

2001

National Report on Schooling in Australia

Preliminary Paper

National Benchmark Results
Reading, Writing and Numeracy
Year 7



2001 year 7 national benchmark results

Reading, Writing and Numeracy

In March 1997, all State, Territory and Commonwealth education ministers agreed on the national goal:

that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

To provide focus to this goal, ministers also agreed to a sub-goal:

that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years.

To help support the achievement of these goals ministers agreed to the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, the essential features of which are:

- early assessment and intervention for students at risk of not achieving minimum required standards
- development of national benchmarks for each of years 3, 5 and 7
- assessment of student progress against these benchmarks
- national reporting of benchmark data
- professional development for teachers.

Education authorities in all States and Territories, assisted by the Commonwealth, have been engaged in implementing these elements of the plan since its formulation. This section concerns the national reporting of Year 7 benchmark data for 2001 and follows on from earlier editions of the National Report which published data for 1999, 2000 and 2001.

The publications reflect the continuing development of the benchmark reporting process. For 1999, data was available only for reading in each of years 3 and 5. For 2000, as well as results for years 3 and 5 reading, data was published on numeracy in each of years 3 and 5. The 2001 report presented data in all of these areas and included benchmark results for writing in each of years 3 and 5. As data for writing had not previously been published, results from 1999 and 2000 were also presented. This edition now adds the 2001 year 7 data in all three areas.

Measurement difficulties have precluded the presentation of spelling data to date.

As part of their commitment to producing nationally comparable data against literacy and numeracy benchmarks, ministers requested further developmental work in the following areas:

- a common equating method to be used by all jurisdictions
- nationally consistent criteria for defining exempt students and an agreed method for collecting information on exemptions and absent students
- a common standardised process for calculating and reporting the accuracy of the student achievement data against the national benchmarks.

This work was not completed in time for the publication of these 2001 benchmark results.

Student achievement against the benchmarks

This section of the report describes the results of testing conducted during 2001 in which the achievement of students in year 7 was measured against the national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy. The results build on those published previously.

Benchmarks

The benchmarks that underpin the reporting of student achievement describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for aspects of literacy and numeracy at particular year levels. That is, they represent minimum standards of performance below which students will have difficulty progressing satisfactorily at school.

The benchmarks have been developed with reference to current levels of achievement demonstrated in national surveys and State and Territory assessment programs. There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders and with experts in

the areas of literacy, numeracy and educational measurement. As well, the benchmarks have been trialed in classrooms in all States and Territories.

Education ministers meeting as MCEETYA determined that the national goal should be for all students to achieve at least the benchmark level of performance as they represent minimum acceptable standards. Regular publication of benchmark results enables monitoring of progress towards the attainment of that goal.

The standards described by the benchmarks for years 3, 5 and 7 demand increasing levels of proficiency against which students' progress through school can be measured and followed. The benchmarks form three important markers along a continuum of increasing competence. The least demanding year 3 benchmark is located in the early part of the achievement continuum, while the years 5 and 7 benchmarks, demanding increasing understandings and skills, are at progressive levels. Students' locations on the achievement continuum are estimated through assessment processes undertaken by the States and Territories.

Full details of all of the benchmarks are available online. Literacy is at <http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/litbench/intro.asp> and numeracy at <http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/numbench/index.htm>. A print publication of the details can be obtained from Curriculum Corporation, PO Box 177, Carlton South, Victoria, 3053, Australia. Telephone: +61 3 9207 6000. Facsimile: 1300 780 545 (within Australia) and +61 3 9639 1616 (outside Australia). Email: sales@curriculum.edu.au. The Curriculum Corporation website is at: <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/>.

The assessment process

All States and Territories have their own literacy and numeracy monitoring programs. These programs are well established, understood and valued within their educational communities who are keen to retain them. As well, they allow States and Territories to report, publicly and to parents, on the range of performance demonstrated by learners, including benchmark performance. Ministers have therefore agreed that assessment against the national benchmarks

should occur using the existing State and Territory-based programs.

A nationally agreed procedure was designed to equate State and Territory tests and to provide comparable reporting of student achievement data against the benchmarks. The committee that developed the procedure included several of Australia's leading educational measurement experts.

At each of years 3, 5 and 7, equating the State and Territory tests is a three-stage process. The first stage involves the construction of common achievement scales for each of reading, writing, and numeracy. During the second stage the location of the benchmark on the common achievement scale is determined and, in the final stage, the equivalent benchmark locations on State and Territory achievement scales are calculated.

The common achievement scales are constructed through testing students from a representative sample of schools in each State and Territory using the assessments of other States and Territories.

To establish the location of the benchmark at each year level, expert judges must envisage a student who is just able to demonstrate the skills described in the benchmark, and to estimate the probability of this minimally competent student succeeding on each test item. Judges used in the benchmarking were from all States and Territories and included a range of literacy specialists and classroom teachers qualified to make decisions about the likelihood of students succeeding on the test items.

In the final phase of equating, an equivalent benchmark location is calculated for each jurisdiction's test. Individual jurisdictions are responsible for equating benchmark locations to any new tests they use. Any imprecision in this process is not reflected in the confidence interval of the published estimates.

