

# NAB INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS SURVEY 2017

## IS AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE IS IN GOOD HANDS?

### PART 1: OUR CHILDREN'S WELLBEING



*NAB Behavioural & Industry Economics*

Embargoed until 17 August  
2017 2017

This report provides a unique insight into the concerns of our children and the important role schools can play in helping them prepare for the future and embrace the challenges they may face. In part 2 of this series on independent schools and our children, schools across the country were asked to assess the wellbeing of their students, how well they were coping with anxieties and the prevalence of “wellbeing” programs within the school system.

While it's very clear that our children are anxious, most schools are not only aware of this issue but proactive in attempting to manage it - around 9 in 10 independent schools have a “wellbeing” program in place. With schools operating in an increasingly scrutinised environment, this report serves as a reminder of the complex pressures facing children today, as well as the investment being made by many schools to help them not only academically, but also emotionally.

Almost daily, there are reports in the media highlighting the growing challenges facing our children arising from globalisation, the future of work, housing affordability and cost of living pressures, terrorism, climate change, global economic uncertainty, declining levels of literacy and numeracy relative to some countries, cyber-bullying and family breakdown to name just a few. So perhaps it's no surprise children are anxious.

Broadly, anxiety appears to be a bigger issue for girls than boys - a finding consistent with other NAB wellbeing research. Primary school children are seen as having much higher levels of personal wellbeing than secondary students and across all aspects of their wellbeing.

The biggest negative impact on student wellbeing stems from family conflict or breakdown, followed by bullying, the health of loved ones, their popularity, friends and peer pressures. Interestingly the factors that impacted the least included the environment, their future, world problems and money.

There were noticeable differences in the drivers of wellbeing between boys and girls at both primary and secondary levels. In primary schools, looks and appearance was seen as having a much bigger negative impact on the wellbeing and anxiety of girls than boys, along with making mistakes in class. Among secondary school students, family conflict and breakdown has a far greater biggest negative impact on girls and boys. However, looks and appearances was identified as the next biggest factor for girls, and significantly more so than for boys, while bullying was the next biggest factor for boys, although the impact was broadly the same as for girls. Not surprisingly, the pressure of schoolwork, test and grades has a much stronger negative wellbeing impact on secondary school students than on primary schools students, but more so for girls.

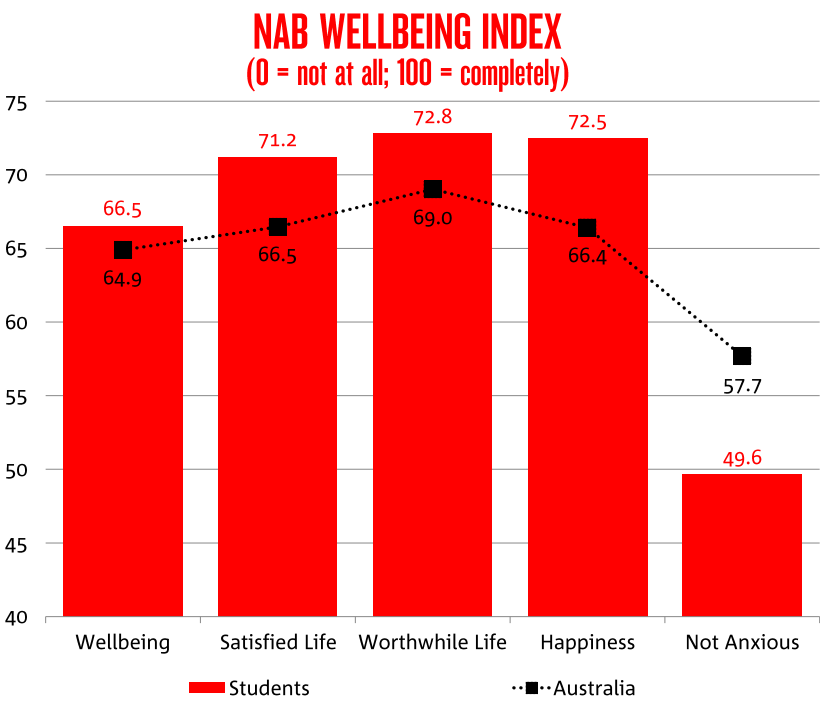
Overall, independent schools believe their students are coping only “moderately” well with their anxiety, however, primary school students - both boys and girls - are coping much better than secondary students. But, boys in secondary schools are seen to be coping much better than girls. That said, it was very encouraging that 87% of surveyed independent schools had a “wellbeing” program in place. The number (and variety) of programs was extraordinary - they ranged from “big brother/big sister”, employing school chaplains, counsellors & psychologists, dedicated “wellbeing times” during the day, student wellbeing committees, multi-disciplinary teams working with “at risk” students across all ages, onsite health service provision (speech pathology, physiology, paediatrics, occupational, physiotherapy, etc.), sexual health programs from Year 5, to more structured programs such as KidsMatter, MindMatters, Men of Honour & Women of Worth.

