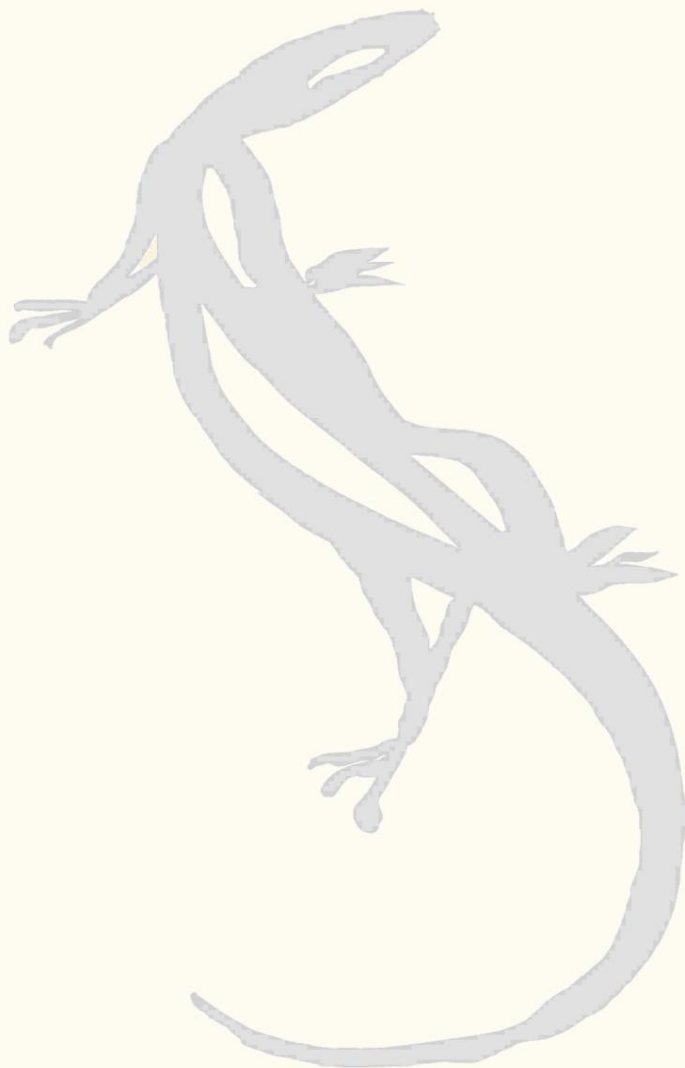


**BARBARA PRESTON RESEARCH**

**School enrolment shares  
by sector in the  
Australian Capital Territory**

**August 2011**



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# School enrolment shares by sector in the Australian Capital Territory<sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

This paper was prompted by publicity surrounding the release of *ACT School Census February 2011* (ACT Department of Education and Training, 2011), which reported that at the high school level (years 7 to 10) there were more ACT students in private schools than in public schools (9,720 and 9,569 respectively – Table 2, page 3). This received national publicity and evoked much discussion, with explanations usually citing the apparent greater desirability of private schools, especially for the generally higher income families of the ACT compared with those elsewhere in Australia.

However, other explanations appear much more powerful.

Higher income families are in fact more likely to send their children to public schools in the ACT than elsewhere in Australia, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data. This is especially so at the secondary level. On the other hand, low income students are more likely to be concentrated in public schools in the ACT than elsewhere in Australia. As a broad generalisation, high income families choose schools, while for low income families it is the schools, or school systems, that do the choosing (or excluding).

Families and schools do their choosing in the context of history, demographics and government policies. It is an investigation into these matters that yields the most powerful explanations for the relative enrolment shares held by the sectors in the ACT.

There are many factors that contribute to the ACT public sector's relatively small share of enrolments. Six such factors are discussed in this paper under two broad headings: the origins and development of schooling in the ACT, and the nature of the ACT and its population. It appears that any two or three of these could account for the difference between the ACT and the rest of Australia - the original establishment of schools and the planned development of the ACT, the high urbanisation of the ACT, and the ACT population's relatively high income and the relatively high percentage of Catholics (especially in earlier years).

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<sup>1</sup> Revised version of a July 2011 paper.

## 1 Enrolment shares

Before discussion of explanations for relative enrolment shares in the ACT, the patterns of enrolment shares by sector and level of schooling for the ACT and Australia since 1970 are outlined.

