

## Chapter 2: Schools and schooling

This chapter provides information on the status of Australian schooling in 2023, including school structures, student and teacher numbers, and teacher education.

### 2.1 School structures

In recent years, school structures and age requirements for student enrolment have become more consistent across Australian states and territories. Policy initiatives leading to this include decisions by several jurisdictions to move Year 7 from a primary school year to a secondary school year and national agreement on minimum requirements for leaving school.

In 2023, primary education consisted of a Foundation year (first year of full-time school) followed by Years 1–6, with secondary education from Years 7–12.<sup>1</sup>

The age at which schooling becomes compulsory is 6 years in most states and territories. In practice, most children start the Foundation year of primary school at between 4 and a half and 5 and a half years old.

All states and territories require young people to participate in schooling until they complete Year 10 and to participate full time in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until at least the age of 17.

However, there are still some variations in school structures, in requirements for compulsory school enrolment and in terminology between states and territories. These are summarised in Table 2.1.

Within the overall structure of primary and secondary education, individual schools may be primary only, secondary only or combined primary and secondary. Secondary schools may cater for the full age range of secondary students or be divided into junior and senior campuses.

In some states and territories, there are government and non-government special schools for students with disability or additional support needs. In other states and territories, most students with additional support needs are enrolled in mainstream classes. See Chapter 10 for definition of special school and special assistance school.

Students who are geographically isolated or who are otherwise unable to attend a local school may study through distance education schools or centres. Boarding facilities are available at some schools, mainly in the non-government sectors.

Students of compulsory school age may also be home-schooled if they have met the criteria set down by the relevant state or territory education authority. However, students undertaking home schooling are only counted in the National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) and this report if they are also formally enrolled in a course of study at school, including through distance education.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the South Australian Government announced that Year 7 would be moved from a primary school year to a secondary school year. In 2020, this change was implemented for a number of non-government schools and 3 government schools. In 2022, Year 7 became a secondary school year for all government and non-government schools in South Australia.

**Table 2.1:** Primary and secondary school structures, minimum school starting age, compulsory school starting age, and minimum school leaving age, by state and territory, Australia, 2023

State/territory	Name of Foundation year	Primary schooling	Secondary schooling	Minimum school starting age (Foundation)	Compulsory school starting age	Minimum school leaving age
<b>NSW</b>	Kindergarten	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 31 July	6 years	17 years
<b>Vic</b>	Preparatory	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 30 April	6 years	17 years
<b>Qld</b>	Preparatory	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 30 June	6 years 6 months	17 years
<b>SA</b>	Reception	Reception Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 1 May	6 years	17 years
<b>WA</b>	Pre-primary	Pre-primary Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 30 June	5 years 6 months	17 years 6 months – 18 years
<b>Tas</b>	Preparatory	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	5 by 1 January	5 years	17-18 years
<b>NT</b>	Transition	Transition Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 30 June	6 years	17 years
<b>ACT</b>	Kindergarten	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	4, turning 5 by 30 April	6 years	17 years

**Notes:**

State and territory minimum ages for the commencement of the Foundation year of schooling are as at January of the year of commencement.

All students are required to complete Year 10 or approved equivalent. After Year 10, students must be in school, in approved education, training, or employment or in a combination of training and employment until they turn 17 years of age or, in some jurisdictions, gain a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education or equivalent.

In WA, the requirement to remain at school or undertake an approved combination of training and employment extends to the end of the year in which a student turns 17 years 6 months of age, or they achieve the requirements for secondary graduation, or until they turn 18 years of age, whichever happens first.

In Tas, all young people must participate in education or training until they complete Year 12, attain a Certificate III, or they turn 18 years of age, whichever occurs first. Young people with full-time employment, or other specific circumstances, can apply for an exemption.

Sources: State and territory education authorities; ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

Each state and territory also has an early childhood education sector that is separate from primary and secondary schooling, although early childhood centres are often attached to, or accommodated in, primary or combined schools. In some jurisdictions, part-time early childhood education programs in the year before full-time schooling that are conducted in primary schools are considered to be a part of schooling. However, these programs are outside the scope and definition of schooling in the NSSC. Statistical data on these and other early childhood education programs is not included in this report.<sup>2</sup>

Data on secondary education provided by adult learning institutions such as institutes of technical and further education (TAFE) is also excluded from this report, except for vocational education and training (VET) programs undertaken by secondary school students.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical data on preschool education is available in ABS, [Preschool Education](#).

## 2.2 School numbers

### Key Facts:

In Australia in 2023:

- There were 9,629 schools – an increase of 15 schools since 2022.
- 69.7% of schools were government schools, 18.3% were Catholic and 12.0% independent.

In Australia, responsibility for school education rests mainly with the 6 state and 2 territory governments.<sup>3</sup> All states and territories provide for 13 years of formal school education. Primary education includes a Foundation year and Years 1–6. Secondary education consists of Years 7–12. Typically, schooling commences at age 5, is compulsory from age 6 until age 17 (with provision for alternative study or work arrangements after Year 10) and is completed at age 17 or 18.

The majority of schools are government schools, established and administered by state and territory governments through their education departments or authorities. The remainder are non-government schools, mostly associated with religious organisations. Non-government schools are established and operated under conditions determined by state and territory governments through their registration authorities.

The number and proportion of schools by school type and school sector in 2023 are shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2:** Number and proportion of schools by school type and school sector, Australia, 2023

School type	Government schools		Catholic schools		Independent schools		All non-government schools		All schools	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary	4,801	77.0	1,237	19.8	199	3.2	1,436	23.0	6,237	100.0
Secondary	1,068	73.5	320	22.0	65	4.5	385	26.5	1,453	100.0
Combined	505	35.5	160	11.3	757	53.2	917	64.5	1,422	100.0
Special	338	65.4	47	9.1	132	25.5	179	34.6	517	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,712</b>	<b>69.7</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>1,153</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>2,917</b>	<b>30.3</b>	<b>9,629</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:

School type:

- primary – school delivers primary education
- secondary – school delivers secondary education
- combined – school delivers both primary and secondary education
- special – students may include primary students, secondary students, ungraded students, or a combination of primary, secondary, and ungraded students. Special schools cater for students with disability and/or additional learning support needs.

