

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release Thursday 9 December 2004

Australia's students among the world's best in mathematical literacy

Australia's 15-year-old students have a level of mathematical literacy among the best in the world, although there are some areas of concern, a new international study released this week shows.

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003 tested 15-year-old students in 41 countries in mathematical, reading and scientific literacy as well as problem solving. The Australian component of PISA 2003 involved a randomly selected sample of just over 12500 students from 321 schools from all states and territories and school sectors.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) released a national report detailing Australia's results in PISA 2003 this week. ACER led the consortium that conducted PISA internationally and also implemented the assessment within Australia.

The report shows Australia's results were above the OECD average in each of mathematical, scientific and reading literacy as well as in problem solving and in each of four mathematical literacy subscales: quantity, space and shape, change and relationships, and uncertainty.

Four countries (Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands) performed significantly better than Australia in mathematical literacy.

In reading literacy only Finland achieved significantly better results than Australia. Three countries (Finland, Japan and Korea) outperformed Australia in scientific literacy.

ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters said that while the results were largely positive for Australia there are some areas where Australia should aim for improvement.

"Australia's PISA results for mathematical literacy are encouraging. Australia's results are significantly higher than the OECD average and similar to or higher than most other countries with which we would usually compare ourselves.

"However, the low level of performance by Australia's Indigenous students continues to be a concern. While some Indigenous students performed well in PISA mathematical literacy, this was a very small proportion of the overall sample and a much greater proportion was performing at the lower proficiency levels," he said.

No significant gender differences were found overall in mathematical literacy, boys tend to be over-represented in the upper levels of achievement while girls appear to be less engaged, more anxious and less confident in mathematics than boys.

The full international report is available from the OECD website at www.pisa.oecd.org. The Australian report, *Facing the future: A focus on mathematical literacy among Australian 15-year-old students in PISA 2003*, by Sue Thomson, John Cresswell and Lisa de Bortoli is available for download from the ACER website at www.acer.edu.au Print copies can be purchased from ACER Press (phone 03 9835 7447 or email sales@acer.edu.au).

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