

SNAPSHOTS

Global Assessment // Local Impact

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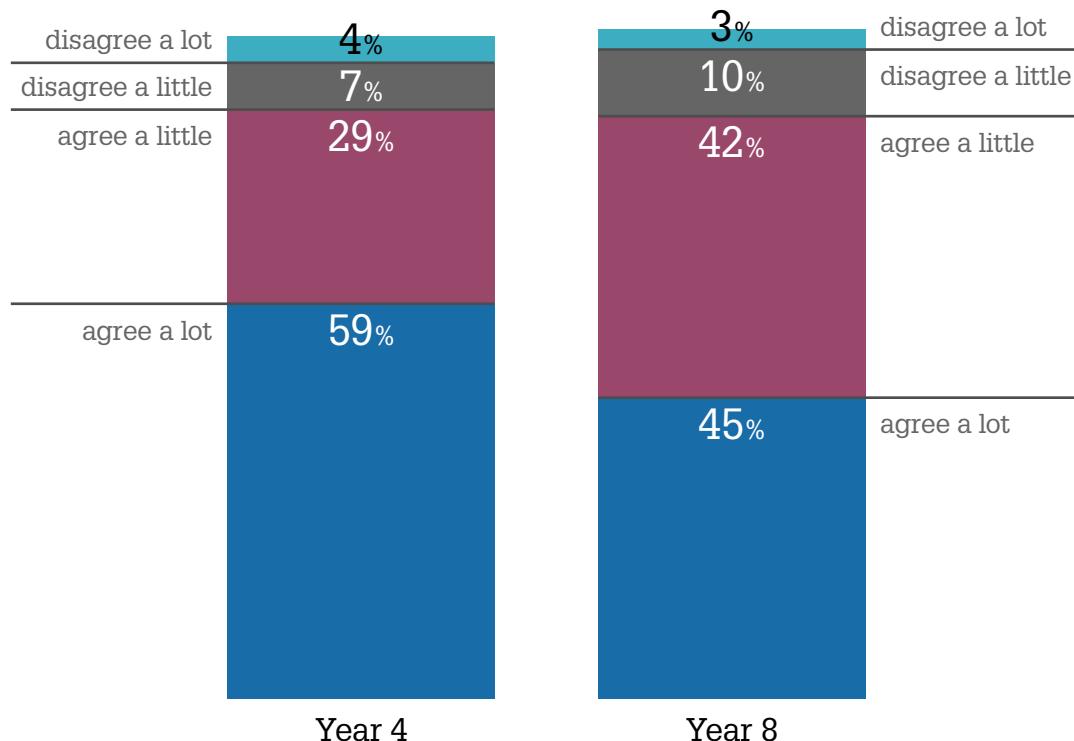
Bullying in Australian schools

Surveys like the recent Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) enable educators, policy makers and the wider community to compare Australian students with each other, as well as their counterparts across the world.

An essential part of a positive school climate that is supportive of student engagement and learning is how safe students feel when at school. In previous editions of the *Snapshots* series we have reported on the relationship between school disadvantage, student discipline and safety, and student achievement. In this edition, we explore bullying behaviours in Australian schools in greater detail through data collected as part of TIMSS and PIRLS 2011.

How safe do students feel in Australian schools?

Encouragingly, most Australian students feel safe at school, with the majority of Year 4 students agreeing a lot with the statement 'I feel safe at school'. At Year 8, fewer students agreed a lot and more agreed a little, compared to the younger students. Around one in every 10 students in Year 4 and Year 8 disagreed, either a lot or a little, to the statement, indicating that they felt unsafe at school.



DID YOU KNOW?

Feelings of security at school showed a relationship with performance in the TIMSS mathematics and science assessments and the PIRLS reading assessment. Among Year 4 students, those who disagreed a lot that they felt safe scored lower on average in reading, mathematics and science than all other students. Year 8 students who disagreed a lot with the statement about feeling safe at school also recorded the lowest scores in mathematics and science, on average.

How common is bullying in Australian schools?

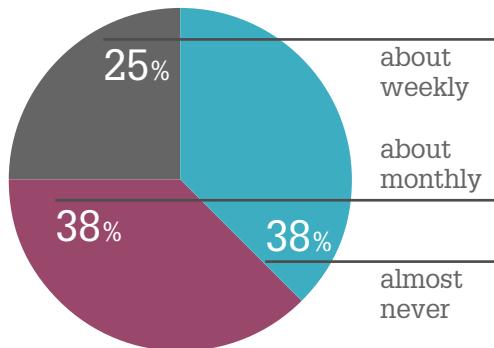
TIMSS and PIRLS asked Year 4 and Year 8 students how often they experienced any of the following bullying behaviours:

- ▶ being made fun of or called names
- ▶ being left out of games or activities by other students
- ▶ having lies spread about them
- ▶ having something stolen from them
- ▶ being hit, shoved, kicked or otherwise hurt by other students
- ▶ being made to do things they didn't want to do by other students.