School sector: Categories used in tables and graphs showing 'school sector' are 'government', 'Catholic' and 'independent'. In some cases, the category 'total non-government' (total of Catholic and independent) is also used. Systemic and non-systemic Catholic schools are counted as Catholic schools in the National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) and in this report. Independent public schools established in Qld, WA and the NT are government schools.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

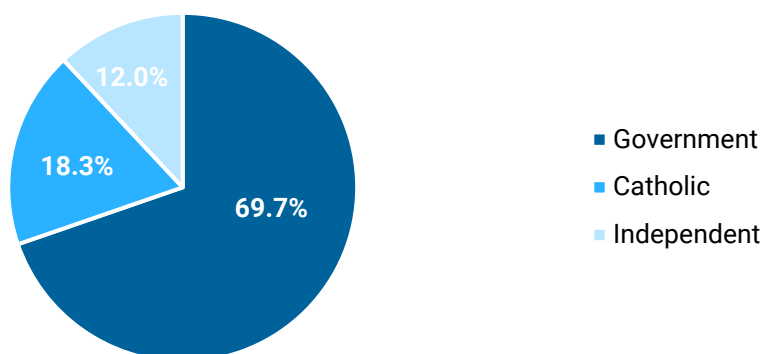
<sup>3</sup> New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (Vic), Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), Western Australia (WA), Tasmania (Tas), Northern Territory (NT) and Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

In 2023 there were 9,629 schools in Australia.<sup>4</sup> This total included primary, secondary, combined (primary and secondary) and special schools, across government and non-government school sectors.<sup>5</sup>

Of the total number of schools, 69.7% were administered by state and territory governments, 18.3% identified as having Catholic affiliation, and 12.0% were classified as independent. Most independent schools are affiliated with religious denominations or promote a particular educational philosophy.

The proportion of schools by school sector in 2023 is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1:** Proportion of schools by school sector, Australia, 2023 (%)



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

In 2023, almost two-thirds (64.8%) of schools were primary schools. In general, primary schools are smaller and more localised than secondary schools. More than three-quarters (77.0%) of primary schools were government schools.

Most secondary schools (73.5%) and special schools (65.4%) were also government schools, while most combined schools (64.5%) were non-government schools, mainly in the independent school sector. The number and proportion of schools by state and territory in 2023 are shown in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3:** Number and proportion of schools by school type and state/territory, Australia, 2023

School type	State/Territory								Australia
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	
Primary	2,089	1,571	1,145	434	686	153	74	85	6,237
Secondary	511	345	279	85	143	41	24	25	1,453
Combined	343	251	283	165	209	59	90	22	1,422
Special	182	116	90	28	82	8	6	5	517
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,125</b>	<b>2,283</b>	<b>1,797</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>1,120</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>9,629</b>
<b>Proportion (%)</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> As at the NSSC schools census date, 4 August 2023.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 10: Glossary for definitions of school levels, school types and school sectors.

The number of schools in each state and territory is largely determined by the size and geographical distribution of the school-age population. Changes in school numbers from year to year may also be due to administrative or structural changes in schooling and changes in student populations.

The total number of schools in Australia rose by 15 from 9,614 in 2022 to 9,629 in 2023, with increases of 6 in Qld, 5 in NSW and 4 in Vic and WA and decreases of 3 in SA and 1 in Tas. Proportions of schools per state and territory in 2023 did not change substantially from 2022.

There was a net rise of 236 (2.5%) in the total number of schools over the period 2013–2023. The numbers and proportions of schools in the 3 school sectors over this period are shown in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4:** Number and proportion of schools by school sector, Australia, 2013–2023

Year	Government schools		Catholic schools		Independent schools		All non-government schools		All schools	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
2013	6,661	70.9	1,717	18.3	1,015	10.8	2,732	29.1	9,393	100.0
2014	6,651	70.8	1,722	18.3	1,016	10.8	2,738	29.2	9,389	100.0
2015	6,639	70.6	1,737	18.5	1,028	10.9	2,765	29.4	9,404	100.0
2016	6,634	70.5	1,738	18.5	1,042	11.1	2,780	29.5	9,414	100.0
2017	6,639	70.3	1,744	18.5	1,061	11.2	2,805	29.7	9,444	100.0
2018	6,646	70.1	1,753	18.5	1,078	11.4	2,831	29.9	9,477	100.0
2019	6,659	70.1	1,756	18.5	1,088	11.4	2,844	29.9	9,503	100.0
2020	6,675	70.0	1,762	18.5	1,105	11.6	2,867	30.0	9,542	100.0
2021	6,692	69.8	1,762	18.4	1,127	11.8	2,889	30.2	9,581	100.0
2022	6,699	69.7	1,766	18.4	1,149	12.0	2,915	30.3	9,614	100.0
2023	6,712	69.7	1,764	18.3	1,153	12.0	2,917	30.3	9,629	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023 and previous releases.

Between 2013 and 2023 there was a net rise of 47 in the number of Catholic schools, of 138 in the number of independent schools and of 51 in the number of government schools. The proportion of independent schools grew by 1.2 percentage points to 12.0% nationally over this period.

## 2.3 Student numbers

### Key Facts:

In Australia in 2023:

- A total of 4,086,998 students were enrolled in Australian schools, an increase of 1.1% from 2022.
- 64.0% of school students were enrolled in government schools, 19.7% were in Catholic schools and 16.3% in independent schools.
- 55.3% of students were primary school students and 44.7% were in secondary school. This difference is mainly due to the structure of schooling, in which primary schooling includes more year groups than secondary schooling.

Over the past 10 years

- Total enrolments grew by 441,479 (12.1%), largely reflecting the growth in the school-age population.
- The number of students in independent schools rose from 521,436 in 2013 to 666,581 in 2023 – a 27.8% increase. This has resulted in a 2.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of students attending independent schools.

