

# 11

## 11 Education

### Key messages

The education and training reforms that have been implemented over the past decade in the early years and senior phase of schooling are now complete. With a later school starting age, Queensland children are now in line with most of the other jurisdictions in Australia.

The new nationally comparable literacy and numeracy testing started in 2008, with Queensland's students performing less favourably in comparison with other states and the Australian average. The national assessment program assesses reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation and numeracy for all children in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Changes to the senior phase of schooling, which allow flexible education and training options, have seen more students take up vocational education and training (VET) opportunities. The introduction of School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships will see Year 12 completers able to fulfil some of the requirements towards their future training while still at school.

### Improvements

About nine in ten students in Queensland met the national minimum standards for numeracy and literacy.

The Indigenous retention rate has continued to improve, with 60.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who start Year 8 now continuing to Year 12. This is an increase of almost 10% in the last decade. The retention rate for Queensland Indigenous students is superior to that of the general Australian Indigenous population.

Vocational education and training is becoming increasingly popular among senior school students and school leavers. The majority of students undertaking VET were employed at the completion of their training, suggesting that these courses are teaching the skills necessary for an effective transition into the workforce.

### Areas of concern

In the national assessment program, Queensland's mean scores were statistically lower than the national mean in every year level and domain, and Queensland's mean scores trailed other jurisdictions except for the Northern Territory. In addition, in the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, the average results of Year 4 Queensland students in maths and science were below those of most other states and territories.

The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous performance on literacy and numeracy tests is still substantial, with Indigenous achievement lagging by up to 25%. The Queensland and Commonwealth governments are introducing a series of initiatives in an attempt to close the gap, with a target of halving the gap in educational performance by 2020.

Exclusion from school is seen as a last resort, although the rate of short and long suspensions due to disruptive behaviours increased in 2007–08. A series of initiatives designed to provide safe, supportive and disciplined learning environments is being trialled across Queensland to improve behaviour in classrooms.

## Education and training reforms

Fundamental changes to schooling in Queensland have occurred as a result of the introduction of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF). These reforms affect both the early and the senior years of schooling.

A full-time Preparatory Year (Prep), which replaced part-time preschool, became universally available in 2007, and in 2008 the school entry age was lifted so children will have to turn 6 on or before 30 June to enrol in Year 1.

Changes in senior schooling allow young people aged 15–17 years to follow learning paths that meet their needs in more innovative and flexible ways. The new laws are articulated in complementary Acts: the *Youth Participation in Education and Training Act 2003* and the *Training Reform Act 2003*.

The legal school leaving age in Queensland has been increased from 15, and it is now compulsory for young people to stay at school until they complete Year 10 or turn 16, whichever comes first. Once a young person completes Year 10 or has turned 16, there is a requirement to participate:

- for two years beyond Year 10, or
- until they have gained a Senior Certificate, or
- until they have gained a Certificate III vocational qualification, or
- until they turn 17.

The only exception to the compulsory participation phase will be for young people who enter full-time work (minimum 25 hours) after they have either completed Year 10 or turned 16.

The ETRF changes are aimed at improving outcomes for young people, which are expected to be seen through:

- increased numbers of young people successfully transitioning into the senior phase of learning, and
- increased numbers of young people successfully taking part in a range of relevant options during the senior phase of learning to assist with their successful transition to further education and training and/or employment.

In 2008, the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) replaced the Senior Certificate for students who complete Year 12. The QCE is a broad-based senior schooling qualification that recognises senior school subjects and nationally recognised vocational training, as well as some workplace, university and community learning. Minimum levels of literacy and numeracy need to be demonstrated to receive the QCE, but all students, including those who are not eligible for the QCE, will receive a Senior Statement at the completion of Year 12.

## School participation and retention

The school age participation rate indicates the proportion of the resident population attending school on a full-time basis (based on data collected each year in August).

Between the ages of 7 and 14 years, participation rates in Queensland are at around 100%. However, it is reported that not all Indigenous children are participating in school, with estimated participation rates in 2004 of 94.4–96.8% for 7–11 year olds and 90.2–92.6% for 12–14 year olds (Department of Communities, 2006). Furthermore, absenteeism rates are particularly high for Indigenous students living in remote regions, where students miss an average of 8 weeks of school per year (Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, 2006). For Semester 1 2008, attendance rates at state schools in Indigenous communities ranged from 42.0% in Aurukun to 94.3% in Coen, while the Queensland all-student attendance rate was 91.1% (Department of Communities, 2008).

The Family Responsibilities Commission's Welfare Reform Trial, set up in Cape York communities in 2008, targets school attendance as one of four social obligations that are linked to welfare payments. Welfare recipients are obliged to ensure that children have fewer than three unexplained absences from school per term. Although there were 202 notices for school attendance in the four jurisdictions between July and December 2008 (Family Responsibilities Commission, 2009), there are no data yet available on the effectiveness of this intervention.

In 2008, 92.0% of Queensland 15 year olds and 80.7% of 16 year olds were attending school (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009c). The male participation rate for 15–16 year olds (85.8%) was lower than the rate for females (91.2%).

The participation rate for 16 year olds (males and females) increased from 76.9% in 1995 to 80.7% in 2008. School participation of Indigenous young people was found to be lower than the Queensland average, with only an estimated 57.7% of Indigenous 16 year olds in school in 2004 (Department of Communities, 2006).

