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Education Updates

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NGS Super National Virtual Debating 2020

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Maths in PISA slide

The Victorian Minister for Education, Mr James Merlino, has called for an immediate review of the national maths curriculum after the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data showed that Australia's mathematics achievement is only slightly better than the average of other developed countries.

PISA assesses the skills of 15-year-old students in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries every three years – in reading (since 2000) maths (since 2003) and science (since 2006). There has been a decline in Australia's mean scores in each domain since testing began.

The latest report, [PISA 2018: Australian students' performance](#), shows this trend has continued for mathematics and science since 2015. Reading performance has remained steady since then.

The Australian Council for Educational Research ([ACER](#)), which manages PISA in Australia, says the average achievement of a 15-year-old in 2018 is equivalent to:

... almost one year of schooling behind in reading compared to an Australian 15-year-old in 2000; more than one full year of schooling behind in maths compared to in 2003; and almost one full year of schooling behind in science compared to in 2006.

Levels of student achievement have not been consistent across the nation.

Victorian students perform higher than the OECD average in reading and science, and have not seen a decline in average achievement in either domain since testing started. Their mathematics performance, however, is only slightly better than OECD average, and in line with student performance in the rest of the country, has declined since 2003.

[Mr Merlino lauded the reading achievement of Victorian students](#), but said a review of the national mathematics curriculum was 'urgently needed to make sure it is relevant and engaging for students and to reverse the long-term decline'.

He said that if this could not be agreed to, Victoria would undertake its own review, to address issues such as the over-reliance on out-of-field educators teaching the subject.

'There's clearly more work to do in mathematics', he said.

Australian Minister for Education [Dan Tehan said](#) the results, especially in mathematics and science, 'should have alarm bells ringing'.

He called on the states and territories to go back to literacy and numeracy basics, saying the December meeting of the Education Council 'provides the opportunity to reset the national education agenda and we must be bold in doing so'.

He said school funding was not a factor in the poor performance, as the government was 'providing record funding of \$310.3 billion to schools'. He noted that Estonia, 'the top-performing country in reading and science', spends 'half as much money per student as Australia'.

Australian Shadow Education Minister, [Ms Tanya Plibersek, said](#) the states and territories weren't to blame for the poor results. She said:

This is a national problem, it is happening in every state and territory, it is happening in every school system. This national problem needs a national solution and it needs national leadership, and a minister that will actually take some responsibility for these appalling results.

- How did system get this so wrong? Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 4 December 2019
- Schools fail on maths, science. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 4 December 2019
- Maths collapse leads test results dive. Adam Carey, Fergus Hunter, *The Age*, 4 December 2019
- Lack of deep thinking is failing school students. Geoff Masters, *The Age*, 4 December 2019
- Education just isn't adding up. Clare Masters. *Herald Sun*, 4 December 2019

- Maths, science students fall years behind Asia. Robert Bolton, *Australian Financial Review*, 4 December 2019
- Truly clever country shouldn't get short-changed on schooling. Glenn Fahey, *Australian Financial Review*, 4 December 2019

Review suggests limiting access to NAPLAN data

[An interim report](#) by a review of NAPLAN commissioned by the Victorian, New South Wales and Queensland governments has raised the possibility of restricting publication of individual school test results.

The results are currently published on the My School website. But the review says a potential change to NAPLAN would limit the availability of the data to prevent it being used 'to make unfair comparisons' between schools, regardless of differences in their students' backgrounds.

The review was initiated by New South Wales Education Minister for Education Sarah Mitchell in June to determine the objectives for standardised testing and suggest improvements. Victorian and Queensland joined the review after the three states failed to support a national inquiry.

The expert panel conducting the review – Emeritus Professor Barry McGaw, Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon, and Professor Claire Wyatt Smith – will present a final report in June next year.

Among other suggestions, the interim report raises concerns about the timing of the tests, as the delay between students sitting the test and receiving the results gives schools limited opportunity to use the results to improve student outcomes.