### Enrolments by school level and sector

In 2023, a total of 4,086,998 students were enrolled in Australian schools, a rise of 1.1% from 2022. The numbers and proportions of individual students by school level and school sector in 2023 are summarised in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5:** Number and proportion of students (full-time plus part-time) enrolled in schools by school level and school sector, Australia, 2023

School level	Government schools		Catholic schools		Independent schools		All schools	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	% (by school level)
Primary	1,553,683	68.7	411,876	18.2	294,823	13.0	2,260,382	55.3
Junior secondary	759,168	58.4	281,227	21.6	259,355	20.0	1,299,750	31.8
Senior secondary	301,243	57.2	113,220	21.5	112,403	21.3	526,866	12.9
Total secondary	1,060,411	58.1	394,447	21.6	371,758	20.4	1,826,616	44.7
Total	2,614,094	64.0	806,323	19.7	666,581	16.3	4,086,998	100.0

Note: School level:

- Primary education includes a Foundation (pre-Year 1) year followed by Years 1–6.
- Secondary education consists of Years 7–12. Junior secondary: the years from start of secondary school to Year 10, including 'ungraded' secondary. Senior secondary: Years 11 and 12.
- Students attending special schools are allocated to either primary or secondary school on the basis of school year or school level, where identified. Where the school year or school level is not identified (ungraded), students are allocated to primary or secondary school level according to the typical age level in each state or territory. See Part 5: Glossary for definition of special school.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

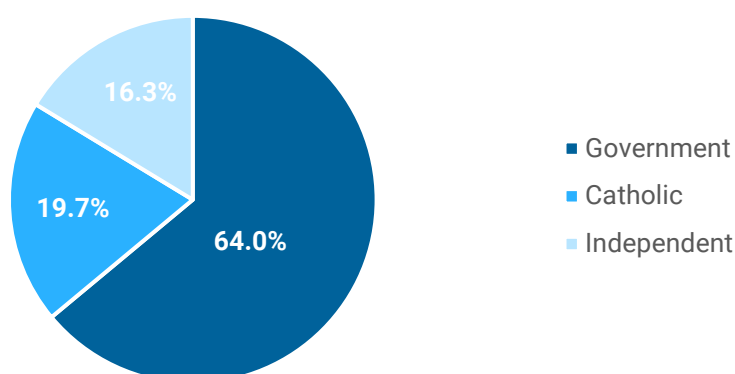
Of the 4.09 million school students, 2.26 million (55.3%) were primary students, and 1.83 million (44.7%) were secondary students. This difference is mainly due to the structure of schooling, in which primary schooling includes more year groups or cohorts than secondary schooling. Also, not all students complete Years 11 and 12, the last 2 years of secondary school.

In 2023, 64.0% of Australian school students were enrolled in government schools, 19.7% of students were enrolled in Catholic schools and 16.3% of students were enrolled in independent schools. This is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

The proportions of students enrolled in each school sector differed between levels of education, with government schools accounting for 68.7% of primary students but less than 60% (58.1%) of secondary students.

Part-time students (10,867 students) accounted for only 0.3% of total enrolments. They were concentrated in Years 11 and 12 (70.9%), and in government schools (89.1%).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2.2:** Proportion of students (full-time plus part-time) enrolled in schools by sector, Australia, 2023 (%)



Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

## Enrolments by school level, and state and territory

Enrolments of students (full-time plus part-time) by state and territory and school level in 2023 are shown in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6:** Number and proportion of students by school type and state/territory, Australia, 2023

School level	State/Territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Primary	698,165	574,381	476,928	148,790	252,373	44,151	23,651	41,943	2,260,382
Junior secondary	399,657	324,745	284,697	88,417	139,750	26,503	12,054	23,927	1,299,750
Senior secondary	151,307	136,856	116,033	39,841	57,440	10,403	4,203	10,783	526,866
Total secondary	550,964	461,601	400,730	128,258	197,190	36,906	16,257	34,710	1,826,616
Total	1,249,129	1,035,982	877,658	277,048	449,563	81,057	39,908	76,653	4,086,998
Proportion of Australian total (%)	30.6	25.3	21.5	6.8	11.0	2.0	1.0	1.9	100.0

Note: See notes for Table 2.5.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Student Numbers data set, National Report on Schooling data portal.

Enrolments by state and territory and school level reflect the school-age population and its age distribution in each jurisdiction. More than three-quarters of students (77.4%) were enrolled in the 3 most populous states of NSW, Vic, and Qld.

### Growth in enrolments

The number of students enrolled in Australian schools grew by 44,486 (1.1%) between 2022 and 2023.<sup>7</sup> During this period, there was an increase of 8,268 students (0.3%) in government schools and 36,218 students in non-government schools. Primary school enrolments increased by 12,593 students (0.6%) and secondary school enrolments increased by 31,893 students (1.8%).

In government schools, primary and junior secondary enrolments remained relatively unchanged between 2022 and 2023 (a net increase of 48 primary students and no change in the number of junior secondary enrolments). Senior secondary enrolments increased by 2.8% (8,220 students).

The non-government sector experienced growth in total enrolments in primary and secondary school, but with proportionately lower growth in Catholic schools (1.4%) than in independent schools (3.9%). In Catholic schools, primary enrolments increased by 0.8% (3,175 students) and secondary enrolments increased by 2.0% (7,780 students). In independent schools, primary enrolments increased by 3.3% (9,370 students) and secondary enrolments increased by 4.5% (15,893 students).

There was a shift between 2022 and 2023 in the share of total enrolments between government and non-government schools, with government schools falling by 0.5 percentage points to 64.0%, Catholic schools rising by 0.1 percentage points to 19.7% and independent schools rising by 0.4 percentage points to 16.3% of total enrolments.

Between 2013 and 2023, total enrolments grew by 441,479 (12.1%), largely reflecting the growth in the school-age population, as schooling is essentially compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16. Growth in senior secondary enrolments, including 17-year-olds and 18-year-olds, is influenced by Year 11 and 12 retention rates as well as population growth, and the number of Full-Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS) enrolled in Australian schools.

Enrolments have risen both in government and in non-government schools over the past 10 years, with the bulk of total growth over the period (54.2%) occurring in government schools. The number of students in independent schools rose from 521,436 in 2013 to 666,581 in 2023 – a 27.8% increase over 10 years. This has resulted in a 2.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of students attending independent schools. Table 2.7 summarises this data.

