sector. Three in four independent schools participate in collaborative ventures across education sectors (75%) including Catholic and government education. Independent schools are also likely to engage collaboratively with different cultural and religious groups with three in five (61%) actively collaborating with schools which have a different faith background.

Does your school participate in any of the following inter-school activities or ventures?

Please select all that apply (n=102)



Community engagement

Independent schools actively engage with the wider community.

Nine in ten schools (89%) open student events, such as musicals and drama performance to the wider community. Three in four (77%) make non-student events such as lecture series and professional learning programs available to the community. Four in five schools provide their school facilities to community groups (80%), in many cases at no cost (83%).

With nine in ten independent schools (90%) holding some level of religious affiliation, it is perhaps unsurprising that three in four schools (76%) engage with their local faith-based community. A similar proportion (74%) use school facilities for community events.

Encouragingly, no independent schools surveyed (0%) do not engage with the wider community.

Raising cultural awareness

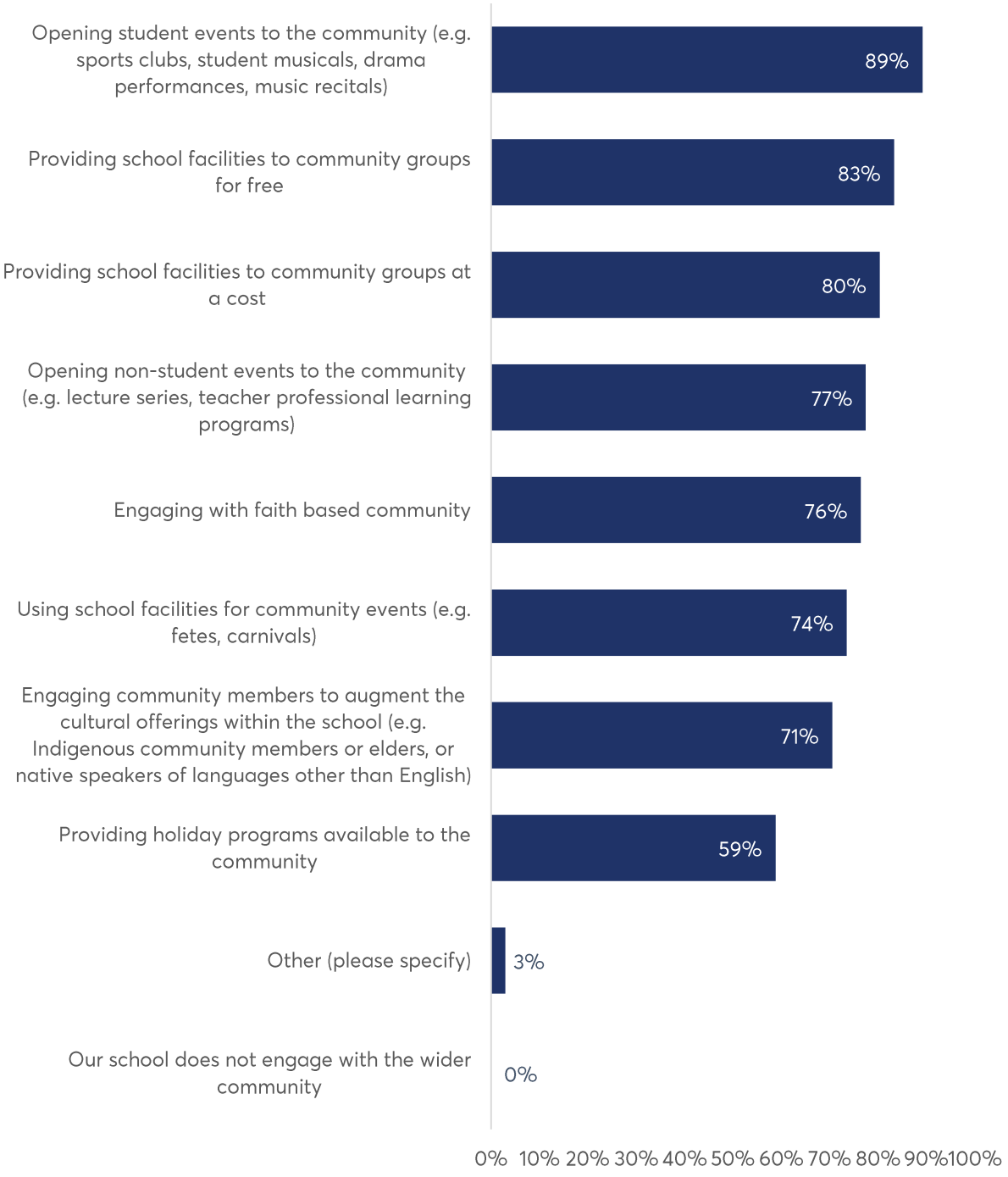
Independent schools in Australia display a high degree of cultural sensitivity and awareness with seven in ten schools (71%) actively engaging community members such as Indigenous elders to augment the cultural offerings within the school.

