

## New research reveals clusters of disadvantage among Australian school students of non-English speaking backgrounds

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New research out today reveals that Australian schools do not reflect the ethnic diversity of their communities and that there is a divide in educational outcomes among ethnically diverse students.

*Ethnic Divides in Schooling*, by Dr Christina Ho, is the fourth in CPD's *In a Class of Their Own* discussion paper series. The series explores different facets of Australia's school system and how it concentrates advantage and disadvantage. The latest paper shows that among students with a language background other than English (LBOTE), we can see these same clusters of disadvantage, further exacerbating the growing inequality in educational outcomes and experiences.

The data shows how students' migrant experience shapes their educational achievement. At one end of the spectrum, high-achieving children of skilled Asian migrants are now highly visible in selective schools and classes and on Year 12 honour lists. On average, 83% of students in Sydney's fully selective schools are from a LBOTE. However, the focus on these high achievers hides the bigger picture of ethnic disadvantage in our schools. Other students from migrant backgrounds are concentrated in lower-income areas and continue to experience disadvantage.

"The stereotype of the high achieving Asian student is the exception rather than the rule", says Dr Ho. "What appears at first to be about ethnicity is actually about socio-educational advantage. There are plenty of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds who continue to need extra support to reach their potential. We mustn't let their experiences get lost in our celebration of the high achievers."

The analysis also reveals that the mixed experience of LBOTE students is also reflected and reinforced by school enrolments. While Australia's overall student population is the most diverse it has ever been, schools themselves do not reflect the diversity of their communities. Sydney, for example, has 125 schools where more than 90% of students are from a LBOTE, and 99 schools with a student LBOTE population of less than 10%.

"Schools should be community hubs, where young people are exposed to the full diversity of people in their community. Increasingly though, schools are not representing their communities. For a range of reasons, including policies encouraging school choice and the rise of selective schools, more families are bypassing or deciding against local schools. This has led to schools becoming less ethnically diverse than their neighbourhoods", says Dr Ho.

"In a nation built by immigration, schools play a pivotal role in integrating new arrivals and socialising all young Australians for life in a multicultural society. This paper examines how ethnicity intersects with socio-economic status to reinforce patterns of separation, inequality and achievement. The findings should resonate for those interested in creating a less divided education system where students and communities can prosper together, wherever they live and whatever their background."

The full discussion paper is available on the CPD website.

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