When asked words that most came to mind when thinking about kids today, some said “anxious”, “uncertain”, “pressured”, “concerned”, “distracted”, “afraid to fail”, “disconnected” and “self-absorbed”. However, many more said: “global citizens”; “inquisitive”; “brave”; “career focussed”; “caring”; “confident”; “amazing”; “motivated”; “self-assured”; “energised”; “interconnected”; “extraordinary”; “disciplined”; “curious”; “digitally literate”; “multi-taskers”; “different”; “environmentally & socially focussed”; and “innovative”.

Finally, this research challenges some “orthodoxies” by asking independent schools to respond to the question: “what might surprise people most to learn about your school?” (see page 6) and most importantly, “what schools wish their students really knew and understood” (see page 7).

# MAIN REPORT

## STUDENT WELLBEING



Independent schools were asked to assess the wellbeing of their students based on the four key measures which NAB also uses to measure personal wellbeing among Australians in its quarterly NAB Wellbeing report:

- Their satisfaction with their lives
- Feeling their lives overall are worthwhile
- Happiness in the past week
- Levels of anxiety

Student wellbeing (66.5) is higher than the Australian average (64.9) - although some care must be exercised in comparing these results as they are based on external perceptions, whereas Australian wellbeing is self-reported.

With this caveat in mind, the perception from independent schools is that students also enjoy higher levels of life worth, happiness and life satisfaction, but are noticeably more anxious.

The chart on the right compares the perceptions of independent schools of their students’ wellbeing by gender and in primary and secondary schools.

Primary school children are seen as having much higher levels of personal wellbeing than secondary students and across all aspects of their wellbeing.

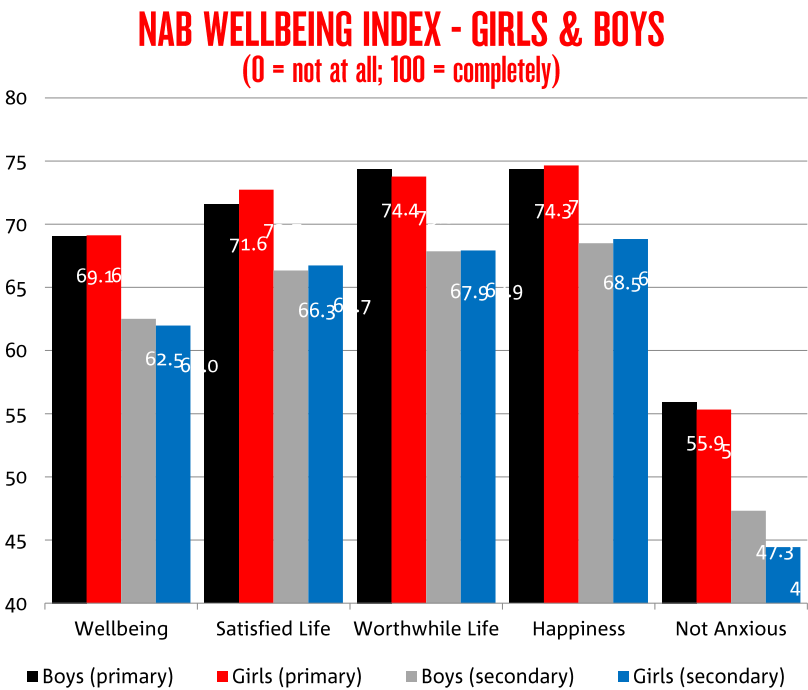
In addition, schools noted very little difference in the wellbeing of primary school boys and girls across all aspects of their wellbeing.

