

High Performance athletes at school: A study of conflicting demands

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Abstract

This study introduces research which explores the competing demands on young people who are both high performance athletes yet still at school. How they cope, and what models of schooling may best support them are the main questions. Three phenomena have resulted in a growing number of school students who are also high performance athletes. One is the increasing range and number of international sports competitions; second is the younger age of many competitors; and the third is the requirement for young people to stay at school until they are 17 years old. These young people have to meet the demands and commitments of being both a full time high school student and a full time high performance athlete. In essence, these young high performance athletes at school are trying to fit two lives into one.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of school-age high performance athletes; out of 573 high performance athletes selected "72% of these athletes (410) are under the age of 18" (Australian Sports Commission (ASC), 2009, p.15).

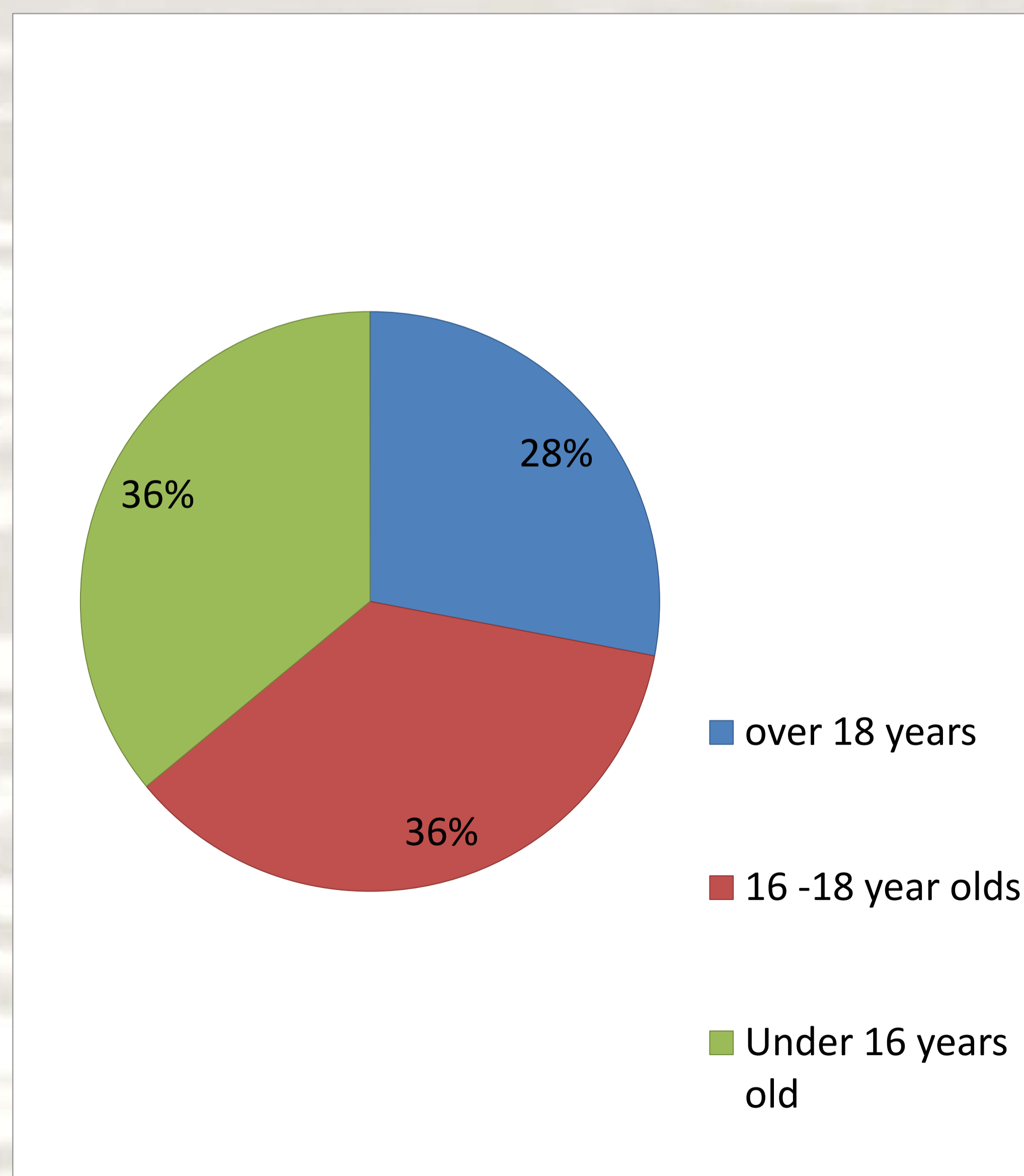


Figure 1 Under 18 years Reference: ASC (2009) p.16.

Research design

Research question

How do different models of schooling in Australia prepare the high performance athlete at school to pursue their sporting ambitions in line with other educational aims?