All these aspects of the process contribute to enhancing comparability of the separate State and Territory tests and to ensuring that differences between States and Territories' results are due to factors other than the tests. Consideration is being given to re-equating some tests.

Making comparisons

Tables A7 to A9 identify apparent differences in relation to the proportion of students achieving the benchmark in States and Territories, but caution needs to be applied when considering these differences. The assessment and equating processes are designed to make the various results comparable between jurisdictions, but there have been large variations in results for some jurisdictions over the four years in which benchmarks have been reported.

The variations in results will be examined by responsible authorities to inform further improvement of benchmarking processes. Relevant issues include major differences between jurisdictions in school starting age, grade structures, and other arrangements that result in variations in the time students would have spent in relevant schooling prior to testing. As well, there are differences between States and Territories in relation to factors known to influence measured literacy and numeracy achievement. For example, it is known that achievement in literacy and numeracy is strongly correlated with the socioeconomic circumstances of students. As well, students who do not usually speak English, or who have just begun to speak English, would be expected to be at some disadvantage during assessment of aspects of English literacy. There are variations in the proportions of such students between States and Territories, and also in the policies regarding their inclusion in the testing programs.

Table B1 identifies important variations in the proportions of government and non-government school students participating in testing. (See Table B1 and the accompanying text.)

It should be noted that absent or withdrawn students are not included in the benchmark calculations. Variation between jurisdictions in the proportion of students absent or withdrawn from testing was reduced between 2000 and 2001, and further effort in this direction is actively contemplated (see Table C1).

Work is to be undertaken by States and Territories to maximise student participation in the tests.

The publication of confidence intervals with the benchmark results reflects the uncertainty associated with the measurement of student achievement and provides a way of making improved inferences about the achievement of students. The tables reporting benchmark achievement percentages include 95 per cent confidence intervals. These confidence intervals account for three components of uncertainty: error associated with the location of the benchmark cut-score, sampling error and measurement error. Error associated with the location of the benchmark cut-score is, by far, the largest component.

As mentioned previously, each State and Territory is responsible for equating the appropriate benchmark location onto any new tests they use. A relatively small component of error, known as 'equating error', potentially results. This error source is not currently reflected in the published confidence intervals. Statistical tests of significance that can further assist readers to make comparisons about students' achievements are being considered and, in the interim, readers are urged to be cautious when comparing results.

The results

The data in the following tables are the proportions of the students participating in the State or Territory testing who have achieved or bettered the benchmark. The results reported are for assessed students. This includes students who sat the test and students who were formally exempted. Because exempted students are reported as falling below the benchmark they are included in the benchmark calculation. Students not included in the benchmark calculation are those who were absent or withdrawn by parents/care-givers from the testing, or attending a school not participating in the testing. The explanatory notes provide further details on State and Territory student exemption criteria.

Table A1 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the reading benchmark, by State and Territory, 2001

State/Territory 1 Average age ^(a) 2 Years of Schooling ^(b)	All students	Male students	Female students	Indigenous ^(c) students	LBOTE ^(c) students
New South Wales 1. 12yrs 4mths 2. 7yrs 2mths	88.0 ± 0.9	85.1 ± 1.1	91.0 ± 0.8	65.6 ± 2.3	86.4 ± 1.1
Victoria^(d) 1. 12yrs 11mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	91.5 ± 0.5	89.6 ± 0.7	93.6 ± 0.6	73.5 ± 5.1	88.2 ± 1.3
Queensland 1. 12yrs 3mths 2. 6yrs 8mths	87.5 ± 0.9	85.8 ± 1.1	89.8 ± 0.8	59.3 ± 2.7	81.3 ± 1.7
South Australia^(e)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Western Australia 1. 12yrs 2mths 2. 6yrs 7mths	89.2 ± 1.1	86.5 ± 1.5	92.0 ± 1.0	54.3 ± 3.6	83.2 ± 1.9
Tasmania 1. 13yrs 0mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	87.5 ± 1.1	84.4 ± 1.5	90.7 ± 1.2	72.9 ± 4.5	82.1 ± 4.7
Northern Territory 1. 12yrs 8mths 2. 7yrs 3mths	69.6 ± 4.3	66.8 ± 4.6	72.6 ± 5.3	29.6 ± 5.6	32.4 ± 6.2
Australian Capital Territory 1. 12yrs 10mths 2. 7yrs 6mths	92.4 ± 1.4	91.6 ± 1.7	93.3 ± 1.6	71.5 ± 14.9	83.2 ± 4.0
Australia^(f)	88.4 ± 0.9	86.0 ± 1.2	91.0 ± 0.9	60.1 ± 3.1	84.8 ± 1.4

Notes:

- The achievement percentages reported in this table include 95% confidence intervals, for example, 80% ± 2.7%.
 - Students who were absent or withdrawn from testing are not classified as assessed students and are not included in the benchmark calculations. The proportion of absent and withdrawn students varies considerably across jurisdictions as shown in Table C1. Hence, readers are urged to be cautious when comparing results.
 - Some of the movements in the results over time may have occurred because of State/Territory equating processes, and may not reflect actual improvements in student performance.
- (a) The typical average age of students at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (b) The typical average time students had spent in schooling at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (c) The methods used to identify Indigenous students and students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) varied between jurisdictions, as outlined in the explanatory notes.
- (d) In 2001, Victoria assessed a sample of students based on voluntary participation. Data on exempt students was not available. Any comparisons should be done so with these factors in mind.
- (e) The year 7 benchmark data for South Australia for 2001 is not available because not all government and non-government students participated in a year 7 test.
- (f) Does not include data from South Australia.

