

Australia

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

Australia does not have a single national education system; its eight individual states and territories (hereafter, “jurisdictions”) are responsible for their own education administration. However, due to increasing collaboration, there is growing consistency in the way in which education is provided across Australia. Most schools are owned and operated by jurisdictional governments, with the national government providing supplementary funding. In addition, approximately one-third of students attend nongovernment schools.¹ Nongovernment schools receive the majority of their public funding from the national government, with state and territory governments providing supplementary funding, along with other funding sources (including fees paid by parents). Policy collaboration takes place in joint governmental councils that include national, state, and territorial government representatives.

Education departments in each jurisdiction recruit and appoint teachers to government schools; supply buildings, equipment, and materials; and provide limited discretionary funding for use by schools. In most jurisdictions, regional offices and schools have responsibility for administration and staffing, although the extent of responsibility varies across jurisdictions. Central authorities specify the curriculum and standards framework from Foundation (Year 0) to Year 10 (since 2011, the Australian Curriculum). However, individual jurisdictions decide how the curriculum is implemented in their schools, and schools have autonomy in deciding curriculum details, textbooks, and teaching methodology, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. Jurisdictional authorities for curriculum, assessment, and certification specify curriculum for Years 11 and 12 and are responsible for examining and certifying final year student achievement in both government and nongovernment schools.

In December 2019, education ministers agreed to The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, which sets out the national vision for Australian education as of 2020.^a Four national agencies^b

^a For more information, see <https://www.dese.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>

^b These agencies are the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (<https://www.acara.edu.au/about-us>), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/about-aitsl>), Educational Services Australia (<https://www.esa.edu.au/about/about-us>), and the Australian Education Research Organisation (<https://www.edresearch.edu.au/about-aero>).

support the national vision for Australian education by collaborating to develop the national curriculum; implement assessment and reporting; ensure national standards for teachers and school leaders; provide digital teaching and learning resources; and use tools, services, and high-quality evidence to support education practice and policy.

Education Levels in Australia

Children in Australia generally attend preschool part-time for one or two years before starting school. Preschools are typically run by local councils, community groups, or private organizations (including within long daycare), with some states also offering state-run preschools. Preschool is offered to children ages 3 to 5, though attendance varies widely. Since 2008, national policy and funding agreements aim to ensure at least 600 hours of preschool per year (15 hours a week) in the year before full-time school.²

The universal preprimary education program in Australia includes government-funded Kindergarten/preschool for children age 4 and the Foundation year provided at primary school. Government-funded Kindergarten/preschool for children age 3 have been introduced in some states, with Early Start Kindergarten available to target populations.^c This means that funded locations are now available for two years of Kindergarten in some jurisdictions.

Preschool education is primarily play-based and since 2009 has been supported by the *Early Years Learning Framework*.³ The *Early Years Learning Framework* also supports other early childhood programs, such as long daycare and family daycare (home-based childcare), ensuring that all children have access to high-quality and consistent early childhood education and care. Community Kindergartens and early childhood education programs in long daycare facilities (from birth until primary school) are generally required to follow an *Early Years Learning and Development Framework* as part of their registration.

The Australian school system is organized around year levels. Since 2007, all jurisdictions provide a Foundation year (known variously as Kindergarten, preparatory [prep], transition, preprimary, or reception) in the year before Year 1. As of 2015, all jurisdictions except for South Australia include Foundation to Year 6 in primary school, and Years 7 to 12 in secondary school. Starting in 2022, South Australia will transition Year 7 to secondary school, in line with all other jurisdictions.

Schooling becomes compulsory at age 6 in most jurisdictions. However, in practice, most children start the Foundation year of primary school when they are between 4 years, 6 months and 5 years, 6 months old. Following a decision by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in July 2009, there is national agreement on a mandatory requirement for young people to complete Year 10 and then participate full-time in education, training, or employment until age 17.⁴

^c For details, see <https://www.vic.gov.au/education-information-parents?>

Primary school and the first two years of secondary school typically provide a general program that all students follow. In subsequent years of schooling, a basic core of subjects is supplemented with optional subjects for students. In the final two years of secondary school, students have the opportunity to choose five or six subjects from a range of elective studies in which to specialize.

Australia has no common national policy on ability streaming, grouping, or tracking students. Streaming is a school-based decision and is not promoted officially in any jurisdiction. Some schools choose to stream students according to ability, and some offer special enrichment or remedial programs for select groups of students.

