

Letter submitted by Sheldon Rothman to the *Sydney Morning Herald*

The Editor

In his article in the Herald on 16 May ('Policymakers must do their homework'), Dr Andrew Leigh stated that 'literacy and numeracy standards of 15-year-old Australians were lower at the end of the 1990s than in the mid-1970s', and he attributed these findings to me. This is a reference to the report *Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by Australian 14 Year-olds, 1975-1998*, which is part of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research report series.

While Dr Leigh did use figures from the report, they relate only to 14 year-olds enrolled in Year 9. This is not as homogeneous as it at first appears, especially when one considers the structure of schooling in the different states of Australia. The best group to use for comparisons over such a long period is all 14 year-old students, regardless of the year level they were in. When the comparison is done on this basis, the data showed that the average level of student achievement in reading and mathematics remained constant over the period.

Sincerely

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