It is however, of some concern that anxiety detracts the most from their overall sense of personal wellbeing - and by some margin.

Wellbeing was much lower in secondary schools for boys and girls.

Secondary schools perceived broadly similar levels of wellbeing for boys and girls in relation to happiness, life worth and life satisfaction.

But they also said anxiety was a bigger issue for girls than boys - a finding consistent with NAB’s wellbeing research which also shows young women are consistently among the lowest wellbeing groups and have the highest anxiety.



# THINGS THAT IMPACT NEGATIVELY ON STUDENT ANXIETY/WEELLBEING

In order to determine what the key drivers of anxiety were, independent schools were asked to assess the negative impact on student anxiety or wellbeing across a number of factors.

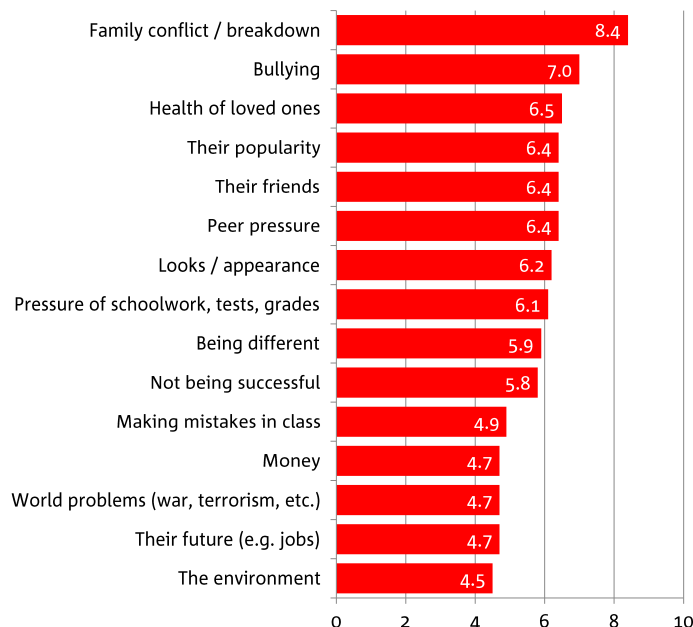
Overall, it was very clear that the biggest negative impact related to family conflict or breakdown, scoring 8.4 out of 10 (where 10 is "very strong negative impact").

Bullying (7.0) was next, followed by the health of loved ones (6.5), their popularity (6.4), their friends (6.4) and peer pressures (6.4).

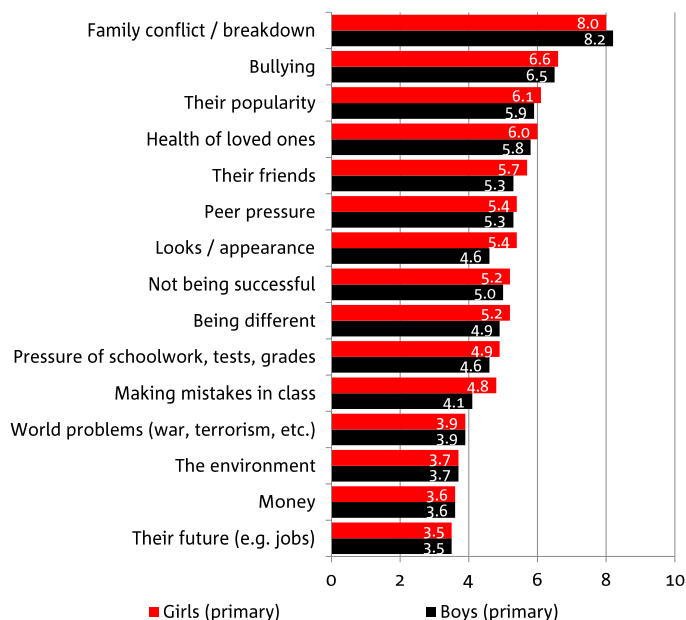
Factors that impacted the least included the environment (4.5), their future (4.7), world problems (4.7) and money (4.7).