**Table 1 Percentage shares of primary, junior high and senior high school enrolments held by public, Catholic and independent schools, Australia and the ACT, 1970 - 2010**

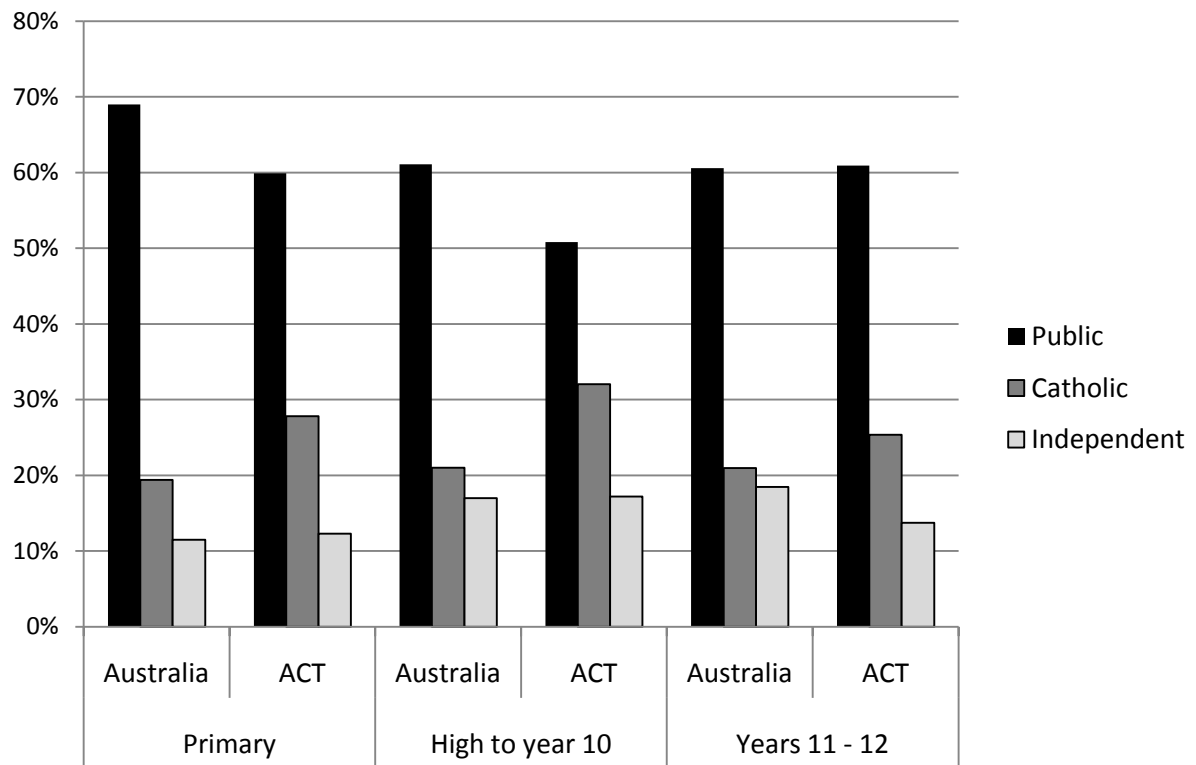
	Primary		High to year 10		Years 11 - 12		All levels	
	Australia	ACT	Australia	ACT	Australia	ACT	Australia	ACT
<b>1970</b>								
Public	80%	75%	77%	70%	68%	68%	78%	73%
Catholic	18%	23%	17%	22%	18%	21%	18%	22%
Independent	2%	2%	7%	8%	15%	12%	4%	5%
<b>1980</b>								
Public	80%	73%	75%	66%	68%	71%	78%	71%
Catholic	17%	25%	18%	27%	20%	21%	17%	25%
Independent	3%	3%	7%	7%	13%	8%	5%	4%
<b>1990</b>								
Public	75%	69%	69%	61%	69%	71%	72%	66%
Catholic	19%	26%	20%	28%	20%	20%	20%	26%
Independent	6%	5%	11%	11%	11%	9%	8%	8%
<b>2000</b>								
Public	73%	66%	65%	56%	63%	70%	69%	64%
Catholic	19%	27%	21%	31%	21%	21%	20%	27%
Independent	8%	7%	14%	13%	16%	10%	11%	9%
<b>2010</b>								
Public	69%	60%	61%	51%	61%	61%	66%	57%
Catholic	19%	28%	21%	32%	21%	25%	20%	29%
Independent	11%	12%	17%	17%	18%	14%	14%	14%
<b>Percentage point (pp) change 1970 to 2010</b>								
Public	-11pp	-15pp	-16pp	-19pp	-7pp	-7pp	-12pp	-16pp
Catholic	1pp	5pp	4pp	10pp	3pp	4pp	2pp	7pp
Independent	9pp	10pp	10pp	9pp	3pp	2pp	10pp	9pp