According to independent principals, more than one in ten Australians (11%) engage with an independent school each year.

Through active community engagement, it is estimated that the 1,137 independent schools engage 2.8 million Australians.

How does your school engage with the wider community?

Please select all that apply (n=102)

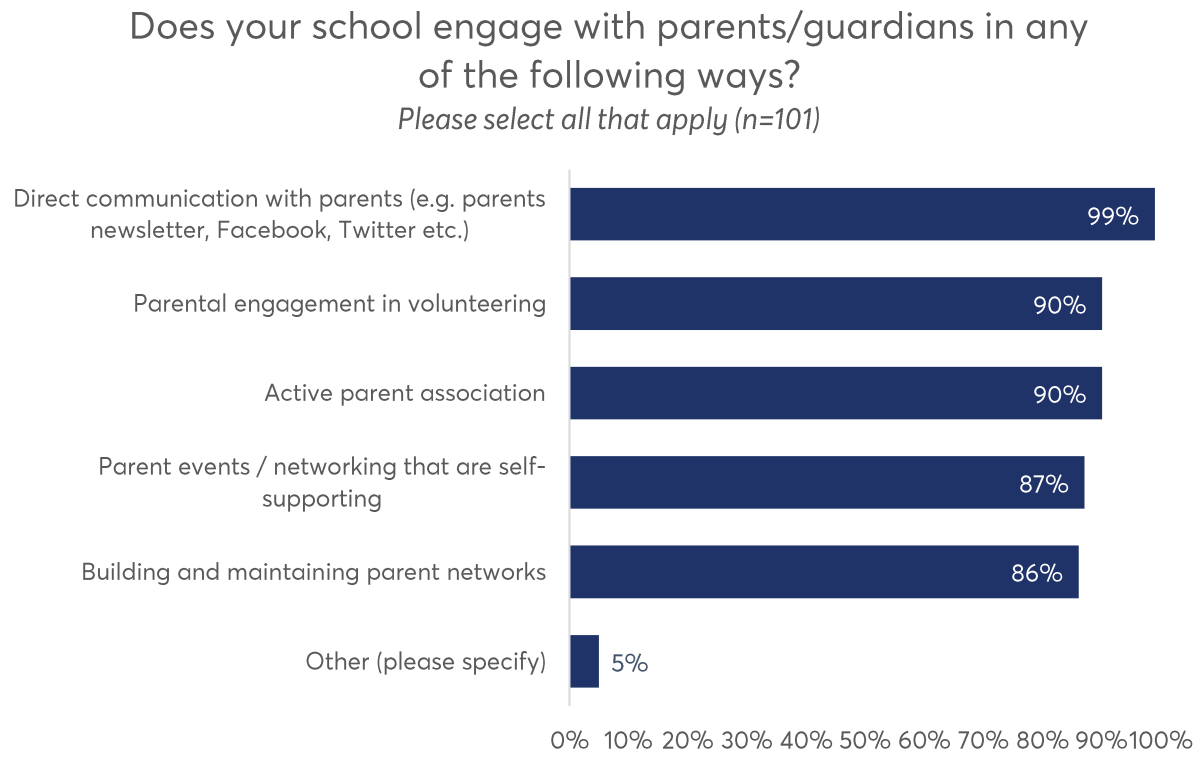


Nine in ten schools have an active parent association.

Unsurprisingly, schools are in direct communication with parents and guardians (99%). A large proportion of schools (90%) have parents who volunteer as well as an equal proportion that have an active parent association (90%).

Parent events and networking that are self-supporting are also common in independent schools (87%). Six in seven schools (87%) build and maintain parent networks.

Each independent school engages a median of 1,000 parents, totalling 1.1 million parents engaged with the independent sector Australia-wide. On average, schools estimate that they actively engage with nearly three quarters of all parents/guardians (74%) connected to their school.



Independent schools remain connected to past students.