Reading and Literacy Policy

Rather than a policy stating that students should attain a specific standard in literacy or reading, the Australian government states that “our education system should deliver a basic learning entitlement for all children to leave school with the skills they need to live and work in a globalized world,”⁵ and achievement standards for each year level in the education system are incorporated into the curriculum framework for each subject or learning area.

Some Australian jurisdictions have minimum literacy and numeracy achievement standards for students completing secondary school (i.e., Year 12) that are aligned with the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) discussed later in this chapter. Between 2008 and 2018, the proportion of Year 5 students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for reading increased by 4 percent, from 91 percent to 95 percent.⁶ In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 assessment, Australian students scored higher than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average in reading.⁷ While the 2018 findings were similar to those from 2015, when considering a longer period, Australian students’ mean performance in reading has been steadily declining from initially high levels since the country first participated in PISA in 2000. In reading, more rapid declines were observed among the country’s lowest-achieving students.⁸ In PIRLS 2016, the mean score for Australian students increased by a statistically significant 17 points compared to 2011. The Intermediate international benchmark, which is the proficient standard for Australia, was met by 81 percent of Australian Year 4 students.⁹

Australia’s performance in national and international assessments, as suggested by PISA in particular, suggests a plateau or even decline in student performance in reading and other learning areas, which has been a cause for concern and has led to the implementation of programs or assessments such as the Year 1 phonics screening check (now mandated in Queensland and New South Wales).

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Australia has participated in three cycles of PIRLS: 2011, 2016, and 2021. The provision of international comparative achievement data about reading literacy in Year 4 is likely to generate

high levels of interest. The focus on Year 4 will draw attention to this significant stage of schooling. Reading literacy is viewed as a critical aspect of the curriculum at all levels of education, and much attention has been given to ways of improving achievement for all Australian children. NAPLAN provides data on the achievement of all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 on an annual basis, enabling comparisons between jurisdictions each year as well as change over time. PIRLS provides not only information about achievement at the Year 4 level, but also reliable internationally comparative data about the reading achievement of students in primary school for Australian educators.

In the context of the Australian Curriculum, PIRLS 2021 data will provide insights on the achievement and learning needs of Australian students. It will be possible to use these insights to improve educational opportunities at a national level.

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

At the end of 2011, all Australian ministers of education agreed to the progressive implementation of the first phase of a national curriculum to be known as the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum was reviewed in 2014, and in September 2015, all Australian education ministers endorsed the revised Australian Curriculum in all eight learning areas for Foundation (the first year of schooling) to Year 10.^d

The teaching of reading is located largely within the English learning area of the Australian Curriculum (although it is also covered under the General Capability of Literacy) and comprises three interrelated strands—Language, Literature, and Literacy—that focus on the development of knowledge, understanding, and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating. The teaching of phonics is part of this approach, with teaching and learning programs balancing and integrating all three strands. Achievement standards outline the levels of attainment students are expected to reach to achieve a satisfactory level of understanding and skill development. Work portfolios are provided to help teachers to judge three grades: satisfactory, above satisfactory, and below satisfactory. There are also level descriptions that provide an overview of the curriculum content for each domain.

Each strand in English is further organized into a series of substrands, under which sit related content descriptions. These substrands provide a consistent organizing structure throughout the English curriculum, unless there is clear reason for the content area to target particular year levels only, such as phonics and word knowledge. The substrands ensure that the breadth of content and skills relating to each strand is addressed for the purposes of teaching and learning. Elaborations of content descriptions are also provided to give teachers ideas about how they might teach the content. At Year 4, the substrands in the 2014 version of the curriculum are as follows:

^d For the complete national curriculum from Foundation through Year 10, see <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/>

- Language
 - Language variation and change
 - Language for interaction
 - Text structure and organization
 - Expressing and developing ideas
 - Phonics and word knowledge
- Literature
 - Literature and context
 - Responding to literature
 - Examining literature
 - Creating literature
- Literacy
 - Texts in context
 - Interacting with others
 - Interpreting, analyzing, evaluating
 - Creating texts

Descriptions referencing reading are spread across the three strands, although some substrands clearly relate to reading comprehension more than others. The substrand of interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, for instance, directly refers to comprehension at each year level. At Year 4, students are expected to “Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts.”¹⁰