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, Australia* (relevant years) Cat. No. 4221.0

Table 1 sets out the enrolment shares by sector and level of schooling for the ACT and Australia, for selected years, 1970 to 2010. (Figure 1 shows 2010 data.) The data indicates that:

- *the public sector's overall share* has been less in the ACT than in Australia as a whole throughout the period from 1970 to 2010, and it has reduced at a greater rate in the ACT than Australia, especially over the past decade (but over the period prior to 1970 the ACT public sector had increased enrolment share at a greater rate – see sections 2 and 3)
- *the public sector's share at the senior secondary level* (years 11 and 12) was the same for both the ACT and Australia in 1970 and in 2010; both fell, at different rates, from 68% to 61%; (note the very sharp decline in the ACT share between 2000 and 2010, from 70% to 61%)
- *the public sector's share at the primary and (junior) high school levels* in the ACT has been particularly small relative to Australia throughout the period
- *the independent sector's shares at the primary and (junior) high school levels* were similar in the ACT and Australia, and those shares increased significantly through the period
- *the independent sector's share at the senior secondary level* was smaller in the ACT compared with Australia throughout the period, and those shares did not increase as greatly as did the independent sector's shares at primary and (junior) high school levels
- *the Catholic sector had a particularly large share of enrolments in the ACT* relative to its share in Australia as a whole, especially at the primary and (junior) high school levels.

**Figure 1 Percentage shares of primary, junior high and senior high school enrolments held by public, Catholic and independent schools, Australia and the ACT, 2010**



Source: Table 1

## **The development of the ACT**

The nature of the development of the ACT incorporates three matters that may be significant explanations for the ACT public sector's relatively small share of enrolments. These matters are: the original schools established in the ACT, the ACT's high rate of school age population growth since the 1970s (especially 1970 to 1990), and the ACT's particular pattern of urban development.

### **2 Original schools in the ACT**

In the mid 1950s, as the ACT was poised for great expansion, there were six secondary schools providing courses leading to leaving certificate standard. Only two of the six were public schools: Telopea Park High School in Barton (established in 1923) and Canberra High School in Acton (1938), and the latter was selective. The private schools were Canberra Grammar School (boys) (1929), Canberra Church of England Girls Grammar School (1926), St Edmund's Christian Brothers College (boys) (1954), and St Christopher's Convent (1928) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1956, p. 124).

In the late 1950s the ACT public sector had the majority share of enrolments – 68% compared with 76% for Australia as a whole (Table 2) (the public sector's enrolment shares at the secondary level were less - three percentage points less for the ACT - 65% -, and two percentage points less for Australia - 74%). There were proportionally fewer public schools in the ACT – a 65% share compared with 79% for Australia as a whole (Table 3).

Overall, between 1957 and 2010, the changes in public sector share for the ACT and Australia as a whole differed by only one percentage point: The ACT public sector share fell from 68% to 57% (11pp), while the Australia-wide public sector fell from 76% to 66% (10pp). Thus the 2010 public sector share of enrolments (and schools) in the ACT compared with Australia as a whole can be largely explained by the original (1950s) situation in the ACT (before enrolments increased six-fold), with the ACT experiencing similar dynamics of private sector share expansion to those experienced around Australia. However, there are additional factors contributing to the circumstances in the ACT.

### **3 Growth of the ACT school-age population**

For almost a century until the late 1970s the public sector's share of overall Australian school enrolments remained within 4 percentage points of 80%, and from the 1950s until the late 1970s that share was increasing. However, after the introduction of very substantial public funding of private schools in the mid 1970s this trend reversed, and the private sector's enrolment share grew

**Table 2 Enrolments in public, private and all schools, the ACT and Australia, 1957, 1970, 1990 and 2010**

	1957	1970	1990	2010	Change				
					1957 to 1970	1970 to 1990	1957 to 2010	1970 to 2010	1990 to 2010
<b>ACT</b>									
Public	5 882	25 053	40 552	34 498	326%	62%	487%	38%	-15%
Private	2 777	9 181	20 487	25 895	231%	123%	832%	182%	26%
Total	8 659	34 234	61 039	60 393	295%	78%	597%	76%	-1%
% public	68%	73%	66%	57%	5pp*	-7pp	-11pp	-16pp	-9pp
<b>Australia</b>									
Public	1 425 126	2 160 177	2 193 347	2 304 259	52%	2%	62%	7%	5%
Private	450 599	608 056	848 310	1 206 616	35%	40%	168%	98%	42%
Total	1 875 725	2 768 233	3 041 657	3 510 875	48%	10%	87%	27%	15%
% public	76%	78%	72%	66%	2pp	-6pp	-10pp	-12pp	-6pp