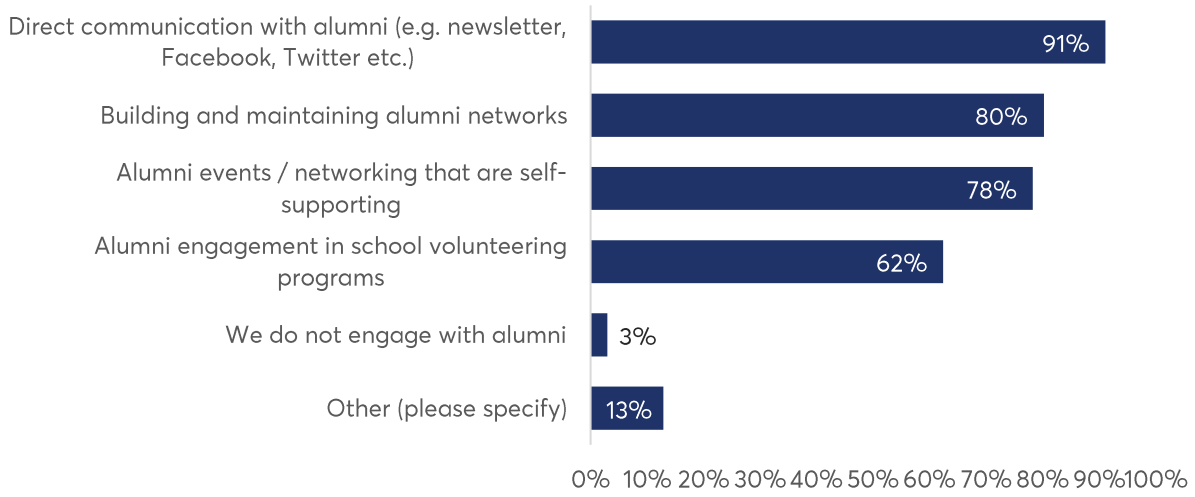
Just over nine in ten independent schools (91%) have direct communication with alumni through mediums such as newsletters and online social media. Four in five build and maintain alumni networks (80%) and have alumni events that are self-supporting (78%).

Three in five independent schools (62%) have alumni involved in volunteering programs. Only 3% of independent schools currently do not connect with their past students.

Across Australia, 97% of independent schools engage with 1,000 alumni (median). Combined, this represents approximately 11 million Australians that are engaged with the independent sector nation-wide.

Does your school engage with alumni in any of the following ways?

Please select all that apply (n=101)



Acknowledging diversity

Independent schools acknowledge diversity through a wide range of undertakings.

All independent schools cater for learning or physical challenges experienced by students (100%) and for high-performing or gifted and talented students (99%).

Independent schools aim to increase diversity

With nearly three in ten Australians born overseas (29%), Australian society is becoming increasingly diverse.[4] When it comes to supporting cultural diversity, a large proportion of independent schools actively incorporate Indigenous and other cultural events into the school calendar (91%) and a similar proportion host students on exchange (89%). Nearly four in five schools intentionally host events in order to reflect the cultural backgrounds of their students' families (79%) and allow uniform variations to accommodate faith traditions (72%).

Independent schools are continuing to work towards a future of greater cultural diversity. Almost half of all independent schools have a goal to increase student (51%) diversity and a similar proportion are actively seeking to increase the cultural diversity of their staff (47%).

