

FACT SHEET

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Summary of key findings from PISA 2003

In mathematical literacy

Four countries outperformed Australia in mathematical literacy in PISA 2003 – Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands.

Six per cent of Australia's students achieved the highest mathematical literacy proficiency level (Level 6), which was slightly above the OECD average of four per cent).

Twenty per cent of Australian students were placed at Level 5 or higher in mathematical literacy, just over 40 per cent at Level 4 or higher, and two-thirds at Level 3 or higher. Corresponding figures for the OECD as a whole were 15 per cent at Level 5 or higher, 34 per cent at Level 4 or higher, and 58 per cent at Level 3 or higher.

Fourteen per cent of Australian students did not reach at least Level 2, compared with the OECD average of 21 per cent.

Four per cent of Australia's students were not achieving at the basic PISA proficiency level, Level 1, compared with eight per cent in the OECD as a whole.

In reading literacy

Australia was among the top scoring countries in reading literacy in PISA 2000 and is again one of the top scoring countries in PISA 2003.

The study found that there was an overall decline across the OECD in average scores in reading literacy since the previous cycle of testing in 2000. For Australia, the average score was about the same as it was in 2000.

Australia's average score of 525 in reading literacy was well above the OECD average of 494.

Fifteen per cent of Australian students achieved Reading Proficiency Level 5; 27 per cent were at Level 4; 28 per cent at Level 3; 18 per cent at Level 2 and 8 per cent at Level 1; while 4 per cent of students did not achieve Level 1.

Only one country, Finland, achieved significantly better results than Australia in reading literacy. This is the same result as for PISA 2000.

Fifteen per cent of Australian students were achieving at the highest level of reading literacy, which was significantly higher than the OECD average of eight per cent.

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In scientific literacy

The Australian average score for 2003 in scientific literacy was 525 score points which is about the same as the score of 528 achieved in 2002. Australia is in a group of nine countries, which have results that are similar. The other countries in this group are Hong Kong-China, Liechtenstein, Macao-China, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland.

Three countries achieved better results than Australia in scientific literacy – Finland, Japan and Korea. In PISA 2000, only Korea and Japan outperformed Australia.

In problem solving

Four countries performed significantly better than Australia in problem solving skills – Korea, Hong Kong-China, Finland and Japan.

More than 25 per cent of Australian students were performing at the highest proficiency level.

Results by gender

There was no gender difference in the mean scores for mathematical literacy in Australia and no evidence of a gender gap in Australia for scientific literacy or problem solving. However, the gender difference in favour of females in reading literacy was large and above the OECD average. Males were underrepresented at the higher proficiency levels in reading literacy.

For reading literacy in Australia the gender difference is relatively high at 39 points, which was larger than the OECD average and appears to be broadening.

Results by state

The performance of all the states and territories in mathematical literacy, on average, was at or above the OECD average. Although there were differences in scores between the states and territories in all domains, not many of the apparent differences were statistically significant. However, the ACT was placed highest or equal highest on every achievement chart and the Northern Territory was the lowest.

Socio-economic status

In Australia for PISA 2003 the strength of the relationship between socio-economic background and performance in mathematical literacy was less than for the OECD on average. However, there still exists a distinct advantage for those students with higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Indigenous students

On average, the performance of Indigenous Australians in mathematical literacy was below the OECD average and well below the average scores of non-Indigenous Australians.

Similar results were evident for reading and scientific literacy and for problem solving.

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Media enquiries:

Louise Reynolds –

Corporate Publicity & Communications manager (03) 9277 5582 or 0419 340 058

Email: reynolds@acer.edu.au