

MEDIA RELEASE

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN SCIENCE REMAINS STATIC

Australian students' science literacy levels have remained static since they were last assessed, according to a new report card issued today by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

Data from the National Assessment Program – Science Literacy assessments held in late 2015 show little change in national performance levels in terms of both average student achievement and the proportion of students performing at or above the proficient standard. The proficient standard is set at a challenging level and only just over half (55.1 per cent) of Year 6 students reached or exceeded it.

“The results show there is no statistically significant difference between the 2006 and 2015 results at the national level, or across most Australian states and territories. The exceptions being Tasmania, which is significantly higher than observed in 2009 and Western Australia which has maintained its significant improvement from 2006, and which was first seen in 2012,” said ACARA CEO, Robert Randall.

“The NAP science literacy report gives valuable insight into the level of science knowledge, understandings and skills that Year 6 students have developed. The results from this assessment, along with those from PISA and TIMSS (for which comprehensive reports were released today, following the high-level results late last year) highlight the need for improvements in primary school science teaching.

“That is why this report includes a chapter prepared specifically for teachers and curriculum specialists. It contains suggestions about how to improve science learning in the classroom, using the Australian Curriculum such as sample classroom lessons and activities, and ways of tracking and measuring student achievement against the science learning area.”

Other points from the report:

- Female students performed better than male students nationally. (In 2012, female students had a higher mean than male students, but it was not statistically significant.)
- As seen in previous assessments, Indigenous students had a statistically significant lower mean achievement than non-Indigenous students.
- Students from metropolitan areas have higher mean scores than students in provincial areas, who in turn have higher mean scores than students in remote and very remote areas.

When undertaking the sample assessment, students are surveyed to determine the extent of their interest in science, their engagement in science-related activities and their understanding of how science is relevant in their lives.

The results of the student survey show that the great majority of students (over 80 per cent) appear to be interested in learning new things in science, learning about science and doing science-based activities.

“This is a strong foundation on which to build student awareness of the importance of science in their everyday lives, build confidence, inspire excellence and encourage students to consider rewarding future careers in the field of science,” said Mr Randall.

Background to the National Assessment Program sample assessments

- NAP sample assessments test students’ skills and understanding in: Science, Civics and Citizenship and ICT literacy. NAP sample assessments began in 2003 and are held on a rolling three-yearly basis (i.e. one subject is tested every three years)
- Not every student in Australia is tested (hence the ‘sample’) – for this assessment around 5% of the Australian Year 6 student population is tested - of which student groups are randomly selected.
- Held in October and November 2015, this is the fifth report on Year 6 science literacy. It is the first time that content from the Australian Curriculum: Science has been specifically incorporated into the assessments.
- The 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) national reports were also released today, following the high-level results released at the end of last year.

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