



This week's stories from the media

- One in two Australian teens fail maths reading or science
- How to help your kids
- Minister backs sexual diversity lessons
- More women becoming scientists
- Drawing improves kids writing
- Victoria may raise teaching benchmarks
- Greens call for free ride for kids

How To Help Your Kids

SA's 260,000 kids are back at school; some for the first time, others heading into their final year.

The influence a parent or carer has over their child's educational future is profound. So much so, the Australian Government has launched a free app, called Learning Potential, that says parents, families and carers are a child's first and most important teachers.

"As a parent, you and your family play an important role in supporting your child's education."

"Research has identified five ways that you can make a big difference to your child's learning."

1. Set positive expectations
2. Have regular conversations
3. Support good study habits
4. Encourage reading
5. Build a partnership with your child's teachers

[Read the full story](#)

One In Two Australian Teens Fail Maths Reading Or Science

Half of Australia's high school students have flunked the minimum international standard in maths, reading or science by the age of 15, a new OECD report shows.

One in 10 students is "low-performing" in all three of the basic learning areas and lacks the skills to find a job.

"Students who perform poorly at age 15 face a high risk of dropping out of school altogether; and when a large share of the population lacks basic skills, a country's long-term economic growth is severely compromised."

Australian teenagers from poor families are five times more likely than their wealthier classmates to perform poorly at school, the report says.

In maths, one in five Australian teens - nearly 57,000 Year 10 students - would struggle to estimate how much petrol is left in a tank by looking at the gauge.

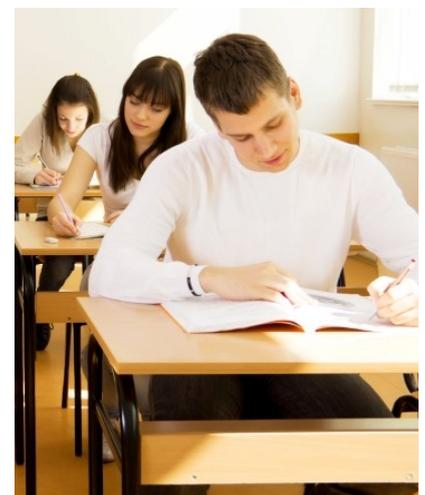
One in three of our poorest students do not have the basic maths skills needed to find a job.

Nearly 41,000 students - or 14 per cent - are functionally illiterate and would not be able to understand the instructions on a packet of headache tablets.

In maths, Australia's share of low-performing students grew from 15 per cent in 2003 to 20 per cent in 2012.

The report says that Australian schools are better resourced than in most industrialised countries, noting there is no other OECD country where low-performing students have "better educational resources".

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Minister Backs Sexual Diversity Lessons

Education Minister Simon Birmingham has defended the objectives of a controversial school program that teaches high school students about sexual diversity and inclusion.

The anti-bullying program, used by nearly 500 schools around Australia, educates 11 and 12-year-old children about the meaning of terms such as “queer”, “pansexual”, “sister girl” and “trans guy”.

Senator Birmingham said: “The objectives I think are perfectly reasonable objectives; there should be no more a place for homophobia in our schools than there is for racism in our schools, and we should be ensuring that every student is taught key attitudes around tolerance and acceptance of others.”

He stressed that the program, introduced and funded by the previous Labor government, allowed schools “complete autonomy” to choose how much they used the program, if at all.

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More Women Becoming Scientists

Women are enrolling in maths and the hard sciences in such unprecedented numbers that female undergraduates outnumber their male counterparts at several universities.

This year’s enrolments at the University of Sydney’s faculty of science are 56% female and 44% male for undergraduates, and there are 78% female postgraduates to 22% male.

Sydney University also recently increased the number of female professors in the school of mathematics and statistics from one to four, a move new department head Jacqui Ramagge described as “extraordinary”.

University of Queensland has reported that 59% of students studying a science discipline this year are women.

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Drawing Improves Kids Writing

Once school starts, nobody really takes drawing seriously anymore. In the classroom, drawings begin to take second place to writing.

Children who draw before they tackle writing tasks produce better writing.

It’s longer, more syntactically sophisticated and has a greater variety of vocabulary.

It is likely this is because the act of drawing concentrates the mind on the topic at hand, and provides an avenue for rehearsal before writing - rather like a first draft where they can sort things out before having to commit words to a page.

[Full Story](#)

VIC May Raise Teaching Benchmarks

Aspiring teachers who receive low marks in Year 12 may be banned from classrooms, as the Victorian Government is considering raising the benchmarks for entry into teaching degrees.

The Government was looking at options to attract teachers of the highest calibre, indicating the NSW model could be one option.

In 2013, NSW announced new measures to lift teaching performance: requiring school leavers to score at least 80% in three of their HSC subjects.

Other measures included introducing a mandatory literacy and numeracy test and making it easier to remove underperforming teachers.

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Greens Call For Free Ride For Kids

South Australian school children should be allowed to travel on public transport for free, the Greens say.

Greens MLC Mark Parnell says the move would encourage good environmental behaviour at an early age and save families money.

“Far too many kids these days are unnecessarily being driven to and from school instead of walking, riding or catching public transport,” Mr Parnell said.

According to a 2015 survey by Active Healthy Kids Australia, less than a third of secondary students use public transport for most of their trips to and from school and nearly half never or rarely do.

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