Individual jurisdictions have also developed their own curricula based on the Australian Curriculum. The Victorian curriculum has adopted the same strands and substrands, but still uses the broader organizers of Reading and Viewing, Writing, and Speaking and Listening.^e This curriculum has also replaced grades with levels as a way of explicitly acknowledging the range of abilities present in different grades. The New South Wales curriculum is divided into stages, with each stage representing the learning expectations of approximately two year levels. This curriculum also uses broad organizers, such as Reading and Viewing, that list objectives and outcomes within a continuum of learning.^f

In Australia, no textbooks are mandated and schools select their own resources and materials for reading programs, both for general classroom programs and to support students experiencing difficulties with reading. Many resources are provided by education departments and curriculum

^e For more details about the Victorian English curriculum, see <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/english/english/introduction/structure>

^f For more details about the New South Wales English curriculum, see <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10/outcomes>

authorities, often accessible online. Schools use a wide range of books, journals, websites, computer programs, and graded reading programs.

Students in Year 4 engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view, and interpret spoken, written, and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. Literary texts that support and extend students in Year 4 as independent readers describe complex sequences of events that extend over several pages and involve unusual happenings within a framework of familiar experiences. Informative texts include content of increasing complexity and technicality about topics of interest and topics being studied in other areas of the curriculum. These texts use complex language features, including varied sentence structures, some unfamiliar vocabulary, a significant number of high frequency sight words and words that need to be decoded phonetically, and a variety of punctuation conventions, as well as illustrations and diagrams that support and extend the printed text.

The Achievement Standard for Year 4 Receptive modes (which include listening, reading, and viewing) states:

“...by the end of Year 4, students understand that texts have different text structures depending on purpose and context. They explain how language features, images and vocabulary are used to engage the interest of audiences. They describe literal and implied meaning connecting ideas in different texts. They fluently read texts that include varied sentence structures, unfamiliar vocabulary including multisyllabic words. They express preferences for particular types of texts, and respond to others’ viewpoints. They listen for and share key points in discussions.”¹¹

The curriculum also categorizes Literacy as a general capability relevant to learning across disciplines. All general capabilities that apply to the content descriptions of a learning area are identified by an icon. For example, under Science Inquiry Skills, the content description for questioning and predicting at Year 4 includes the icon for the Literacy general capability.¹² The icon indicates the relevance of literacy skills in the teaching and learning of scientific inquiry. Each general capability also has a Learning continua that includes an introduction of the nature and scope of the capability, organizing elements and subelements that support the ability, and a learning continuum. This learning continuum is divided into levels with level descriptions.

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Jurisdictional teacher regulatory authorities currently accredit teacher education courses and will continue to do so. However, the revised *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures* (agreed to by education ministers in December 2015 and revised in 2018) commits states and territories to nationally consistent, strengthened accreditation of initial teacher education programs.¹³ All teacher education programs are implemented by higher

education providers. While Australian higher education providers have autonomy in setting the standards required to graduate from a particular degree, there is increasing oversight over the standards required for graduating teachers.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established to provide national leadership in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. The institute is responsible for creating and maintaining national professional standards for teaching and school leadership as well as for promoting high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders (including national oversight of the accreditation of preservice teacher education). The more rigorous standards require universities to show how they will ensure that their teacher education students will develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the classroom and meet the graduate level of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*.¹⁴

These standards (implemented in 2011) describe expectations for teachers across three domains—Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement—and four career stages—Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead. The Graduate and Proficient stages enumerate the mandatory requirements for entry into the profession.¹⁵ For example, with reference to literacy and numeracy, the standards are as follows:

- Graduate—“Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas.”
- Proficient—“Apply knowledge and understanding of effective teaching strategies to support students’ literacy and numeracy achievement.”
- Highly Accomplished—“Support colleagues to implement effective teaching strategies to improve students’ literacy and numeracy achievement.”
- Lead—“Monitor and evaluate the implementation of teaching strategies within the school to improve students’ achievement in literacy and numeracy using research-based knowledge and student data.”¹⁶

One of the changes to teacher preparation is that every initial teacher education student undertaking a primary teaching program is required to graduate with a subject specialization in areas of priority that may include the teaching of English and literacy. All initial teacher education students also are expected to meet the standard of a national literacy and numeracy test prior to graduation.

Australian education authorities recognize that professional development is imperative for maintaining the vitality of the teaching profession. This belief is reflected in the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*,¹⁷ which describes the importance and characteristics of high-quality professional development in improving teacher and school leader practice, and the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework*¹⁸ (developed at the

same time), which outlines the critical factors for creating a performance and development culture in schools.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The teaching of reading and literacy is included in the initial teacher education programs available for early childhood and primary school teachers across Australia. Universities determine the content of programs that will equip initial teacher education students with strategies to ensure they can address the specific learning needs of school students across a range of abilities.