Research guiding questions

1. What are the differing needs of school-age high performance athletes and how might they be in conflict?
2. What schooling models exist in Australia for the high performance athlete of school-age?
3. What are the experiences of the high performance athlete at school within different schooling models?
4. How do high performance athletes who have left school identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school model they were in?

Methods

This research involves the collection and analysis of qualitative data, within an interpretivist paradigm. Using in-depth interviews and field observations, the research aims to develop theory around the conflicting needs of the high school, high performance athlete.

Participants

The sampling in this research is 'purposive' (Punch, 2010). Three groups of participants are targeted: (i) athletes who were high performance while at school, (ii) school officials and (iii) parents. This study will provide critical data on the accurate numbers of school-age high performance athletes. At present ASC (2009) supports evidence that out of "573 NTID athletes in 2009 in 13 sports 36% were under 16 years (school-age)" (p.16), as illustrated in Figure 2.

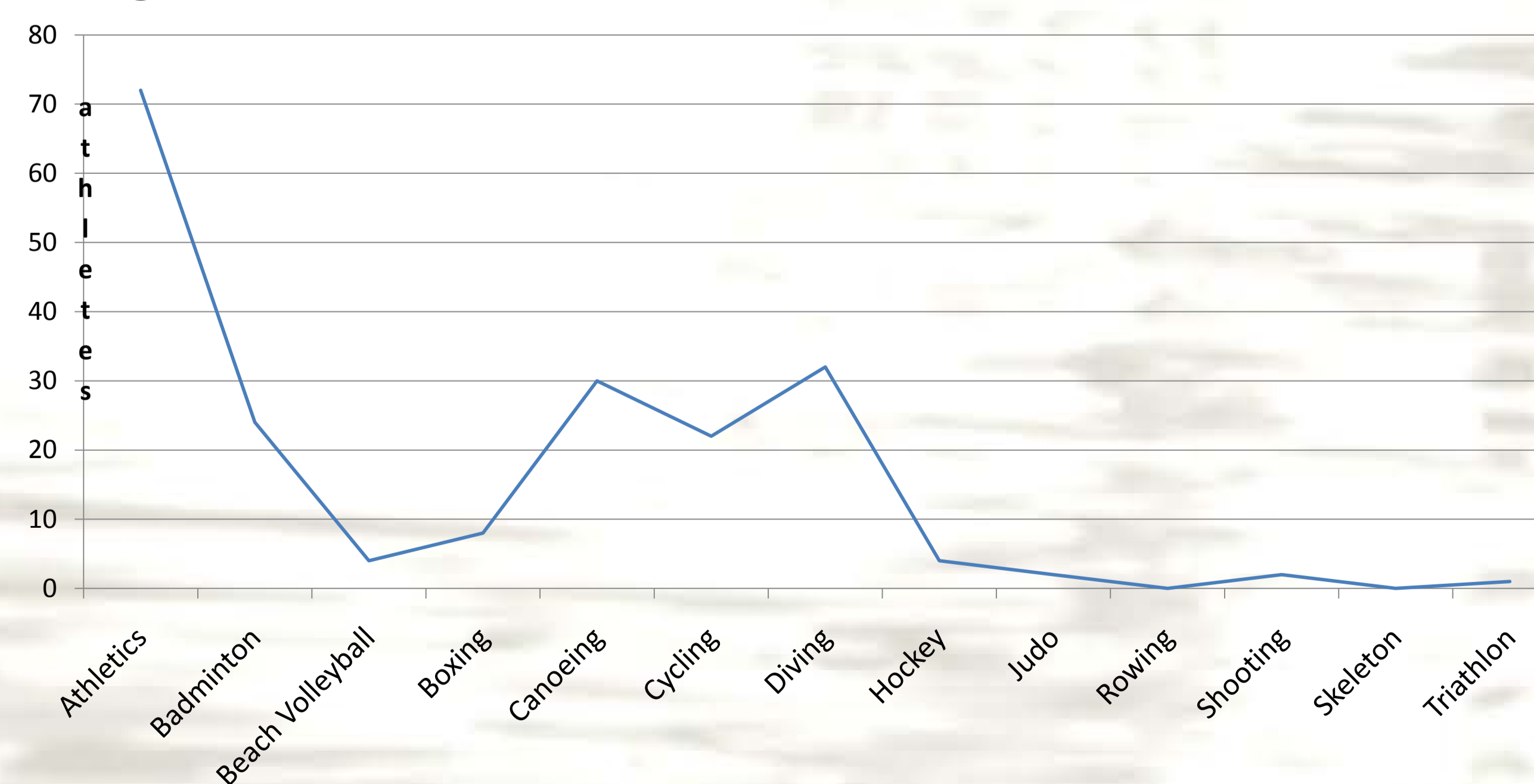


Figure 2 Under 16 years school-age athletes in 2009 13 NTID sports.