<sup>7</sup> The number of Full-Fee Paying Overseas Students contributed to the higher growth rate, increasing by over a third (36.6 per cent) from 2022 to 21,124 students. Between 2019-2022 there was a drop of 41.9 per cent, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic (ABS, *Schools*, 2023).



**Table 2.7:** Number and proportion of students (full-time plus part-time) by school sector, Australia, 2013–2023

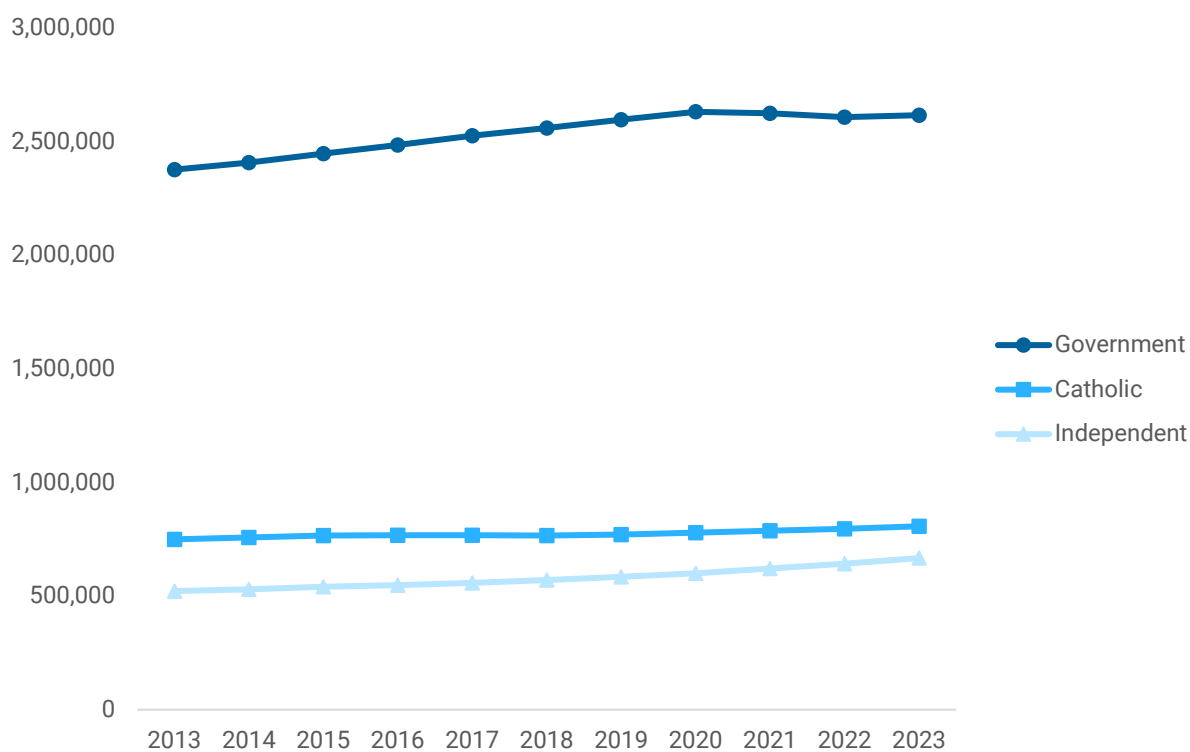
Year	Government schools		Catholic schools		Independent schools		All schools
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
2013	2,375,024	65.1	749,059	20.5	521,436	14.3	3,645,519
2014	2,406,495	65.1	757,749	20.5	529,857	14.3	3,694,101
2015	2,445,130	65.2	765,539	20.4	540,304	14.4	3,750,973
2016	2,483,802	65.4	767,050	20.2	547,374	14.4	3,798,226
2017	2,524,865	65.6	766,870	19.9	557,490	14.5	3,849,225
2018	2,558,169	65.7	765,735	19.7	569,930	14.6	3,893,834
2019	2,594,830	65.7	769,719	19.5	584,262	14.8	3,948,811
2020	2,629,143	65.6	778,605	19.4	599,226	15.0	4,006,974
2021	2,622,755	65.1	787,181	19.5	620,781	15.4	4,030,717
2022	2,605,826	64.5	795,368	19.7	641,318	15.9	4,042,512
2023	2,614,094	64.0	806,323	19.7	666,581	16.3	4,086,998

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023 and previous releases.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the growth in student enrolments 2013–2023 by school sector.

**Figure 2.3:** Number of students enrolled (full-time plus part-time) by school sector, Australia, 2013–2023



Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

Between 2013 and 2019 the government sector share of total enrolments increased by 0.6 percentage points to 65.7%. In 2020, it fell by 0.1 percentage points and in 2021, it fell sharply by 0.5 percentage points to 65.1%, with a net loss in total enrolments in that year. This decline continued in 2022, with a larger net loss in total enrolments than for 2021, and a fall in the government sector share of 0.6 percentage points to 64.5%. While total enrolments in government schools increased in 2023, the government sector share of students declined by 0.5 percentage points to 64.0%.

Over this ten-year period, independent school enrolments rose by 2.0 percentage points to 16.3% of the total, while Catholic sector enrolments fell by 0.8 percentage points to 19.7% of total enrolments. This continues a long-term trend in the relative growth of the independent sector.

The fall in total enrolment growth in government schools in 2020-2022 can be largely attributed to the continued disruption of international travel due to COVID-19. One effect of this was a fall in the number of overseas students enrolled in Australian schools. Between 2020 and 2021 the number of full fee-paying overseas students (FFPOS) fell by 5,480, followed by a fall of 1,561 between 2021 and 2022. In 2023, the number of FFPOS increased by over a third (36.6 per cent) to 21,124 students (ABS, *Schools*, 2023).

However, border closures had a much broader effect than on international students, resulting in a fall in net overseas migration to Australia to its lowest level for 75 years. This depressed population growth across all age groups, including those with school-aged children, had a negative impact on school enrolments. Overall, net overseas migration for 5–19-year-olds fell from 66,510 in 2019 to 3,220 in 2021 before increasing to 51,330 in 2022 and 97,080 in 2023.<sup>8</sup> As government schools provide education for around two-thirds of students, it is not surprising that the ‘loss’ of potential students in 2021 and 2022 – due to greatly reduced immigration – was reflected mainly in government school enrolments.