Table A2 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the writing benchmark, by State and Territory, 2001

State/Territory 1. Average age ^(a) 2. Years of Schooling ^(b)	All students	Male students	Female students	Indigenous ^(c) students	LBOTE ^(c) students
New South Wales 1. 12yrs 4mths 2. 7yrs 2mths	92.5 ± 1.9	89.5 ± 2.8	95.4 ± 1.5	77.5 ± 5.2	90.8 ± 2.6
Victoria^(d) 1. 12yrs 11mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	97.8 ± 0.7	96.4 ± 1.2	99.2 ± 0.4	92.7 ± 3.5	97.4 ± 0.9
Queensland 1. 12yrs 3mths 2. 6yrs 8mths	94.1 ± 1.2	91.9 ± 1.9	96.7 ± 0.8	83.0 ± 3.2	91.7 ± 1.6
South Australia^(e)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Western Australia 1. 12yrs 2mths 2. 6yrs 7mths	87.6 ± 1.6	83.1 ± 2.2	92.2 ± 1.3	57.5 ± 4.3	84.8 ± 2.0
Tasmania 1. 13yrs 0mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	85.9 ± 3.1	80.3 ± 4.3	91.6 ± 2.6	75.4 ± 6.3	84.1 ± 5.8
Northern Territory 1. 12yrs 8mths 2. 7yrs 3mths	75.1 ± 0.1	71.3 ± 2.3	79.0 ± 4.5	36.0 ± 6.8	37.0 ± 6.8
Australian Capital Territory^(f) 1. 12yrs 10mths 2. 7yrs 6mths	90.8 ± 2.0	86.8 ± 2.8	95.4 ± 1.6	79.2 ± 12.9	81.8 ± 4.4
Australia^(g)	92.6 ± 1.5	89.8 ± 2.3	95.6 ± 1.2	74.3 ± 4.6	90.4 ± 2.3

Notes:

- The achievement percentages reported in this table include 95% confidence intervals, for example, 80% ± 2.7%.
 - Students who were absent or withdrawn from testing are not classified as assessed students and are not included in the benchmark calculations. The proportion of absent and withdrawn students varies considerably across jurisdictions as shown in Table C1. Hence, readers are urged to be cautious when comparing results.
 - Some of the movements in the results over time may have occurred because of State/Territory equating processes, and may not reflect actual improvements in student performance.
- (a) The typical average age of students at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (b) The typical average time students had spent in schooling at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (c) The methods used to identify Indigenous students and students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) varied between jurisdictions as outlined in the explanatory notes.
- (d) In 2001, Victoria assessed a sample of students based on voluntary participation. Data on exempt students was not available. Any comparisons should be done so with these factors in mind.
- (e) The year 7 benchmark data for South Australia for 2001 is not available because not all government and non-government students participated in a year 7 test.
- (f) ACT writing data should be interpreted with some caution as a criterion-referenced assessment process was not used. This will be changed from 2003.
- (g) Does not include data from South Australia.

Table A3 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the numeracy benchmark, by State and Territory, 2001

State/Territory 1 Average age ^(a) 2 Years of Schooling ^(b)	All students	Male students	Female students	Indigenous ^(c) students	LBOTE ^(c) students
New South Wales^(d) 1. 12yrs 6mths 2. 7yrs 4mths	79.2 ± 1.0	77.9 ± 1.1	80.3 ± 1.1	47.8 ± 2.2	77.7 ± 1.2
Victoria^(e) 1. 12yrs 11mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	85.8 ± 0.8	86.0 ± 0.9	85.6 ± 1.0	65.6 ± 6.1	82.8 ± 1.4
Queensland 1. 12yrs 3mths 2. 6yrs 8mths	83.8 ± 0.5	84.3 ± 0.6	83.8 ± 0.7	52.3 ± 2.0	80.0 ± 1.5
South Australia^(f)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Western Australia 1. 12yrs 2mths 2. 6yrs 7mths	84.1 ± 0.8	84.2 ± 0.9	84.2 ± 0.9	47.7 ± 2.9	78.6 ± 1.5
Tasmania 1. 13yrs 0mths 2. 7yrs 7mths	79.7 ± 1.3	79.2 ± 1.7	80.3 ± 1.7	63.2 ± 5.0	78.4 ± 5.0
Northern Territory 1. 12yrs 8mths 2. 7yrs 3mths	65.2 ± 4.1	63.9 ± 4.4	66.6 ± 4.9	23.0 ± 5.4	26.2 ± 6.0
Australian Capital Territory 1. 12yrs 10mths 2. 7yrs 6mths	88.3 ± 1.3	88.4 ± 1.5	88.2 ± 1.7	62.6 ± 15.4	79.2 ± 5.0
Australia^(g)	82.0 ± 0.9	81.7 ± 1.0	81.9 ± 1.1	48.6 ± 2.8	77.8 ± 1.4

