



WELCOME

This newsletter shares with you some of the questions and issues raised from the First Assessment.

You can download this newsletter from <http://www.education.murdoch.edu.au/pips/>

REMINDER

The Final Assessment period is:

ACT	18 October – 4 November
QLD	4 – 22 October
TAS	27 September – 15 October
WA, NSW, NT and SA	18 October – 5 November

WHO USED PIPS IN 2004?

This year we have approximately 550 schools participating in PIPS across Australia. More than 18,300 Australian students have been assessed with the First Assessment in 2004.

The number of students per cohort appears below. Please refer to the PIPS Manual for a further explanation of cohort.

Cohort	Pre-primary or equivalent year group	Year 1
ACT	2761	0
WA+	7480	279*
TAS	5988	0
QLD	1350	536**

Note: WA+ contains more than 200 WA schools, 5 from SA, 8 from NT and 1 NSW.

* WA Year 1 students are not normally tested with PIPS. This number includes those schools that mistakenly tested Year 1 students and a few schools that were given permission to test Year 1 students due to special circumstances.

** Queensland schools are moving towards the inclusion of state wide pre-primary programs. Currently the program is available in some, but not all schools.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN YOUR STATE

ACT

Visits to assist analysis of PIPS feedback.

A third of the government ACT schools have welcomed the opportunity to receive a visit from Assessment and Reporting Executive Officer, Di Grantham, to assist with the analysis of PIPS feedback. Assessment and Reporting also provided a workshop which was attended by teachers from a number of schools.

QLD

Dr Helen Wildy's presentation to Districts, 16 and 17 June

Currently only schools from QLD's independent sector are taking part in PIPS. Due to a growing interest from some government sector districts, Helen presented to 80 participants from a number of districts including Ipswich and Toowoomba as well as a number of Catholic schools.

TAS

Dr Helen Wildy's visit to Catholic Education Office, 12 March

PIPS Australia Director, Dr Helen Wildy visited the Catholic Education Office and discussed the use of PIPS feedback by schools including the need for Year 1 teachers to act upon PIPS feedback.

WA

Workshop: Interpreting the First Assessment Feedback, 4 & 6 May

Over 90 participants from 59 WA schools attended the 2 hour workshop run by Helen Wildy. The majority of attendees were pre-primary teachers including a number of Principals and specialist teachers from all education sectors.

Professor Peter Tymms Seminar "Examining On-Entry Baseline Assessment across Cultures", 3 June

The originator of the PIPS On-Entry Baseline Assessment (PIPS), Professor Peter Tymms shared his expert knowledge in a once only presentation in Perth. Professor Tymms is the Director of the Curriculum Evaluation Management Centre (CEM) at University of Durham in the UK.

ISSUES

About the assessment

Why does PIPS not display all questions in all sections?

The program is tailored to each student's ability and if a student starts to falter in a given section, the program automatically moves on to the next section. In this way the student is not presented with a fixed number of questions that must be attempted, to the detriment of the student who is aware he or she cannot answer correctly.

Are the letters in the letters section presented in a particular order?

The first letter asked is the same as the first letter of the student's first name. The second letter asked is "S". This is considered the most widely recognised letter by children when they start school. There are letters that are in general better recognized than others such as S, o, A, C, and K. These are presented earlier in the assessment than other letters. In this way a student has quite a few chances to answer questions before the program "cuts" to the next section.

Is it possible to administer the rhyming words section without the pictures? Some students may be guessing the answer based on the associations with the pictures.

An earlier version included a phonics section without pictures. Identifying from a string of words those that rhymed was found to be too difficult for students. The assessment has been refined so that only those items are proven to be good measures have been included.

There is a small number of questions in the phonological awareness section. There is a good chance that the child can get half of those right simply by guessing. This section is reported separately from the reading section. It is also the least reliable part of the assessment. However it does fulfill a function in identifying children with poor phonological skills (when you also take into account repeating words) in comparison to high reading and maths scores.

Are the words *cash*, *cosmetics* and *toadstool* appropriate for the Australian setting, or are they too British?

These words are included as difficult words. PIPS is designed so that the assessment gets progressively challenging. Analysis shows that in 2001, WA students found the words "yacht", "cash", "jewellery" and "saxophone" slightly easier than students in the UK. ACT students found "cash", "microphone", "jewellery", "saxophone" and "cosmetics" a little easier than students in the UK. This analysis has not taken into account the age of Australian students, so there might be slight adjustments. However overall, there is not much difference in item difficulty between students from these countries.

About the feedback

Why do we display extreme scores as "over 75" and "under 25" for the maths, reading and total in the results table?

No test gives an exact score every time. If a student sat the test several times they may get several scores, sometimes a little higher, sometimes a little lower. For students who score around the average range, a few points difference in the raw score may move the standardised score at most a point each way (for example, a total raw score of 86 may match a standardised score of 55.2, and 3 raw points either way may give a standardised score of 54.1 and 56.2. However, if a student has a very high or low score, a few points either way could make a large difference to the standardised score. For example a total raw score of 236 may correspond to a standardised score of 82.4, and 3 points either way may give standardised scores of 79.6 and 85.4 – a larger range. So "above 75" and "below 25" are used as a way of not implying more accuracy than is possible.

What does "x" represent in the box-and-whisker plot?

The "x" represents an unusual score for that particular class. The circle under the x is the student who achieved that score. Of course, what is an unusual score or outlier in one group may not be an outlier in another group.

Administration queries

What should I do if I make an error entering a response and I have now completed the assessment?

The assessment tailors what questions are presented based on previous responses. If you mistakenly chose the "next" button to signify an incorrect response when it should be correct the assessment may present fewer questions for the student to answer. It is best to immediately use the "back an item" button to enter the correct response. If this is not possible because you have finished the assessment seek advice from your PIPS Contact. Do not enter a new student record and assess the student again.

What should I tell the student about the assessment prior to testing?

Test conditions will affect the student's performance on the assessment. Therefore students should not be told anything that will make them feel nervous or scared. For example "We are going to use the computer to give you a test and find out what you know" would be an intimidating statement.

What happens when I send the data after the assessment period stated in the Manual?

It is important that disks are returned by the date specified in the 2004 PIPS Manual so we can standardise the data. Every school's cooperation to provide data on time is appreciated as this ensures that schools in your cohort (including your own school) receive the feedback on time. If your school provides data much later than specified, the data can still be analysed but this means that your school's data will not be used as part of the standardisation process.

Why do I need one floppy disk per computer used to administer PIPS?

By clicking-on the *Transfer Data* button in the program, all PIPS data is copied on to the floppy disk. In this process, the new data copies over any existing data on the disk. If you have more than one computer and you use only one disk, the data from the second computer will copy over the data already transferred from the first computer. It is not possible for us to determine how many computers were used by your school to administer PIPS, so it is important you provide the correct number of disks and indicate by labelling each floppy disk separately (for example "1 of 3" "2 of 3" and "3 of 3").

Can I email my data rather than send by floppy disk?

No, there are logistical issues with receiving emailed data from over 500 schools. It is best to send data using the floppy disks provided. In future we are implementing an initiative, PIPS+, which will allow schools to submit data via a website and to download feedback data. We will let you know as soon as this is available.

ADMINISTRATION NOTE (Government ACT schools only.)

ACT government schools need to check that student details have been entered correctly before undertaking the final assessment. The Student ID is a 6 or 7 digit maze number e.g. 6898731 not the Family code e.g. CAVAD. For guidance to edit details, refer to page 33 of the 2004 PIPS Manual.