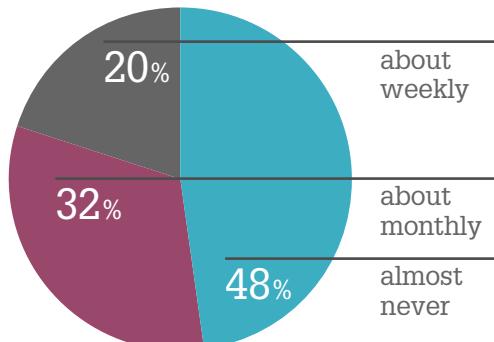
When all of the bullying behaviours were considered together, just over one-third of Australian Year 4 students reported being bullied at school *almost never*, while just over one-third reported being bullied at school *about monthly*, and one-quarter of students reported that this happened *about weekly*.

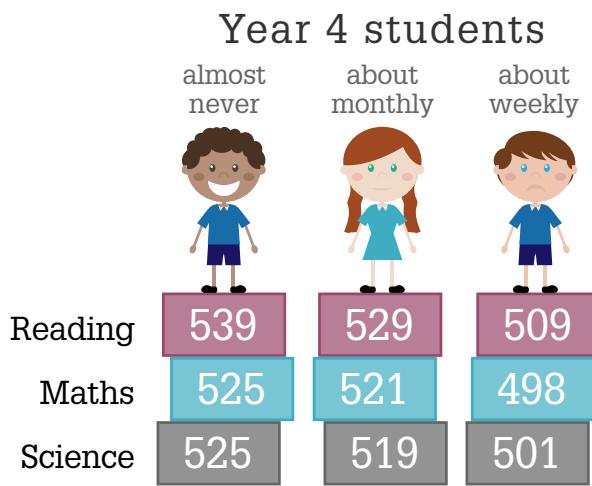
Compared to the international average, more Australian Year 4 students reported being bullied *about weekly* and fewer reported that they were *almost never* bullied.

Australia average – Year 4



International average – Year 4





Australian Year 4 students who reported being bullied about weekly scored lower, on average, in reading, mathematics and science than students who were bullied less often. Those who were bullied about monthly also had lower reading scores than students who were almost never bullied, but there was no difference in their mathematics and science scores.

AT A GLANCE

What are the most commonly reported forms of bullying in Australian schools?

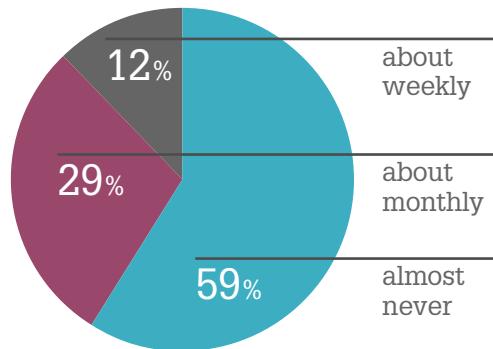
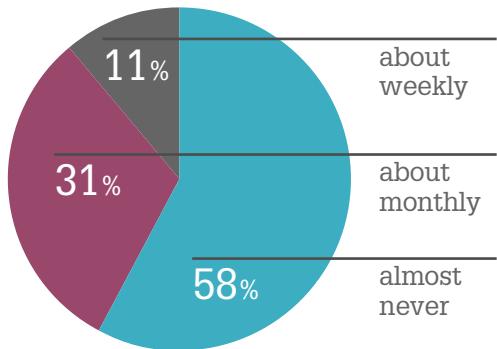
Year 4 students:

1. Teased me or called me names 20%
2. Left me out of games or activities 16%
3. Spread lies about me 13% / Hurt me 12%

Year 8 students:

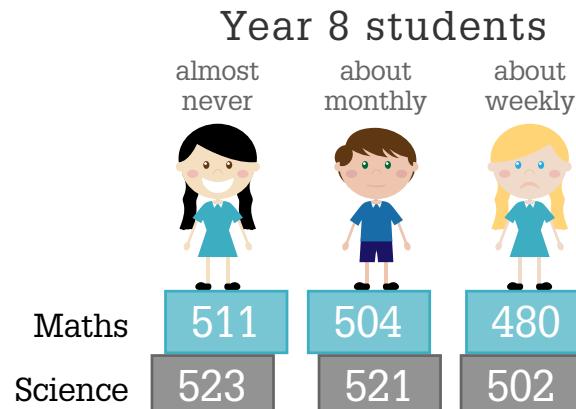
1. Teased me or called me names 17%
2. Spread lies about me 6%
3. Hurt me / Left me out of games or activities 6%

Australia average – Year 8 International average – Year 8



The majority of Year 8 students, both in Australia and across participating countries on average, almost never experienced the bullying behaviours they were asked about, but one in 10 Year 8s were bullied about weekly.