Notes:

- The achievement percentages reported in this table include 95% confidence intervals, for example, 80% ± 2.7%.
 - Students who were absent or withdrawn from testing are not classified as assessed students and are not included in the benchmark calculations. The proportion of absent and withdrawn students varies considerably across jurisdictions as shown in Table C3. Hence, readers are urged to be cautious when comparing results. results.
 - Some of the movements in the results over time may have occurred because of State/Territory equating processes, and may not reflect actual improvements in student performance.
- (a) The typical average age of students at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (b) The typical average time students had spent in schooling at the time of testing, expressed in years and months.
- (c) The methods used to identify Indigenous students and students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) varied between jurisdictions, as outlined in the explanatory notes.
- (d) New South Wales considers that the year 7 results for New South Wales are anomalous. The national numeracy benchmark results show that:
- (i) a lower proportion of New South Wales year 7 students are meeting the minimum numeracy benchmark than are meeting the reading and writing benchmarks
 - (ii) a lower proportion of students are meeting the numeracy benchmark in year 7 than in year 3 and year 5.
- National benchmarks represent the minimum standard of performance a student must achieve to be able to progress through his/her schooling. The national benchmark results show that New South Wales students in years 3 and 5 are consistently performing at or above the national average for reading, writing and numeracy. The New South Wales results for year 7 reading and writing are also fairly consistent with the national average.
- (e) In 2001, Victoria assessed a sample of students based on voluntary participation. Data on exempt students was not available. Any comparisons should be done so with these factors in mind.
- (f) The year 7 benchmark data for South Australia for 2001 is not available because not all government and non-government students participated in a year 7 test.
- (g) Does not include data from South Australia.

Figure A1 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the reading benchmark, by sub-group, Australia, 2001

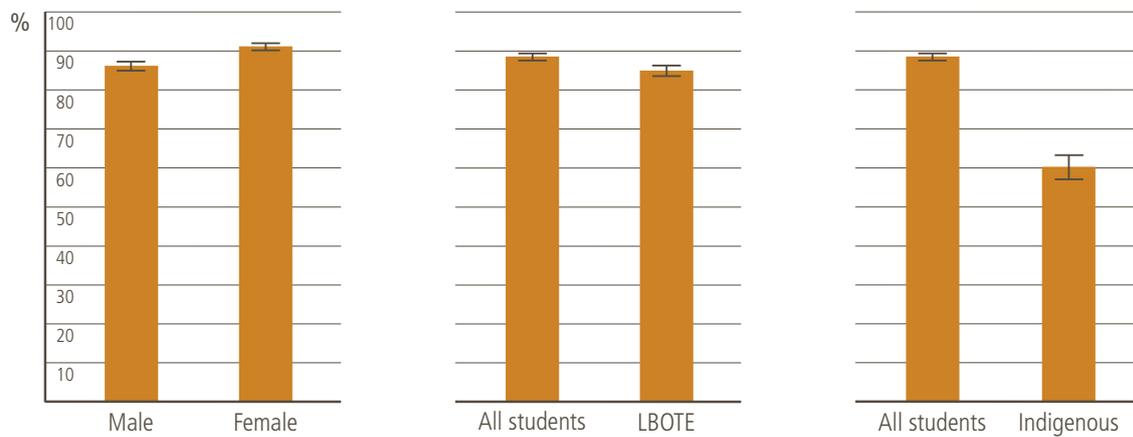


Figure A2 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the writing benchmark, by sub-group, Australia, 2001