However, the shift in enrolment ‘shares’ between the government and non-government sectors between 2020 and 2023 may indicate that this was more than proportionate. The movement of students between sectors and differences in numbers of students starting and leaving school may have also contributed to this shift. It is not clear how much of the shift in sector proportions since 2019 is attributable to the fall in Australia’s net overseas migration and how much to net movements of students between sectors.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

In 2023 there were 264,395 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in Australian schools, making up 6.5% of the total school population.<sup>9</sup> Table 2.8 shows the number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by school level and state and territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not evenly or proportionately distributed among states and territories. NSW had the highest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in 2023, with 89,226 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (33.7% of the national total). This is more than the NSW share of total enrolments nationally (30.6%) and represented 7.1% of the state’s students, more than the national average of 6.5%. Qld schools accounted for 30.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (compared with 21.5% of total enrolments) and WA 12.0% (compared with 11.0% of total enrolments).

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<sup>8</sup> ABS, Overseas migration, release date 15/12/2023, Net overseas migration: Arrivals, departures and net, State/territory, Age, and sex - Financial years, 2004-05 onwards.

<sup>9</sup> This report uses the term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ to refer to First Nations Australians. This is in line with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration and definitions used for data collection.

The highest concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was in the NT, which accounted for only 1.0% of total school enrolments in 2023, but for 5.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments. The 15,671 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in NT schools made up 39.3% of the Territory's school population. Because of this, data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has a greater impact on overall statistics for the NT than for any other state or territory.

**Table 2.8:** Number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (full-time plus part-time) enrolled in schools by school level and state/territory, Australia, 2023

School level	State/Territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Primary	53,072	12,178	46,544	8,532	18,923	4,895	9,370	1,434	154,948
Junior secondary	29,044	6,862	26,061	4,822	9,837	2,902	4,938	774	85,240
Senior secondary	7,110	2,179	7,999	1,763	3,080	921	1,363	332	24,747
Total secondary	36,154	9,041	34,060	6,585	12,917	3,823	6,301	1,106	109,987
<b>Total</b>	<b>89,226</b>	<b>21,219</b>	<b>80,604</b>	<b>15,117</b>	<b>31,840</b>	<b>8,718</b>	<b>15,671</b>	<b>2,540</b>	<b>264,935</b>
Proportion of the Australian total of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students per state/territory (%)	33.7	8.0	30.4	5.7	12.0	3.3	5.9	1.0	100.0
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a proportion of total students in each state/territory (%)	7.1	2.0	9.2	5.5	7.1	10.8	39.3	3.3	6.5

Note: See notes for Table 2.5.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were under-represented in senior secondary years: 4.7% of senior secondary students were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, compared with 6.6% of junior secondary students and 6.9% of primary school students. These proportions reflect Year 10 to Year 12 apparent retention rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, which are still substantially lower than for the overall school population. Apparent retention rates are reported in Chapter 4.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students predominantly attended government schools, with 81.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments in government schools compared with 64.0% of enrolments for all students. Overall, 18.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in non-government schools (11.3% in Catholic schools, 6.9% in independent schools) with this proportion rising from 15.1% for primary students to 26.4% for senior secondary students.

## 2.4 School students with disability

### Key Facts:

In Australia in 2023:

- 991,272 school students received an educational adjustment due to disability – this represents 24.2% of total enrolments, up from 22.5% in 2022 and 18.0% in 2015.
- 2.2% of all school students were provided with extensive adjustments to enable them to participate in education on the same basis as other students. A further 4.3% were provided with substantial support, 10.4% were provided with supplementary support and 7.3% were supported through quality differentiated teaching practices.
- Among school students who received an educational adjustment due to disability, 54.3% of adjustments were provided to students with cognitive disability, 33.6% to students with social/emotional disability, 9.3% for students with physical disability and 2.7% for sensory disability.

The [Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability \(NCCD\)](#) collects data about Australian school students with disability who are receiving adjustments in a consistent, reliable, and systematic way. It enables schools, education authorities and governments to better understand the needs of students with disability and how they can be best supported at school; and allocate resources efficiently.

The NCCD records information on students who received an educational adjustment to address the functional impact of a disability for a minimum of 10 weeks of school education in the 12 months preceding Census Day.<sup>10</sup> Through this collection, teachers use their professional judgement based on evidence to capture information on:

- The level of adjustment that students with disability are being provided to enable them to participate in education on the same basis as other students. The four levels are:
  - support within quality differentiated teaching practice (QDTP)
  - supplementary
  - substantial
  - extensive.
- The broad category of disability under which each student best fits:
  - physical
  - cognitive
  - sensory
  - social-emotional.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Census Day is the date on which schools identify the student population to count for the government and non-government School Census, which includes the NCCD.

<sup>11</sup> Further details about the NCCD, levels of adjustment, and categories of disability are available on the NCCD portal ([www.nccd.edu.au](http://www.nccd.edu.au)).

Through participating in the collection, schools are embedding better support for all students with disability in their routine day-to-day practice by:

- focusing attention on the educational needs and adjustments required to support individual students,
- facilitating a more collaborative and coordinated approach, including improvements in support systems at the school level, and
- strengthening communication between schools, parents, and the broader community, increasing transparency and reinforcing a culture of inclusion.<sup>12</sup>

In 2023, 991,272 school students received an educational adjustment due to disability. This represented 24.2% of total enrolments. Table 2.9 shows the number and proportion of students that received an adjustment due to disability in 2023, by level of educational adjustment and category of disability.

**Table 2.9:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total school enrolments, by category of disability and level of adjustment, 2023

Level of adjustment	Category of disability				
	Cognitive	Physical	Sensory	Social/emotional	All
Support within QDTP	3.3	1.6	0.2	2.2	7.3
Supplementary	6.2	0.4	0.3	3.5	10.4
Substantial	2.3	0.2	0.1	1.7	4.3
Extensive	1.3	0.1	0.1	0.7	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>24.2</b>

Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023.

