
3A GOVERNMENT SCHOOL EDUCATION

Definitions for the descriptors and indicators in this attachment are in Section 3A.4. Notes that do not appear below Tables are in Section 3A.4. Unsourced information has been obtained from State or Territory Governments unless an alternative source is given.

3A.1 Jurisdiction comments

Commonwealth Government comments

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While State Governments have the constitutional and major financial responsibility for school education, the Commonwealth Government has an important role in identifying national priorities for schooling, and in promoting national strategies for achieving common aims. It provides significant supplementary financial assistance to State and non-government school authorities to support agreed priorities and strategies.

The new Coalition Government, which came into office in March 1996, has placed particular priority on the literacy and numeracy skills of Australia's school students. This was emphasised by the role played by the Commonwealth in adding a new and specifically-focussed literacy goal to the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia during 1996. The 1996–97 Budget announced funding for a National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, and the Commonwealth's priorities were also evident in its support for the National School English Literacy Survey, which will provide the richest picture of literacy performance in Australia to date. The Survey took place in 1996 and results will be published in 1997. The Commonwealth has continued its support for other studies with strong student outcomes components, such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth program.

The Commonwealth has confirmed its strong commitment to improving the educational outcomes from schooling for Indigenous students, including in the areas of literacy and numeracy as well as an accelerated effort to make the levels of educational outcomes for Indigenous students similar to the levels achieved by other Australians.

Other relevant activities initiated or substantially assisted by the Commonwealth in 1995–96 and 1996–97 have included development of the information framework for the 1996 Annual National Report in Schooling in Australia (the ANR) and the development and funding of the 1996 study on the social objectives of schooling. This study, now underway, is expected to contribute directly to the work of the Review. It aims, among other things, to define and describe aspects of the social objectives of schooling and to obtain baseline data on achievement against the selected objectives.

The Commonwealth has continued its contribution to the work of the MCEETYA Schools Taskforce and the Taskforce on Schools Statistics on such matters as common definitions of student populations, and is funding other projects relating to assessment and reporting, including making reporting more accessible to parents and involving parents in contributing to better learning outcomes for their children.

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New South Wales Government comments

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The Department of School Education (DSE) administered 2190 government schools in 1995 serving 755 252 students which was 72 per cent of all NSW students. Aboriginal students represented 3 per cent of enrolments and students of non-English speaking background 19.6 per cent of enrolments. The DSE is the major provider of special education and 2 per cent of all students enrolled were in classes for students with specific needs.

Current payments for education and training in NSW represented 25.5 per cent of the total Government current payments for the 1995–96 financial year. Current expenditure on school education increased by 5.06 per cent from 1994–95 to 1995–96. The mean class size in government primary schools was 26.4 students down from 27.4 students the previous year.

The DSE produces an annual priorities document to communicate its plans to the education community. The priorities for government schools for 1996 were: teaching traditional values, in happy and safe schools, aiming for excellence, in high-tech classrooms and providing a fair go for all. Progress on achieving the priorities is monitored and reported in the DSE Annual Report to Parliament. Student outcomes feature strongly in this monitoring process.

In the 1996 basic skills tests improvements made by equity groups were particularly pleasing. There was broader subject choice in the post-compulsory years through higher enrolments in vocational education and in the Creative Arts, Technology and PDHPE Key Learning Areas.

A restructuring of the DSE began in August 1995 to be completed by the end of 1996. The restructure was designed to eliminate administrative duplication and waste, and to improve the quality and range of services provided locally to schools. Schools were grouped into 40 school districts, each with a district office, a superintendent and support staff. The districts provide significantly enhanced support for teachers and schools and are increasingly collecting data to facilitate performance benchmarking.

A major 4 year program began in 1995 to ensure that students, teachers and parents have the knowledge and skills to use technology effectively. By the end of 1996 the connection of all government schools to the Internet was completed. Technology adviser positions had been established in each of the 40 district offices to lead the training and development of teachers in the use of computers in the classroom and to provide technical advice to schools.

The community values schools highly and is supportive of government funding for education. Public education has a high approval rating from parents of school-aged children. Peak parent groups are involved in decision-making and School Councils have increased the commitment and Involvement of parents in the operations of schools.