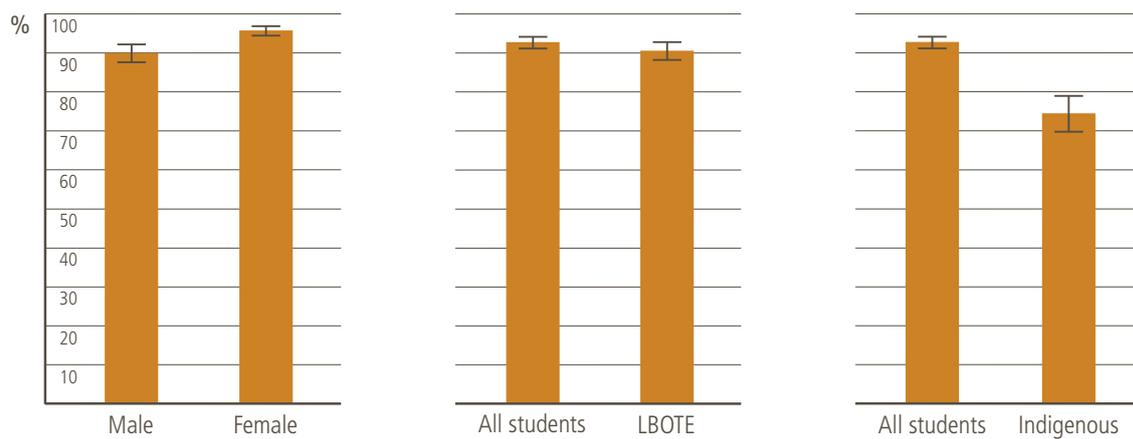
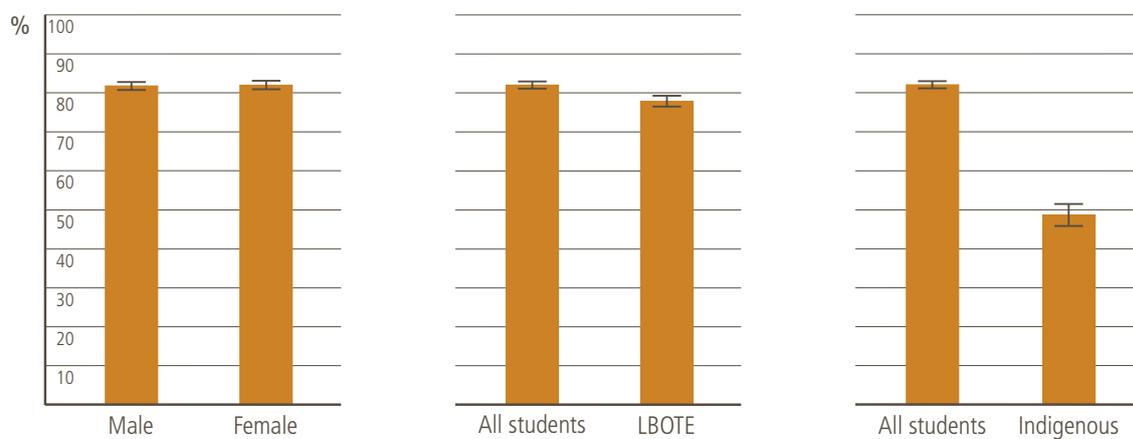


Figure A3 Percentage of year 7 students achieving the numeracy benchmark, by sub-group, Australia, 2001



Participation in assessment

Table B1 Year 7 participation in assessment by school sector, by State and Territory, 2001

State or Territory	Percentage of assessed government school students ^(a)			Percentage of assessed non-government school students ^(b)			Proportion of assessed students (per cent)					
							Government school students ^(c)			Non-government school students ^(d)		
	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.
New South Wales	95.3	95.3	93.4	75.9	75.9	73.3	68.8	68.8	69.1	31.2	31.2	30.9
Victoria ^(e)	44.6	43.2	42.7	46.1	45.2	44.5	60.3	60.0	60.1	39.7	40.0	39.9
Queensland	96.9	96.6	97.5	96.5	96.3	97.1	74.3	74.3	74.3	25.7	25.7	25.7
South Australia ^(f)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Western Australia	91.8	91.7	92.2	94.7	96.8	95.2	72.7	72.9	72.7	27.3	27.1	27.3
Tasmania	91.6	89.9	91.9	93.3	93.6	93.0	70.4	69.9	70.5	29.6	30.1	29.5
Northern Territory ^(g)	89.8	84.0	90.3	99.8	94.9	101.1	74.6	74.3	74.5	25.4	25.7	25.5
Australian Capital Territory ^(h)	93.7	93.8	94.1	52.7	53.5	53.6	66.5	66.2	66.3	33.5	33.8	33.7
Australia ⁽ⁱ⁾	82.9	82.4	82.0	71.9	71.7	70.5	69.6	69.5	69.7	30.4	30.5	30.3

- (a) The percentage of assessed students from government schools includes exempted students, but not students withdrawn by parents/care-givers from the testing and not students attending schools that did not participate in testing at all. The figure is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time government students based on *National Schools Statistics Collection* data.
- (b) The percentage of assessed students from non-government schools includes exempted students, but not students absent or withdrawn by parents/care-givers and not students attending schools which did not participate in testing at all. The figure is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time non-government students based on *National Schools Statistics Collection* data.
- (c) The percentage of assessed government school students compared with all assessed students.
- (d) The percentage of assessed non-government school students compared with all assessed students.
- (e) In 2001, Victoria assessed a sample of students based on voluntary participation. Data on exempt students was not available. Any comparisons should be done so with these factors in mind.
- (f) The year 7 benchmark data for South Australia for 2001 is not available because not all government and non-government students participated in a year 7 test.
- (g) Record supplied by testing organisation indicated a different number of students enrolled in schools to that published in the *National Schools Statistic Collection* (NSSC) tables. When student enrolment is transitory it is possible for the participation rate which is calculated from the NSSC to be greater than 100.
- (h) In 2001, the participation of non-government students in the ACT was voluntary.
- (i) Does not include data from South Australia.

