

Student difficulties

The PILNA 2021 student questionnaire collected information about difficulties students experienced beyond well-being. Specifically, the questionnaire asked students to respond to statements about their ability to learn, manage themselves, and navigate their environment. Their responses highlight the learning support needs in the region.

Students were provided with a list of situations and were asked to indicate whether they had any difficulty with them. The situations were framed around physical, cognitive, and behavioural challenges, such as seeing, hearing, managing behaviour and walking. The responses they could give were 'No difficulty', 'A little difficulty', 'A lot of difficulty', or 'I cannot do it at all'.

Proportions of students experiencing challenges

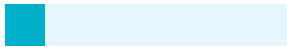
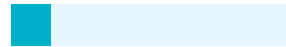
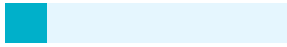
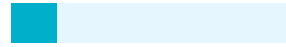
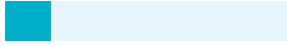
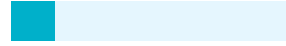
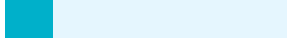
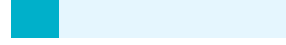
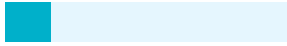
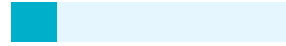
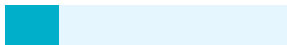
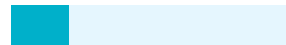
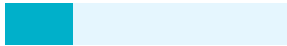
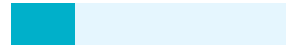
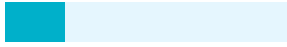
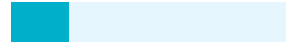
Table 3 lists the challenges to student learning measured by the questionnaire. This table also shows the proportions of year four and year six students who reported these as either 'A lot of difficulty' or 'I cannot do this at all'. This allows us to identify the proportion of students on whom these factors posed a severe burden.

Overall, the distribution of students reporting at least 'A lot of difficulty' across the eight items was relatively concentrated. For both year four students and year six students, the proportions of students reporting at least 'A lot of difficulty' across the items was between 14% and 24%.

The most frequent difficulty was 'Controlling their behaviour' (Year four, 24%; Year six, 22%). This was followed by 'Concentrating and focusing their attention' (Year four, 21%; Year six, 20%) and 'Learning or remembering things' (Year four, 19%; Year six, 20%). The least reported difficulty was 'Seeing, even if wearing glasses' (Year four, 14%; Year six, 14%).

Table RCST#3

Percentage of students with difficulties

Difficulty	Year 4	Year 6
Seeing, even if wearing glasses	 14% (0.5)	 14% (0.5)
Hearing, even if wearing a hearing aid	 15% (0.5)	 16% (0.5)
Walking or climbing steps	 16% (0.5)	 15% (0.6)
Being understood by other people when I speak	 17% (0.6)	 17% (0.5)
Self-care, such as feeding or dressing yourself	 16% (0.6)	 16% (0.6)
Learning or remembering things	 19% (0.6)	 20% (0.5)
Controlling your behaviour	 24% (0.6)	 22% (0.6)
Concentrating and focusing your attention	 21% (0.6)	 20% (0.6)

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

These findings can be compared with teachers' responses to a similar set of items ([Student difficulties reported by the teacher](#)). Not all the items were the same but there are interesting comparisons that can be made for the items about controlling their behaviour, concentrating and focusing their attention.

What does this mean?

A large proportion of students are experiencing quite severe behavioural and cognitive challenges related to learning and school environments in general.

One in five students across both year four and six are finding it difficult to concentrate and, relatedly, finding it difficult to control their behaviour. Smaller proportions of students are experiencing difficulties with sensory or physical tasks.

These findings can inform learning support activities throughout the region.