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Victoria Government comments

“ 1992–96 has been a period of far reaching reform in school education in Victoria. The focus has been on achieving high and constantly improving standards of student learning and ensuring that schools have the operational flexibility to allocate resources and make decisions which reflect the needs of their particular communities, within a strong accountability and improvement framework. The Department of Education administered 1711 Government schools in 1995 which provided services for some 515 000 students. In addition 675 non-government schools are supported in Victoria, demonstrating Government commitment to diversity of provision and the exercise of choice by parents and students. Traditionally, Victoria has had the highest proportion of school enrolments in the non government sector of any state — a trend which is expected to continue.

The Victorian Government places a premium on efficiency in provision of government services. The levels of in-school expenditure, which are close to national averages, reflect a commitment to sustainable resourcing in a context of stable enrolments. Low out-of-school expenditure has resulted from elimination of redundancy and duplication of services and the devolution of maximum resources to the school level. Victoria has the lowest ratio of non school staff to students of any government system in Australia.

The Victorian apparent retention rate to Year 12 in 1995 is the highest of any Australian state. Decline in Victorian apparent retention rates since 1992 have accompanied improved economic circumstances within the wider community and a broadening of pathways to further education, training and employment for young adults.

A major government initiative that aims to improve the learning outcomes of students in the early years of schooling has been introduced through the Keys to Life Strategy. Its central objective is to improve literacy learning outcomes for students at risk of not achieving satisfactorily in the early years of schooling. This is being achieved by strengthening classroom practices and the skill base of teachers, expanding Reading Recovery programs and other literacy intervention programs.

The measures of performance of Victorian students published in this report are inclusive of the non-government schools sector. The Learning Assessment Program (LAP) is designed to give information to teachers and parents about the progress of primary students in relation to the standards set out in the Curriculum Standards Framework. It is primarily a diagnostic tool and is not intended for normative use. This initiative is planned to be extended to secondary schools in 1997. The Victorian Certificate of Education is a flexible, rigorous and cumulative assessment of students achievements in the post compulsory years.”

Queensland Government comments

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To provide quality education services for all state school students, the Queensland Department of Education has developed new organisational goals to drive service delivery: quality curriculum programs for all students; effective teaching; improved learning outcomes for all students; a skilled, confident and responsible workforce; confidence in public education; adoption of technology to enhance learning, teaching and management; a safe, supportive and productive learning environment. All program performance indicators are now structured around these goals to ensure that reporting from all areas focuses on common purposes.

Teachers increasingly have been asked to concentrate on improvement in student learning outcomes. To support them in this, we are reducing bureaucratic demands on teachers and schools, freeing teachers to concentrate on teaching. Development of Student Performance Standards has ceased, following a ministerial review by the Queensland School Curriculum Office. New Queensland Levels of Student Performance will be trialed in volunteer schools in 1997.

There is now concentration on four key priorities: literacy and numeracy; students with disabilities; behaviour management and the convergence of vocational and general education in senior secondary. The central role of literacy and numeracy is reflected in funding priorities, curriculum development, support services and professional development. Students with disabilities are being supported across a range of programs to develop fully the ability to participate in their community, to acquire work and life skills, to achieve employment and to develop a career path, independence and self-esteem. The authority of principals is being strengthened and behaviour management supported through a range of initiatives including an enhancement to alternative programs. Students in post-compulsory years will achieve outcomes in vocational training modules within the National Framework for the Recognition of Training.

Key factors affecting service delivery are geography and diversity. The state school system is the most widely dispersed in Australia, reflecting a population distribution of under 46 per cent in the Brisbane area and high proportions in remote and rural areas and provincial towns. This leads to a high proportion of small schools. Nearly 300 of 1068 state primary schools have 50 or fewer students, while 422 have fewer than 100.

Other aspects of diversity are the relatively high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (including those who attend schools in remote Aboriginal communities and in the Torres Strait, which can be reached effectively only by air), students with disabilities and students from non English speaking backgrounds who are enrolled predominantly in the state system.

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Western Australia Government comments

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WA occupies some 2.5 million square kilometres. Agricultural, pastoral, mining, industrial and urban settlement patterns have historically required the provision of a very large number of small, widely-dispersed schools. In 1996, there are some 770 government schools with enrolments ranging from less than 10 to over 1700 students.