Table C1 Year 7 exemptions, absences and participation, by State and Territory, 2001

State or Territory	Percentage of students exempted from testing ^(a)			Percentage of students absent or withdrawn ^(b)			Percentage of students assessed								
							All students			Indigenous students ^(c)			LBOTE students ^(d)		
	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.	Read.	Wrtg	Num.
New South Wales	0.6	0.6	0.7	11.7	11.7	13.9	88.3	88.3	86.1	4.3	4.3	3.9	23.8	23.8	22.9
Victoria ^(e)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	54.8	56.0	56.6	45.2	44.0	43.4	0.6	0.6	0.6	8.4	8.2	8.1
Queensland	1.2	1.2	1.2	2.6	2.8	2.1	96.8	96.6	97.4	5.4	5.4	5.5	6.0	6.0	6.1
South Australia ^(f)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Western Australia	0.8	1.5	0.8	7.4	7.0	7.0	92.6	93.4	93.0	4.6	4.5	4.8	12.5	12.5	12.6
Tasmania	0.7	0.7	0.7	7.9	9.0	7.8	92.1	91.0	92.2	5.8	5.6	5.7	3.8	3.8	3.8
Northern Territory ^(g)	0.9	1.0	0.5	9.5	11.9	9.2	92.1	86.5	92.8	27.1	23.0	27.7	24.2	20.4	24.8
Australian Capital Territory ^(h)	1.1	1.1	1.1	4.7	4.4	4.1	74.4	74.8	75.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	3.9	3.9	3.9
Australia	0.6	0.7	0.6	20.3	20.7	21.3	79.2	78.8	78.2	2.3	3.7	3.7	5.3	13.7	13.5

- (a) The percentage of students who were exempted from the testing program in the relevant State or Territory. Exempted students are reported as not achieving the benchmark. The percentage of exempted students is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time government students based on *National Schools Statistics Collection* data, together with the non-government students who participated in the relevant State and Territory testing programs.
- (b) The percentage of students who were absent or were withdrawn by parents/care-givers from the testing program in the relevant State or Territory. These students are not included in the benchmark calculations. The percentage of absent/withdrawn students is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time government students based on *National Schools Statistics Collection* data, together with non-government students who participated in the relevant State and Territory testing programs.
- (c) The percentage of assessed Indigenous students. The percentage of Indigenous students includes exempted students and is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time government students based on figures for the *National Schools Statistics Collection* and non-government students who participated in the relevant testing programs. The specific ways in which Indigenous student information was collected and/or categorised were characterised by a degree of variation across the jurisdictions.
- (d) The percentage of assessed students with a language background other than English (LBOTE). The percentage of LBOTE students includes exempted students and is calculated as a percentage of the total number of full-time government students based on figures for the *National Schools Statistics Collection* and non-government students who participated in the relevant State or Territory testing programs. The specific ways in which LBOTE information was collected and/or categorised were characterised by a degree of variation across the jurisdictions.
- (e) In 2001, Victoria assessed a sample of students based on voluntary participation. Data on exempt students was not available. Any comparisons should be done so with these factors in mind.
- (f) The year 7 benchmark data for South Australia for 2001 is not available because not all government and non-government students participated in a year 7 test.
- (g) *National Schools Statistics Collection* figures have been used for the total number of students in calculation of the participation rates. However, in the NT, students are tested at years 3, 5 and 7 in Urban schools. In Remote schools, students are tested at ages 8, 10 and 12, rather than at year level. This may result in percentages for NT not adding to 100.
- (h) In 2001, the participation of non-government students in the ACT was voluntary.

Analysis of 2001 results

Tables A1 to A3 show that the majority of year 7 students are achieving at the benchmark level or better in reading, writing and numeracy in all States and Territories.

In reading and writing the proportion of female students achieving at the benchmark level or better is significantly higher than for male students in most jurisdictions and across Australia as a whole. This performance difference is not apparent in numeracy.

In most States and Territories and in Australia, year 7 students with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) are achieving the reading and numeracy benchmarks at statistically significant lower rates than for students as a whole. In writing, there is no significant difference in most jurisdictions between achievement of LBOTE and all students.

Inspection of the three tables shows that around one in eight year 7 students in reading and one in fourteen in writing are achieving below the benchmark level. In numeracy, around one in six year 7 students are not reaching the benchmark level. The proportion of Indigenous year 7 students achieving at or above the benchmark level is significantly below the proportions for non-Indigenous students, as for years 3 and 5.

Tables B1 and C1 provide details, by State and Territory, of student participation in the assessment processes and the proportions of students from government and non-government schools. The tables also provide information on the proportions of students exempted from testing (and therefore counted as not having achieved benchmark level), the proportions of students absent or withdrawn from testing, and the proportions of Indigenous and LBOTE students involved in the processes. This information helps explain the reported performance levels for States, Territories and Australia as a whole.

Rates of participation in the testing program are lower for year 7 than for years 3 and 5. The Australian average in 2001 is around 82 per cent for government schools and 71 per cent for

non-government schools in each of the three reported learning areas. Because participation in testing is voluntary in Victoria, the level of participation there was considerably lower than in other States and Territories, around 43 per cent for government schools and 45 per cent for non-government schools. For administration reasons, South Australia was unable to participate in the 2001 program at year 7 level.

Readers should note that as this is the first time of reporting at year 7 level, there are no year-on-year trends to be presented.

Review of year 7 benchmarks

In 2003, at the direction of ministers, the PMRT undertook a review of the year 7 reading and numeracy benchmarks following concerns about the proportion of students meeting these benchmarks. Investigations into the year 7 benchmarking and cut-score setting procedures found that the procedures for setting the year 7 cut-scores had followed the same methodology as for years 3 and 5, and verified that the year 7 calculations were correct.