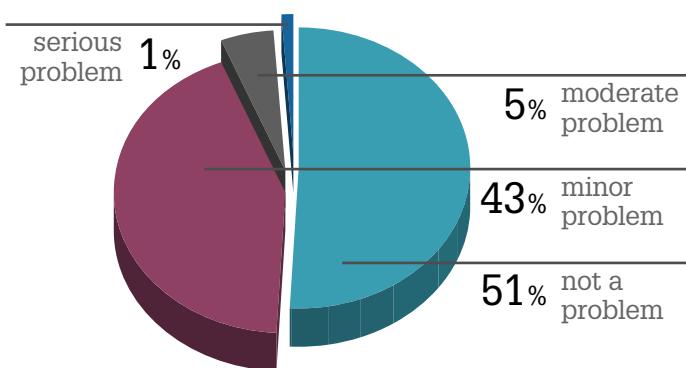
Australian Year 8 students who were bullied almost never or about monthly scored higher on average in their mathematics and science assessments than students who were bullied about weekly.



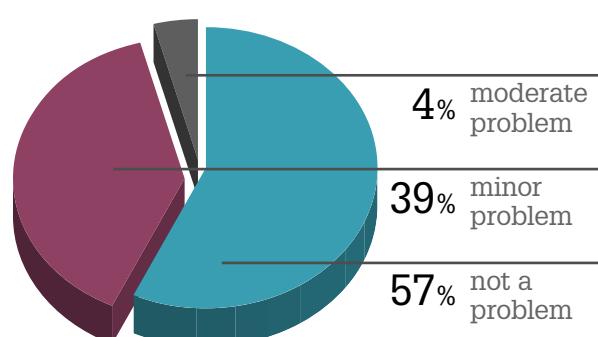
And what do principals think?

School principals were also asked about bullying behaviours among students and, according to their reports, more than half of Australian Year 4 students were in schools that do not have problems with behaviours such as intimidation or verbal abuse, including texting or emailing, or physical fights between students. Four to five per cent of students were in schools with moderate problems with these sorts of bullying.

Intimidation of Year 4 students



Physical fights among Year 4 students

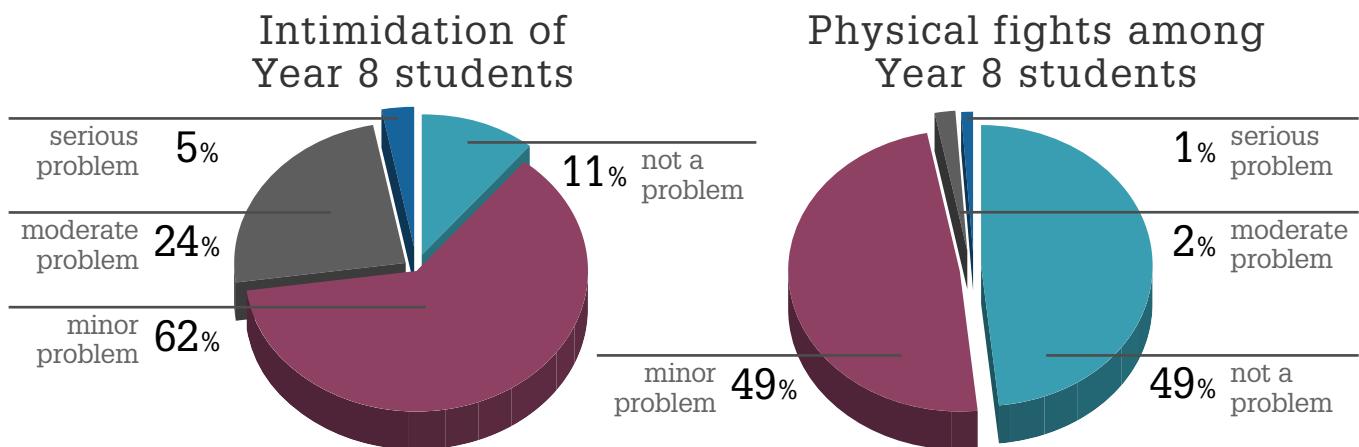


Again, bullying was associated with lower performance in reading, mathematics and science, with Year 4 students in schools with no bullying problems, as reported by principals, scoring higher on average in the assessments than students in schools with minor, moderate or severe bullying problems, as reported by principals.

As might be expected, problems with bullying and intimidation among students appeared to be more common at secondary schools, with more than 60 per cent of Year 8 students in schools with minor bullying and intimidation problems and only 11 per cent in schools without any problems, as reported by principals.

Around half of Year 8 students attended schools where there were minor problems with fights among students, but only three per cent were in schools with moderate or serious problems with physical violence between students.





The performance of students in schools whose principals reported moderate problems with intimidation did not seem to be adversely affected by this, but Year 8 students in schools whose principals reported serious problems with physical fights scored significantly lower on average in mathematics and science than students in other schools.



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

While performance does vary according to how frequently students experience bullying, this does not necessarily mean that bullying causes lower performance, or that lower performance places a student at greater risk of being bullied. Other characteristics, such as low socioeconomic background, learning difficulties or having English as a second language, may place students at greater risk of lower performance *and* bullying.

The data presented here are drawn from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study PIRLS, which together with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), form the suite of international comparative education studies in which Australian students participate as part of Australia's National Assessment Program. Further information about Australia's participation in TIMSS and PIRLS can be found at www.acer.edu.au/timss or www.acer.edu.au/pirls

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