But there were some noticeable differences between boys and girls at both primary and secondary levels. In primary schools, the most apparent differences related to looks and appearance, which was seen as having a much bigger negative impact on the wellbeing and anxiety of girls (5.4) than boys (4.6) and making mistakes in class (4.8 vs. 4.1).

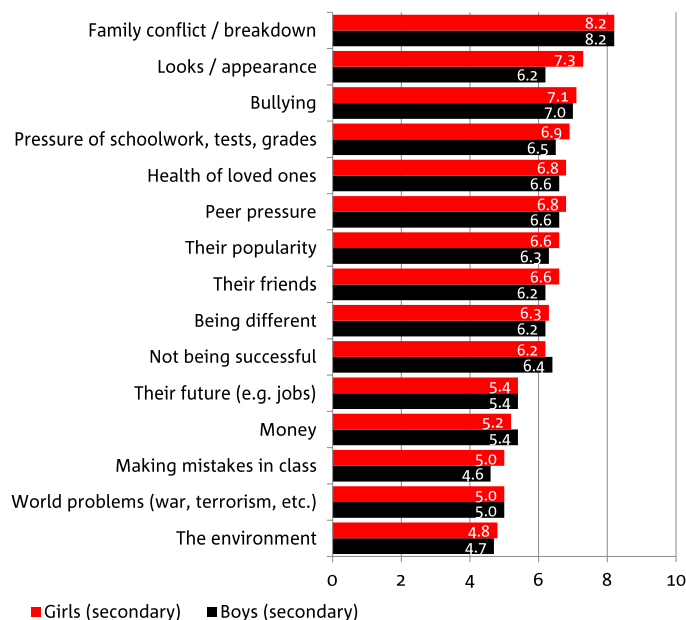
## FACTORS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT STUDENT ANXIETY/WEELLBEING - OVERALL (0 = not at all; 10 = very strong negative impact)



## FACTORS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT STUDENT ANXIETY/WEELLBEING - PRIMARY (0 = not at all; 10 = very strong negative impact)



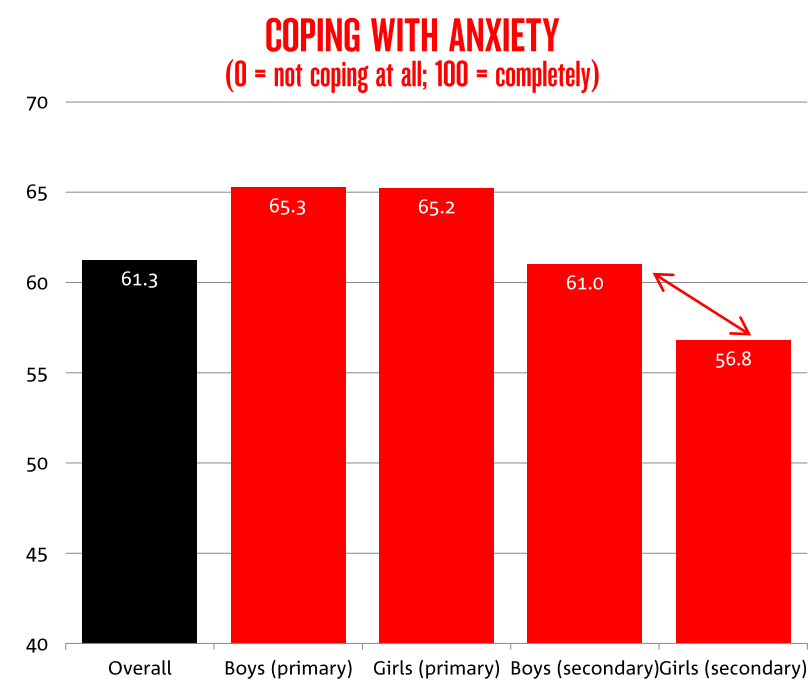
## FACTORS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT STUDENT ANXIETY/WEELLBEING - SECONDARY (0 = not at all; 10 = very strong negative impact)