The review resulted in revised benchmark cut-scores for year 7 reading and numeracy. The review also noted that the percentages of students achieving the revised year 7 reading benchmark is in keeping with expectations, however, this is not the case in numeracy.

The review identified factors that may have contributed to the apparent inconsistency in the year 7 benchmarks standards. One factor was a lack of State-wide test data available in 1999 when the benchmark standards were set. Another factor was that the year 7 benchmarks were developed independently of the year 3 and 5 benchmarks.

MCEETYA ministers recently agreed to proceed with trialing common instruments across all jurisdictions in 2006. Following the trial, ministers will consider whether the introduction of common instruments across all jurisdictions will address many of the current issues with the equating of State-based tests to the national benchmark.

Explanatory notes

New South Wales

Exemption from Testing Policy	All students enrolled in years 3, 5 and 7 should participate in testing. However, parents do have the right to withdraw their children from testing. This is classified as a parent withdrawal and not as an exemption. It is expected that students with learning difficulties and those with mild intellectual disabilities will undertake testing, including those students in specific purpose schools. For a very few students though, testing will not be appropriate. The principal may exempt students from testing, but only in consultation with the parents or caregivers. In these cases the principal must ensure that an exemption has been agreed to by the parents or caregivers. Consideration for exemption can be given to: some students newly arrived in Australia (up to 12 months) from non-English speaking backgrounds; students with moderate or severe disabilities; other students who have a current disability confirmation sheet who cannot be accommodated through special provisions; students with a medical condition that would affect wellbeing and test performance; and (for years 3 and 5) students attending Stewart House on the test day.
Average Age Calculation Method	Average age at time of testing was determined from New South Wales Department of Education July census student age data for government school years 3, 5 and 7 students.
Years at School Calculation Method	Most year 3 and 5 students in New South Wales schools have completed 3–5 full years of schooling prior to the tests being held at the beginning of August. Years at school were thus taken to be 3 years, 7 months for year 3 students and 5 years, 7 months for year 5 students. Similarly, for year 7 students, literacy tests were held at the beginning of March and numeracy tests early May. Years at school for year 7 students were thus taken to be 7 years, 2 months for reading and writing and 7 years, 4 months for numeracy.
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Indigenous students are those who answered 'Yes' to the question: 'Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person?'.
Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students	LBOTE students are those who answered 'Yes' to the question: 'Does anyone speak a language other than English in your home?'.

Victoria

Exemption from Testing Policy	The principal may grant an exemption to students with disabilities and impairments and to students who have been learning English in Australia for less than two years, and in other exceptional circumstances. The decision is made at the school level. The principal should consult specialist staff and ensure that parents sign a document agreeing to the exemption. Note that of those schools participating, some students may have been exempted but the numbers are unknown.
Average Age Calculation Method	Students provide date of birth on test task books. Average age is calculated at August of each testing year by using the month and year of birth and averaging the age of all students who participated in the test.
Years at School Calculation Method	Students commence schooling in the Preparatory year and the year of schooling is calculated as the 3, 5 or 7 years from Prep to the beginning of year 3, 5 or 7, and 7 months to the beginning of August to when testing takes place.
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Schools were asked to answer the following question: 'Is this student Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander?' on the front page of each student's test booklet. Students are identified as Indigenous on enrolment forms at the commencement of school.

Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students Schools were asked to answer the following question: 'Is this student of non-English-speaking background?' on the front page of each student's test booklet. The generally accepted definition of a LBOTE student is one where the student or either parent was born in a non-English-speaking country or has a home language other than English.

Queensland

Exemption from Testing Policy The following students may be exempted: those for whom English is not their first language and who are assessed by an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and classroom teacher as achieving at or below Reading Level 4 and Writing Level 4 using the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) ESL Bandscales; those with intellectual impairment who have been identified as having educational needs at Levels 5 or 6 through the systemic ascertainment process; or exceptional cases, where taking the tests will cause trauma.

Average Age Calculation Method The average ages are calculated on age distributions of the populations of year 3 and 5 students attending government and non-government schools based on 1 July census enrolment data, published in ABS, Cat. No. 4221.0, Schools Australia, 2000.

Years at School Calculation Method Compulsory schooling commences at year 1. Students sat the test in late August. Year 3 students who sat the test would typically have been at school for 2 years and 8 months. Year 5 students would typically have been at school for 4 years and 8 months. Year 7 students who sat the test would typically have been at school for 6 years and 8 months.

Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students Students self-identify that they are Indigenous by answering 'Yes' to either or both of the questions: 'Are you an Aboriginal person?' or 'Are you a Torres Strait Islander person?'. Teachers are required to check the accuracy of the students' responses.

Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students LBOTE students are those who answer 'Yes' to the question: 'At home, do either of your parents/care-givers speak a language other than English MOST of the time?' and who are not classified as Indigenous. Students self-identify and teachers are required to check the accuracy of the students' responses.

South Australia

Exemption from Testing Policy A student may be exempted from the testing program by the school principal in consultation with the parent/care-giver. Reasons for exemptions include: students from a non-English-speaking background who have been enrolled in an English-speaking school for less than 12 months; students with high support needs who would not be able to read the test.