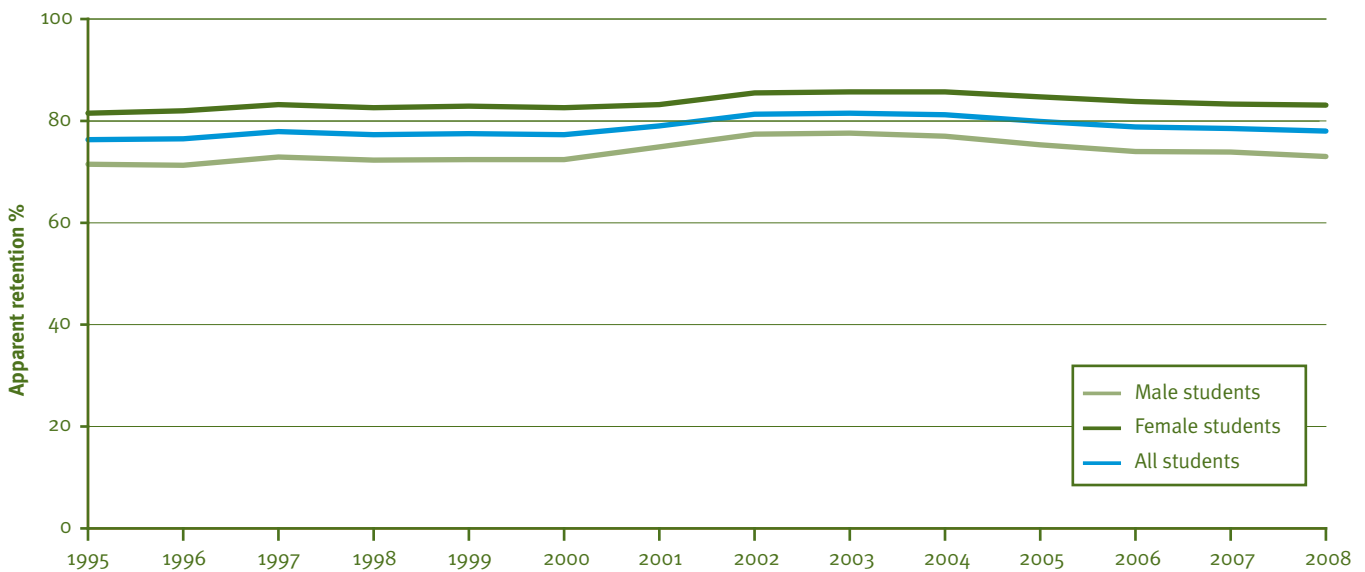
Participation rates for senior students need to be interpreted with care as, although the majority of Year 12 students will be aged either 16 or 17 when the enrolment data are collected in August, some Year 12 students may be older or younger, depending on the age at which they started school and on whether any school years were repeated or skipped. Bearing this in mind, the average age of Year 12 students in 2008 was 16.7 years, which was lower than the national average (17.1 years) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009c). The 2008 increase in the age at which students can enrol in Year 1 means that the 2008 cohort of students will be on average 6 months older when they complete school in 2019.

Participation rates indicate school enrolments at particular ages, but apparent retention rates show what proportion of high school students continue on to Year 12 from Year 8. These compare the current number of Year 12 students enrolled with the number of Year 8 students four years before, although it should be noted that this is not a measure of successful completion of Year 12.

Year 8 to Year 12 apparent retention rates in Queensland have declined slightly in the last few years, from 81.5% in 2003 to 78.0% in 2008 (Figure 11.1). As with participation rates, the retention rate was lower for males, with 73.0% retention to Year 12, compared with 83.1% retention for females.

Indigenous students are much less likely to continue schooling to Year 12 than non-Indigenous students. However, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous retention rates appears to be narrowing, with Indigenous rates improving at a faster pace than non-Indigenous rates. From 1999 to 2008, Indigenous retention rates increased from 50.8% to 60.5%, while non-Indigenous rates were relatively stable (78.6% and 79.0% respectively) (Figure 11.2). The retention rate for Indigenous females (64.3%) was higher than the rate for Indigenous males (57.0%).

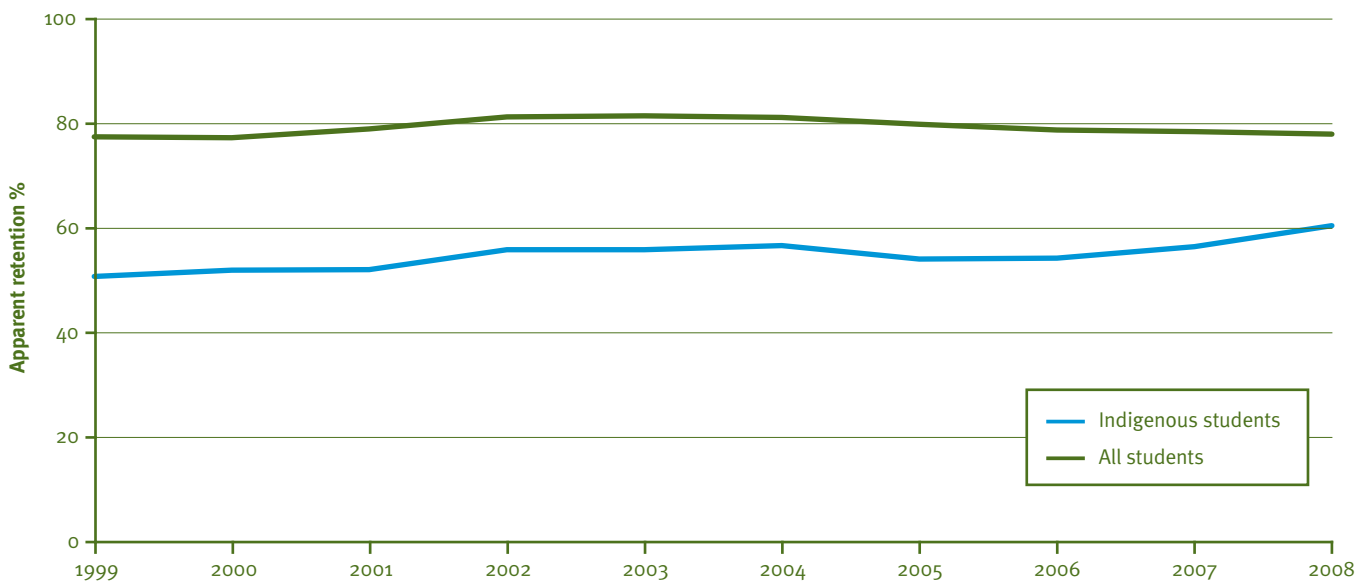
**Figure 11.1 Apparent retention rate<sup>a</sup> by sex, Queensland, 1995 to 2008**



