# Performance and Evaluation Division Snapshot

## Health and developmental differences between **boys and girls** at school entry

**Findings from the School Entrant Health Questionnaire, 2014**

The School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) is completed by parents during their child’s first year at primary school. It records their concerns and observations about their child’s health and wellbeing, for follow up by a nurse. The data collected from the SEHQ also provides a snapshot of health and development characteristics across the Prep population. In this snapshot, we focus on gender. We know there are gender differences in the early years.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data collections have highlighted a large difference in the child development outcomes of Australian boys and girls at school entry. In 2012, more boys (28 per cent) were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC than girls (16 per cent).

*From AEDC research snapshot 2014, “Gender differences in the AEDC and into the school years”*

Data from the 2014 SEHQ shows that the top three concerns for boys (as identified by parents) are speech or language difficulties, developmental issues and asthma. For girls, the top three concerns cited by parents were oral health, developmental issues and asthma.

* 1 in 5 boys start school with a speech or language difficulty
* 1 in 5 boys start school with at least one developmental

**How many boys are affected**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Speech or language difficulties | 1 in 5 | 18.6% |
| Developmental issues 1 | 1 in 5 | **18.4%** |
| Asthma | 1 in 6 | **17.1%** |
| Oral health concerns | 1 in 7 | **14.9%** |

**How many girls are affected**

| Speech or language difficulties | 1 in 9 | 10.6% |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Developmental issues 1 | 1 in 8 | **11.8%** |
| Asthma | 1 in 9 | **11.3%** |
| Oral health concerns | 1 in 7 | **15.0%** |

1 Using the Parental Evaluation of Developmental Status – PEDS - a ten item questionnaire, that can be used as a developmental screening test, or an informal means to elicit and respond to parent concerns; the children identified as having ‘developmental issues’ are those classified by the test as ‘high risk’ or PEDS Pathway A.

On speech and language difficulties, issues are even more prevalent in some of the ‘at risk’ populations groups: for Aboriginal boys and girls, boys listed on a Health Care Card, and boys that live with one parent. However, for children with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE), parents reported fewer speech and language issues.

Research conducted by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, using SEHQ (2010) linked to Year 3 NAPLAN (2013), showed that having *speech and language difficulties at Prep was associated with an average difference of -31 points in reading and -19 points in numeracy at Year 32.*

Behavioural and emotional wellbeing is measured in the SEHQ using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)3. This is an area where again, boys demonstrate more vulnerability than girls, with 1 in 9 boys classified as being at high or moderate risk of significant clinical problems related to behaviour and emotional wellbeing (compared with 1 in 14 girls).

On the SDQ sub-scales, more boys demonstrate issues across four of the five areas, with more girls being at higher risk on the ‘emotional symptoms’ scale.

The SDQ includes questions on 25 psychological attributes which are divided between five sub-scales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and pro-social.

**Peer and conduct problems are the most common issues for both boys and girls, with issues much more prevalent in boys**

**1 in 5 boys start school with peer problems**

**The only sub-scale where girls with issues outnumber boys is emotional symptoms**

**1 in 9 girls start school with emotional symptoms**

Research into gender and subject selection at VCE level (by Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research) revealed that on average, boys have higher NAPLAN numeracy scores than girls in Years 7 and 9, and this makes them more likely than girls to choose science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects4.

2 Research by Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Mendez and Ryan), unpublished

3 The SDQ includes questions on 25 psychological attributes which are divided between five sub-scales:

emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and pro-social.

4 Research by Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research

(Justman and Mendez), presentation to DET