

Poor parents not encouraging high school completion, study says

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Parents from poorer backgrounds are less likely to encourage their kids to finish high school, according to a new analysis from the University of Melbourne.

About six in 10 children from low socio-economic [households](#) in Australia currently complete high school, while 90% of students from more affluent homes finish their secondary studies.

Lead researcher Dr Cain Polidano (0409 703 296), from the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, said the attitudes of parents played a crucial role.

"Differences in the education [aspirations](#) of parents are probably the most important factor explaining the gap in school completion rates," he said.

The research found disadvantaged students were not only less likely to plan on completing high school (76% compared to 90% of better-off students), but they were also less likely to believe their parents want them to finish school (58% vs 73%).

"More importantly though, parents on lower incomes are more likely to favour vocational training courses—which have no school completion pre-requisite—over university courses," Dr Polidano said.

"Therefore, those parents may be more willing to let their children quit

school.

"It seems many parents aren't aware that more than 95% of schools now offer their own VET courses."

Differences in the quality of schools on offer (including resources, governance, teachers and peers) is estimated to be relatively unimportant in explaining the completion gap.

But the study did find good quality teachers encourage [disadvantaged students](#) to remain in school, but have little effect on the retention of other students.

"This result underlines the particular importance of teachers in promoting a positive learning culture in low SES schools where [academic achievement](#) may not be the norm among students and their parents," Dr Polidano said

"These findings should help schools and politicians better focus policies aimed at closing the SES completion gap, which is vital to reduce [inequality](#) of opportunity."

More information: The research, 'Explaining the SES School Completion Gap' (co-authored by Barbara Hanel and Hielke Buddelmeyer), has been produced as part of the Melbourne Institute's Working Paper Series 2012.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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