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## Media release

For comment, please contact

Richard Denniss 02 6125 1270 or 0419 222 511

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### Private schools: Australians fear divisiveness

A clear majority of Australians believe schools should not promote religious or ethnic sectarianism, or snobbery, according to a study released today by the Australia Institute.

The study, *The Accountability of Private schools to Public Values*, is based on a Newspoll survey showing 96 per cent of Australians believe it is desirable for children of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to mix at school, with 58 per cent believing expensive private schools promote snobbery.

Institute Deputy Director Richard Denniss said only one-third of those surveyed agreed with Government policies to promote private schools. He said 57 per cent of Australians disagree with the statement that 'policies to promote private schools will be good for Australia'. A further 10 per cent were unsure.

"While many parents are willing to send their children to private schools, the majority believe that the current approach is not in the national interest," he said.

"These figures show that Australians believe that schools have an essential role to play in promoting harmony and tolerance in society. While many private schools seek to be inclusive and to create a school environment in which differences are accepted, the fact remains that some private schools seek to create an exclusive environment in which tolerance and diversity may be discussed but not practiced."

The report says that there is a consensus that all schools should adhere to public values of tolerance and inclusiveness, yet provides evidence that the rapidly growing private school sector is not always adhering to them. Nor is the Government making private schools account for the values they teach.

"Changes in Commonwealth funding are having an adverse impact not only on the equity of the distribution of school funding, but on social cohesion," said Dr Denniss.

"Parents have said repeatedly that they are willing to pay higher taxes to fund better public schools, yet the Commonwealth Government is instead directing more funding to the private sector. What this poll shows, however, is that only a third of Australians actually believes that the current approach to school funding is good for the country.