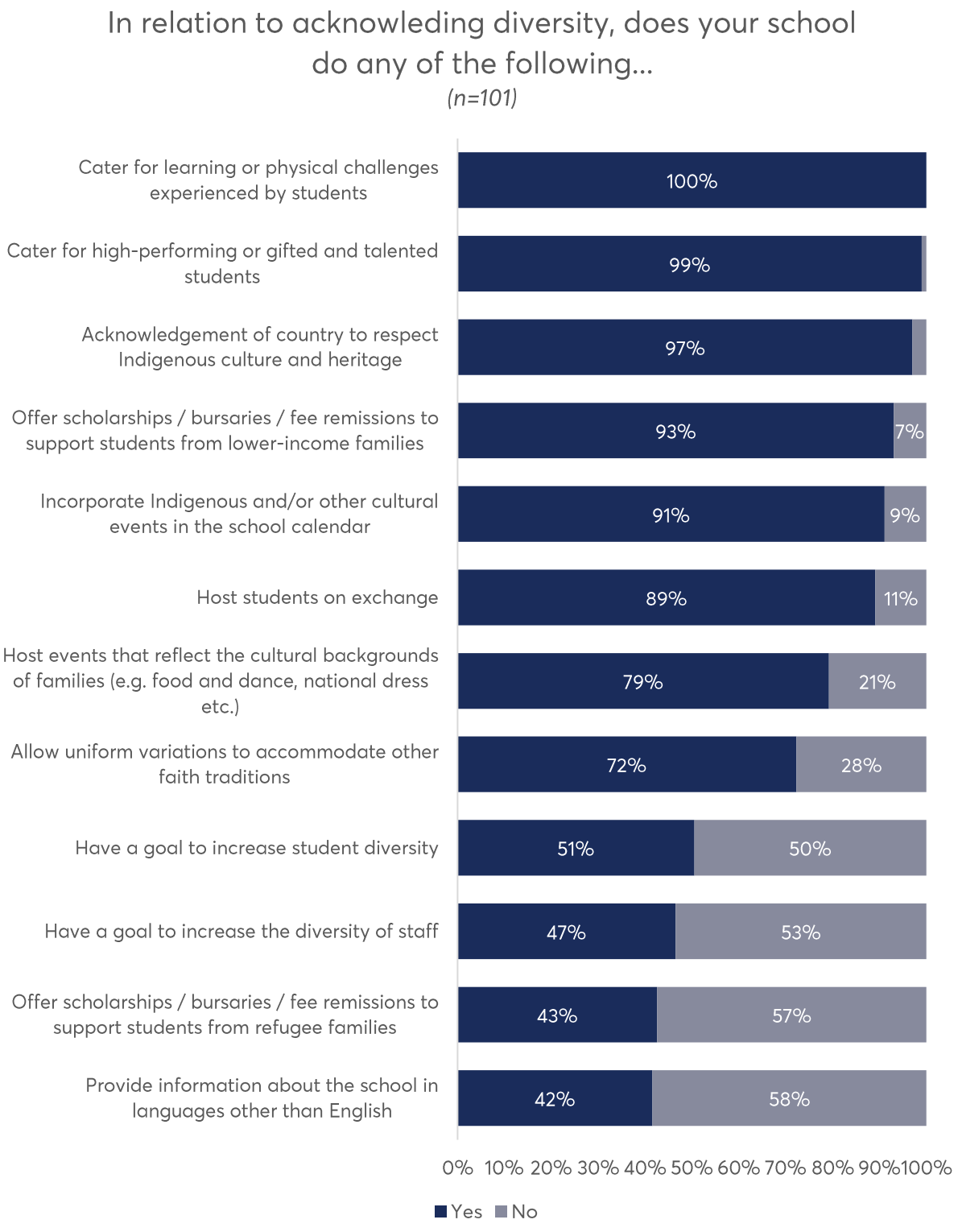
Two in five schools acknowledge diversity by providing information about the school in languages other than English (42%).

Independent schools support families in challenging circumstances

Nine in ten schools (93%) support increasing diversity by offering scholarships/fee remissions/bursaries to support students from lower-income families. An average of 49 scholarships or fee remissions are provided to lower-income families by 93% of independent schools. This equates to 51,813 scholarships provided by the independent sector nationally. The average combined value of lower income scholarships per school is $553,256. Based on this estimate, Australian independent schools currently provide lower income families scholarships valued at $585 million per annum.

A smaller proportion of schools currently provide scholarships/fee remission/bursaries to refugee families (43%). An average of nine scholarships or fee remissions are provided by these independent schools for refugee families. This is equivalent to 4,400 scholarships to the value of $60 million currently being provided for refugee families nationally.

The two forms of fee support combined represent $645 million worth of educational value provided to refugees and lower income families each year.


In relation to acknowledging diversity, does your school do any of the following...
(n=101)
Cater for learning or physical challenges experienced by students
100%
Cater for high-performing or gifted and talented students
99%
Acknowledgement of country to respect Indigenous culture and heritage
97%
Offer scholarships / bursaries / fee remissions to support students from lower-income families
93%
7%
Incorporate Indigenous and/or other cultural events in the school calendar
91%
9%
Host students on exchange
89%
11%
Host events that reflect the cultural backgrounds of families (e.g. food and dance, national dress etc.)
79%
21%
Allow uniform variations to accommodate other faith traditions
72%
28%
Have a goal to increase student diversity
51%
50%
Have a goal to increase the diversity of staff
47%
53%
Offer scholarships / bursaries / fee remissions to support students from refugee families
43%
57%
Provide information about the school in languages other than English
42%
58%
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Yes
No

Independent schools are addressing gender/sexual diversity.

