



Media Release

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NSW Independent school students' PISA results a reason for optimism

Students in NSW Independent schools participating in the OECD's Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) achieve results that rank them among the best-performing school systems in the world, a new analysis of 2012 PISA results (the latest available) has found.

Released today by the AISNSW Institute, the analysis - '*Academic Achievement in NSW Independent Schools*' - undertaken by Dr Gary Marks of the Australian Catholic University, shows that NSW Independent school students scored significantly higher than the national and state average in the 2012 PISA assessments in mathematical literacy.

Chair of the AISNSW Institute, Bill Daniels, said the analysis demonstrates that a significant part of the Australian schooling system is getting things right in terms of helping students to achieve their best, and also counters widely-held perceptions that the decline in the performance of Australian students in international assessments over the past ten years is uniformly reflected across all school jurisdictions.

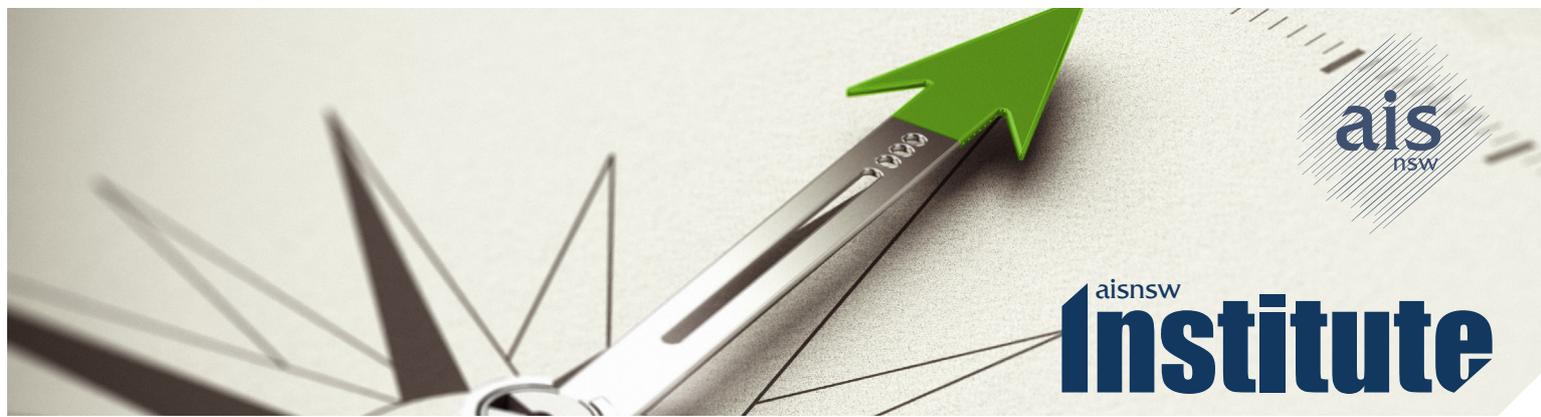
"Amid the frequent gloomy assessments focusing on the apparent decline in performance of Australian students relative to other countries, this analysis gives parents reason to be confident that choosing an Independent school education for their child is a decision that will benefit their child", Mr Daniels said.

The mean scores from the 2012 PISA assessments saw the NSW Independent schools sector ranked competitively with the top Asian countries/jurisdictions and Finland, all of which are frequently cited as benchmarks in international student assessments.

The analysis also delved more deeply into the achievement data, showing that socioeconomic status and family background typically explained only a small part of the variation in student achievement, contrary to common perceptions that these were very strongly linked. Even when adjusted for socioeconomic status, the differences in achievement were still significant.

Mr Daniels said: "The strong performance of students in Independent schools across a range of measures is often dismissed as being the result of wealth. This ignores the fact that two-thirds of Independent schools in NSW have a socioeconomic score in the lower half of the SES scale. The research shows that it is parents' education levels and the value they place on education, along with school and teacher quality that are the strongest defining factors."