Among secondary school students, family conflict and breakdown was identified as having by far the biggest negative impact on the wellbeing and anxiety of girls and boys. However, looks and appearances was identified as the next biggest factor for girls (7.3), and significantly more so than for boys (6.2), while bullying was the next biggest factor for boys, although the impact was broadly the same as for girls (7.0 vs. 7.1).

Not surprisingly, the pressure of schoolwork, test and grades has a much stronger negative wellbeing impact on secondary school students than on primary schools students, but more so for girls (6.9) than boys (6.5). Schools also said that the health of loved ones, peer pressure, popularity, friends and making mistakes in class had somewhat bigger negative impact on the wellbeing and anxiety of their female students, while not being successful and

# ARE STUDENTS COPING WITH ANXIETY?



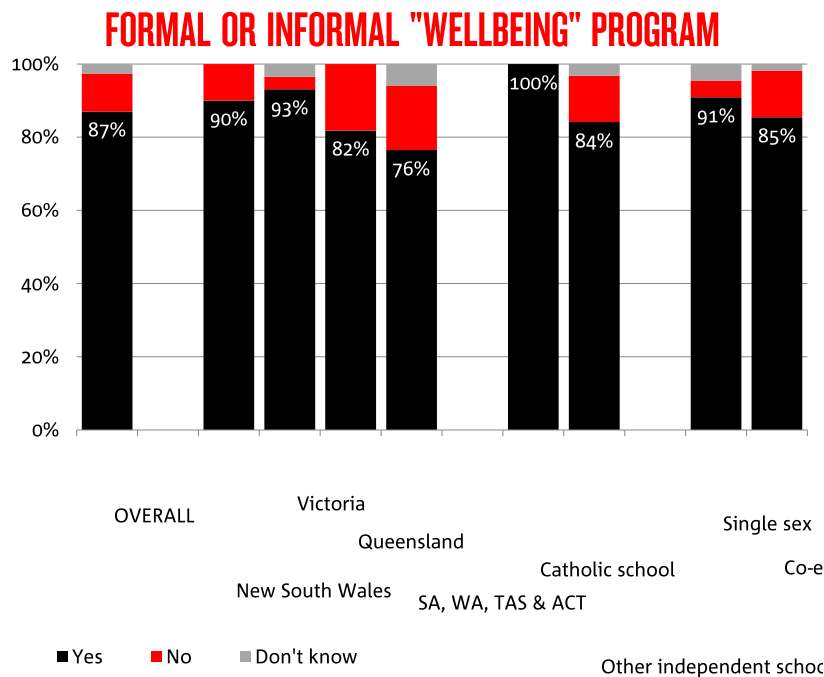
Independent schools believe their students are coping only “moderately” with their anxiety, scoring just 61.3 out of 100 (where 100 is “completely”).

However, primary school students - both boys (65.3) and girls (65.2) - are coping much better than secondary students.

Of particular concern is the fact that boys (61.0) in secondary schools are seen to be coping much better than girls (56.8). So not only are girls seen as being more anxious than boys, they also aren’t coping with their anxiety as well.

This may reflect greater pressure placed on girls by others or themselves, with schools speaking of “girls [being] more self-motivated, well organised and [having] a sense of ownership” and “boys [tending] to allow the girls to take the initiative”.