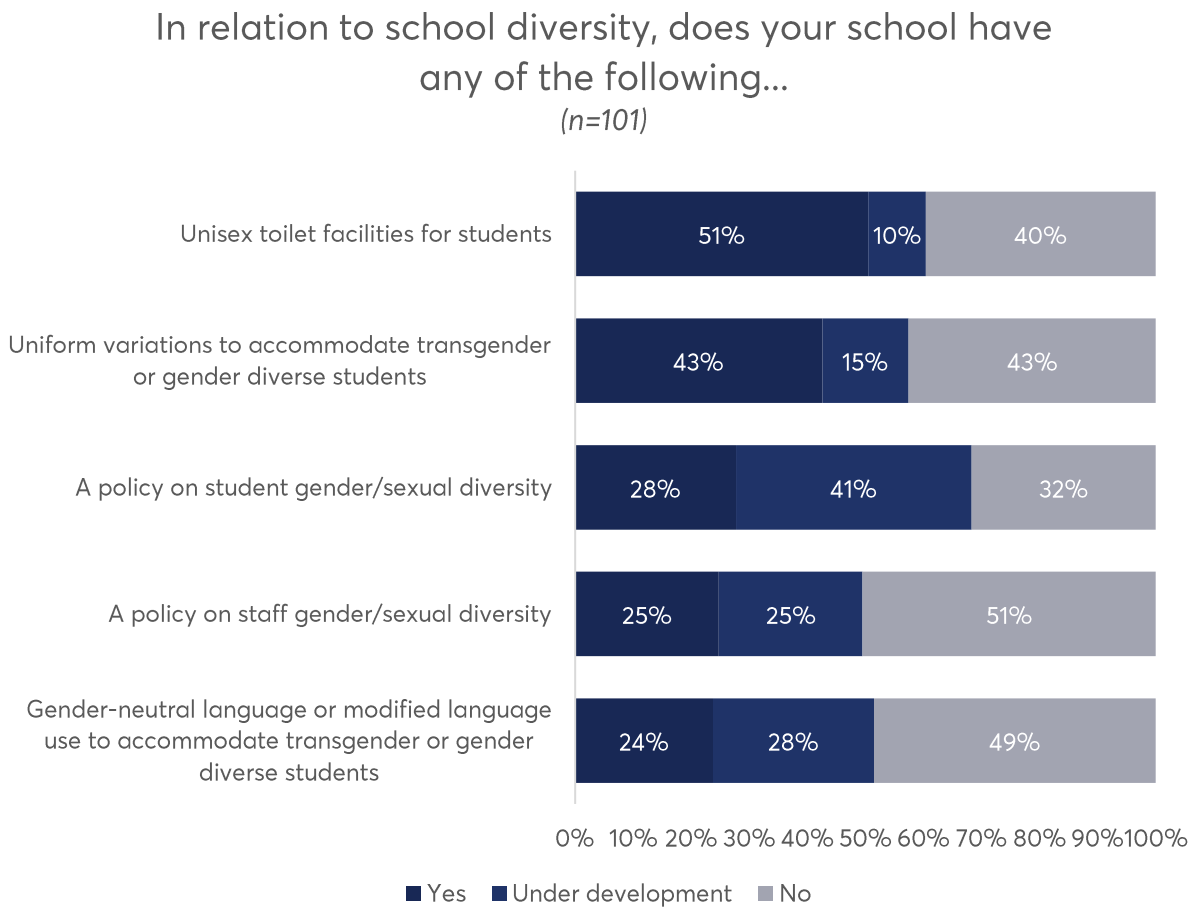
Specific to gender/sexual diversity, independent schools are engaging in and developing a number of practices to address the diversity within their schools.

More than three in five schools (61%) either already have unisex toilet facilities for students (51%) or have the facilities under development (10%). More than two in five schools (43%) have uniform variations to accommodate transgender or gender diverse students. A further 15% are currently developing these uniform variations.

Independent schools are actively working towards addressing gender/sexual diversity among their students and staff. While currently just over a quarter of schools (28%) have a policy on student gender and sexual identity, a larger proportion (41%) have a policy currently under development.

Staff gender and sexual diversity is recognised by half of all independent schools (50%). A quarter of schools are currently developing (25%) a policy while a quarter (25%) already have a policy on staff gender and sexual diversity in place.

A quarter of independent schools (24%) use gender-neutral or modified language to accommodate transgender or gender diverse students. Slightly higher than a quarter (28%) have this practice under development.