\* change in percentage points

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, Australia* (relevant years) Cat. No. 4221.0, assessed 10 June 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=4221.0&viewtitle=Schools,%20Australia~2000~Previous~20/06/2001&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=4221.0&issue=2000&num=&view=&>

**Table 3 Number of schools, public, private and all schools, the ACT and Australia, 1957, 1970, 1990 and 2010**

	1957	1970	1990	2010	Change				
					1957 to 1970	1970 to 1990	1957 to 2010	1970 to 2010	1990 to 2010
<b>ACT</b>									
Public	15	47	98	83	21%	62%	453%	77%	-15%
Private	8	22	36	44	175%	123%	450%	100%	22%
Total	23	69	134	127	200%	78%	452%	84%	-5%
% public	65%	68%	73%	65%	3pp*	5pp	0%	-3pp	-8pp
<b>Australia</b>									
Public	7 712	7 470	7 490	6 743	-3%	0%	-13%	-10%	-10%
Private	2 015	2 180	2 517	2 725	8%	15%	35%	25%	8%
Total	9 727	9 650	10 007	9 468	-1%	4%	-3%	-2%	-5%
% public	79%	77%	75%	71%	-2pp	-2pp	-8pp	-6pp	-4pp

\* change in percentage points

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, Australia* (relevant years) Cat. No. 4221.0, assessed 10 June 2011, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=4221.0&viewtitle=Schools,%20Australia~2000~Previous~20/06/2001&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=4221.0&issue=2000&num=&view=&>

as the public sector's fell, until in 2010 the public sector's share was just 66% (Preston, 2011, pp. 3-4, and Tables 1 and 2 above).

The period from the 1950s until 2010 can be divided into three periods<sup>2</sup> in which developments in ACT schooling differed.

- From 1957 until 1970 there was a rapid expansion of overall enrolments and an increasing public sector share of enrolments in both the ACT and Australia-wide. The ACT rate of increase in overall enrolments was much greater than the Australia-wide rate of increase (almost 300% compared with less than 50%), and the ACT's percentage point increase in public sector share of enrolments was also greater than that occurring Australia-wide (5 percentage points compared with just 2 percentage points).
- From 1970 until 1990 the private sector share of enrolments in both the ACT and Australia-wide increased as the impact of high and increasing levels of public funding of private schools took effect. There was again a rapid expansion of overall enrolments (but at a slower rate than 1957 to 1970) and the ACT rate of increase in overall enrolments was again much greater than the Australia-wide rate of increase (nearly 80% compared with just 10%), and the ACT's percentage point decrease in public sector share of enrolments was also greater than that occurring Australia-wide (7 percentage points compared with 6 percentage points).
- From 1990 until 2010 overall enrolments declined in the ACT (associated with reductions in public sector employment, and population ageing resulting in a smaller proportion of school age), but continued to increase Australia-wide. However, the ACT's percentage point decrease in public sector share of enrolments was again greater than that occurring Australia-wide (9 percentage points compared with 6 percentage points), and the difference increased from 2000 to 2010 (see figure 2). It appears that the dynamic of the previous period was well established, and the ACT private sector was able to take advantage of the overall enrolment decline (see section 4 below).

Table 4 sets out the data showing these patterns, and Figure 2 graphs the ACT and Australian public sector shares each decade from 1960 to 2010.