# WELLBEING PROGRAMS



With anxiety a key detractor from student wellbeing, it is very encouraging that a significant number of independent schools have formal (structured, timetabled, embedded in curriculum) or informal “wellbeing” programs to improve student and school outcomes.

Around 9 in 10 (87%) of surveyed independent schools overall have a “wellbeing” program in place.

Wellbeing programs ranged from mentoring, employing school chaplains, counsellors and psychologists, pastoral care, structured programs such as KidsMatter and MindMatters and links with outside organisations to support the emotional mental well-being of students

When independent schools were asked what words came to mind when thinking about kids today, many said things like “brave”, “happy”, “caring”, “confident”, “self-assured” and “sensitive”.

But they also spoke of students being “anxious”, “concerned”, “less resilient”, “uncertain”, “distracted”, “afraid to fail”, “increasingly connected yet disconnected” and “self-absorbed”, underlying the important role that Wellbeing programs can play in supporting students both from an education and life perspective.

## EXAMPLES OF "WELLBEING" PROGRAMS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS...

*"Three lessons per two week cycle and chapel service. Assembly and year level meetings all contribute to the wellbeing program."*

*"GenStar is a program managed by our Performance Psychology Department building resilience, growth, leadership and pastoral strength amongst the students."*

*"In the process of appointing a Director of Wellbeing. Wellbeing to be embedded in activities throughout the school."*

*"Pastor/Welfare Officer available."*

*"Kidsmart Program for Mental Wellbeing."*

*"Interpersonal engagement is inspired through student-led activities, House events and co-curricular programs that include "buddies", "big sisters" and rich and varied experiences inside and outside the classroom."*

*"Delivered formally through a Pastoral Care House structure."*

*"Changes will be introduced in July 2017 - 15 minutes wellbeing time in the morning; 10 minutes wellbeing time in the afternoon; both blocks with the class teacher team addressing the needs of the students."*

*"We have both KidsMatter and MindMatters. This is structured and built in to our programs."*

*"Our student leaders have developed a student wellbeing page providing online resources accessible to the whole school community."*

*"What's the Buzz program."*

*"Access to school psychologists for students with more specific needs."*

*"Chaplain and Counselling services."*

*"We have a Student Wellbeing Committee which focuses on supporting students with information sessions, trains staff in supporting students with challenges, is linked with our Leadership program (timetabled) to assist the students in developing as a whole person, run events targeting issues which affect students at different life stages."*

*Formal holistic approach to student well-being involving trained counsellors, health care professionals, pastoral care and learning support staff.*

*"Mentor program, Men of Honour program and Women of Worth Program."*

*"Multi-disciplinary teams working with students at risk from Reception to Year 12."*

*"Comprehensive health care and counselling services plus significant onsite service provision (speech pathology, physiology, paediatrics, occupational and physiotherapy)."*

*"Comprehensive sexual health program commencing in Year 5."*

*"Strong links with outside organisations to support the emotional mental well-being of students."*



***"We aren't a community to shelter people from the world, but one that prepares them well for the world."***

*(Australian independent school)*



## WHAT WOULD SOMEONE BE MOST SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL?

"We are very welcoming of difference. We support students through all types of life challenges."

"80% of students come from a language background other than English."

"How much of our budget and time goes on completing government requested forms and tasks rather than teaching."

"20% of our students have a diagnosed disability or learning need."

"Our outstanding music and drama - in a boys' school!"

"The huge demographic spread in our school despite the appearances of 'sameness'."

"We started in 2007 with 5 students."

"That the kids can climb trees, go to the shop, give and receive cuddles, teach classes and organise the school fete."

"That our students, who have not succeeded at other schools, are proving to be so intelligent and capable and wonderful young people."

"We have a farm on site."

"How much we love the children in our care."

"Students travelling to Kenya to work in children's homes have raised over half a million dollars over the past 15 years."

"Our students are generally respectful and appreciative of their teachers."

"Every senior student is analysed and counselled to pursue and focus on subjects they are most suited to and performing best in."

"How innovative it is and how quickly we can move to adjust programs. We are quite agile for a school environment".