Global connections

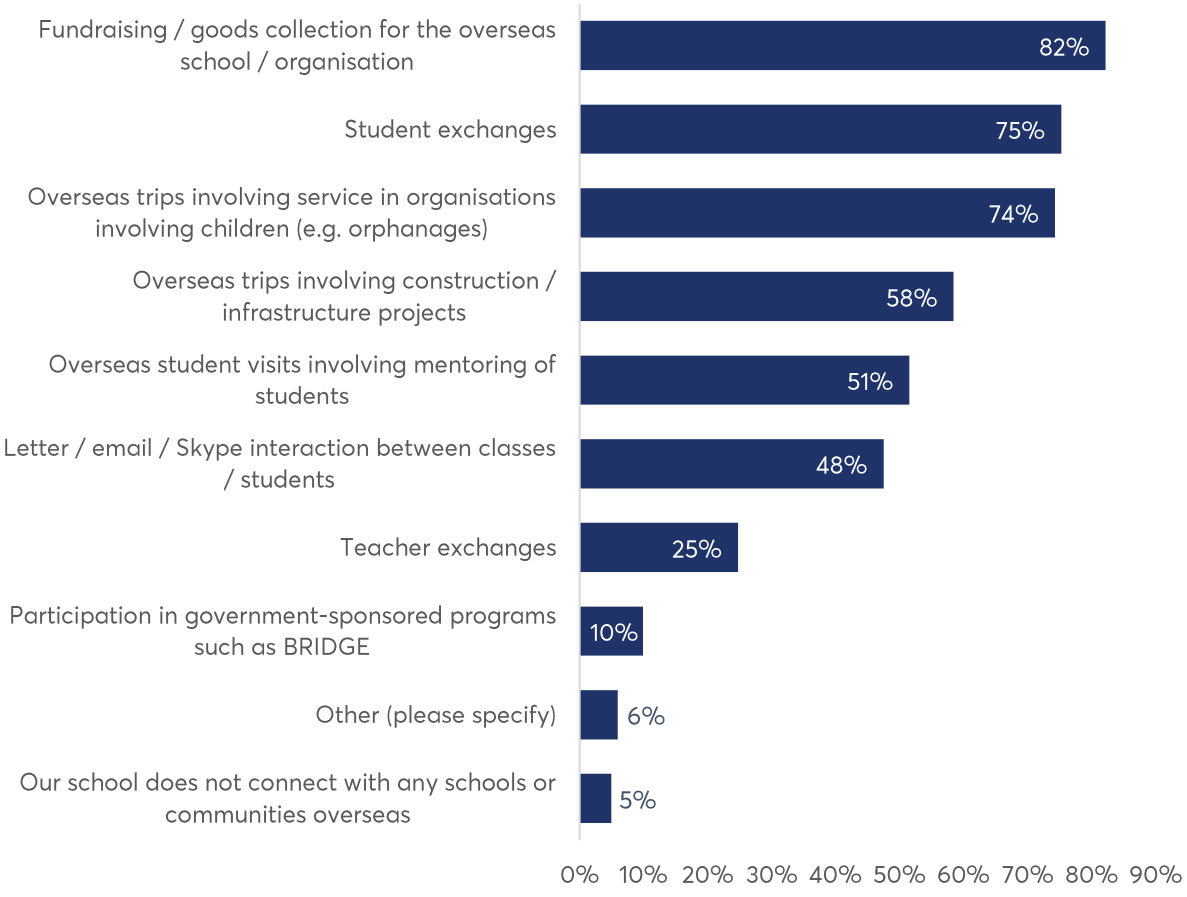
Independent schools are globally focussed.

In order to support overseas communities and enhance global connections, four in five independent schools (82%) raise funds and collect goods for overseas schools and organisations. Three in four have an overseas student exchange program (75%) and overseas trips involving service in organisations involving children (74%). Overseas trips are also likely to involve infrastructure projects (58%) and students visits involving the mentoring of students (51%). While three in four schools are likely to participate in student exchanges (75%) only one in four are likely to engage with teacher exchanges (25%).

Correspondence via letters, emails or skype also take place between classes and students internationally (48%).

Does your school connect with schools or communities overseas in any of the following ways?

Please select all that apply (n=101)



Values of independent education

Principals believe school values are important for all of society.

Nearly all independent school principals (98% strongly/somewhat agree) believe that promotion of and modelling of the school's ethos and values is an important way for students to learn about how successful communities function. They also believe that student engagement within the community through service and fundraising efforts is an important way for schools to develop 'bridging' social capital, that is, the confidence of students to engage with others beyond their school community and family circle (95%).