WA collects and publishes a great deal of performance data that are not included in this document. These are reported in the Education Department's Annual Report and also reported in the National Report on Schooling in Australia. Detailed performance data from the Monitoring Standards in Education sample testing in years 3, 7 and 10 each year are reported in detail. The performance information in this report, therefore, represents only a small sample of the total available. For example, the system-wide Monitoring Standards in Education testing has provided performance data on English, Mathematics, Science, Society and Environment, and Health and Physical Education. In 1996 performance information was gathered for The Arts, along with further information on Mathematics. These performance data are analysed in terms of a number of equity factors, including gender, Aboriginality, non English speaking background and location. Monitoring Standards in Education, including the instruments used and the performance data collected, is highly recognised throughout Australia for its quality and coverage of the curriculum.

Analyses of system-level student performance at years 10 and 12 are conducted, yielding information on overall performance and performance in all key learning areas. As well as performance data on the content of courses, information is also collected, analysed and reported on participation and retention.

For information on all of these aspects of performance, readers should consult the Education Department's Annual Reports.

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South Australia Government comments

“ SA had a government school system of 660 school sites in 1995. The Department of Education and Children's Services also has responsibility for the administration of Children's Services, including pre-schools. The Children's Services aspect of the Department is not included in the indicators.

As the table of descriptors indicates, the enrolments in government schools have declined from 1991 to 1995, due mainly to the demographic effects of a reduced birth rate in the middle and late 1970s, and as well as an increase in the proportion of students enrolled in non government schools, even though below the national average. The number of school sites has been reduced in the period 1991 to 1994 from 696 to 660. During this period new sites have also been established in new development areas. Average primary school size has grown slightly from 216 in 1991 to 227 in 1994. Average secondary school size has dropped from 625 to 603 over the same five year period. Total expenditure for the school system was \$1.05 billion in the 1994–95 (\$1.07 billion in 1993–94).

Retention rates to year 12 dropped to 63 percent in 1995, consistent with a general national trend of reduced retention. The year 12 retention rate for full-time female students was 69 percent and the full-time male rate 57 percent.

Cost per student across all schools in 1995 was \$4681 (\$4621 in 1994) for primary level students and \$7063 (\$7222 in 1994) for secondary level students. Student-Teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools have been relatively stable (of the order of 17 for primary schools and 11 for secondary schools) over the last 5 years. These ratios are however distorted by the non-inclusion of a proportion of senior secondary students in SA who are part-time students. Their non-inclusion inflates cost per student and depresses student teacher ratios. Tables 3A.33 and 3A.35 show the effects of school size and socio-economic background (SES) on cost per student. These tables include those schools that service only primary or secondary students. Combined schools are ignored, full time equivalent enrolments are used and some cost elements that are brought to account in Table 3A.33 are not included. As a result the costs per student are generally lower than those identified in Table 3A.33. The tables however illustrate the effects on resourcing of school size and SES. Cost per student in smaller schools or schools with a high proportion of low SES students are greater than the per student costs in larger or higher SES schools.

SA conducts tests of aspects of student literacy and numeracy at years 3 and 5, in conjunction with the NSW Department of School Education. SA is designing collection processes for outcomes, using profiles for Australian schools, on a sample basis. Trial collections of data, system wide, in four learning areas is anticipated for 1997.

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Tasmania Government comments

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Student learning outcomes. Tasmania has conducted a rolling program of tests of literacy and numeracy skills in 10 year olds and 14 year olds in government schools since 1975. The results of these have been publicly reported. In recent years other jurisdiction have moved to grade cohort testing rather than age cohort testing and Tasmania has now made that change in order to make results more easily comparable with other jurisdictions. In 1996 there was a test of literacy for grade 5 students which was statistically linked to previous literacy testing of 10 year olds. The results showed significant gains as outlined in the body of the report. This program will be continued in 1997 when grade 9 students will be tested in numeracy. As well, the Tasmanian education system, in conjunction with the University of Tasmania, is using its literacy test results to investigate the relationship between student achievement and literacy teaching methods.

