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Education Updates

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Children's Commissioner assesses human rights outcomes for kids

The National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell, has released a children rights scorecard calling on governments to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years. [Click here to read more...](#)

VCE language assessments to be 'made fairer' – Merlino

The Victorian Minister for Education, Mr James Merlino, says that new changes to the way modern languages are assessed will differentiate between students who speak a language as a 'first language' or are learning it as a 'second language'. [Click here to read more...](#)

New app to help students learn Hindi

The Victorian School of Languages has launched a new App for VCE students of Hindi. [Click here to read more...](#)

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Religious hospitals to be protected under religious freedoms legislation

Australian Attorney General Christian Porter says that religious hospitals and aged-care providers will be given protections equivalent to those given to other religious bodies, such as schools, in the government's imminent religious freedom's bill.

[Mr Porter told the National Press Club](#) that many religious hospitals and aged-care providers wanted the same capacity as religious schools to take religion into account in making staffing decisions.

He said that he had consulted with more than 90 stakeholders since introducing the draft bill in August, and it was inevitable people 'disagree on which rights are more important than others and where to draw the lines between them'. In practice, he said, freedoms 'collide with each other rather than neatly contouring into each other'.

He said there was 'always a balance to be struck between anti-discrimination clauses of any type and other rights, including rights to free expression and free association' and that freedom of association provided a 'particular challenge' in the religious context.

Mr Porter gave the example of a religious school, which he said:

may admit students of many faiths or it may prefer students only of its own faith; but that discretion is not viewed by other faiths as discriminatory because they understand and accept its existential importance to all faiths.

He said that the bill would adopt a broad approach informed by an exception in the Victorian legislation, in effect preserving the 'status quo' and allowing religious bodies to 'apply its own determination of the best application of its own doctrines and beliefs' when 'dealing with the exclusivity of its premises or composition or services'.

He stressed that this 'type of exception for religious bodies applies only in respect of decisions on matters of religious doctrine that pertain to people of different religious beliefs'.

Mr Porter said that many religious hospitals and aged-care providers wanted the same capacity as religious schools to take religion into account in staffing decisions and had 'reasonably sought' an exception to the general prohibition on religious discrimination in employment.

ACER questions value of end-of-semester reports

Most end-of-semester school reports reveal little about a student's growth, and are being overtaken by tools that allow continuous reporting, according to a new report from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The report, [Communicating Student Learning Progress: A Review of Student Reporting in Australia](#) by Hilary Hollingsworth, Jonathan Heard and Paul Weldon, considers the effectiveness of the various ways of communicating how student learning is progressing. It examines the quality of the information they provide and if they are valued by students and parents.

Dr Hollingsworth said that despite the '[Gonski 2' report's](#) emphasis on communicating learning growth as well as general achievement, most schools only reported student achievement.

'This singular focus on grades and scores can leave parents with little insight into their child's learning growth and can be demotivating for students', he said.

Dr Hollingsworth said that parents and students told ACER that they wanted school reports to 'explain what the student has, and has not yet, been able to demonstrate, and indicate more specifically what they need to do next to progress in a learning area'.

She said that by the time parents received end-of-semester reports, it was too late to act on them. Online tools, she said, give teachers the ability to continuously report on student achievement, and parents information 'closer to the point of assessment'.

– End-of-year reports are 'old school'. Michael Fowler, *The Age*, 19 November 2019

Schools have the resources they need, say parents

Most parents feel that their child's school has the resources it needs to meet the needs of its students, according to a policy paper from the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS).

The paper, [What do parents want from schools?](#), by CIS research fellow Glenn Fahey, is based on a cross-sectoral survey of more than a thousand parents with school-aged children. It finds that most of them (88 per cent) think their child's school is at least adequately resourced. This includes parents of children in government schools, where 86 per cent responded that their child's school had the resources it needed.

The report also finds that:

- the most common funding priorities for parents are infrastructure and facilities (29 per cent), and increasing extra-curricular activities (24 per cent)
- the most common priorities for parents when choosing a school were location (61 per cent) and facilities (48 per cent)
- parents most commonly rely on their family and friends for advice when choosing a school (53 per cent), followed by their visits to schools.

This has policy implications for government, writes Mr Fahey.

He says that arguments for increased school funding do not reflect the 'priorities of parents – or, by extension, voters and taxpayers' and that there should be 'less focus on how much school funding is spent, and more attention paid to how it is spent'.

He says that school funding could focus more on ensuring schools have the best facilities instead of being linked to staffing numbers and pay.

He also recommends that state and territory governments consider removing 'restrictive' school zone regulations.

- Most parents happy with school funding. Robert Bolton, *Australian Financial Review*, 20 November 2019
- School's out says survey of parents' choice. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 20 November 2019

Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14, says children's commissioner

The National Children's Commissioner, [Megan Mitchell, has released](#) a children's rights scorecard, calling on governments to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years.

The current age of criminal responsibility in Australia is 10, meaning that children below this age would be deemed incapable of having committed a criminal offence. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended all countries lift the minimum age to 14.

Ms Mitchell says that [her children's rights scorecard](#) makes it clear that there is no good rationale for detaining children under the age of 14, in any form of detention.

She said 'placing children behind bars amounts to taking away their childhood and disrupting their healthy development. It makes them more likely to go on and reoffend'.

The scorecard also addresses the impact of climate change on children's rights, their mental health, standards of living, and the rights of children in immigration detention.

VCE language assessments to be 'made fairer' – Merlino

The Victorian Minister for Education, Mr James Merlino, says that new changes to how modern languages are assessed will differentiate between students who speak a language as a 'first language' or are learning it as a 'second language'.

As is already the case with some languages, such as VCE Japanese, Vietnamese and Indonesian, both groups of students will follow the same curriculum and sit the same examinations. They will only be assessed differently.

VCE first language studies are for students who have resided in (or have had significant experience with) the language of a country where it is the main language of communication. Students with less than seven years of education at a school where it is the main language are considered second language students.

The changes will be introduced in 2021 for the study of VCE Unit 3 and 4 languages.

Mr Merlino said the changes would 'make it fairer for all VCE Language students'.

– VCE change a bid to halt language slump. Adam Carey, *The Age*, 21 November 2019

New app to help students learn Hindi

The [Victorian School of Languages has launched](#) a new app for VCE students of Hindi.

The app aims to provide students with a flexible option for learning Hindi, with voice recordings, interactive tasks and other materials. Students will be able practice their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills on their own.

Victorian Education Minister James Merlino said that the Victorian Government wanted more Victoria students to study Indian languages.