

# 1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL

## 1.1 Background

The process of collecting student background information from parents using nationally agreed definitions of student background characteristics began in 2005. The original edition of this manual, titled *Data Implementation Manual for Enrolments for the 2005 and 2006 School Years*, was prepared to assist schools and systems in modifying enrolment forms and associated data collection and storage processes to enable reporting of student performance by the agreed background variables. Further editions of the manual were produced in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

The data collection requirements introduced in 2005 arose from state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers' agreement that all government and non-government schools would use common definitions of specified background variables when reporting on students' outcomes.

To date, national agreement has been reached on standard definitions for the following student background characteristics:

- sex
- Indigenous status
- socio-economic background
- language background\*
- geographic location.

\*The measure of students' 'Language background other than English' status is currently under review. Until the review is completed, the existing technical specifications for language background will continue to be used.

The technical specifications for collecting data for the first four of these variables are contained in this manual. (Geographic location is collected through a separate process.)

Nationally comparable measurement and reporting of student outcomes are crucial to determining the extent of improvement in student outcomes, particularly for students who may be educationally disadvantaged. This underlines the importance Education Ministers attach to the link between educational equity and student attainment. All Australian governments are committed to improving student outcomes from schooling, addressing social inclusion and closing the gap on educational disadvantage.

The collection, provision and publication of data on student outcomes and school performance is also essential for public accountability and to provide the evidence necessary to provide support for the continuous improvement of students, schools and education systems over time.

Reporting student outcomes data, disaggregated by student background characteristics, is a standard component of national reporting and applies to all government and non-government schools.

## 1.2 Purpose of the manual

The purpose of the manual is to provide guidance to schools and school systems for the collection of information on student background characteristics using nationally agreed, standard measures of the characteristics.

This edition of the manual is to be used by schools and school systems when enrolling students for the first time in the 2013 school year onwards or when collecting information, via special data collection forms, on those students participating in national assessments.

## 1.3 Who should use the manual?

The manual is for the use of **school and school system personnel responsible for:**

- **designing enrolment forms** and enrolment processes
- **collecting information from parents**
- **designing, maintaining or modifying student information storage and retrieval systems**
- **updating student records**
- **managing or coordinating** at the school level **students' participation in** full cohort literacy and numeracy **testing**, and national or international sample assessments.

The manual also provides information for **test administration authorities, testing services contractors, software providers and boards of studies.**

Not all schools need to use the manual. In some systems, the implementation of the required student data collection arrangements is a central responsibility.

Because implementation of the nationally agreed definitions of student background characteristics began in 2005, most school systems and schools will have already have in place the required data collection protocols. There are, however, a number of potential new users - that is, schools or school systems implementing the required data collection arrangements for the first time.

**New users** are most likely to be either:

- **new systemic or non-systemic non-government schools coming into operation**
- **schools changing their status or operation and schools providing new level(s) of schooling.**

Such schools may need to review and adjust their data collection tools and data processing procedures to implement in their collections the standards agreed for each data item. These users should refer to **Section 4 – Action required.**