Australian primary school teachers have no specific obligation to undertake ongoing professional development specific to teaching reading. However, jurisdictional teacher regulatory authorities have requirements regarding the nature and amount of professional learning that teachers must undertake in order to maintain registration.⁹

Teachers have many opportunities for ongoing professional learning about teaching reading. One avenue is through postgraduate university courses that include units on reading or related areas, such as children’s literature. State education authorities provide many opportunities for professional learning about the teaching of reading, such as in projects of the National Partnerships: Literacy and Numeracy Program, and through access to online training modules and institutes of teaching and leadership. Teacher professional associations provide quality professional learning related to reading at conferences and other events. Recent years have seen a notable increase in the number of online professional development resources available through government websites. Short-cycle, nonqualification professional development programs tend to be provided by private companies rather than governments or the university sector.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

As part of the national reform agenda, jurisdictions committed to increasing accountability and transparency and established the National Assessment Program in 2002, which has been managed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) since 2009. The program involves the following:

- A full cohort assessment of students in Grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 in literacy and numeracy
- A program of sample assessments at Grades 6 and 10 in science, civics and citizenship, and Information and Communications Technology conducted every three years
- Participation in international surveys, including PIRLS

⁹ For example, 20 hours in any year that a teacher works more than 20 days are required of teachers registered in Victoria (see <https://www.vit.vic.edu.au/maintain/requirements/learning>), South Australia (see <https://www.trb.sa.edu.au/faq-ql-004>), or Queensland (see <https://www.qct.edu.au/professional-development/requirements>), while at least 100 hours over a five-year registration period are required in the Northern Territory (see <https://www.trb.nt.gov.au/registration/registration-applications/registration-renewal>) or 100 hours since the registration was last renewed in Western Australia (see <https://www.trb.wa.gov.au/Further-Information/FAQs/Professional-learning>).

The purpose of these programs is to report on student achievement on standardized tests to parents, teachers, and schools. They also seek to monitor the overall performance of the education system.

Australia's National Assessment Program tests reflect an increased emphasis on accountability in education. Schools are required to provide plain language reports on the progress and achievement of each student to their parents or caregivers. All schools are required to report student achievement against national standards using a five-point rating scale (A to E) and an assessment relative to the performance of the student's peer group.

School-based or teacher-led assessment is used at the primary and lower secondary levels to evaluate student progress against the national standards. At the primary level, this assessment is mainly informal, including checklists, observations, projects, and portfolios. At the lower secondary level, assessment becomes more formalized, including teacher-created tests, essays, and laboratory assignments. Growing interest in formative assessments has led to the development of assessment libraries.^h