a. Number of full-time Year 12 students divided by the number of Year 8 students four years before. Factors such as migration and students repeating year levels will affect data.

Source: ABS, *Schools, Australia*, cat. no. 4221.0

**Figure 11.2 Apparent retention rate<sup>a</sup> by Indigenous status, Queensland, 1999 to 2008**



a. Number of full-time Year 12 students divided by the number of Year 8 students four years before. Factors such as migration and students repeating year levels will affect data.

Source: ABS, *Schools, Australia*, cat. no. 4221.0

In 2008, the Year 7/8 to Year 12 apparent retention rate was higher in Queensland than the national average, both for the whole school cohort (78.0% and 74.5% respectively) and for Indigenous students (60.5% and 46.5% respectively). Factors such as jurisdictional differences in schooling systems, students repeating years and those joining or leaving the school system will affect the estimates.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has introduced the apparent continuation rate measure from 2008 to address, in part, data quality issues associated with apparent retention rates. In 2008, 95.1% of 14 year old Queensland students continued school the next year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009c). Likewise, 88.5% of 15 year olds continued school, as did 58.0% of 16 year olds.

## Educational achievement

### *Literacy and numeracy testing in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9*

In July 2003, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed to establish common national literacy and numeracy tests to improve comparability across jurisdictions and to increase the potential usability of the data obtained (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). In May 2008, all Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students at all government and non-government schools in Australia sat the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. That is, for the first time, all students in the same year level sat the same tests at the same time. Reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy were all assessed for each cohort. Before 2008, each state and territory administered independent tests, which prevented reliable comparisons across jurisdictions.

The NAPLAN tests, which were developed collaboratively by the states and territories as well as other government and non-government stakeholders, broadly reflect the curriculum content across all jurisdictions.

National minimum standards, in the form of particular National Achievement Bands, replace the previous concept of single-point National Benchmarks. A single continuous scale of student achievement across ten national achievement bands spans Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, for each dimension under

NAPLAN assessment. Each scale consists of 10 bands to cover the full range of student achievement across the four points of assessment. Each year level is reported against six of these achievement bands. Table 11.1 shows the bands covered in each year level, as well as the band which indicates that the national minimum standard has been met.

**Table 11.1 National Achievement Bands and National Minimum Standards, by year of assessment**

	Bands covered	National minimum standard
Year 3	1–6	Band 2
Year 5	3–8	Band 4
Year 7	4–9	Band 5
Year 9	5–10	Band 6

The benefits of the NAPLAN tests include:

- reports for the full range of student achievement against a common scale, using consistent tests
- a single continuous scale of achievement for numeracy and each aspect of literacy
- inclusion of testing of ability of students in Year 9, and
- that teachers will be able to use the tests to provide further support to students who do not meet the national minimum standards.

Furthermore, individual student reports will be available that show literacy and numeracy progression of students through their years of schooling. These reports will also show student performance against the national average and the middle 60% of students in Australia. To help parents understand their child's relative skills and abilities, the individual student reports will contain plain English language descriptors.

Student performances in literacy and numeracy tests have shown that there are wide ranges in abilities in each year level, and the student performances from different year levels overlap. For example, higher-performing students in Year 3 performed at least as well as the lower-performing students in Year 7.

In September 2008, individual student reports were delivered to parents of all students who sat the tests, with schools receiving whole-of-school reports. Figures 11.3 and 11.4 show Queensland students' achievements in reading and numeracy from the first year of NAPLAN testing (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008).

For reading:

- 87.1% ( $\pm 0.5$ ) of Year 3 students met the national minimum standard
- 86.9% ( $\pm 0.7$ ) of Year 5 students met the national minimum standard
- 92.9% ( $\pm 0.5$ ) of Year 7 students met the national minimum standard, and
- 90.5% ( $\pm 0.9$ ) of Year 9 students met the national minimum standard.

Significant proportions of Indigenous Queensland students did not meet the national minimum standards for reading, across all year levels. Just 62.9% of Indigenous students in Year 5 met the national minimum standard for reading, which was 25.9% fewer than non-Indigenous counterparts. Three-quarters of Indigenous students in Year 7 met the national minimum standard (74.8%), but this was still a smaller proportion than the 94.3% of non-Indigenous students who met the standard.

