
3 School education

This chapter focuses on performance information — equity, effectiveness and efficiency — for government funded school education in Australia. Reporting relates to government funding only, not to the full cost to the community of providing school education. Descriptive information and performance indicators are generally reported for:

- government primary and secondary schools
- non-government primary and secondary schools
- school education as a whole (government and non-government primary and secondary schools).

Schooling aims to provide education for all young people. The main purposes of school education are to assist students in:

- attaining knowledge, skills and understanding in key learning areas
- developing their talents, capacities, self-confidence, self-esteem and respect for others
- developing their capacity to contribute to Australia's social, cultural and economic development.

Indigenous data in the school education chapter

The school education chapter in the 2005 Report contains the following data items on Indigenous people:

- The number of Indigenous full time students (and as a proportion of all students) in government, non-government and all schools, 2003.
- Proportion of Indigenous students achieving the years 3 and 5 reading benchmark, 2001.
- Proportion of Indigenous students achieving the years 3 and 5 writing benchmark, 2001.
- Proportion of Indigenous students achieving the years 3 and 5 numeracy benchmark, 2001.

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- Apparent retention rates of full time secondary students from year 7 or 8 to year 10, by Indigenous status, all schools, 2003.
 - Apparent retention rates of Indigenous full time secondary students from year 10 to year 12, by Indigenous status, 2003.

Throughout the chapter, the following definition is used for an Indigenous student:

“A student of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin who identifies as being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or as being from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.”

It needs to be noted that administrative processes for determining Indigenous status vary across jurisdictions.

Supporting tables

Supporting tables for data within the school education chapter of the compendium are contained in the attachment to the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an ‘A’ suffix (for example, table 3A.3 is table 3 in the school education attachment to the compendium). As the data are directly sourced from the 2005 Report, the compendium also notes where the original table, figure or text in the 2005 Report can be found. For example, where the compendium refers to ‘2005 Report, p. 3.15’ this is page 15 of chapter 3 of the 2005 Report, and ‘2005 Report, 3A.2’ is attachment table 2 of attachment 3 of the 2005 Report.

Funding

Australian, State and Territory government recurrent expenditure on school education was \$27.0 billion in 2002-03. Expenditure on government schools was \$21.8 billion, or 80.6 per cent of the total. Government schools account for most of the expenditure by State and Territory governments. These governments also contribute to the funding of non-government schools and provide services used by both government and non-government schools. More information, including on Australian Government spending on Indigenous specific programs, can be found in table 3A.1.