"We may be perceived to be traditional due to our long history but we're incredibly future thinking. We are very inclusive of all newcomers."

"The hidden talent."

"That 'quirky' kids feel a sense of welcome and belonging."

"We have a good combination of country and city."

"They shouldn't be surprised, but sometimes adults get a bit despondent about the youth of today. What I see each week in my school is the amazing generosity of spirit and social justice they display for those less fortunate."

## HOW WOULD YOU FINISH THIS STATEMENT: I REALLY WISH MY STUDENTS KNEW AND UNDERSTOOD THAT.....

"Failure is to be embraced, and that the key to them growing is simply about hard work and acting on wise advice."

"Every effort is worthwhile irrespective of the success."

"Happiness is not dictated by the wealth of your parents or the grades that you receive, it is what you do for yourself and your community."

"Life abounds with opportunities, they can do anything they strive for!"

"The internet is a helpful tool but also a destructive weapon...find the need for it to be used as a tool only."

"They're all special and valued. Every one of them has a talent and is going to positively contribute to society. We're all here to help them develop their talent and help them live rich lives. We're all on the same team."

"Test results do not define them as a person."

"It is really important to do their very best and to excel, and they are valued and it's OK to make mistakes."

"We all have the same fears."

"Test results are a chance for you to work out what you don't know so you can know it next time - mistakes help you learn. And that is what we at school are here for."

"The future will take care of itself... focus on the here and now of their families, friends and the task at hand."

"The world isn't fair or fixed. It is a teacher, and what matters most is how you decide to respond with what it brings you."

"School is just the start of their lifelong learning and we are here to equip them as best as we can for their future."

"The world of work is changing and they'll need to be highly agile and adaptive. Looking after their wellbeing is an important skill that they'll carry through their lives."

"We're responsible for our own learning and we need to see the value in every opportunity to learn new skills in academic, social, emotional, physical, cultural & spiritual arenas."

"You're not defined by a mark - you are cared for, valued and capable young women. It is ok to dream big, follow your passions."

"Life's not all about the HSC. Trying to do your best is so much better than not trying at all regardless of the marks you get. You think so much of your life is about results but really it's about the effort and enjoyment."

"Finding your strengths and doing what you love is more important than money."

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

NAB is grateful to the 90 independent schools across Australia that participated in this survey.

In July 2016, NAB introduced the NAB Labs Business Innovation Index. The index provides a unique measure of innovation based on what a business does “differently”, “more quickly”, and “more cost efficiently”. This methodology was also used to assess innovation within independent schools.

## CONTACT THE AUTHORS

### Alan Oster

Group Chief Economist

[Alan.Oster@nab.com.au](mailto:Alan.Oster@nab.com.au)

+613 8634 2927

### Dean Pearson

Head of Behavioural & Industry Economics

[Dean.Pearson@nab.com.au](mailto:Dean.Pearson@nab.com.au)

+613 8634 2331

### Robert De lure

Senior Economist - Behavioural & Industry Economics

[Robert.De.lure@nab.com.au](mailto:Robert.De.lure@nab.com.au)

+613 8634 4611

### Brien McDonald

Senior Economist - Behavioural & Industry Economics

[Brien.McDonald@nab.com.au](mailto:Brien.McDonald@nab.com.au)

+613 8634 3837

### Steven Wu

Economist - Behavioural & Industry Economics

[Steven.A.Wu@nab.com.au](mailto:Steven.A.Wu@nab.com.au)

+(613) 9208 2929

## Important Notice

This document has been prepared by National Australia Bank Limited ABN 12 004 044 937 AFSL 230686 ("NAB"). Any advice contained in this document has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Before acting on any advice in this document, NAB recommends that you consider whether the advice is appropriate for your circumstances.

NAB recommends that you obtain and consider the relevant Product Disclosure Statement or other disclosure document, before making any decision about a product including whether to acquire or to continue to hold it.

Please click [here](#) to view our disclaimer and terms of use.