For numeracy:

- 92.0% ( $\pm 0.6$ ) of Year 3 students met the national minimum standard
- 90.4% ( $\pm 0.6$ ) of Year 5 students met the national minimum standard
- 94.9% ( $\pm 0.4$ ) of Year 7 students met the national minimum standard, and

- 92.4% ( $\pm 0.8$ ) of Year 9 students met the national minimum standard.

As with reading achievement, a lower proportion of Indigenous Queenslanders reached the national minimum standards for numeracy than did non-Indigenous Queenslanders. However, the gap was narrower for numeracy than for reading, particularly for students in Year 3 (75.5% for Indigenous and 93.3% for non-Indigenous) and Year 7 (81.8% and 95.9% respectively).

Lower proportions of Queensland students reached the national minimum standard for reading in comparison with the general Australian student population in:

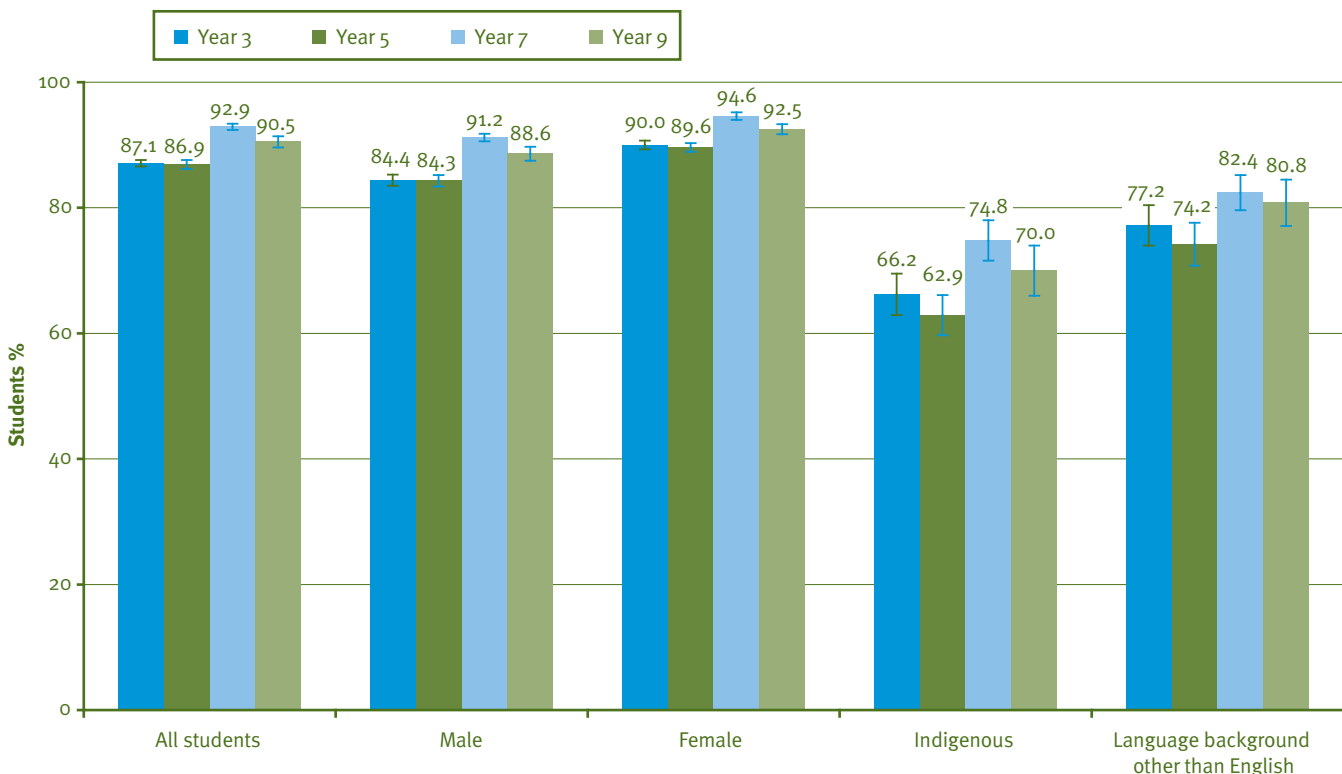
- Year 3 (87.1%  $\pm 0.5$  and 92.1%  $\pm 0.3$  respectively)
- Year 5 (86.9%  $\pm 0.7$  and 91.0%  $\pm 0.3$  respectively)
- Year 7 (92.9%  $\pm 0.5$  and 94.2%  $\pm 0.3$  respectively), and
- Year 9 (90.5%  $\pm 0.9$  and 92.9%  $\pm 0.4$  respectively).

Similarly, comparing results in numeracy for Queensland and Australia, fewer Queensland students in Year 3 (92.0%  $\pm 0.6$  and 95.0%  $\pm 0.2$  respectively), Year 5 (90.4%  $\pm 0.6$  and 92.7%  $\pm 0.2$  respectively) and Year 9 (92.4%  $\pm 0.8$  and 93.6%  $\pm 0.3$  respectively) met the national numeracy standard.

Queensland students with a language background other than English did not perform as well as their interstate counterparts in reading and numeracy for all year levels under assessment. However, there were no significant differences between Queensland Indigenous students' performance in reaching the national minimum standards and the performance of their interstate counterparts.