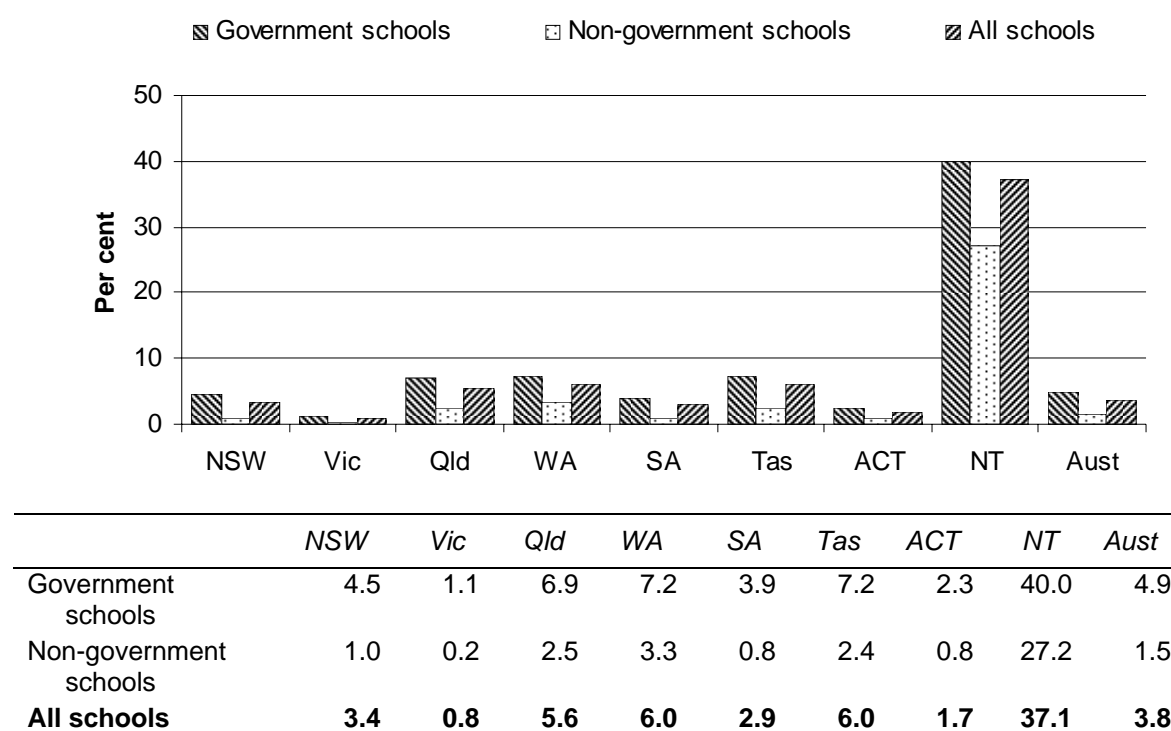
Indigenous full-time students, 2003

Certain groups of students, including Indigenous students, have been identified as having special needs in school education. Government schools provide education for a high proportion of students from special needs groups. In 2003, 87.5 per cent of Indigenous students attended government schools (table 3A.2).

The proportion of full time Indigenous students in NT schools was 37.1 per cent in 2003, far higher than the proportion in any other jurisdiction. The jurisdictions with the next highest proportions of full time Indigenous students were WA and Tasmania (both 6.0 per cent), while Victoria had the lowest (0.8 per cent) (figure 3.2). In absolute terms, NSW (37 118) and Queensland (35 237) had the largest numbers of full time Indigenous students, together accounting for 57.5 per cent of all Indigenous students enrolled in Australian schools (table 3A.2). Table 3A.2 provides additional information on Indigenous enrolments.

In all jurisdictions, the proportion of Indigenous students was higher in government schools than in non-government schools. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous students was 4.9 per cent for government schools and 1.5 per cent for non-government schools (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Indigenous students as a proportion of all students, 2003^a



^a Full time students.

Source: ABS (2004); 2005 Report, table 3A.2, p. 3.10; figure 3.2.

Access and equity

Access and equity objectives of school education can be assessed by comparing outcomes for special needs groups, such as Indigenous students, to those for all students through indicators such as, apparent retention rates and age participation rates. Outcomes (such as

literacy, numeracy and completion rates) are compared for special needs groups for available indicators where possible.

Outcomes

Nationally comparable learning outcomes

The Steering Committee has identified ‘literacy’ and ‘numeracy’ as outcome indicators of school education (boxes 3.1–3.3). Nationally comparable learning outcomes data for 2001 for reading and writing literacy, and numeracy are reported in tables 3A.3–17. Data for 2002 and 2003 were not available for the 2005 Report.

Literacy — reading

‘Literacy — reading’ has been identified as an outcome indicator (box 3.1). The data for this indicator is provided on a comparable basis.

Box 3.1 Literacy — reading

‘Literacy — reading’ has been identified as an outcome indicator of governments’ objective that young Australians should attain high standards of knowledge, skill and understanding in core curriculum areas.

The indicator is defined as the proportion of assessed year 3 and 5 students who achieved the national reading benchmark for a given year, reported by sex, Indigenous status and LBOTE status. The benchmarks describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for reading literacy at years 3 and 5. Student performance is measured (or assessed) by State-based testing programs which are equated by a national process designed to (or intended to) allow comparable reporting against the benchmarks.

Holding other factors equal, a high or increasing proportion of students achieving the reading benchmark is desirable. This indicator is affected by socioeconomic circumstances, age, length of time spent in schooling, and LBOTE and Indigenous status.

Literacy — writing

‘Literacy — writing’ has been identified as an outcome indicator (box 3.2). The data for this indicator is provided on a comparable basis.

Box 3.2 Literacy — writing

‘Literacy — writing’ has been identified as an outcome indicator of governments’ objective that young Australians should attain high standards of knowledge, skill and understanding in core curriculum areas.

The indicator is defined as the proportion of assessed year 3 and 5 students who achieved the national writing benchmark for a given year, reported by sex, Indigenous status and LBOTE status. The benchmarks describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for writing literacy at years 3 and 5. Student performance is measured (or assessed) by State-based testing programs which are equated by a national process designed to (or intended to) allow comparable reporting against the benchmarks.

Holding other factors equal, a high or increasing proportion of students achieving the writing benchmark is desirable. This indicator is affected by socioeconomic circumstances, age, length of time spent in schooling, and LBOTE and Indigenous status.

Numeracy

‘Numeracy’ has been identified as an outcome indicator (box 3.3). The data for this indicator is provided on a comparable basis.

Box 3.3 Numeracy

‘Numeracy’ has been identified as an outcome indicator of governments’ objective that young Australians should attain high standards of knowledge, skill and understanding in core curriculum areas.

