

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Research shows many Australian students feel they ‘don’t belong’ in school**

More Australian students than their OECD peers feel like outsiders at school, according to a report released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

ACER Deputy CEO (Research) Dr Sue Thomson said, “Australian students feel a lower sense of belonging than their peers in the 35 OECD countries, and the overall sense of belonging has declined significantly since our first PISA results in 2003.”

Students who are Indigenous, female, Australian-born, in the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile or living in provincial and remote areas felt the least sense of belonging in school.

First-generation and foreign-born migrants, and students who are male, metro-based or belong to the highest SES quartile reported the greatest sense of belonging.

Students in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania scored highest and achieved similarly on the sense of belonging index, while the cohorts in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory scored lowest. All scored beneath the OECD average.

“Research shows that a sense of belonging is an important schooling outcome,” Dr Thomson said. “For some students it really makes a difference to their educational success and long-term health and wellbeing.”

“Although these results don’t tell us why some students have a lower sense of belonging, they do highlight where the social issues are – among students who are Indigenous, female, Australian-born, from low SES backgrounds and country areas. Schools could focus on these students and consider how to support those who may be at risk of becoming disengaged.”

While Australian students generally felt lower levels of belonging at school than students in the OECD, they did report feeling that other students liked them at much higher levels than the OECD average of 82 per cent.

Student responses to six statements about how they feel about school were combined to construct a sense of belonging index that allows for comparison not just with OECD counterparts but also with peers in different states and territories and socioeconomic groups, and between genders. The responses from Australian 15-year-olds surveyed were:

- I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school (77 per cent disagree)
- I make friends easily at school (79 per cent agree)
- I feel like I belong at school (72 per cent agree)
- I feel awkward and out of place in my school (78 per cent disagree)
- Other students seem to like me (88 per cent agree)
- I feel lonely at school (84 per cent disagree).

The table below shows student responses by State and Territory.

Jurisdiction	Percentage of students who reported agree or disagree to the following statements											
	I make friends easily at school (agree)		I feel like I belong at school (agree)		Other students seem to like me (agree)		I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school (disagree)		I feel awkward and out of place in my school (disagree)		I feel lonely at school (disagree)	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
ACT	76	1.8	75	1.7	87	1.4	77	1.7	77	1.8	82	1.6
NSW	80	0.8	72	1.0	86	0.7	76	0.8	78	1.0	82	0.8
VIC	81	1.1	76	1.1	89	0.7	78	1.0	79	0.8	85	0.8
QLD	79	1.0	69	1.1	88	0.8	76	0.9	78	1.1	84	0.8
SA	78	1.4	71	1.2	87	0.9	76	1.2	77	1.0	83	1.2
WA	78	1.1	70	1.2	89	0.8	77	1.1	77	1.0	85	0.9
TAS	77	1.4	72	1.7	85	1.0	74	1.3	77	1.1	81	1.3
NT	76	2.3	72	2.4	86	1.6	73	2.8	76	2.5	81	2.4
OECD average-35	78	0.1	73	0.1	82	0.1	83	0.1	81	0.1	85	0.1

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a large-scale three-yearly study of more than half a million 15-year-olds in 72 countries, including 14 500 students in 750 Australian schools. It measures reading, science and maths literacy to determine how well prepared students are for the challenges of adult life. The report released today takes a more detailed look at the non-cognitive results from the most recent study in 2015 and asks how Australian 15-year-olds feel about school and their place in it.

Read the full report, *PISA Australia in Focus Number 1: Sense of belonging at school*, published by ACER, at <https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/30>

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