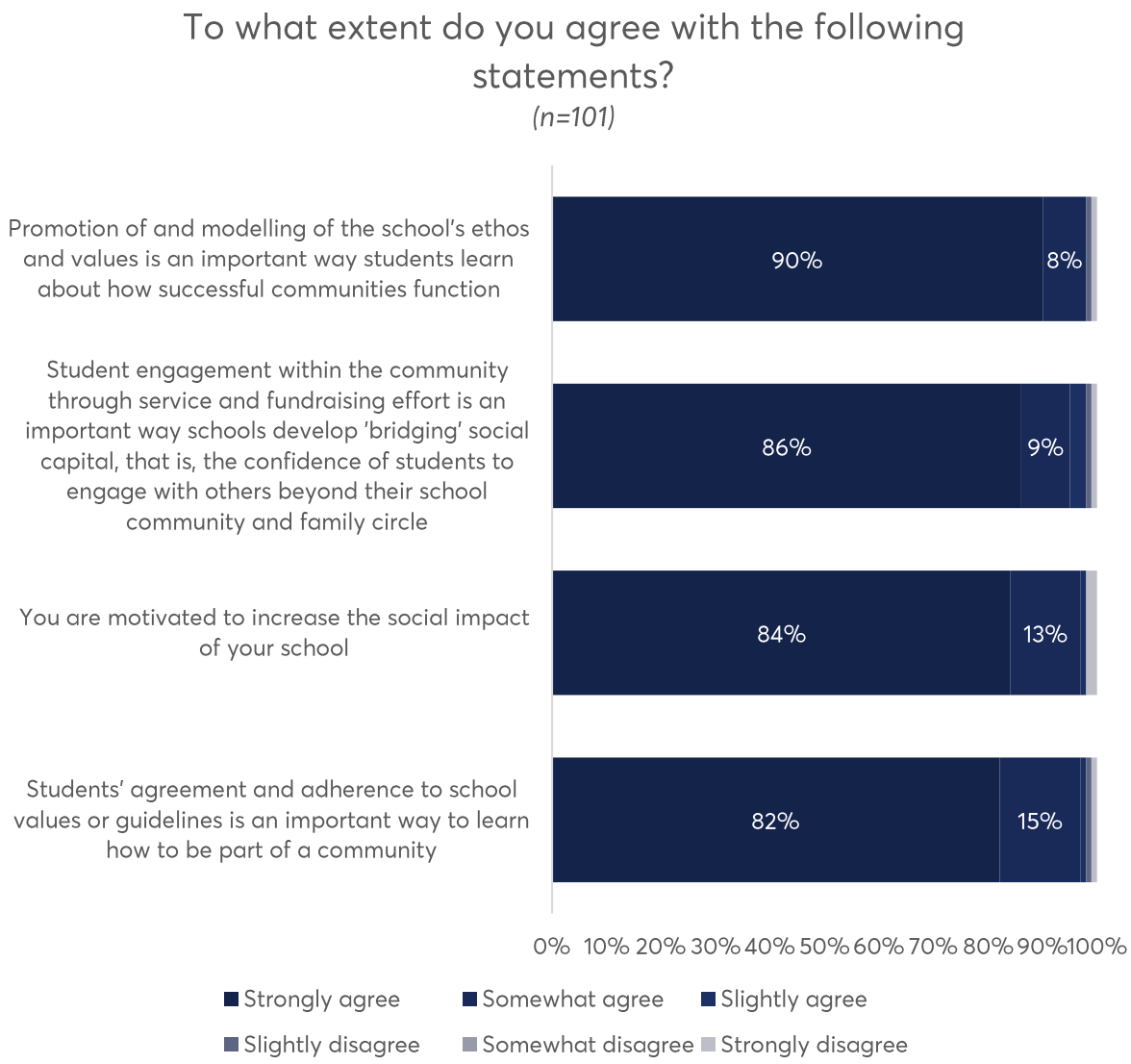
Principals are motivated to increase their school's social impact

