

Supporting improvement in literacy and numeracy skills

Literacy and numeracy resources developed by ACER for the Commonwealth Government will provide extra support to underperforming students, says **Jocelyn Cook**.



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Literacy and numeracy are foundation skills for a successful education and a productive life. Improved literacy and numeracy outcomes encourage higher school retention rates, lead to improved employment opportunities, enhance engagement in society and support future economic prosperity.

ACER's work to develop materials for An Even Start – National Tuition Program, a Commonwealth government initiative, aims to address the learning needs of students who require additional assistance to acquire satisfactory literacy or numeracy skills.

The Even Start program funds tuition for students who have not met the national benchmarks in reading, writing or numeracy in Years 3, 5 and 7.

To ensure these students receive the best tuition possible for their individual needs, ACER has developed a kit of

resources to support the program. The kit includes software for the pre- and post-tuition assessment tools, and supporting resources to help schools and tutors administer the assessments, identify individual student's needs, and plan an appropriate tuition program for each student. This kit is available to every Australian school.

The pre-assessment diagnoses each student's needs in reading, writing or numeracy so that schools, parents and tutors can plan tuition for each child and access appropriate supporting resources and teaching strategies relevant to the particular identified points of need or weaknesses.

Because the assessment instruments were developed to gauge the reading, writing and numeracy needs of students whose performance was reported as below the national



benchmark, these instruments were designed to have much greater precision in the measurement of weaker students.

The post-assessment measures student achievement and progress at the end of a period of tuition. The post-assessments mirror the skills assessed in the pre-assessments, although the post-assessments are a little harder overall so that progress can be measured.

In addition to individual results, the assessment tools also provide quantitative national data, which will form part of the overall program evaluation strategy, providing baseline data for an independent evaluation of the program.

The resource kit also contains the Components of Reading Investigation

and the Investigation into the Components of Writing.

The Components of Reading Investigation is a series of small tests to be conducted one-on-one with students whose levels of achievement fall below the Year 3 reading benchmark. This tool aims to provide specific insight into the areas of difficulty experienced by those students who are not independent readers. It allows the teacher to focus on the student's phonemic awareness, understanding of phonics, vocabulary and fluency.

The Investigation into the Components of Writing tool is specifically designed to give teachers more insight into the specific areas of difficulty for students struggling to develop writing skills.

All the Even Start resources developed by ACER are designed for use in

an information and communication technology environment.

Assessments are also marked on-screen. Once student scores have been entered into the software, a detailed diagnostic report on the student's performance is generated. These reports show which questions the student answered right or wrong and for which misconceptions may exist. Tutor resources linked to each question or group of questions are provided as website links in the software.

The aim of the Even Start program is a measurable improvement in the literacy or numeracy levels of eligible students.

Schools can download all of these resources by registering on the Even Start website at www.anevenstart.deewr.gov.au ■