Table 2.10 shows the proportion of school students with disability, by school sector and level of adjustment provided in 2023. Overall, the proportion of students receiving adjustments due to disability in Catholic schools (21.8%) and independent schools (21.9%) was lower than that of government schools (25.5%). The proportion of students receiving an adjustment for a physical disability was higher in the independent sector (3.1%) than in the Catholic (2.1%) and government (2.1%) sectors. The proportion of students receiving an adjustment for cognitive, sensory, or social/emotional disability was higher among students in government schools than in non-government schools. This may be at least partly due to the fact that the majority of special schools are government schools.

**Table 2.10:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total student population, by category of disability and school sector, 2023

School sector	Category of disability				
	Cognitive	Physical	Sensory	Social/emotional	All
Government	13.6	2.1	0.8	9.0	25.5
Catholic	13.1	2.1	0.4	6.1	21.8
Independent	11.3	3.1	0.5	7.0	21.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>24.2</b>

Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Education Council (2017), 2017 data on students in Australian schools receiving adjustments for disability.

Table 2.11 shows the proportion of students with disability in 2023, by school sector and level of adjustment provided. The proportion of students in Catholic schools who received support within QDTP (4.6%) was lower than in independent schools (8.2%) and government schools (7.9%). The proportion of students receiving extensive support was higher in government schools (2.9%) than in Catholic (0.9%) and independent schools (1.0%). As was the case for the proportion of students receiving adjustments by category of disability, this difference is likely to be at least partly because the majority of special schools are government schools.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 2.11:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total school student population, by level of adjustment and school sector, 2023

School sector	Level of adjustment				
	Support within QDTP	Supplementary	Substantial	Extensive	All
Government	7.9	10.1	4.6	2.9	25.5
Catholic	4.6	12.0	4.3	0.9	21.8
Independent	8.2	9.5	3.2	1.0	21.9
Total	7.3	10.4	4.3	2.2	24.2

Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023.

The proportion of students receiving an adjustment due to disability was higher than average in the NT, Vic, and SA, as shown in Table 2.12. With 31.3% of students receiving an adjustment due to disability, 10.0% of students receiving substantial support and 4.8% receiving extensive support, the NT had the highest proportion of school students receiving assistance. In SA, 29.2% of school students received an adjustment due to disability, with higher proportions receiving support within QDTP (9.6%) and supplementary support (13.3%) than substantial or extensive support (3.9% and 2.4% respectively).

**Table 2.12:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total school student population, by level of adjustment and state/territory, 2023

Level of support	State/Territory								Australia
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	
Support within QDTP	6.8	8.7	5.1	9.6	9.1	4.1	5.1	7.2	7.3
Supplementary	11.4	9.5	9.9	13.3	9.2	8.5	11.5	9.5	10.4
Substantial	3.9	4.9	4.8	3.9	3.0	5.2	10.0	4.0	4.3
Extensive	2.1	3.1	1.8	2.4	1.0	1.4	4.8	1.1	2.2
Total	24.2	26.3	21.5	29.2	22.3	19.3	31.3	21.8	24.2

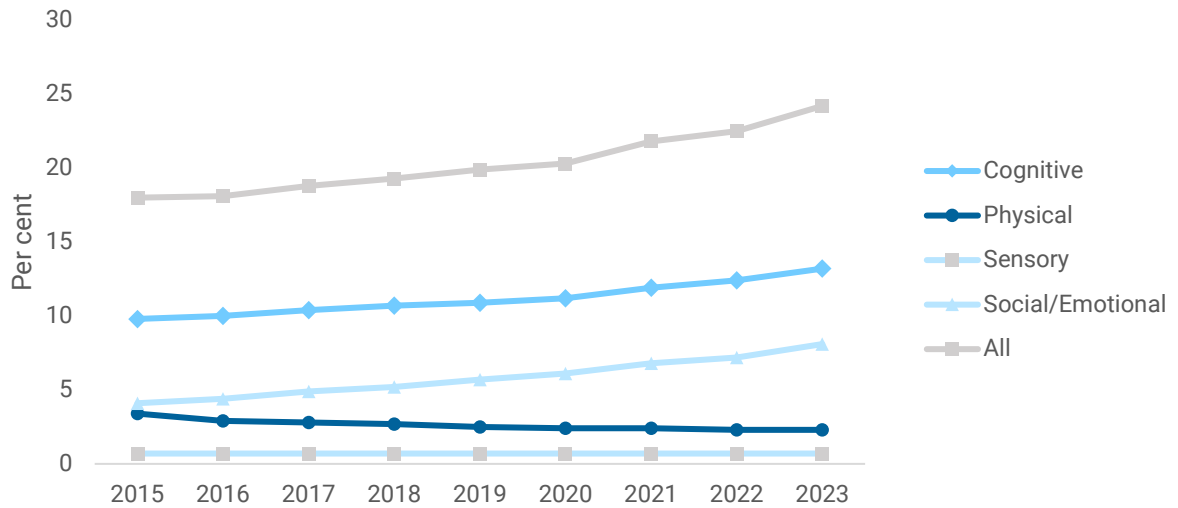
Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023.

Between 2015 and 2023, the proportion of school students receiving an adjustment due to disability increased by 6.2 percentage points, from 18.0% to 24.2%, as shown in Figure 2.4.

<sup>13</sup> Independent reviews of the quality of the data found that schools' level of understanding of the data collection model, the DDA and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 contributes directly to the quality of the data collected. This may account for some of the variability between states/territories and school sectors, and over time, as understanding grows stronger with each year that schools participate (Education Council (2017), 2017 data on students in Australian schools receiving adjustments for disability).

While the proportion of school students receiving adjustments for cognitive and social-emotional disabilities increased by 3.4 and 4.0 percentage points respectively, the proportion of students receiving adjustments for sensory disabilities remained stable at 0.7% and the proportion receiving adjustments for physical disabilities declined from 3.4% in 2015 to 2.3% in 2023.