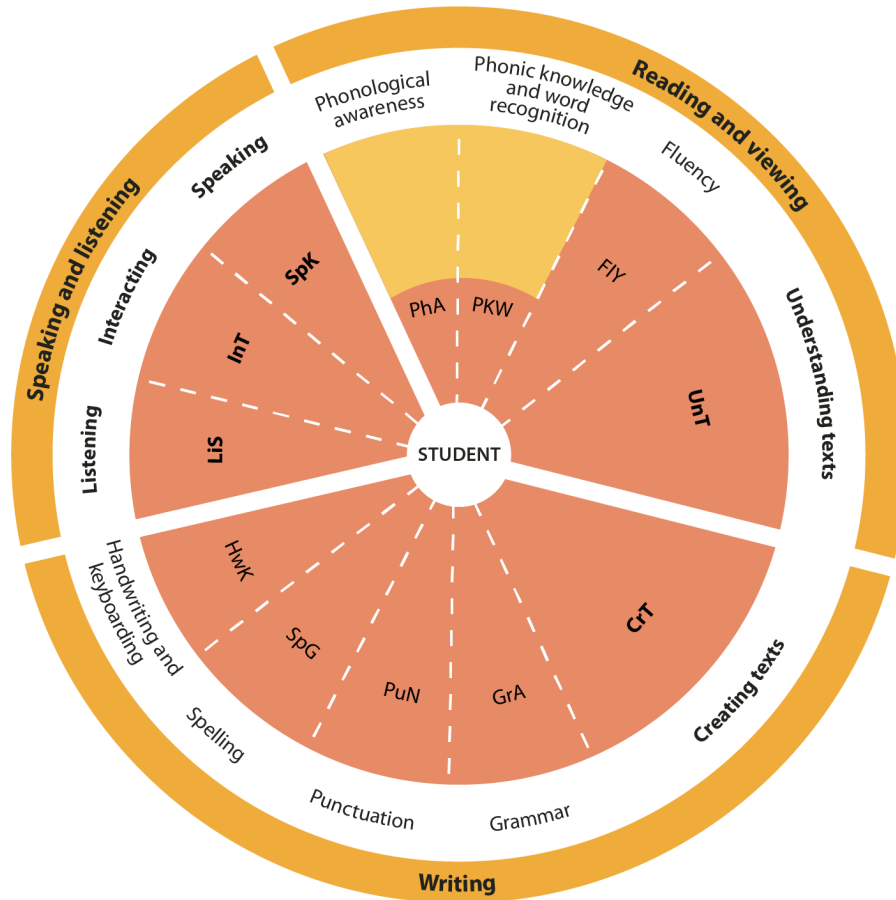
A key contribution to the monitoring of student progress in recent years has been the development of the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions (NLNLP) in 2016–2017. These learning progressions are intended to help teachers support students to successfully engage with the demands of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum. The *Australian Core Skills Framework* was used to guide decisions on the scope of the progressions. The NLNLP have been reviewed and refined since 2017, with version 3 recently released.ⁱ They describe the observable indicators of increasing sophistication in the use of Standard Australian English language and are designed as a conceptual tool that can assist teachers to develop targeted teaching and learning programs for students who are working above or below year-level expectations.

The Literacy Learning Progression has three structural elements that align with the modes of language use: speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing. The progression comprises five overarching subelements: listening, interacting, speaking, understanding texts, and creating texts. Exhibit 1 shows the elements and subelements of the Literacy Learning Progression.

^h One example is the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's Digital Assessment Library (<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/f-10assessment/digital-assessment-library/Pages/Index.aspx>).

ⁱ For more information, see <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/national-literacy-and-numeracy-learning-progressions/version-3-of-national-literacy-and-numeracy-learning-progressions>

Exhibit 1: Literacy Learning Progression Elements and Subelements¹⁹



To further support student progress, the Australian government is also funding the development of an Online Formative Assessment Initiative that aims to provide teachers with innovative assessment solutions that integrate resources, data collection, and analytical tools in a teaching tools network. The initiative is intended to assist teachers to align their assessment data with the NLNLPs.

At the end of secondary school in Year 12, all jurisdictions conduct formal assessments of student performance. The purpose of these assessments is to certify student achievement at the end of school while also providing a basis for course selection in higher education. In most jurisdictions, assessments are based on a combination of curriculum-specific formal examinations conducted by a jurisdictional authority and school-based assessments of student performance on specified tasks or assignments.

Individual Student Progress in Reading

School-based assessment is the most common form of assessment during the primary years, and schools regularly report to parents on student progress using the reporting frameworks or standards developed by state and territory curriculum authorities. Teachers make judgments relative to jurisdictional standards, and schools often make provisions for teachers to engage in training to achieve consistency. Judgments are based on teacher observations and assessments of classroom work over time. Some schools use a system of portfolios in which samples of student work and assessment tasks in learning areas are collected at regular intervals as evidence of development over the course of an academic year or longer. Since 2006, all Australian schools have been required to use a grading system of A to E to report achievement, with A indicating very high achievement and C indicating satisfactory achievement. As mentioned above, the NLNLPs and Online Formative Assessment Initiative are designed to support student progress.

Special Reading Initiatives

Australian locations are defined according to remoteness, with five key categories: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote.²⁰ Around 2 percent of the Australian population live in remote or very remote areas. There are statistically significant differences between the literacy outcomes of students in remote areas, on average, and students in other locations. Data from NAPLAN show a strong correlation between lower literacy outcomes and remote locality (particularly very remote). In 2019, the proportion of Year 3 students at or above the minimum standard NAPLAN level for reading was 88.7 percent in remote schools and just 64.1 percent in very remote schools, compared with 96.8 percent in schools in major cities.²¹

To address these differences, the Australian government funded the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program. The program, introduced five years ago, is the first large-scale pilot of two explicit teaching approaches—Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction—in remote Australia. The program aims to increase teacher pedagogical skills and improve the literacy outcomes of students in participating schools. Studies gauging the success of the program have differed in their conclusions. However, early indications of improvement led to an extension of the program in 2018 and 2019.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The appearance of COVID-19 in Australia in early 2020 led to significant disruption to Australian school education. Schools were closed in most jurisdictions, although the periods of closures varied across jurisdictions (e.g., the Northern Territory, Tasmania, and Western Australia did not experience extended closures in 2020).