As 2008 was the first year of implementation of the new national testing system, it is not possible to compare test results with the previous state-wide testing results.

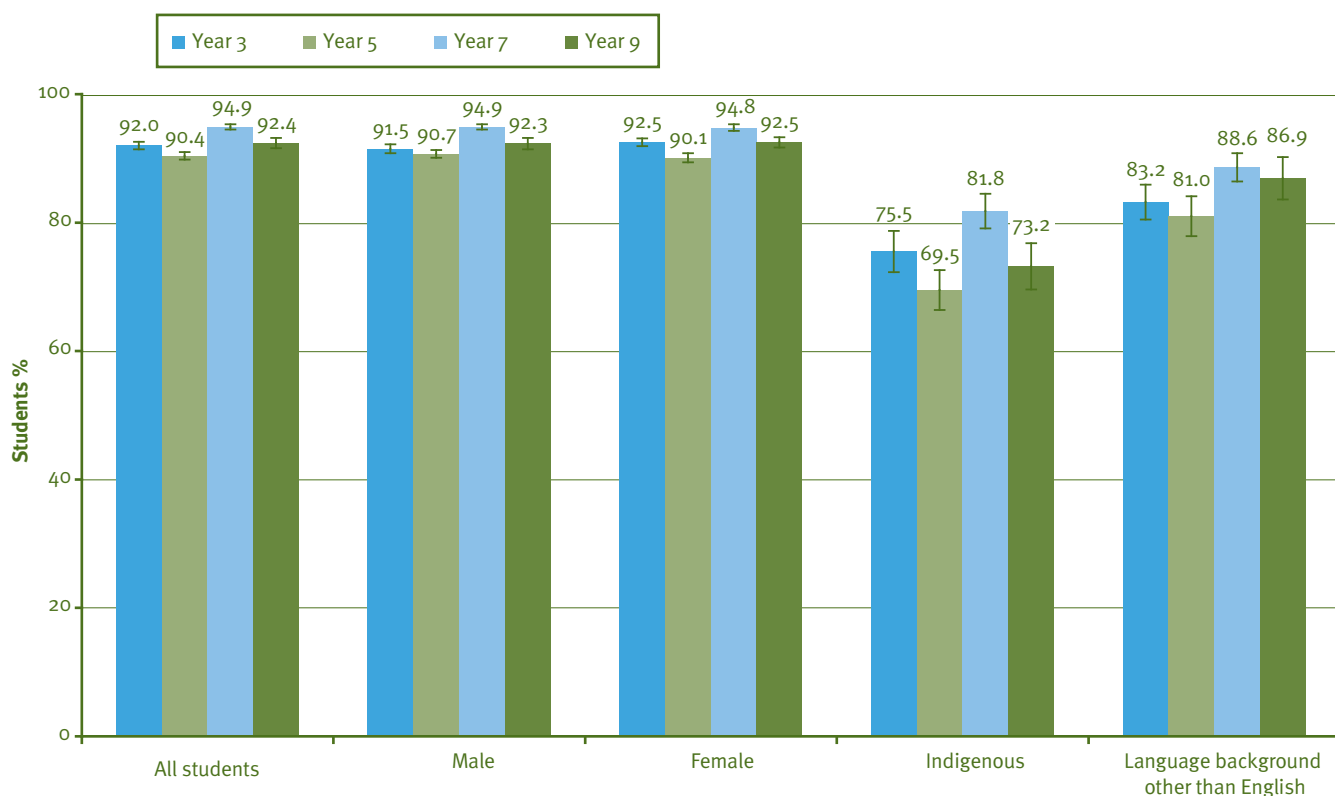
**Figure 11.3 Students achieving national minimum standards for reading by selected groups, Queensland, 2008**



**Note:** Bars on estimates indicate the possible range of the actual value at a 95% confidence interval.

**Source:** MCEETYA, *Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*

**Figure 11.4 Students achieving national minimum standards for numeracy by selected groups, Queensland, 2008**



**Note:** Bars on estimates indicate the possible range of the actual value at a 95% confidence interval.

**Source:** MCEETYA, *Achievement in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy 2008*

### **Mathematics and science testing in Years 4 and 8**

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is conducted every four years in over 35 countries worldwide (Thomson et al., 2008). TIMSS, which is part of MCEETYA's National Assessment Program, provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time. In 2007, almost 1500 (849 Year 4 and 648 Year 8) students in Queensland completed the tests.

For each year level and subject matter, a TIMSS scale average of 500 is calculated, allowing comparison between countries and jurisdictions within Australia. Four international benchmarks were established for each subject and year level of assessment: low benchmark, intermediate benchmark, high benchmark and advanced benchmark.

For mathematics achievement:

- the Year 4 average achievement score for Queensland was 485 (S.D. = 6.7), which ranked 7th of 8 jurisdictions and was significantly lower than for New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania and not statistically different from Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory
- one in seven (14%) Queensland Year 4 students did not meet any international benchmarks for mathematics; one in five students met high (18%) or advanced (3%) benchmarks, with 38% achieving the intermediate benchmark and 27% only reaching the low benchmark score

- the Year 8 average achievement score for Queensland was 491 (S.D. = 4.9), which ranked 4th of 8 jurisdictions; there were no significant differences from other jurisdictions
- one in nine (11%) Queensland Year 8 students did not meet any international benchmarks for mathematics; 3% achieved the advanced benchmark, with 17% reaching the high benchmark; an additional 41% met the intermediate benchmark and 28% only achieved the low benchmark as their highest achievement.