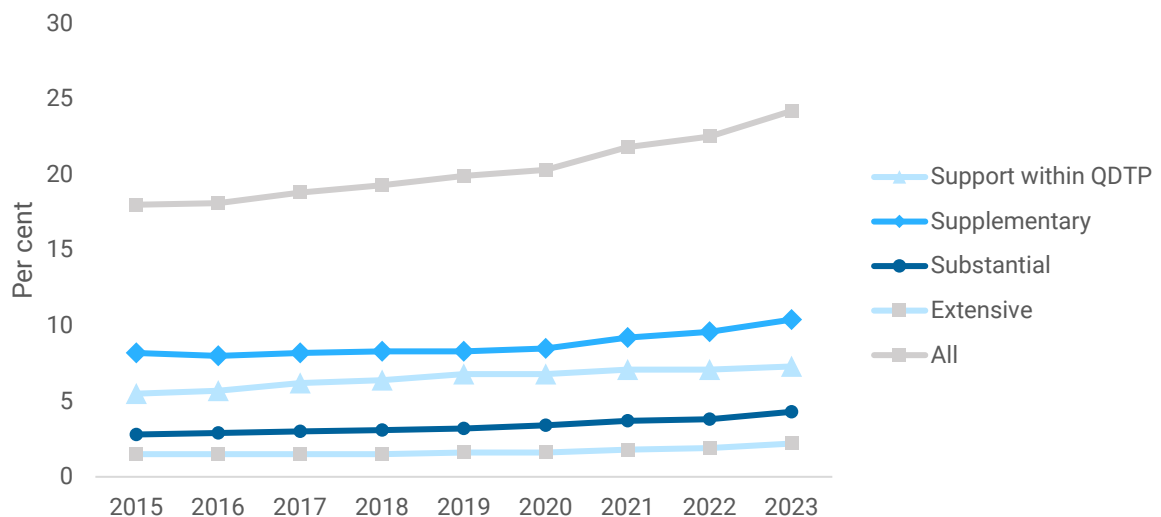
**Figure 2.4:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total student population, by category of disability, 2015–2023



Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023, and previous years.

Figure 2.5 shows that between 2015 and 2023, the proportion of school students receiving support within QDTP increased by 1.8 percentage points, the proportion receiving supplementary support increased by 2.2 percentage points, and the proportion of students receiving substantial and extensive support increased by 1.5 percentage points and 0.7 percentage points respectively.

**Figure 2.5:** School students with disability receiving adjustments as a percentage of the total student population, by level of adjustment, 2015–2023



Source: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), 2023 and previous years.

## 2.5 Staff numbers

### Key Facts:

In Australia in 2023:

- There were 311,655 full time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff in Australia – an increase of 4,427 (1.4%) from 2022.
- Staff numbers closely reflected enrolments, with 62.6% of school teachers employed in government schools, 19.3% in Catholic schools 18.2% in independent schools.
- Australia’s teaching workforce continued to be predominantly female, with women making up 71.9% of FTE teachers in 2023. The gender difference was more pronounced at the primary level (82.1% female) than at secondary level (61.4% female).

In 2023, there were 311,655 FTE teaching staff across primary and secondary schooling in Australia. This was an increase of 4,427 (1.4%) from 2022. It was made up of a rise of 3,409 non-government school teachers (3.0% increase) and 1,018 government school teachers (0.5% increase). The percentage increase in teaching staff in independent schools (3.7%) was larger than that of Catholic schools (2.4%).

Across Australia in 2023, 62.6% of FTE teachers were employed by the government school sector, 19.3% by the Catholic school sector and 18.2% by the independent sector. This remains broadly consistent with the distribution of (full-time plus part-time) students across school sectors.

The numbers and proportions of full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff by school sector, school level and gender in 2023 are shown in Table 2.13.



**Table 2.13:** Number and proportion of full-time equivalent teaching staff by school sector, school level and gender, Australia, 2023

	Government schools	Catholic schools	Independent schools	Total non-government schools	All schools
<b>Primary level</b>					
Male	19,809	4,174	4,224	8,397	28,207
Female	89,563	23,133	16,864	39,998	129,560
<b>Total</b>	109,372	27,307	21,088	48,395	157,767
<b>% of all staff</b>	69.3%	17.3%	13.4%	30.7%	100.0%
<b>Secondary level</b>					
Male	32,068	12,660	14,627	27,287	59,355
Female	53,510	20,084	20,940	41,024	94,533
<b>Total</b>	85,577	32,744	35,567	68,311	153,888
<b>% of all staff</b>	55.6%	21.3%	23.1%	44.4%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>					
Male	51,877	16,834	18,851	35,684	87,561
Female	143,072	43,217	37,804	81,021	224,094
<b>Total</b>	194,949	60,051	56,655	116,706	311,655
<b>% of all staff</b>	62.6%	19.3%	18.2%	37.4%	100.0%

**Notes:**

In the calculation of numbers of FTE teaching staff, a part-time teacher is counted as a proportion of a full-time teacher according to the time employed, compared with a full-time teacher in the same school system or school. (See Section 10: Glossary for definitions of FTE and teaching staff.)

Staff employed in combined and special schools are allocated to either primary or secondary education on a pro-rata basis.

Percentage columns for primary and secondary show the proportions of FTE primary and secondary teachers employed in each sector, relative to total FTE teaching staff. The total percentage column shows the proportions of total FTE teaching staff employed in each sector. The total (All schools) row shows the number and proportion of total FTE teaching staff employed at each level.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

In 2023, Australia's teaching workforce continued to be predominantly female, with women making up 71.9% of FTE teachers. This gender gap is similar to that in previous years. In 2023, the difference was again more pronounced at the primary level (82.1% female) than at secondary level (61.4% female).

The number and proportion of FTE teaching staff by state and territory in 2023 is shown in Table 2.14.

**Table 2.14:** Number and proportion of FTE teaching staff by state and territory and school level, Australia, 2023

School level	State/Territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
<b>Primary</b>	46,753	43,059	32,598	10,649	16,526	3,282	1,963	2,937	157,767
<b>Secondary</b>	45,214	41,581	33,174	10,383	16,053	3,258	1,468	2,759	153,888
<b>Total</b>	91,967	84,640	65,771	21,032	32,579	6,540	3,431	5,696	311,655
<b>Proportion (%)</b>	29.5	27.2	21.1	6.7	10.5	2.1	1.1	1.8	100.0

Note: See notes for Table 2.12.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

The distribution of FTE teaching staff between states and territories remains broadly consistent with the overall distribution of students.