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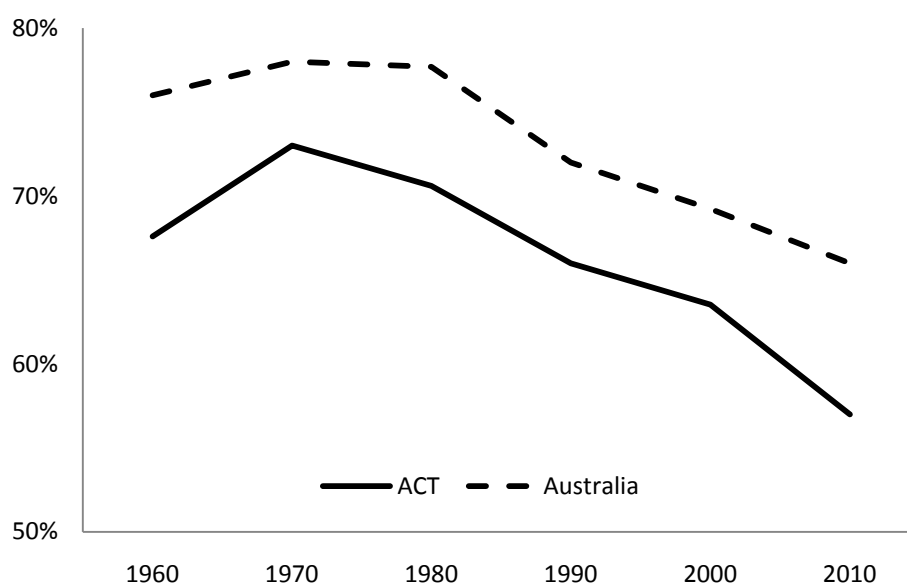
<sup>2</sup> The years referred to are those for which data is provided in Tables 2 and 4, and may not be the actual years when trends changed.

**Table 4** Changes in overall school enrolments and in public sector shares of enrolments over three periods, 1957-1970, 1970-1990, and 1990-2010, ACT and Australia

	1957-1970		1970-1990		1990-2010	
	Enrolments	Public sector share	Enrolments	Public sector share	Enrolments	Public sector share
<b>ACT</b>	+295%	+5pp	+78%	-7pp	- 1%	-9pp
<b>Australia</b>	+48%	+2pp	+10%	-6pp	+15%	-6pp

Source: Table 2

**Figure 2** Public sector share of school enrolments, ACT and Australia, 1960 to 2010



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Schools, Australia* (relevant years) Cat. No. 4221.0

#### 4 Patterns of urban development and enrolment fluctuations

Associated with the ACT's rapid population growth has been the pattern of urban development since Canberra's foundation: new housing for the expanding population has been largely systematically provided in new greenfields suburbs, built around planned provision of public and private schools, the latter provided with school sites at very low cost. Families with young children fill the new suburbs, and the children age as the suburbs age. Thus the peak in the age profile of children in a given suburb moves through primary school, then secondary school, then post school. In the early years of an area, first primary schools, then secondary schools, can be overcrowded, with temporary buildings, special purpose rooms used as general classrooms, and other difficulties.



As the age peak moves on and enrolments shrink, schools become expensive on a per capita basis, under-utilised facilities become shabby as maintenance is not cost effective, curriculum options become limited, and the morale of the school community can plummet as the viability of the school becomes uncertain.

Private schools do not have to take all comers during the expanded enrolment years, thus forcing the public sector to take more than its share of the burden. Similarly, private schools can increase marketing efforts and other strategies to maintain optimal enrolment levels as overall student enrolment numbers shrink. We have seen this pattern repeat over and over again as new areas are opened up and mature – especially on the fringes of the metropolitan cities, and throughout Canberra<sup>3</sup>. ACT Department of Education and Training data from the February School Census in 2003 and 2011 illustrates this pattern over the past decade (Table 5):

- Tuggeranong South experienced an overall decline in primary enrolments between 2003 and 2011 of 20%, with the public sector experiencing a 25% decline, and Catholic sector only a 5% decline
- Gungahlin experienced an overall increase in primary enrolments between 2003 and 2011 of 88%, with the public sector experiencing a 103% increase, and the Catholic sector only increasing by 58%. Gungahlin will surely experience an overall enrolment decline as the population ages, and we can expect a repeat of the Tuggeranong South pattern.

**Table 5 Percentage change in primary school enrolments from 2003 to 2011, public schools, Catholic schools, and total public and Catholic schools, Tuggeranong South and Gungahlin**

	Public	Catholic	Total Catholic and public enrolments
Tuggeranong South	-25%	-5%	-20%
Gungahlin	103%	58%	88%

Source: ACT Department of Education and Training February school censuses of government and nongovernment schools, 2003 and 2011, assessed on 10 June 2011 at [http://www.det.act.gov.au/publications\\_and\\_policies/publications\\_a-z2/census](http://www.det.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/publications_a-z2/census)

The pattern noted for Tuggeranong South and Gungahlin over the period 2003 to 2011 can be assumed to have generally occurred in the older suburbs since the 1950s. ABS Census 2006 data on the population age structure in the various ACT Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs) (Table 6) and

<sup>3</sup> This general pattern is also illustrated when a change in school starting age results in a small size cohort moving through the school grades, as occurred in Tasmania a decade ago and is currently occurring in Western Australia and Queensland - ABS school enrolment data shows that the public sector disproportionately experienced the impact of the fluctuations, and that the private sector had permanently ratcheted up its enrolment share after the small cohort had moved on (see Preston 2011, p. 7).