For science achievement:

- the Year 4 average achievement score was 501 (S.D. = 6.0), which ranked last of the Australian states and territories; this score was significantly lower than for Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and the ACT
- one in eight (12%) Queensland Year 4 students did not meet the lowest international benchmark for science; 4% achieved the advanced benchmark, with 24% meeting the high benchmark; 38% achieved the intermediate benchmark, whereas 22% reached only the low benchmark score
- the Year 8 average science achievement score for Queensland was 513 (S.D. = 4.3), which ranked 4th of 8 jurisdictions; there were no significant differences between Queensland Year 8 achievement scores and those of other states and territories
- 8% of Queensland Year 8 students did not meet the international lowest benchmark score for science; one in three reached the advanced or high benchmark level (6% and 27% respectively), whereas 39% and 21% reached the intermediate and low benchmarks respectively.

## The Masters Review

In response to Queensland school students' performance in the NAPLAN 2008 and TIMSS 2007 tests, the Queensland Government commissioned the *Masters Review* – an independent review of primary school standards in Queensland (Masters, 2009). The review examined existing data and international evidence to provide a pathway to improved standards in literacy, numeracy and science.

Professor Masters highlighted the inherent difficulties of comparing performances across jurisdictions because of varying schooling structures, school starting ages and transition points from primary to high school. Queensland students had on average one less year of schooling and were about one year younger than students from other jurisdictions.

The review outlined the significant achievement disparities between the best and worst performing students. For example, by Year 5 the gap between the top and bottom 20% of students is equivalent to about 2.5 years of schooling. By Year 9 this gap is closer to 5.5 years, suggesting that, once a student falls behind in the basics of literacy and numeracy, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for them to catch up.

The review recommended a general approach to improving primary school standards, which included:

- setting clear achievement standards that all students in particular year levels are expected to meet
- providing schools with standardised tests for diagnosing and monitoring student achievement and progress in these core learning areas
- providing teachers and school leaders with access to high-quality, evidence-based professional development,

advice and support in promoting successful learning in the core areas of literacy, numeracy and science

- ensuring that aspiring primary teachers demonstrate that they meet threshold standards of readiness to teach literacy, numeracy and science, and
- allowing teachers and school leaders to decide on the best local strategies for improving school achievement.

## Year 12 completion

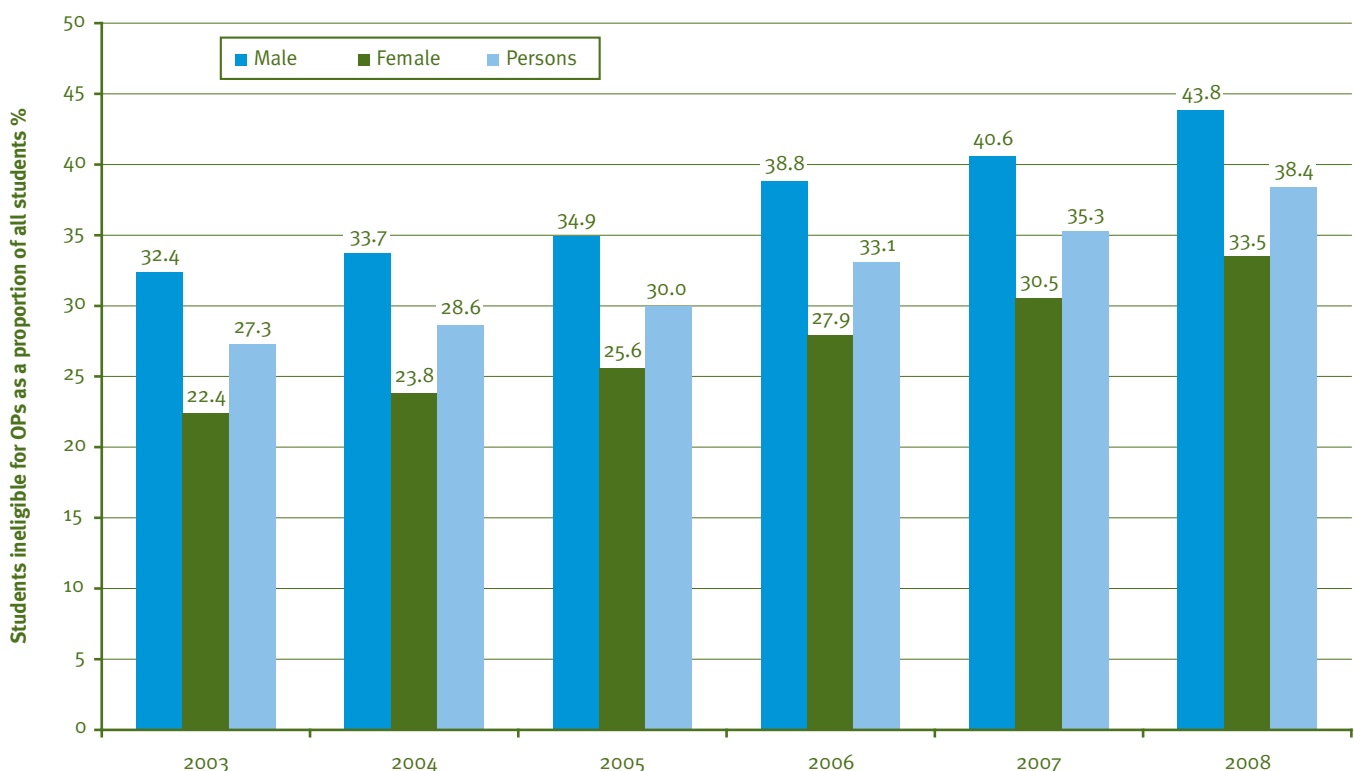
As outlined at the start of this chapter, Queensland Certificates of Education (QCE) replaced Senior Certificates in 2008. All students who complete Year 12 receive a Senior Statement. Senior Statements also report the details of any accredited vocational education and training (VET) and grades in the Queensland Core Skills Test.