The nexus of the study

This study will provide :

1. The range of school models and external programs that cater for school-age high performance athletes throughout the various jurisdictions of Australia are illustrated in Figure 3.

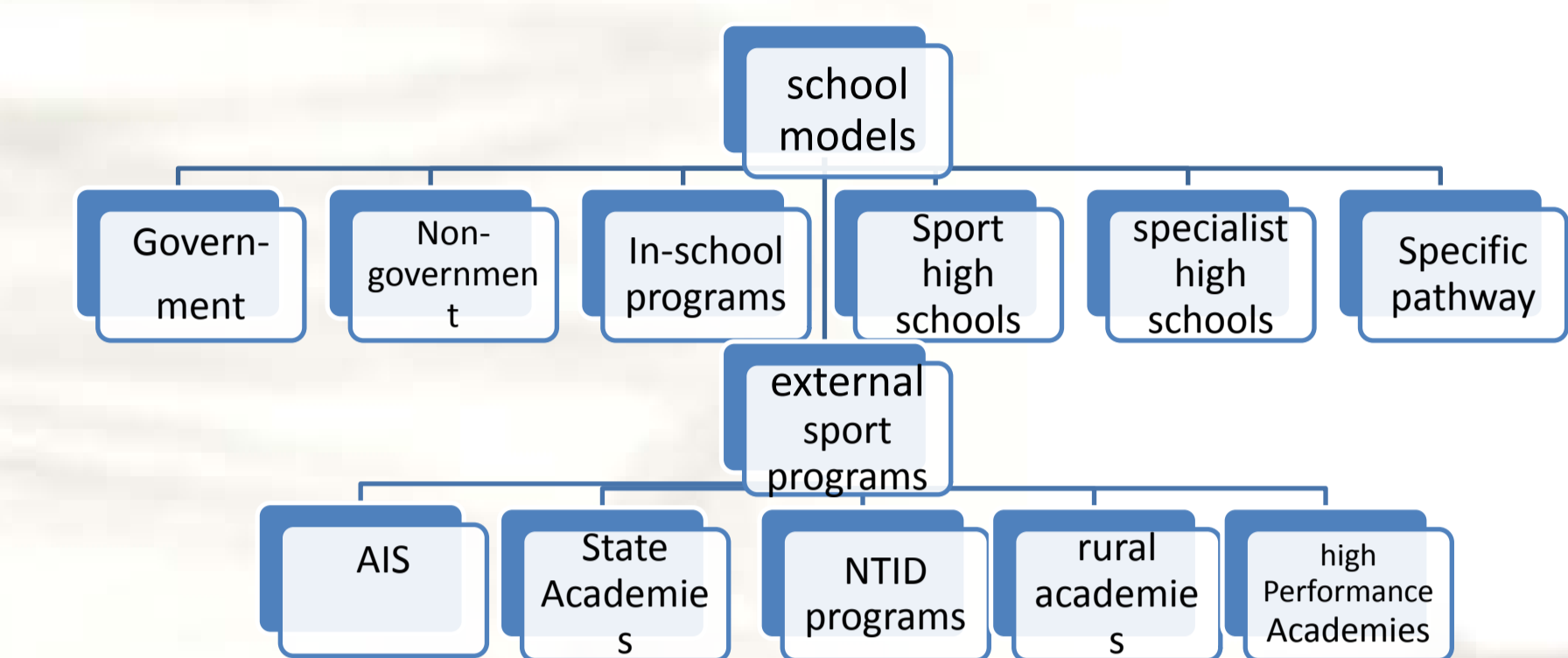


Figure 3 Range of school models and external programs

2. Issues school-age high performance athletes are facing may include :

- Time and management (Radtke & Coalter, 2007)
- Demands of the school curriculum (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009)
- Additional nutritional requirements (AIS, 2010)
- Fatigue and recovery (Burden, Tremayne and Marsh, 2004)
- Inequity (Roderick, 2006)

3. Features within schools relevant to the school-age high performance may embrace:

- Pastoral care and social development (Lang, Best & Litchenberg, 1994)
- Wellbeing and leadership (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008)
- Goal setting (Price & University of Wollongong, 2007)
- Injury and prevention management (Pearson and Petitpas, 1990)
- Drug and alcohol awareness (Monti & Stone, 2004)

Conclusion

These young people go well beyond the ordinary in their endeavours and understanding better their situations and possible predicaments may well help them to cope better in their demanding lives.

References

- Punch, K. (2010). *Introduction to research methods in education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Australian Sports Commission (ASC)(2009). *National Identification and Development (NTID) in three: Year snapshot of the NTID program 2006-2007 to 2008 -2009*.p.15