The indicator is defined as the proportion of assessed year 3 and 5 students who achieved the national numeracy benchmark for a given year, reported by sex, Indigenous status and LBOTE status. The benchmarks describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for numeracy at years 3 and 5. Student performance is measured (or assessed) by state-based testing programs which are equated by a national process designed to (or intended to) allow comparable reporting against the benchmarks.

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Box 3.3 (Continued)

Holding other factors equal, a high or increasing proportion of students achieving the numeracy benchmark is desirable. This indicator is affected by socioeconomic circumstances, age, length of time spent in schooling, and LBOTE and Indigenous status.

Mathematical literacy was the major focus for the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003 survey and results are expected to be available in late 2004.

Apparent retention from the commencement of secondary school to year 10 and from year 10 to year 12

‘Apparent retention’ has been included as an output indicator of equity-effectiveness (box 3.4). The data for this indicator is provided on a comparable basis.

Box 3.4 Apparent retention

‘Apparent retention’ — that is, progression to final years of schooling — is included as an output – access indicator of governments’ objective to develop fully the talents and capacities of young people through longer participation to higher levels of schooling.

The indicator is defined as the number of full time school students in a designated level/year of education as a percentage of their respective cohort group (which is either at the commencement of their secondary schooling or at year 10). Data are reported for the proportion of:

- people commencing secondary school and continuing to year 10
- people commencing secondary school and continuing to year 12
- year 10 students continuing to year 12.

Data are also reported for all students and Indigenous students, and for government and non-government schools. Holding other factors constant, a higher or increasing apparent retention rate suggests that students have greater exposure to schooling over their lives which is likely to result in improved educational outcomes. The term ‘apparent’ is used because the indicator is derived from total numbers of students in each of the relevant year levels, rather than by tracking the retention of students individually. Apparent retention to year 12 is a long standing measure that is presented as an indicator of the extent to which students progress to their final year of schooling.

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Box 3.4 (Continued)

Apparent retention rates are influenced by a wide range of factors, including student perceptions of the benefits of schooling, the availability of employment and further educational alternatives, socioeconomic status and population movements. Care needs to be taken in interpreting apparent retention rates in school education because rates are influenced by jurisdictional differences in:

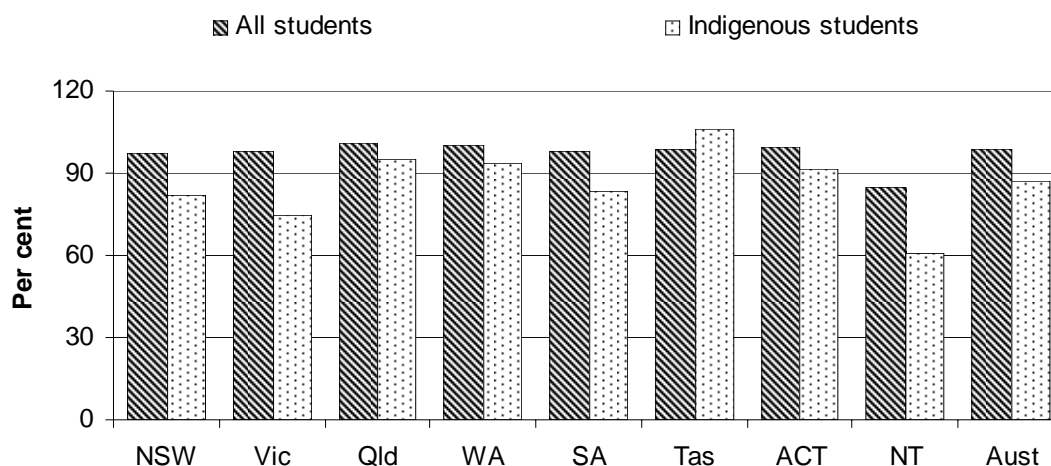
- enrolment policies across jurisdictions, which contribute to different age/grade structures
- the extent of part time year 12 enrolment in schools.

The indicator has been consistently reported over time, but does not reflect factors such as:

- students repeating a year of education or returning to education after a period of absence and thus being included in the year 10 cohort in 2001 but not in the year 12 cohort in 2003
- interstate movement of students
- movement between the government school sector and the non-government school sector
- the impacts of migration and full fee paying overseas students
- varying enrolment patterns in which students choose to complete their secondary schooling in TAFE institutes.

