

Young people in rural and remote communities frequently missing out

Australia is yet to overcome the enormous challenge of providing quality education to those outside urban centres. While only 10 per cent of Australians live in rural and remote areas, this population is spread across a vast continent with one of the lowest population densities in the world.¹

The proportion of very remote students who meet each education milestone is between 19 and 48 percentage points lower than the general population.

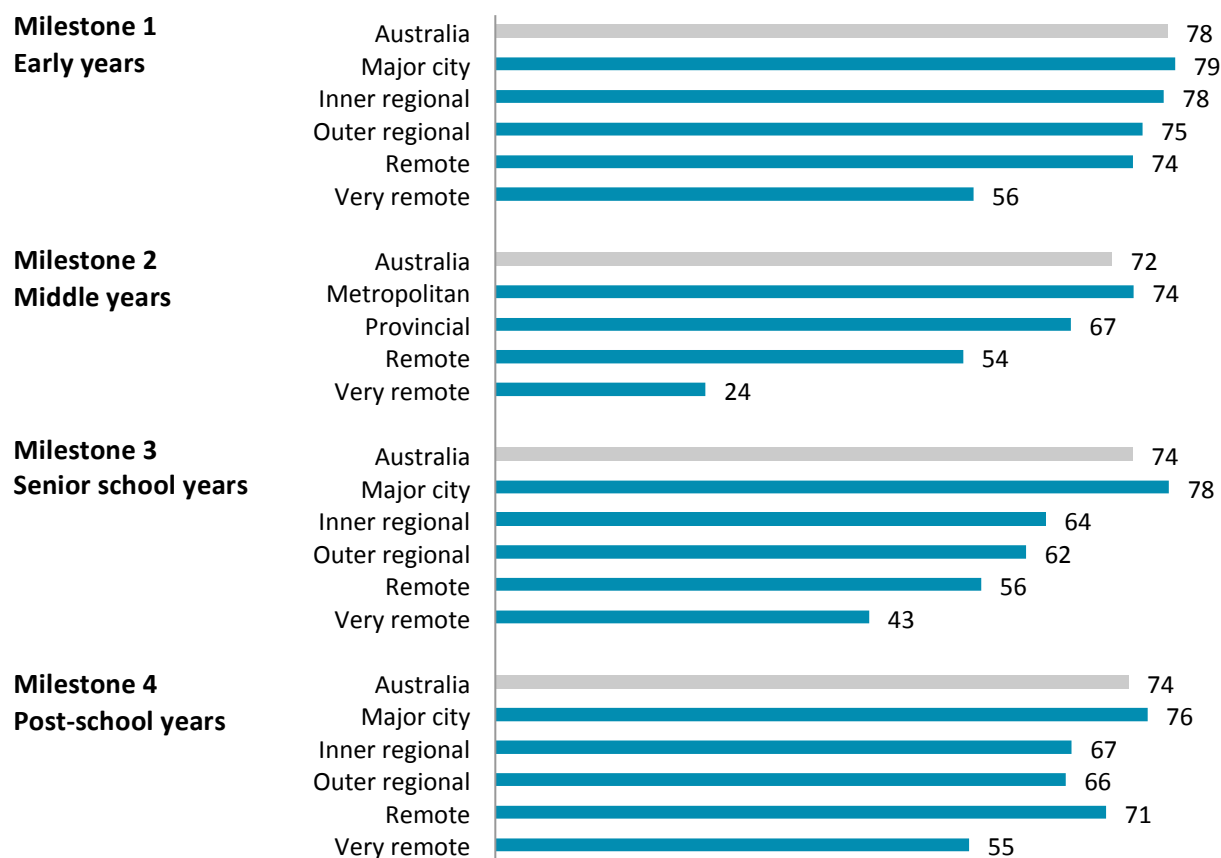
The evidence shows there is a consistent link between where Australians live and their educational outcomes at all stages of education, with those living in rural and remote communities doing worse than students in urban areas. To date, many of the policies in place to address this have been ineffective.

