

MEDIA RELEASE

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Turning up and tuning in key to Indigenous education

Indigenous students are performing well below the Australian average in international tests and student attitudes, behaviours and backgrounds could provide some of the keys to understanding this, according to a report launched today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The report is based on findings from all three completed cycles of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is managed nationally by ACER.

Indigenous students on average have reported lower levels of access to home educational resources, such as a desk, textbooks and a quiet place to study, and also generally have parents with lower levels of experience of education than non-Indigenous students.

This report focused on the psychological factors that can affect student achievement, and found that while Indigenous students on average have lower levels of confidence, less interest in learning, lower levels of motivation and engagement with reading and higher levels of anxiety about education than non-Indigenous students, they still put in as much effort and reported similar levels of persistence with learning, and felt similar levels of general engagement with school, as their non-Indigenous peers.

However, the report also found that Indigenous students are less likely to attend pre-school, and are more likely to be late to school on a regular basis, to miss consecutive months of schooling and to change school several times.

Some absences may be due to ceremony and Sorry business (Indigenous bereavement rituals); however, as PISA shows a link between consistent school attendance and better student performance, ways must be found to minimise the disadvantages to Indigenous students through missing school.

These factors contribute to Indigenous students' underperformance in international tests of educational achievement.

"Indigenous students are lagging well behind both the Australian and the international averages, and the gap is not closing," report co-author Dr Sue Thomson said.

"More than a third of Indigenous students do not meet the basic proficiency levels in maths, reading and science considered necessary to face the challenges of life beyond school.

"Our report shows that programs to improve Indigenous education should address students' attitudes, engagement, motivation and beliefs.

"It also suggests that funding to schools with high numbers of Indigenous students could allow for a higher level of resources to help counteract the lack of resources in their own homes.

"As well, it is vital that there is an understanding that students need to attend school regularly in order for them not to fall behind," Dr Thomson said.

The report, *Contextual factors that influence the achievement of Australia's Indigenous students: Results from PISA 2000–2006*, by Lisa De Bortoli and Sue Thomson, is available from www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/reports/

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