A two-page summary version and the detailed Research Briefing of *Academic Achievement in NSW Independent Schools* are attached. Both papers, along with the accompanying Technical Report, are also available at [AIS Latest Research](#).



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN NSW INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

This paper reports on the findings of research commissioned by the AISNSW Institute into the academic achievement of NSW Independent schools.¹

In an increasingly technological age, education outcomes are a key determinant of social wellbeing and economic prosperity, for both individuals and the nation. Despite its importance however, academic achievement and educational excellence are often missing elements in education debates, overshadowed by issues such as funding, teacher quality and the social background of students.

Australia's PISA performance

Australia's education performance as a nation, as measured in the PISA international testing regime, has declined significantly over the past decade. While Australia is still rated a high performing, high equity country, its international ranking overall has dropped from 11th in 2003 to 18th in 2012, and the average score in mathematical literacy, the main domain of both the 2003 and 2012 PISA tests, has dropped by 20 score points, from 524 to 504, the equivalent of more than half a year of schooling. This decline is in part attributable to a tail of low performing students, but more critically, it is the result of a fall in the number of students achieving at a high level.

¹ This research, undertaken by Dr Gary Marks, is presented in a Technical Report, available at www.aisnsw.edu.au

Performance of NSW Independent schools

Unsurprisingly, PISA performance varies between jurisdictions and sectors within Australia (see Table over page). In mathematical literacy, NSW students achieved slightly higher than the national average of 504 score points. Across the nation, Independent school students scored 541. This is significantly higher than the national average, a difference of 37 score points, the equivalent of about one year of schooling. In NSW, Independent school students scored 546 and outperformed the state average by the same margin, 37 score points.

High and low achievers

Just as important as the average scores of a cohort of students is the number of students performing at high and low proficiency levels. The most successful nations have a high proportion of students at the high proficiency level and a small number failing to reach minimum proficiency. Relative to highly ranked education systems, Australia has a high proportion of low achievers and a declining proportion of high achievers. A significantly higher proportion of Independent school students performed at the highest proficiency level than the national average – 23% compared with 15% – and a significantly lower proportion of Independent school students performed at the lowest proficiency level – 9% compared with 20%.

In PISA 2012, NSW Independent school students scored significantly higher than the national and state averages.

2012 PISA: mathematical literacy for selected jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Mean Score	% Top Performers	% Low Performers
Shanghai-China* ¹	613	56	4
Singapore* ²	573	40	8
Hong Kong China* ³	561	33	9
Chinese Taipei* ⁴	560	37	13
Korea* ⁵	554	31	9
Independent schools NSW	546	**	**
Independent schools Australia	541	23	9
Finland* ¹²	519	15	12
ACT all schools	518	18	16
Canada	518	16	14
Catholic schools Australia	514	14	14
NSW all schools	509	17	19
Australia* ¹⁹	504	15	20
Victoria all schools	501	12	20
New Zealand	500	15	23
United Kingdom	494	12	22
OECD average	494	12	23
Government schools Australia	489	13	25
United States	481	9	26

*Ranking in 2012 PISA.

**Directly comparable data is not available for NSW Independent schools.

Across countries, high performance at school is linked above all with quality teaching and leadership.



Socioeconomic impact

When students' socioeconomic background is taken into account, these differences between Independent schools and other school sectors are reduced, but they remain significant. Analysis of school achievement data that take a student's prior achievement as well as socioeconomic background into account show that prior achievement has a far stronger association with later performance than family socioeconomic status, suggesting that the significance of socioeconomic background is often overstated.

Influential performance features

The PISA results allow for analysis of the features of students, schools and education policy which have a significant impact on education performance. Across countries, high performance at school is linked

above all with quality teaching and leadership. In the Australian PISA results, the data show that the higher achievement of students in Independent schools is associated with strong teacher-student relations, a good disciplinary climate, effective classroom management and a sense of belonging at school. While there are many influences on student achievement, the evidence suggests that Independent school students benefit from the capability and professionalism of their teachers and a school climate that values academic achievement, provides personal support and a safe and ordered environment and fosters a sense of belonging to a community.