Average Age Calculation Method The average age of students at the time of testing is estimated from student enrolment information which schools collect.

Years at School Calculation Method A student may begin school once they turn 5 years of age. Most students will spend between 10 and 13 terms in junior primary school classes (ie Reception, and years 1 and 2).

Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students Indigenous students were identified through their response to a question on the test cover asking if they were an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students LBOTE students were identified through their response to a question on the test cover asking if a language other than English is spoken in their home.

Western Australia

Exemption from Testing Policy	Exemptions may be granted by the principal with the signed agreement of parent/care-givers on the following grounds: temporary or permanent disability or impairment; enrolment in specified intensive language centres; ESL students in mainstream classes who have been in Australia for one year or less.
Average Age Calculation Method	Students provide date of birth on test booklets. Average age was calculated at the week of testing on the basis of this information.
Years at School Calculation Method	The figure given is an estimate based on the assumptions of: (a) continuous attendance of students in all years of schooling; (b) an equal number of students skipping a year of studies and repeating a year of studies; and (c) that for these cohorts of year 3, 5 and 7 students the pre-primary year was neither full-time nor compulsory and is therefore not included in the calculation.
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Indigenous students were identified through their 'Yes' response to the question: 'Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person?'. This question was included on the front of the student answer booklet.
Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students	Students from a language background other than English were identified by their responses to the question: 'Does anyone in your home usually speak in a language other than English?'.

Tasmania

Exemption from Testing Policy	Government school students were exempted on the following grounds: students on the Department's intellectual disabilities register; ESL students who were identified by the Principal Education Officer (ESL) as being unable to complete the test owing to the students' inability to comprehend English; vision and hearing impaired students identified by Equity Standards Branch as being unable to complete the test; and some students who were exempted, with their parents' written permission, by the Director, Office for Educational Review. Students in Catholic and independent schools were exempted at their principal's discretion, under strict guidelines established by each sector.
Average Age Calculation Method	The average age reported is the weighted average for all three sectors (government, Catholic and independent). The average age of government school students was calculated from date-of-birth enrolment records held in a central database.
Years at School Calculation Method	In Tasmania, most students enrol in Kindergarten. Compulsory schooling begins in Prep, followed by years 1, 2, 3 etc. Testing is conducted in early August. Thus, the average number of years of compulsory schooling at the time of testing was approximately 3 years, 7 months (year 3), 5 years, 7 months (year 5) and 7 years, 7 months (year 7).
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Indigenous students attending government schools were identified from enrolment records, held in a central database. Indigenous students in Catholic and independent schools were identified by enrolment records or self-identification.
Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students	Government school students with a language background other than English were identified by self-identification on test booklets. Catholic schools used new-arrival and special education applications to identify LBOTE students. Independent schools used self-identification. If the LBOTE status of a student was unknown, that student was considered not to have had a language background other than English.

Northern Territory

Exemption from Testing Policy	A student may be exempted from testing if they have high support needs (identified intellectual and/or physical disability) or they have a medically diagnosed communication disorder that would preclude them from completing the test.
Average Age Calculation Method	The date of birth of each student is recorded on the test cover. The age of the student relative to the official end of the testing period is then calculated as a decimal. The average age of all students in the cohort (eg year 3) is then calculated.
Years at School Calculation Method	Schooling begins at age 5 in Transition classes. The typical time in school for year 3 students was calculated as follows: 2 years, 8 months (years 1, 2 and 3 to time of testing) plus 7 months (Transition) equals 3 years, 3 months. For year 5 students, the calculation was as follows: 4 years, 8 months (years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 at time of testing) plus 7 months (Transition), equals 5 years and 3 months. For year 7 students, the calculation was as follows: 6 years, 8 months (years 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 at time of testing) plus 7 months (Transition) equals 7 years and 3 months.
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Indigenous students are identified by schools at the time of enrolment or by self-identification.
Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students	Students are considered to have a LBOTE if they answer 'No' to the question, 'Does everyone at home speak to you in English?' or answer 'Never/Sometimes' to the question, 'How often do you speak English at home?'.

Australian Capital Territory

Exemption from Testing Policy	All students enrolled in years 3, 5 and 7 are expected to participate in testing. Students eligible for exemption include ESL students who have been learning English in Australia for less than 2 years; students enrolled in Learning Support Classes and Units, except those who can be accommodated through special provisions; Level 5 integration students enrolled in mainstream settings, except those who can be accommodated through special provisions, and students enrolled in Special Education schools.
Average Age Calculation Method	From date of birth until August 1 in the year of testing.
Years at School Calculation Method	The years and months beginning February 1 in the Kindergarten year through to August 1, in year 3, 5 or 7.
Definition, Identification of Indigenous Students	Indigenous students are identified at the time of enrolment by the parents/care-givers.
Definition, Identification of LBOTE Students	Data represents funded ESL students rather than the broader LBOTE category.

2001

further strengthening
SCHOOLS as learning
COMMUNITIES

literacy, numeracy,
indigenous education,
science, the arts

australia's future depends upon
each citizen having the necessary
knowledge, understanding, skills
and values for a productive and
rewarding life in an educated
just and open society