Tasmania participated in the TIMSS program which is described elsewhere. On an interstate comparison, the State was consistently at the lower end of the rankings in both mathematics and science. It should be pointed out, however, that there were significant features of the Tasmania sample that influenced the result. In general terms the Tasmanian students were younger than their mainland counterparts and the mix of students contained a relatively high proportion of boys (53 percent) compared to ACT (29 percent) and a relatively high proportion of students from government schools (84 percent) compared to 57 percent in the ACT. A subsequent study of the TIMSS report has established that Tasmanian students, in general terms, spent less time studying mathematics than had students in other jurisdictions and steps have been taken to correct this anomaly.

Size of the Tasmanian education system. Tasmania has a relatively small school system, characterised by small schools (averaging 211 for primary schools and 512 for high schools). Most of the large establishments are secondary colleges (averaging 859 enrolments).

The school environment in Tasmania. Retention rates to Year 11 and 12 are lower in Tasmania than in other states, but have followed the same recent pattern: a sharp increase to 1992 and a falling off since then. Participation in education is more accurately reflected by the proportion of a given age group who are in school than by retention rates which appear to reflect differences between the states in the ages of children in a particular grade.

The student population in Tasmania reflects the State's demography: a relatively small proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, a relatively small proportion of students in non-government schools (25.2 percent), and Aboriginal students comprise 4.7 percent of the total.

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Australian Capital Territory Government comments

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In the ACT 98 government schools deliver the full range of educational resources to over 40 000 students. The ACT Department of Education & Training and Children's, Youth & Family Services also provides preschool services which are not referred to in the indicators.

Schools participate in a cyclical quality assurance process to ensure high standards of service provision are maintained. This process seeks parent, student and teacher feedback on school effectiveness. A school development plan is a major outcome of the process.

In 1996 a commitment was made to enhance the monitoring and reporting of student outcomes. Education and community representatives were consulted to determine the most effective mechanisms to achieve this goal.

As a result of consultations the ACT has decided to implement the ACER DART (Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers) literacy assessment instrument for Year 3 and Year 5 in 1997 and to trial the ACER numeracy instrument for Year 5 in 1997. Parents of all students who participate in the assessment process will receive a report on achievement within the year group and in relation to the relevant National Curriculum Profile.

The ACT will use school aggregated data to target resources for improved literacy and numeracy outcomes. Data for designated equity groups will be separately identified. The ACT will establish a similar process for the introduction of system wide assessment in high schools in 1998.

High retention rates to Year 12 are a feature of the ACT Government education system. The apparent retention rates of over 100 percent to Year 12 reflect the transfer of students from non-government schools after Year 10 from interstate. Over 80 percent of students entering Year 11 receive a Year 12 certificate. Of these students, over 60 percent go on to further education and training. The ACT college system involves school based assessment. The Australian Scaling test is used to moderate scores between colleges.

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Northern Territory Government comments

“ The statistical data for the NT must be interpreted with great care and any attempt to draw comparisons with other States and the ACT must take the following major factors into account.

The geography of the NT presents very significant distance and isolation disadvantages. The NT has a population of 171 440 and a land area of 1 348 000 square kilometres (an area 30 per cent larger than the combined areas of NSW and Victoria) with a population density of less than 13 people per 100 square kilometres. Many small centres are accessible only by air or sea and are often not accessible at all during the wet season.

It is important to note that 54.4 per cent of NT schools and 24.1 per cent of students are located in remote areas — many of these are in the most isolated centres in Australia.

Educational services are provided to a diverse multi-cultural and multi-lingual population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up about 35 per cent of the total student population. In the States the proportion is between 1 per cent and 3 per cent. A significant number (over 70 per cent) of school-aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have English as a second or third language and, for many, English is not in common use in their homes or communities. Many also suffer a significant degree of economic disadvantage.

While many schools are in remote communities and have predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments, even in urban schools Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment is significant, with an average between 10 per cent and 30 per cent and, in some cases as high as 60 per cent.

NT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school-aged children experience a range of living condition disadvantages which set them apart from other Australians. A high percentage of these children suffer from hearing and sight impairment and other health problems which inhibit educational participation and achievement. A high percentage live in housing conditions which are well below the standard for other Australian children.

The factors noted above significantly influence all aspects of school education in the NT, being reflected, for example in higher unit costs and lower student/teacher and student/non-teacher ratios. ”