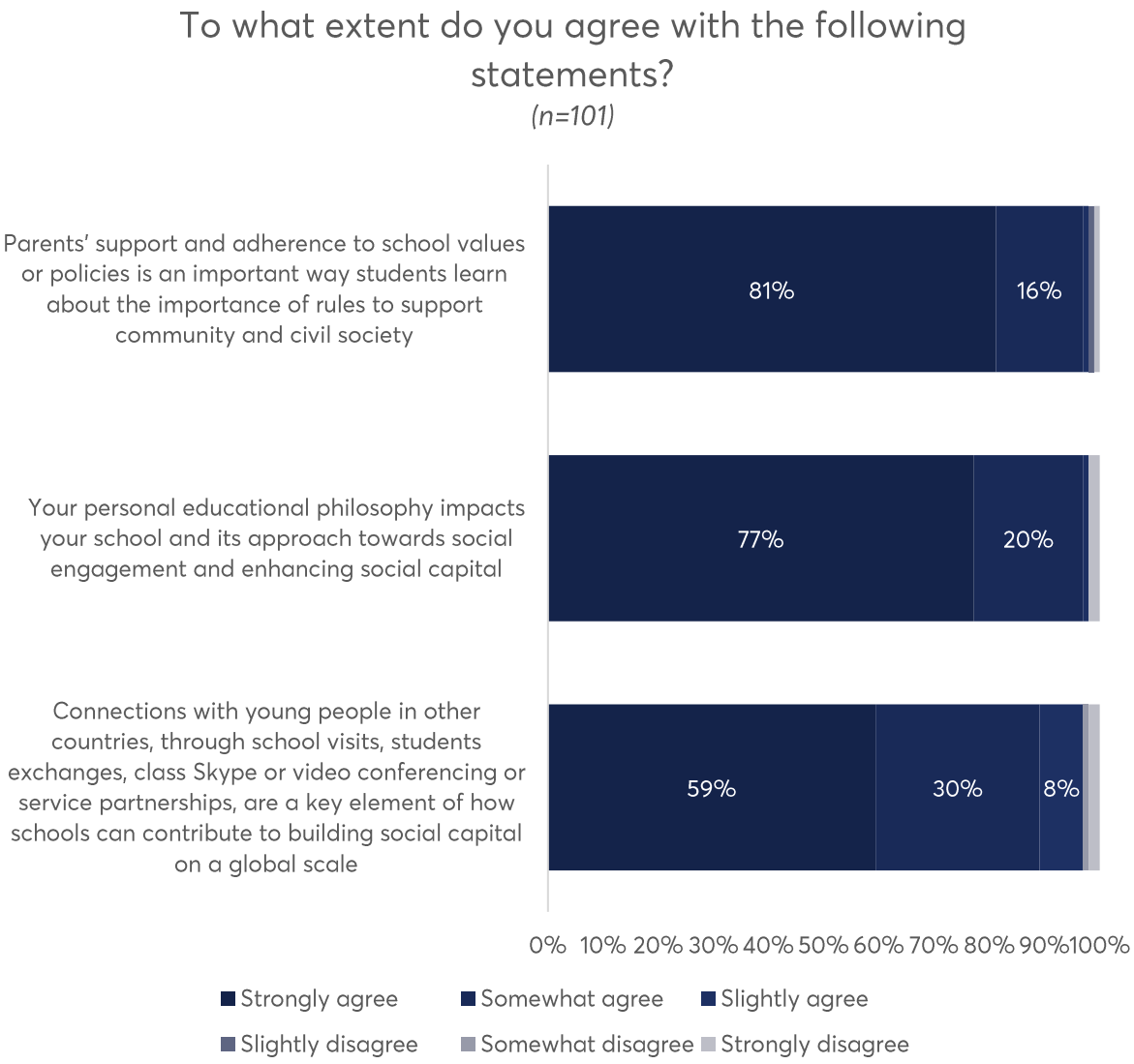
Almost all principals (97%) feel motivated to increase the social impact of their school. They agree that students' agreement and adherence to school values or guidelines is an important way to learn how to be part of a community (97%). Similarly, they agree that parents' support and adherence to school values or policies is an important way for students learn about the importance of rules to support community and civil society (97%).

Understandably, principals agree their personal educational philosophy impacts their school and its approach towards social engagement and enhancing social capital (97%).

Global connections create reciprocal social capital

Close to nine in ten principals (89%) find that connections with young people in other countries are a key element to building social capital on a global scale.


To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
(n=101)
Promotion of and modelling of the school's ethos and values is an important way students learn about how successful communities function
90%
8%
Student engagement within the community through service and fundraising effort is an important way schools develop 'bridging' social capital, that is, the confidence of students to engage with others beyond their school community and family circle
86%
9%
You are motivated to increase the social impact of your school
84%
13%
Students' agreement and adherence to school values or guidelines is an important way to learn how to be part of a community
82%
15%
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Slightly agree
Slightly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree


To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
(n=101)
Parents' support and adherence to school values or policies is an important way students learn about the importance of rules to support community and civil society
81%
16%
Your personal educational philosophy impacts your school and its approach towards social engagement and enhancing social capital
77%
20%
Connections with young people in other countries, through school visits, students exchanges, class Skype or video conferencing or service partnerships, are a key element of how schools can contribute to building social capital on a global scale
59%
30%
8%
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Slightly agree
Slightly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree

References

[1] National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011, Social Capital and Young People. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Briefing Paper 26

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, Schools, Australia, 2018

[3] Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2019, Independent Schools at a Glance 2019

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019, 3412.0 Migration, Australia, 2017-18.

[5] Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2019, School Profile 2018.

[6] Independent Schools Council of Australia 2019, *Independent Schools at a Glance 2019*, Canberra.

[7] Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2019, *Australian Charities Report 2017*, Australian Government, Melbourne.

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