Apparent rates of retention from the commencement of secondary school to year 10 provide one measure of the equity of outcomes for Indigenous students. Apparent retention rates for all students were commonly 97–100 per cent in 2003, except in the NT (85.0 per cent) with a national proportion of 98.5 (figure 3.2). High rates are to be expected because normal year level progression means students in year 10 are generally of an age at which schooling is compulsory. Rates for Indigenous students, however, were considerably lower than those for all students in all jurisdictions except Tasmania. The national retention rate for Indigenous students was 87.2 per cent, or 11.3 percentage points lower than that for all students.

Figure 3.2 **Apparent rates of retention from year 7 or 8 to year 10, full time secondary students, all schools, by Indigenous status 2003^{a, b, c, d}**



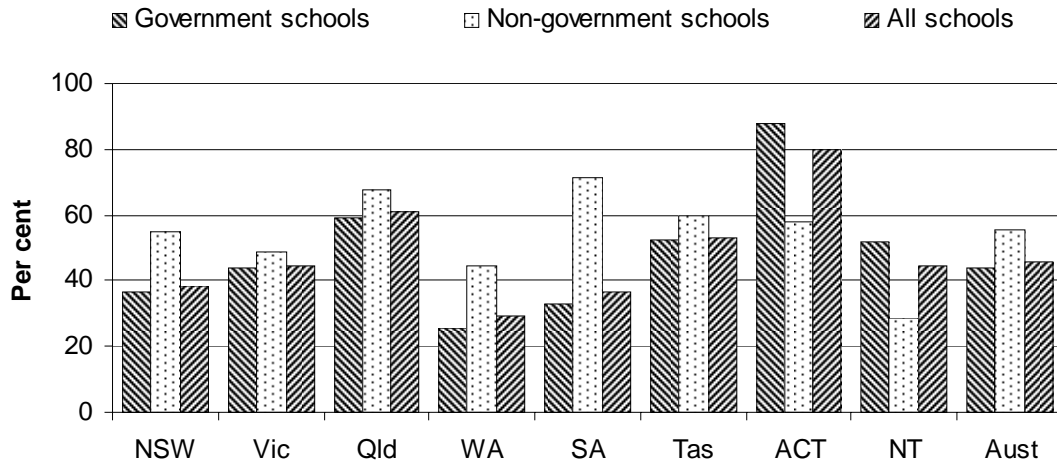
^a Apparent retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. ^b Retention rates can exceed 100 per cent for a variety of reasons, including student transfers between jurisdictions after the base year. ^c The exclusion of part time students from standard apparent retention rate calculations has implications for the interpretation of results for all jurisdictions, but particularly for SA, Tasmania and the NT where there is a high proportion of part time students (2005 Report, table 3A.3). ^d Ungraded students are not included in the calculation of apparent retention rates. This exclusion has particular implications for the NT, where 43 per cent of Indigenous secondary students are ungraded (compared with an average of 7.5 per cent for the rest of Australia). As a result, Indigenous apparent retention rates may misrepresent the retention of students in secondary schooling in the NT.

Source: ABS (2004); table 3A.21; 2005 Report, p. 3.21, figure 3.8.

The apparent rate of retention from year 10 to year 12 has been derived by expressing the number of full time school students enrolled in year 12 in 2003 as a proportion of the number of full time school students enrolled in year 10 in 2001.

For all schools, apparent rates of retention from year 10 to year 12 for Indigenous students in 2003 ranged from 79.7 per cent in the ACT to 29.3 per cent in WA (figure 3.3). In interpreting this indicator, note that about 10–20 per cent of Indigenous students leave school before year 10 (figure 3.1) so are not included in the base year for retention from year 10 to year 12. Nationally, Indigenous retention from year 10 to year 12 for all schools in 2003 was 45.7 per cent (figure 3.3), or 31.2 percentage points lower than the rate for all students.

Figure 3.3 **Apparent rates of retention from year 10 to year 12, Indigenous full time secondary students, 2003^{a, b, c}**



^a Apparent retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. ^b The exclusion of part time students from standard apparent retention rate calculations has implications for the interpretation of results for all jurisdictions, but particularly for SA, Tasmania and the NT where there is a high proportion of part time students (2005 Report, table 3.4). ^c Ungraded students are not included in the calculation of apparent retention rates. This exclusion has particular implications for the NT, where 43 per cent of Indigenous secondary students are ungraded (compared with an average of 7.5 per cent for the rest of Australia). As a result, Indigenous apparent retention rates may misrepresent the retention of students in secondary schooling in the NT.

Source: ABS (2004); table 3A.22; 2005 Report, p. 3.24, figure 3.10.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2004, *Schools Australia*, 2003, Cat. no. 4221.0, Canberra.

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2005, *Report on Government Services 2005*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.