Educational opportunity in Australia 2015 is one of the most comprehensive data studies of Australia's education system. It examines young people's progress on four key educational milestones, from the early years right through to young adulthood.

Key findings

- The proportion of very remote students who meet the requirements at each milestone is between 19 and 48 percentage points **lower than for the Australian population as a whole**.
- Students living further from cities are **less likely to catch up** once they are off track at a milestone.
- **Rural and remote students have reduced access to education services** compared to metropolitan students. These students attend school less frequently, are less likely to go to university and are more likely to drop out if they enrol.
- **Remote students have less positive dispositions towards school on every measure** (belonging, self-confidence, purpose and perseverance) than their regional and metropolitan peers.
- **Vocational education and training (VET) is an important pathway** for regional and remote students, though very remote participation is low. Nearly one third of remote and outer regional students undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship.
- Remote communities are home to one-quarter of Australia's Indigenous population. As a consequence, the educational challenges faced in remote areas have a **disproportionate impact on Indigenous Australians**.

Proportion of students meeting educational milestones by location



What does this tell us?

The research shows a clear relationship between location and educational outcomes in Australia for each of the four milestones. With a population spread across such a vast country, Australia struggles to provide high quality education to its rural and remote communities. These communities present the dual challenges of isolation and low population density. Rural and remote areas must cope with issues around funding, workforce recruitment and retention, access to services and fostering engagement across diverse, widely-dispersed communities.

The small size of communities makes provision much more expensive per capita than in cities. The (Gonski) Review of Funding for Schooling recommended loadings for school size and school location to address this. However, funding alone is not enough in these areas. In particular, rural and remote education providers find it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff. The financial and other incentives on offer (such as generous leave entitlements) have been ineffective at reliably addressing shortages. There is evidence that recruiting staff who already live in these communities is effective, as is providing opportunities during training to spend time in rural and remote areas. These strategies are not used widely enough.

Access to services is an ongoing challenge for isolated locations, but technology and the rollout of broadband across regional and remote areas will enable educators to provide access to opportunities previously only available to those in metropolitan areas. There will still be cultural challenges that require sophisticated responses, such as the potential disconnect between those determining the curriculum, the structure of mainstream education, and the needs and interests of rural and remote students.

While those missing out must be a priority, *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015* also shows the achievements of systems, education providers and young people themselves, in creating an education system in which a majority of students are on track at every milestone. Importantly, students in all geographic locations across Australia can achieve at the highest international standards. The report aims to inform efforts to build on these successes, and identify areas where Australia's education system can better provide opportunity to all.

What was measured?

Milestone 1 – Early years looked at which children were developmentally ready at the point of entry to school, across all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge.

Milestone 2 – Middle years looked at the academic outcomes of Australian students at Year 7 – examining which students were at the mid-point of the third achievement band in reading for the National Assessment Program Literary and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

Milestone 3 – Senior school years examined how many young people had attained Year 12 or an equivalent qualification (at the level of Certificate III or higher) by the age of 19, using ABS Census data.

Milestone 4 – Post-school years used ABS Labour Force data to determine how many young people were engaged in full time work, training or study at age 24.

Factsheets in this series

Fact sheet 1 – Socio-economic disadvantage and educational opportunity persistently linked

Fact sheet 2 – Early years: Gaps in educational opportunity evident at entry to school

Fact sheet 3 – Middle years: Achievement gaps widen at Year 7

Fact sheet 4 – Senior school years: School completion uneven across Australia

Fact sheet 5 – Post-school years: Many 24 year olds marginalised, but second chances help

Fact sheet 6 – Young people in rural and remote communities frequently missing out

More information

Educational opportunity in Australia 2015 was prepared by the Centre for International Research on Education Systems at Victoria University for the Mitchell Institute. For more information visit our website at www.mitchellinstitute.org.au

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¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013, April 10). 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, April 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30April+2013>