The Overall Position (OP) score provides a state-wide rank order of students on a 1 to 25 scale (1 being the highest), based on students' achievement in Queensland Studies Authority subjects studied for the QCE.

OPs are used in the selection of students for tertiary education courses. A student is eligible for an OP at the end of Year 12 provided that the student has completed a minimum of 20 semester units of Authority subjects, including at least three subjects for all four semesters, and has sat for the Queensland Core Skills test in that year.

In 2008, Senior Statements were issued to 42,020 students; of these, more than one-third (38.4%) were ineligible for an OP score (Queensland Studies Authority, 2009). The proportion of ineligible students continues to increase, up from 27.3% in 2003, suggesting that more young people are taking up training or vocational qualifications after the reforms to senior schooling policy (see Figure 11.5). Also, 64.6% of females were eligible for an OP, compared with 54.0% of males.

**Figure 11.5 Students ineligible to receive OP scores by sex, Queensland, 2003 to 2008**



Source: Queensland Studies Authority, 2008 Summary of Year 12 Enrolment and Certification

In 2007, 3.0% of all students awarded Senior Certificates<sup>32</sup> were Indigenous (Queensland Government, 2008a). Although 65.3% of non-Indigenous students were eligible for an OP, just 26.3% of Indigenous students received an OP. Of those who graduated without an OP, Indigenous students were more likely to have VET certification than were their non-Indigenous counterparts (38.1% and 22.6% respectively). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were three times more likely to complete Year 12 without receiving any qualification (OP or vocational qualification) than non-Indigenous students (36.1% and 12.1% respectively).

In 2008, 594 Queensland Certificates of Individual Achievement were awarded to eligible students who had completed 12 years of education. Eligible students were those on individual learning programs who have either an impairment or difficulties in learning that are not primarily due to socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic factors. The certificates provide students with a summary of their skills and knowledge that they can present to employers and training providers.

The Next Step 2008 survey of Year 12 completers who received a Senior Certificate (or the Certificate of Post-Compulsory School Education) in 2007 (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008b) found that, in the year after they completed Year 12:

- 34.4% were undertaking a university degree
- 26.2% were studying vocational education and training (including those in apprenticeships or traineeships)
- 17.4% were working full-time
- 14.7% were working part-time
- 5.8% were looking for work, and
- 1.5% were not studying and not looking for work.

Females were more likely than males to be attending university (37.7% and 30.8% respectively), whereas males were more likely than females to be undertaking VET (31.4% and 21.4% respectively). One in six male Year 12 completers undertook apprenticeships in 2008 (17.3%), with only 2.4% of females doing so.

Approximately one in twelve Year 12 completers from 2007 deferred university placement in 2008 (8.4%). Of those who deferred, almost one-half did so because they wanted a break from study (43.3%). Working to finance further study (13.1%), being undecided and considering options (13.0%), working to qualify for independent Youth Allowance (8.5%) and not feeling ready for more study at that time (6.1%) were also commonly cited.

Compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous Year 12 completers were more likely to be undertaking VET (31.9% and 26.0% respectively), but less likely to be attending university (14.0% and 34.9% respectively). Furthermore, Indigenous Year 12 completers were more likely to be seeking work than were their non-Indigenous peers (14.4% and 5.6% respectively).

## Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

A substantial disparity continues between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students. The data presented in this chapter, in combination with the *Partnerships Queensland: Baseline Report 2006* (Department of Communities, 2006) and the *Closing the Gap* report (Queensland Government, 2008a), show clearly that the school participation and achievement of many Indigenous students is well below that of non-Indigenous students.

In the consultation issues paper *Winning the Game of Life* (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2007) the Commission explores the factors that can affect achievement among Indigenous students and highlights some of the current and proposed initiatives to address these issues. Barriers to educational achievement include:

- lack of family support
- lack of support from teachers and low teacher expectation
- the student's own expectation that he/she would leave school early
- negative influence of peers
- limited access to further education facilities and available job opportunities
- inappropriate career advice from family and friends, and
- lack of knowledge of future education or job training required to achieve goals.

Indigenous students in remote and very remote areas also have to deal with problems of distance, poor roads and extremes of climate, and many may have had little exposure to English language before they started school – an additional impediment for children in the important early years at school.

*Closing the Gap* is a reform approach established by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) aimed at reducing the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) signifies the importance that COAG places on improving conditions for Indigenous people. A series of COAG Closing the Gap targets have been established across areas such as early childhood development, health, housing, economic development and remote service delivery. The NIRA incorporates the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance measures and benchmarks to which all governments have committed themselves in achieving the COAG targets.

The *Queensland Closing the Gap Report 2007–08* (Queensland Government, 2008a) outlines two specific COAG targets pertaining to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade, and
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

32 At the time of publication of this report, data were not available for 2008, when Queensland Certificates of Education replaced Senior Certificates.