One potential change would be moving the tests from May to earlier in the year, so results can be better used by teachers.

It also suggests changing the school years that tests are administered – currently years 3, 5, 7 and 9 – to years 3 and 7, or years 4 and 8, and reviewing test content, particularly the writing assessment.

Commenting on the interim report, Victorian Education Minister [James Merlino said](#): 'The status quo is not an option for NAPLAN and we are prepared to make whatever changes are needed'.

'We will always need some form of standardised test – but what I have heard very clearly when I visit schools is that NAPLAN has lost the support of much of the teaching workforce and that simply isn't good enough.'

- Push to cut exam schedule. Adam Carey and Jordan Baker, *The Age*, 6 December 2019
- Push to keep NAPLAN results from public. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 6 December 2019.

ISV report focusses on challenges facing schools, teachers and students

A detailed discussion paper produced by Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) highlights challenges facing schools as a result of rapid economic, political, social and technological trends that are affecting demand for future skills.

The report, [Navigating the Future of Education: Schools, Skills and the Challenge of Change](#), aims to stimulate discussion among educators and the wider community.

It draws on the research, experiences and predictions of wide range of experts, including educators who are already adapting to the dramatic developments outlined in the paper.

Among the forces influencing education, it highlights changes in the way students think and learn; the impact of global change; the need to build students' resilience; and the impact of technological advances on teaching and future workplace skills.

'ISV's aim in preparing this document is to encourage all those with an interest in education as they navigate in a shifting landscape,' [ISV Chief Executive Michelle Green said](#).

'We hope it adds to the discussion that's already engaging educators and the wider community, so we can not only identify the challenges that change creates – but act on the positive opportunities these challenges provide.'

Education to be included with skills and small business in new department

Prime Minister [Scott Morrison has announced](#) the creation of a new Commonwealth department that brings together the current departments of Education, Employment Skills, and Small and Family Business.

Mr Morrison said the new Department of Education, Skills and Employment would provide Australians with continuity 'from the day you walk into school to the day you walk into a job and beyond'.

He said he wanted the department to focus on the 'continuity of policy and service delivery and engagement with the states'.

He said:

Education doesn't start and stop when you leave school. It goes on over your entire life. Learning happens in the workplace. Skills development happens in the school. It happens at university, at TAFE and vocational training. It's a lifelong activity. Well into senior years.

The consolidation is part of a broader restructure that will see number of government departments reduced from 18 to 14, from February 2020.

Mr Morrison said the restructure would let the government 'bust bureaucratic congestion, improve decision making, and ultimately deliver better services'.

Australian Greens Education Spokesperson, [Dr Mehreen Faruqi, said](#) merging the Department of Education with Skills and Employment was 'a huge mistake' that highlighted the government's 'narrow, neoliberal idea of education'.

She said education was a public good, 'essential to building a socially and economically just society, not just an avenue to employment or profit', that 'demands a standalone focus'.

Advertising campaign calls on VCE graduates to consider teaching

The Victorian Government [has launched an advertising campaign](#) encouraging young people, especially school leavers, to consider a career in teaching.

Victorian Education Minister James Merlino said an estimated 115,000 students would join the education system over the next five years and the campaign would help ensure there were enough teachers to meet the demand.

The advertisements encourage school leavers to put teaching first in their university course preferences, or consider it as an alternative when they get their results next week.

For more information about the campaign, visit the [teach the future website](#).

NGS Super National Virtual Debating 2020

NGS Super is inviting schools to apply for a nationwide online debating competition.

The [2020 NGS Super National Virtual Debating Competition](#) connects regional and metropolitan schools across the country in online debates via video conferencing. In 2019, more than 400 students across the country debated about mobile phones at school, climate action paralysis, parent access to social media, consumerism and waste, fashion and child labour.

All schools are eligible to participate in the competition, in the following divisions:

- Primary School (years 5 and 6)
- Junior School (years 7 and 8)
- Middle School (years 9 and 10)
- Senior School (Open).