In most cases, longer-term school closures related to lockdown or stay-at-home orders were determined by jurisdictional authorities, although these may not have applied to all schools within a state (e.g., due to the greater prevalence of infections in urban areas, regional areas may have experienced shorter periods of lockdown). There were also many localized closures during the 2020 and 2021 academic years due to school- or area-specific COVID-19 cases. School-driven closures occurred on a smaller scale to conduct deep cleaning and/or as a response to infection in a school community. Large-scale closure decisions were made at a state or territory level.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

In April 2020, the Australian government commissioned six research reports to examine the potential impact of remote learning on the educational outcomes for vulnerable cohorts of children, describe barriers to access, and provide evidence-based actions to support student learning.^{22,23,24,25,26,27} The reports indicated that nearly half of the national school student population were vulnerable to negative impacts from learning at home. Reasons for this vulnerability included student age, social disadvantage, specific needs, or family employment status. Negative impacts were increased for students with low socioeconomic status or additional learning needs, or who were already at risk of school failure. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students faced greater challenges because of their reduced interaction with Indigenous teacher assistance and the lack of culturally appropriate pedagogies in online resources.

The reports also indicated that many families struggled to support learning at home, lacking the space, experience, time, technology, or resources required. Access to adequate technology was a barrier particularly for students from remote and rural areas and low-income households. In terms of student well-being, it was found that home-based learning was likely to increase anxiety and stress in young people due to increased isolation and loss of social connections. There were also restrictions to school-based health support and reduced opportunities for schools to identify and respond to issues related to a student's well-being (including issues around child safety and protection).²⁸

In November 2020, a poll of Australians ages 18 or older conducted by the Australian National University found that 88 percent of respondents who were parents were satisfied with how their children's educational institution (including childcare, Kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools) had adapted to changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including 48 percent who were very satisfied. However, parents expressed concerns about the effects of school closures and disruptions on their children's learning; almost half of those surveyed had some concern about their child falling behind in their education, including 13 percent who were very concerned.²⁹

Lockdowns, school closures, and remote learning continued in 2021. Victorian students missed more than a term of in-school instruction in 2020 and also experienced several periods of lockdown and remote learning in 2021. Students in New South Wales and the Australian Capital

Territory were also learning remotely during terms 3 and 4 of 2021 while COVID-19-related lockdowns were in place.

Policy and Practice Changes

During periods of lockdown and school closures, schools shifted to remote learning with support from federal and jurisdictional governments. Instruction methods were largely left up to schools, with some guidance from the relevant jurisdictional departments of education. Online learning was conducted via a variety of platforms, such as Seesaw and Google Classroom apps or Webex meetings. Overall, guiding policy was dependent on school capability. Not all schools and their students have access to the same resources, such as devices, or the same level of reliable internet access and bandwidth. The Australian government provided early access to recurrent funding and a Special Circumstances School Hygiene Assistance Fund to offset hygiene costs in nongovernment schools. Education ministers agreed to cancel the NAPLAN assessment in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has raised the importance of NAPLAN 2021 as a measurement of the impact of the pandemic on educational outcomes. NAPLAN returned in May 2021. The National Cabinet (a committee made up of the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, and Premiers of all states and territories) agreed to a set of National Principles for School Education in April 2020 to support the ongoing delivery of high-quality education for all students during COVID-19, enable students to progress through their year level, and support a successful transition to 2021.^j

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

Victoria had two periods of extended school closures in 2020, which contributed to the decision to delay Australia's main data collection for PIRLS until 2021. As a Southern Hemisphere participant, Australia usually conducts the field trial and main data collection in the year preceding Northern Hemisphere participants, e.g., in 2020 for the PIRLS 2021 cycle. Further outbreaks of COVID-19 variants in the later half of 2021 resulted in lockdowns being called in Victoria, New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory. The PIRLS testing window for schools in these jurisdictions was delayed until lockdowns were over and Year 4 students returned to in-school learning.

^j For details, see <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/schools/covid-19-national-principles-school-education>

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