To achieve these goals, the Queensland Government, in partnership with key stakeholders, has established initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. These include:

- *Indigenous Education Support Structures*, a pilot project which focuses on working with Indigenous students, teachers and families in five clusters of state schools across the state
- *Let's Stay Put for Literacy and Numeracy Learning*, a pilot project which focuses on addressing student mobility as a major factor influencing low student achievement in literacy and numeracy; this project will target schools across central and northern Queensland
- the *Palm Island Senior Phase Program*, which provides vocationally oriented curriculum for the young people of Palm Island
- the *Bound for Success Consistent Curriculum* (also known as Scope and Sequence), which was developed specifically for discrete communities in Cape York and the Torres Strait, and reflects local, regional and systemic priorities across all learning areas for Years 1–9, and
- the *Remote Area Teacher Education Program*, which provides flexible, community-based training to Indigenous teachers in 19 remote, rural and urban sites across Queensland.

To encourage and maintain involvement in learning through to the senior phase of schooling and beyond, the *Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation* will focus on improved educational opportunities through scholarships and bursaries.

In addition, *Transition Support Services* help Indigenous students in rural and remote areas to attend secondary schools in locations away from their communities.

## Student behaviour – disciplinary absences

A number of strategies are used by schools to manage student behaviour. State schools in Queensland use student disciplinary absences – suspension, exclusion and cancellation of enrolment – as options of last resort to deal with serious behaviour difficulties (Department of Education, 2002).

Figure 11.6 illustrates the incidence of disciplinary absences at state schools (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008a). In the four terms from Term 3, 2007 to Term 2, 2008, there were:

- 25.8 short (1–5 day) suspensions per 1000 students per term (49,946 suspensions)
- 2.8 long (6–20 day) suspensions per 1000 students per term (5356 suspensions)
- 0.4 exclusions per 1000 students per term (866 exclusions), and
- 0.2 cancellations per 1000 students per term (326 cancellations).

The numbers and rates of 1–5 and 6–20 day suspensions have generally increased over time, with increases of 12.3% in the number of short suspensions and 22.0% in long suspensions in 2007–08.

**Figure 11.6 State school disciplinary absences,<sup>a</sup> Queensland, 2002–03 to 2007–08**



a. Incidents per 1000 students per term.

b. Based on Term 4 2002 to Term 2 2003.

Source: Department of Education, Training and the Arts, *Annual Report 2007–08*

Reasons for the 1–5 day suspensions in the four terms in 2007–08 (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008a) were:

- 31.4% for physical misconduct
- 22.2% for verbal or non-verbal misconduct
- 12.6% for persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others
- 12.1% for refusal to participate in the program of instruction
- 8.7% for other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school
- 6.7% for property misconduct
- 3.8% for substance misconduct involving tobacco and other legal substances
- 2.2% for absences, and
- 0.4% for substance misconduct involving an illicit substance.

The main reasons for long suspensions were physical misconduct (30.6%) and verbal or non-verbal misconduct (18.5%).

One-third of exclusions were for physical misconduct (34.2%), with 15.2% due to persistent disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others, 13.7% for verbal or non-verbal misconduct and 13.5% for other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school.

The vast majority of cancellations were due to students' refusal to participate in the program of instruction (94.5%).

To improve the provision of safe, supportive and disciplined learning environments and to strengthen student engagement, the department has developed a range of initiatives under Better Behaviour, Better Learning. An example of one of these initiatives is the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) program, which will be trialled in over 250 state schools across the state by the end of 2009. The SWPBS program helps schools to create positive learning environments by developing proactive systems to define, teach and support appropriate student behaviours.

Another initiative of Education Queensland is Positive Learning Centres (PLCs), which are one provision in an array of regional services that aim to provide an alternative program for some students who at a given point in time require intervention beyond the capacity of a mainstream classroom. The overall aim of the PLCs is to reintegrate students into mainstream schooling or into more appropriate learning or vocational pathways. PLCs are located in 13 districts across the state.

## Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training is a national system designed to train workers to work in specific industries. VET helps young people move from school to work through the provision of hands-on courses that encourage learning in the workplace as well as the classroom.

The Student Outcomes Survey revealed that, in 2008, 80.7% of Australian VET graduates were employed after completing their VET in 2007 (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2008). This figure was slightly higher for Queensland VET graduates (83.8%).

VET includes School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SATs), which are becoming more prevalent throughout Queensland. SATs allow Years 11 and 12 high school students to participate in paid employment, receiving structured training on and off the job while continuing with their school studies (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008a). That is, they divide their time between school, work and training. The skills they acquire are part of nationally recognised vocational qualifications, and it is possible for young people to complete up to one-third of an apprenticeship while still at school, possibly giving them a head start into full-time apprenticeships and other jobs.

There are more than 700 different apprenticeships and traineeships available through SATs in various fields. At 30 June 2008 there were 4525 SATs commenced in Queensland (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008a). One in eleven (8.7%) Year 12 completers in 2007 undertook SATs while at school (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008b).

In 2007–08, about 19,500 15–17 year olds commenced apprenticeships or traineeships in Queensland (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008a). In addition, there were 45,513 15–17 year old VET students in industries such as construction, hospitality, automotive and tourism.

According to the Next Step 2008 report, 8788 Year 12 completers from 2007 were enrolled in VET in 2008 (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008b). Two in five (39.8%) achieved a VET qualification while finishing school in 2007.