

# Report finds bullying and emotional and behavioural problems impact on primary students' learning ability

9 November 2018, by Christine Tondorf



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New research has found that a large percentage of Australian eight to 12 year olds are being bullied and/or experiencing emotional difficulties – and these children are falling behind their peers in numeracy and reading in the classroom.

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute's Centre for Adolescent Health has produced the [Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Learning across the Middle Years report](#) for the Federal Department of Education and Training.

According to the report, a substantial proportion of students in middle primary school (Years 3 to 5) are not tracking well. 20 per cent experience persistent emotional problems (like depression and anxiety), 20 per cent have [behavioral problems](#), and around 10 per cent self-report low wellbeing.

More than 20 per cent of [children](#) in Years 3 to 5 are also being bullied across two or even three years. The statistics in the report come from a

longitudinal study of more than 1200 Melbourne students – the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS).

CATS project leader, MCRI's Professor George Patton said it is likely that every Years 3, 4 and 5 classroom in Australia has at least one child experiencing persistent bullying and/or emotional and behavioral issues.

"The report also clearly shows that these problems hamper a child's learning in Year 3 to 7," Prof Patton said. "Students with these problems fall about 12 months behind their peers in numeracy in the four years between Years 3 and 7 with similar, although smaller trends, in reading."

"One in six students disengage from school during the late primary years. A child's emotional well-being is central to both learning and engagement and should be a focus for all schools and teachers."

Prof Patton, who is also a Professor of Adolescent Health Research with the University of Melbourne, said these children were a high-risk group.

"The statistics also reveal that children suffering emotional and/or behavioral problems and bullying in primary years were more likely to disengage from learning in secondary school.

"Given that around half of students report some level of emotional problems and over one in five report persistent problems, it needs a greater emphasis in schools and educational policy," he said.

The report came up with five key recommendations to help children not flourishing in late primary [school](#):

- strengthen the curriculum to continue to build and develop social and emotional skills in children
- promote and supporting teacher capabilities in this area (in-service and pre-service training). For example, by improving teachers' knowledge of [emotional development](#) across the middle years
- prioritise policies and practice to promote wellbeing in order to create inclusive and positive social environments in which students can engage effectively with learning and interact positively with other students
- form partnerships with families and develop strategies to maintain parental engagement about the social and emotional development of their children
- ensure links with health service systems for students identified with persisting problems

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

APA citation: Report finds bullying and emotional and behavioural problems impact on primary students' learning ability (2018, November 9) retrieved 23 May 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-bullying-emotional-behavioural-problems-impact.html>

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