Statistical Local Areas shows the impact of the ACT pattern of urban development. The oldest areas of North Canberra and South Canberra, generally settled before the early 1960s, had in 2006 fewer than 10% of their population in the main compulsory school ages of 5 to 14, while the most recently settled areas of Tuggeranong and Gungahlin had more than 16% of their populations aged 5 to 14<sup>4</sup>. It is notable that, while these latter SSDs had the same proportion of their populations aged 5 to 14, the percentages aged 5 to 9 and 10 to 14 are very different, which is consistent with the trends in primary school enrolments noted above:

- in 2006 Tuggeranong had only 4.5% of its population aged 5-9, while more than double that percentage, 11.7%, were aged 10-14
- in Gungahlin, in contrast, 8.8% were aged 5-9 and 7.3% were aged 10-14.

**Table 6 Percentage of total population aged 5-14, 5-9 and 10-14, ACT Statistical Subdivisions and total ACT, 2006**

Statistical Subdivision	Population aged 5-14 as % of total population	Population aged 5-9 as % of total population	Population aged 10-14 as % of total population	Ratio population aged 5-9 to population aged 10-14
North Canberra	8.3%	4.2%	4.1%	1.04
South Canberra	9.7%	6.0%	3.7%	1.61
Weston Creek-Stromlo	11.7%	5.8%	5.9%	0.99
Woden Valley	11.9%	5.6%	6.3%	0.90
Belconnen	12.3%	7.5%	4.8%	1.58
Tuggeranong	16.1%	4.5%	11.7%	0.38
Gungahlin-Hall	16.1%	8.8%	7.3%	1.21
Total ACT	12.9%	6.3%	6.6%	0.95

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010)

## The nature of the ACT and its population

### 5 ACT more urbanised than the rest of Australia

The ACT's very high level of urbanisation is one of the most significant explanations for the lesser enrolment share of public schools in the ACT compared with Australia as a whole, especially at the secondary level.

<sup>4</sup> The pattern is even more marked in the smaller areas of Statistical Local Areas. Among those with small percentages of total populations aged 5 to 14 were Turner (4.5%), Lyneham (6.6%) and Dickson (8.7%), and among those with large percentages of the population aged 5 to 14 were Nicholls (18.6%), Gordon (18.8%), Theodore (19.7) and Conder (21.0%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

**Table 7 Enrolment shares by sector, total state and capital cities\*, primary and secondary levels, states and territories and Australia, 2006**

		NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Australia
<b>Primary</b>										
<i>Public</i>	Total State	68.7%	68.2%	71.3%	67.0%	69.7%	74.6%	77.3%	62.1%	69.2%
	Capital city	67.7%	65.8%	69.1%	63.9%	66.7%	68.0%	73.2%	62.1%	67.2%
	Difference**	-1.0pp	-2.4pp	-2.2pp	-3.2pp	-3.1pp	-6.5pp	-4.1pp	0.0pp	-2.1pp
<i>Catholic</i>	Total State	20.9%	21.9%	17.0%	18.2%	18.8%	16.5%	12.9%	28.0%	19.8%
	Capital city	21.1%	23.1%	18.1%	21.7%	21.1%	21.3%	15.1%	28.0%	21.0%
	Difference**	0.2pp	1.1pp	1.1pp	3.5pp	2.3pp	4.8pp	2.2pp	0.0pp	1.1pp
<i>Independent</i>	Total State	10.4%	9.9%	11.6%	14.7%	11.4%	9.0%	9.8%	9.9%	10.9%
	Capital city	11.1%	11.1%	12.9%	14.4%	12.2%	10.7%	11.7%	9.9%	11.9%
	Difference**	0.8pp	1.2pp	1.3pp	-0.3pp	0.8pp	1.7pp	1.9pp	0.0pp	0.9pp
<b>Total primary</b>	% Capital city	65%	67%	61%	65%	60%	23%	74%	99%	64%
<b>Secondary</b>										
<i>Public</i>	Total State	60.8%	58.3%	61.5%	59.6%	58.0%	64.6%	67.4%	55.5%	60.0%
	Capital city	57.7%	55.2%	57.5%	54.8%	52.8%	56.0%	65.9%	55.5%	56.4%
	Difference**	-3.1pp	-3.1pp	-3.9pp	-4.8pp	-5.2pp	-8.5pp	-1.6pp	0.0pp	-3.6pp
<i>Catholic</i>	Total State	15.3%	19.1%	19.5%	20.5%	21.0%	16.3%	17.5%	15.9%	18.0%
	Capital city	16.8%	21.5%	22.7%	21.7%	23.6%	21.2%	17.6%	15.9%	20.1%
	Difference**	1.5pp	2.4pp	3.2pp	1.2pp	2.5pp	5.0pp	0.1pp	0.0pp	2.1pp
<i>Independent</i>	Total State	23.9%	22.7%	19.0%	19.8%	21.0%	19.2%	15.1%	28.6%	22.0%
	Capital city	25.5%	23.3%	19.7%	23.5%	23.6%	22.7%	16.5%	28.6%	23.5%
	Difference**	1.6pp	0.6pp	0.7pp	3.7pp	2.6pp	3.6pp	1.5pp	0.0pp	1.5pp
<b>Total secondary</b>	% Capital city	66%	68%	62%	68%	65%	26%	82%	99%	66%
<b>Total primary &amp; secondary</b>	% Capital city	65%	67%	61%	66%	62%	24%	77%	99%	64%