Changes in teaching staffing levels for the period 2013–2023 are shown in Table 2.15. Between 2013 and 2023, the total number of FTE teaching staff grew by 50,070 (19.1%). This was substantially more than the percentage growth in (full-time plus part-time) student enrolments (12.1%) over the same period.

**Table 2.15:** Number of FTE teaching staff by school sector, Australia, 2013–2023

Year	Government schools	Catholic schools	Independent schools	Total non-government schools	All schools
<b>2013</b>	167,903	50,527	43,154	93,682	261,585
<b>2014</b>	169,199	50,936	43,930	94,866	264,065
<b>2015</b>	171,763	52,160	45,277	97,437	269,200
<b>2016</b>	176,819	53,154	46,357	99,511	276,330
<b>2017</b>	180,973	53,839	47,248	101,087	282,059
<b>2018</b>	185,458	54,511	48,614	103,125	288,583
<b>2019</b>	182,959	55,372	49,963	105,335	288,294
<b>2020</b>	189,069	56,645	50,802	107,447	296,516
<b>2021</b>	193,186	57,667	52,686	110,353	303,539
<b>2022</b>	193,932	58,666	54,631	113,297	307,228
<b>2023</b>	194,949	60,051	56,655	116,706	311,655

Note: See notes for Table 2.12.

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023 and previous releases.

In 2023, FTE teaching staff accounted for 66.0% of the FTE of all school staff. In addition to teaching staff, 160,215 FTE staff were employed in administrative and clerical roles, as teacher aides and assistants (27.0% of all staff), as specialist support staff (3.6%) or in building and maintenance (3.3%). Time series data on school staff by state and territory, school sector and school level is available in the National Report on Schooling data portal.

## 2.6 Student-teacher ratios

### Key Facts:

In Australia in 2023:

- The average student to teaching staff ratio was 13.1 students per teacher, the same as in 2022 and a reduction from 13.3 students per teacher in 2021.
- The average student to teaching staff ratio was lower in independent schools (11.8 students per teacher) compared to Catholic and government schools (13.4 students per teacher).
- The average student-teacher ratio was 11.8 students per teacher at the secondary level, compared with 14.3 students per teacher at the primary level. Student-teacher ratios are consistently lower for secondary education than for primary education in all school sectors. This reflects differing requirements for particular student groups, and for different school subjects in secondary schools.

The student–teacher ratio is calculated as the number of FTE students per FTE teaching staff. Table 2.16 summarises average student–teacher ratios in Australia in 2023 across the 3 school sectors.

**Table 2.16:** FTE student–teacher ratios, by school sector and school level, Australia, 2023

School sector	Primary	Secondary	All schools
Government	14.2	12.3	13.4
Catholic	15.1	12.0	13.4
Independent	14.0	10.4	11.8
All non-government	14.6	11.2	12.6
All schools	14.3	11.8	13.1

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

For all Australian schools, the average FTE student–teacher ratio in 2023 was 13.1 students per teacher. There was no change to this ratio between 2022 and 2023, after a reduction of 0.2 from 13.3 students per teacher in 2021.

Between 2022 and 2023 student teacher ratios in government schools nationally remained constant, at 13.4 students per teacher. However, there was a reduction in student teacher ratios in government primary schools, from 14.3 students per teacher in 2022 to 14.2 students per teacher in 2023. Student teacher ratios in government secondary schools remained the same in 2022 and 2023, at 12.3 students per teacher.

Overall, the average student-teacher ratio for non-government schools decreased by 0.1 between 2022 and 2023, to 12.6 students per teacher. The average ratio for Catholic schools fell by 0.2 to 13.4 students per teacher, while ratios in independent schools increased by 0.1 to 11.8 students per teacher in 2023.

Table 2.17 shows average student–teacher ratios in 2023 by school level and state and territory.

**Table 2.17:** FTE student–teacher ratios, by state/territory and school level, Australia, 2023

School level	State/Territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Primary	14.9	13.3	14.6	14.0	15.3	13.4	12.0	14.3	14.3
Secondary	12.2	11.1	12.0	12.3	12.3	11.3	11.0	12.6	11.8
All schools	13.6	12.2	13.3	13.1	13.8	12.4	11.6	13.4	13.1

Source: ABS, *Schools*, 2023.

Between 2022 and 2023, the number of students per teacher remained constant in NSW and Tas, increased by 0.1 in WA and ACT and by 0.2 in the NT, and decreased by 0.1 in Vic and QLD and by 0.2 in SA.

While there was no change in overall student–teacher ratios at a national level between 2022 and 2023, the average number of students per teacher at the primary level decreased by 0.1 to 14.3 students per teacher in 2023.

At the primary school level, the number of students per teacher remained constant in WA, Tas and the ACT, decreased by 0.3 in SA and by 0.1 in NSW, Vic and Qld, and increased by 0.4 in the NT. At the secondary level, the number of students per teacher increased by 0.3 in the ACT and by 0.1 in NSW, SA and WA, and decreased by 0.1 in Vic, Qld, Tas and the NT.

Student–teacher ratios are consistently lower for secondary education than for primary education in all school sectors and across all states and territories. In 2023, the average FTE student–teacher ratio was 11.8 teachers per student at the secondary level, compared with 14.3 teachers per student at the primary level.

This reflects differing requirements for particular student groups, and for different school subjects, in secondary schools, such as smaller maximum class sizes for practical subjects, and for senior secondary classes.

The specialist and administrative duties undertaken by teaching staff in secondary schools, such as non-teaching principals, subject head teachers, teacher librarians and careers advisers, also contribute to this difference. The extent to which teaching staff perform these roles may vary between states and between school systems. This will affect the number of teachers employed in each school, and therefore the average student–teacher ratio.

Lower student–teacher ratios mean there is a smaller number of students per teacher and, potentially, smaller class sizes. However, ratios, by themselves, are only approximate indicators of actual class size because they do not take into account the factors mentioned above.

The average national student–teacher ratio fell from 13.9 students per teacher in 2013 to 13.1 teachers per student in 2023, with reductions across all school sectors. Time series data (2001–2023) on student–teacher ratios by state and territory, school sector and school level is available in the National Report on Schooling data portal.