Improving Learning

MEDIA RELEASE

Latest PISA results: Australia at the crossroad

6 December 2016: A report released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on the science, reading and mathematics skills of Australian 15-year-olds indicates not only that Australia is slipping backwards relative to other countries, but that we are getting worse at preparing our students for the everyday challenges of adult life.

Releasing the report, *PISA 2015: A first look at Australia's results*, ACER Director of Educational Monitoring and Research Dr Sue Thomson said evidence from the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) now makes clear that the science, reading and mathematics achievement of Australian students is in absolute decline.

ACER is the national project manager for PISA and is releasing the results on behalf of the Australian, and state and territory governments.

PISA measures how well 15-year-olds from across the globe are prepared to use their knowledge and skills in science, reading and mathematics to meet real-life challenges.

A combined total of more than half a million students from more than 70 countries and economies took part in PISA 2015, including a nationally representative sample of around 14 500 Australian students from 750 schools. Australia has now participated in all six cycles of PISA since its inception in 2000.

Comparing results internationally, Dr Thomson said that Australia performed equal 10th in science, equal 12th in reading and equal 20th in mathematics, after accounting for insignificant differences between countries and economies.

Table 1: Australia's performance compared to other countries/economies

	Science	Reading	Mathematics
Significantly higher than Australia	9	11	19
At a similar level to Australia	8	13	10
Significantly lower than Australia*	39	29	25

Singapore was the highest performing country in scientific, reading and mathematical literacy in PISA 2015. Singapore's students are ahead of Australia's in scientific literacy by the equivalent of around one-and-a-half years of schooling, and are around one year of schooling ahead in reading literacy and around two-and-a-third years of schooling ahead in mathematical literacy.

Australia's performance in scientific literacy – the major domain assessed in 2006, and again in 2015 – declined significantly, by the equivalent of around half a year of schooling. Twelve other countries have also seen a significant decline in their scientific literacy performance between PISA 2006 and PISA 2015.

Qatar, Colombia, Portugal, Macao (China), Romania and Norway have all experienced significant improvements in scientific literacy since PISA 2006.

"Results from the 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study released last week indicate that, although we are slipping backwards relative to other countries, Australian student achievement against the mathematics and science curriculum is unchanged," Dr Thomson said.

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"Results from PISA 2015 suggest the situation is much worse: Australian students' ability to apply their mathematical and scientific knowledge to real life situations is falling not only relative to other countries but also in an absolute sense."

Dr Thomson said there has been a three per cent decrease in the proportion of high performers and a five per cent increase in the proportion of low performers in scientific literacy from 2006 to 2015.

"While Victoria and the Northern Territory saw no significant change in achievement in scientific literacy, all other jurisdictions experienced a decline between 2006 and 2015. In reading literacy there was no decline between 2009 and 2015 for any state or territory except Queensland. In mathematical literacy, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania experienced no significant change; Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland experienced a decline, while the Northern Territory significantly improved by the equivalent of more than three-quarters of a year of schooling."

ACER conducts PISA in Australia on behalf of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with funding from the Australian, and state and territory governments.

The first of two Australian national reports, *PISA 2015: A first look at Australia's results,* by Sue Thomson, Lisa De Bortoli, and Catherine Underwood, and further information about the PISA assessment is available from the Australian PISA website < www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa >.

The Australian report was released to coincide with the launch of the international PISA study by the OECD in Paris.

PISA 2015: A first look at Australia's results
(PDF: 108 pages, 3.2 MB)
Sue Thomson, Lisa De Bortoli, Catherine Underwood

Audio grabs
Download broadcast-quality audio .wav files of Dr Sue Thomson here.

Take the test
Find more about the PISA 2015 science tests: explore the concepts and competencies being tested; learn what 15-year-old students at different proficiency levels can do; and test yourself on sample questions.

***** While 72 countries participated in PISA 2015, Australia's performance has only been compared with those countries that achieved a mean score that was higher than the lowest performing OECD country (Mexico).

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