Note: \* Capital cities are the 'Major urban' (in the NT Darwin is 'other urban') classification in the ABS 'Section of State' (SOS) geographic classification. \*\* Difference in percentage points.  
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010)

Across Australia students in capital cities are less likely to attend public schools than are students in other sections of the states. At the primary level 69% of all students attend public schools, while only 67% of primary students in capital cities attend public schools. At the secondary level the difference is more marked: 60% of all students attend public schools, while only 56% of those in

capital cities attend public schools. The differences between the sections of state are greatest at the secondary level in Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia (see Table 7).

In the ACT 99% of students are in the capital city, compared with 64% of students nationally.

At the primary level 62.1% of ACT students attend public schools, while nationally 67.2% of capital city students, and 69.2% of all students, attend public schools.

At the secondary level 55.5% of ACT students attend public schools, while nationally 56.4% of capital city students, and 60.0% of all students, attend public schools.

It thus appears that this very high proportion of the student population in the ACT ‘capital city’ accounts for around 25% of the difference in public sector enrolment share between the ACT and Australia as a whole at the primary level, and more than 75% of the difference at the secondary level. Table 7 provides details.

**6 Income and religion of the ACT population**

The ACT population has significantly higher incomes than Australians as a whole, and a slightly larger proportion of Catholics. In 1954, as the patterns of school systems in the ACT were being consolidated, the proportion of the ACT population who were Catholic was much greater: 31% compared with 23% for Australia as a whole. In addition, Catholics in the ACT are more likely to have higher incomes than Catholics elsewhere in Australia: in 2006 43% of employed Catholics in the ACT had weekly gross incomes of \$1,000 or more, compared with only 30% in Australia as a whole. Table 8 provides details.

**Table 8 Religion and income, ACT and Australia, 1954 and 2006**

	ACT	Australia
1. 1954 - % of total population who are Catholic	31%	23%
2. 2006 - % of total population who are Catholic	28%	26%
3. 2006 - % of employed population earning over \$1,000 per week	47%	30%
4. 2006 - % of employed Catholic population earning over \$1,000 per week	43%	30%
5. 2006 - % of those earning over \$1,000 week who are Catholic	28%	27%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data - 1954 data: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1954); 2006 data: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010)

The pattern for the general population is reflected in the family incomes of the populations of ACT school students compared with Australian students as a whole. Table 9 shows that the ACT has a much higher percentage of students with HIGH family incomes than Australia as a whole (column C, rows 4 and 8), and a much smaller percentage of students with LOW family incomes

(column A, rows 4 and 8). (The ranges of LOW, MEDIUM and HIGH family incomes are close to the tercile family incomes ranges for all Australian school students – see row 8.)

These datasets, in part, explain the ACT’s larger share of enrolments in Catholic schools, and to a lesser extent, independent schools – from the 1950s.

