

National Report on Schooling in Australia 2010

Schools and schooling

3.1 School structures

School structures and age requirements for student enrolment in Australia differ between the States and Territories and are summarised in Table 3.1.

In New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, primary education consists of a preliminary year followed by Years 1 to 6. Secondary education consists of Years 7 to 12. In Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, primary education consists of a preliminary year followed by Years 1 to 7 and secondary education consists of Years 8 to 12. The preliminary year has different names in the various jurisdictions.

The age at which schooling becomes compulsory is six years in all States and Territories except Tasmania, where it is five years. In practice, most children start the preliminary year of primary school at between four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half.

Prior to 2010, the minimum school leaving age in most jurisdictions was 15 or 16. However, in January 2010, the National Youth Participation Requirement, agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009, came into effect across all States and Territories. This includes a mandatory requirement for all young people to participate in schooling until they complete Year 10 and to participate full time in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until the age of 17.

This requirement had already existed in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. From 2010 it also applies in New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, effectively lengthening the period of compulsory education for young people in these jurisdictions. The National Youth Participation Requirement is part of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions and is a major step in achieving national consistency in the structure of schooling.

The move for Australian governments to raise minimum school leaving ages (while accepting vocational training and employment as acceptable alternatives to senior secondary schooling) recognises the need for higher levels of education and skill in the modern globalised economy. It reflects the policy intent expressed in the [Melbourne Declaration](#) on Educational Goals for Young Australians that to maximise their opportunities for healthy, productive and rewarding futures, Australia's young people must be encouraged not only to complete secondary education or equivalent, but also to proceed into further training or education.

More information on the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions is provided in the [National initiatives and achievements – supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions](#) section of this report.

Table 3.1 Primary and secondary school structures – minimum age of commencement for Year 1 and minimum school leaving age by State and Territory, 2010

State/Territory	Preparatory year (first year of school)	Month of and age at commencement for Year 1	Primary schooling	Secondary schooling	Minimum school leaving age
New South Wales	Kindergarten	January, 5 turning 6 by 31 July	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 years ^(a)
Victoria	Preparatory	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 April	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 years ^(b)
Queensland	Preparatory	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 June	Preparatory Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 years ^(c)
South Australia	Reception	January, 5 years 6 months by 1 January	Reception Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 years ^(d)
Western Australia	Pre-primary	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 June	Pre-primary Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 years ^(e)
Tasmania	Preparatory	January, turning 6 by 1 January	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 years ^(f)
Northern Territory	Transition	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 June	Transition Years 1–6	Years 7–12 ^(g)	17 years ^(h)
Australian Capital Territory	Kindergarten	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 April	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 years ⁽ⁱ⁾

(a) From 2010 all NSW students must complete Year 10. After Year 10, students must be in school, in approved education or training, in full-time employment or in a combination of training and employment until they turn 17.

(b) From 2010 all Victorian students are required to complete Year 10 and remain in some form of education, training or employment until the age of 17.

(c) From 2006 Queensland students have been required to participate in 'learning or earning' for two years after completing compulsory schooling, or until they turn 17 or until they attain a Senior Secondary Certificate or a Certificate III (or higher) vocational qualification.

(d) From 2007 South Australian students who have turned 16 are required to remain at school or undertake an approved learning program until they turn 17 or gain a Senior Secondary Certificate or equivalent or a Certificate II (or higher) vocational qualification.

(e) From 2008 Western Australian students are required to remain at school or undertake an approved combination of training and employment until the end of the year in which they turn 17.

(f) From 2008 Tasmanian students are required to continue participating in education, training or full-time employment until they turn 17.

(g) The Northern Territory moved to include Year 7 students exclusively in secondary education in 2008.

(h) From January 2010, it is compulsory for all Northern Territory students to complete Year 10 and then participate in education, training or employment until they turn 17.

(i) From 2010 ACT students are required to complete Year 10 and then participate full time in education, training or employment until completing Year 12 or equivalent, or reaching age 17.

Sources: Australian Government, *Country Education Profile*; States and Territories

Within the overall structure of primary and secondary education there is further scope for variation in the structure of individual schools. Both government and non-government schools may be primary only, secondary only or combined primary and secondary. Secondary schools may accommodate the full age range of secondary students or be

divided into junior and senior campuses. Government and some non-government school authorities operate special schools for students with disabilities and other special needs, while in some jurisdictions a high proportion of students with special needs are integrated into mainstream schools. (See [Glossary](#) for definition of special schools.)

Children may be exempted from attending a school if they live too far away from an appropriate institution. These children receive tuition through various means, including distance education, School of the Air, and use of computer, facsimile and satellite technologies. Boarding facilities are available at some non-government schools, mainly in cities and regional centres. A small number of government schools, in particular those catering for groups such as Indigenous students, have residential hostels located close by. Children may be home-schooled if they have met the criteria set down by the relevant State or Territory education authority ([Year Book Australia, 2009–2010](#)).

Each State and Territory also has a preschool sector that is separate from primary and secondary schooling, but preschools are sometimes attached to or accommodated in primary schools. Data on preschools and on preschool education within schools are not included in this report. Data on secondary education provided by adult learning institutions such as colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) are also excluded from this report, except for VET in Schools programs undertaken by secondary school students.