

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## ACER head calls for national action plan

**12 May 2016:** A national action plan agreed by Commonwealth, state and territory governments is urgently required if Australia is to arrest declining performances in schools.

The Chief Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Professor Geoff Masters AO, has called for a new level of cooperation between governments to address worrying trends in Australian schools. The call for concerted action follows his analysis in the report, *Five challenges in Australian school education*. The report aims to prompt cooperation by identifying the kinds of interconnected strategies we need if we are to address the deepening problems in Australian schools.

“Australia’s productivity and our national ability to innovate and compete globally in the next 50 years will be largely in the hands of students currently in our schools. But as recent public commentary has made clear, on a number of fronts our educational performance is in decline,” Professor Masters said.

“The challenges we face are beyond the control of individual schools or classroom teachers, but they are not beyond the control of governments. They require changes in policy. We cannot keep doing what we have been doing and expect performances to improve.

“Among the current warning signs are a long-term decline in the reading, mathematics and science levels of Australian 15 year olds; growing disparities between Australia’s schools linked to differences in socioeconomic background; and a continuing decline in the attractiveness of teaching as a career among more able school leavers,” Professor Masters said.

“The problem is not that Australia is standing still relative to other countries; we are actually going backwards. We ignore these warning signs at our peril,” Professor Masters said.

Professor Masters said that, while adequate school funding was essential for improving outcomes, money alone was not the answer. “Australia has increased spending on schools and seen standards decline. The answer is to target resources on effective strategies for arresting the drift in Australia’s schools.

“This is a national challenge and it requires a national response,” Professor Masters said. “The challenges we face in school education transcend state borders, school sectors and political parties. They require a national conversation that includes parents and the business community about what we now want from our schools, followed by a sustained commitment over decades.”

Professor Masters said international experience shows that declining performances in schools can be turned around. “A number of countries have implemented coordinated, sustained and interconnected strategies to improve student performances, including by making teaching more attractive to highly able school leavers and reducing disparities between schools,” he said.

Read the full report, *Five challenges in Australian school education*, Policy Insights 5, by Professor Geoff Masters AO and published by ACER, at <http://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/5>

### DOWNLOADS:

HD video comment by Professor Masters available at <https://vimeo.com/album/3934074>

**PASSWORD:** ACER\_national\_action\_plan\_2016

### LOWER THIRD:

Professor Geoff Masters AO, Chief Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research

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