**Table 9 Percentage of students in each of public, Catholic and independent schools, with LOW, MEDIUM or HIGH family incomes, ACT and Australia, 2006**

	Family income			Ratio sector to All schools		
	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
	<\$1000	\$1000- \$1699	>\$1700	<\$1000	\$1000- \$1699	>\$1700
- A -	- B -	- C -	- D -	- E -	- F -	
<b>ACT</b>						
1. Public	24%	27%	49%	1.26	1.08	0.88
2. Catholic	13%	23%	64%	0.68	0.92	1.14
3. Independent	10%	16%	74%	0.53	0.64	1.32
4. All ACT schools	19%	25%	56%	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>Australia</b>						
5. Public	40%	33%	27%	1.18	1.03	0.79
6. Catholic	25%	33%	43%	0.74	1.03	1.26
7. Independent	22%	26%	53%	0.65	0.81	1.56
8. All Australian schools	34%	32%	34%	1.00	1.00	1.00

Source: Preston (2007), Table 2.2, p.8. Original source: ABS 2006 Census

The data indicates that in the ACT students with HIGH family incomes are more evenly spread between the sectors than in Australia as a whole (column F). In fact, once the overall shares of enrolments are accounted for, ACT families with HIGH incomes are more likely to have children in public schools than are families with HIGH incomes Australia-wide. This is clearly so at the secondary level: 48% of ACT students with HIGH family incomes attend public schools, while 46% of Australia-wide students with HIGH family incomes attend public schools – even though in the ACT only 55% of all secondary students attend public schools, compared with 61% of all secondary students Australia-wide attending public schools (Table 10).

However, students with LOW family incomes are more concentrated in ACT public schools than they are in public schools across Australia as a whole (Table 9, column D).

**Table 10** Percentage of students with HIGH family incomes attending public schools, and percentage of all students attending public schools, ACT and Australia, 2006

	Primary students			Secondary students		
	% of students with HIGH family incomes attending public schools	% of all students attending public schools	Ratio - percentage of HIGH income students attending public schools to percentage of all students attending public schools	% of students with HIGH family incomes attending public schools	% of all students attending public schools	Ratio - percentage of HIGH income students attending public schools to percentage of all students attending public schools
<b>ACT</b>	56%	63%	0.89	48%	55%	0.86
<b>Australia</b>	58%	69%	0.84	46%	61%	0.75

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010)

## Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to indicate the complexity of explanations for the ACT public school sector's lesser share of total school enrolments (especially at the junior high and primary levels) compared with Australia as a whole, and the slightly greater decline in that share since 1970. Those explanations include (in approximate order of significance):

- the initial establishment in the ACT of a relatively large proportion of private schools, and the maintenance of this proportion through urban planning and the provision of low cost land for private schools
- the ACT's very high level of urbanisation
- the ACT population's higher income compared with Australia as a whole
- the ACT's higher percentage of Catholics compared with Australia as a whole (especially in the early years of establishment of the territory's schools)
- the ACT's high rate of enrolment growth during a period of overall increase in private sector enrolment share
- the ACT's pattern of planned urban development that results in substantial fluctuations in school enrolments as the child populations of suburbs age with the suburbs, combined with the lack of any requirement for the private sector to share the impact of enrolment fluctuations.

Given these factors and the dynamics at play elsewhere in Australia, it is surprising that the public sector's share is not smaller than it is. I speculate that there are two major sets of countervailing factors supporting the public sector share, especially at the senior secondary level:

- the ACT's occupational structure (especially the high proportion of public servants) and relative lack of geographic concentration by socio-economic status
- the structure and quality of public schooling in the ACT – especially the college system.

These factors are probably reflected in that fact that students from HIGH income families are more likely to attend public schools in the ACT than Australia-wide, as well as providing some constraint on the public sector losing further enrolment share.

However, the vulnerability of the ACT public sector is clear:

- the public sector share in the ACT has always been relatively small at the primary and junior high school levels
- the public sector in the ACT experienced a very sharp decline in enrolment share over the decade from 2000 to 2010 – 7 percentage points (compared with just 3 percentage points for Australia as a whole), and the decline was greatest at the senior secondary level (10 percentage points) (Table 1)
- students from LOW income families are more concentrated in public schools in the ACT than Australia-wide

This residualisation of public schooling is a 'wicked' policy problem (Preston 2011, p.1-2), for which there are no easy solutions. Financial support and commitment to the continual improvement of public schooling is essential, and so, too, is explicit support from governments and across the community. The private sector, in receipt of substantial public funds and with planning support and low cost land since Canberra's early days, should accept responsibilities that it now shirks: for educating its share of low income and difficult to teach students (without creaming, tokenism or exploitation<sup>5</sup>), and for bearing its share of the impact of enrolment fluctuations.

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<sup>5</sup> The private sector should receive no plaudits for the active recruitment of academically or musically talented and well prepared low SES or Indigenous students from the public sector, nor for the outcomes of such recruitment in final year results, NAPLAN scores, or fine school musical performances.

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