



Mine fire helped students' learning

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CHILDREN exposed to the Hazelwood mine fire that shut schools and smothered the Latrobe Valley in smoke for six weeks achieved surprising results in their studies.

Research analysing the psychological and educational impacts to students of the massive blaze that burned for 45 days in 2014 shows it may have had a positive effect on children's school outcomes.

The long-term study, led by Monash University, found Morwell children whose schools were closed and were forced to bus to neighbouring towns for classes performed better in NAPLAN results than students unaffected.

Michael Abramson, Professor of Clinical Epidemiology at Monash, said researchers had hypothesised the closing of schools and bussing of children elsewhere "would have been disruptive".

"If anything, the results were the exact opposite," Prof

Abramson said.

NAPLAN results for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 showed significantly higher marks in all domains for Morwell pupils affected by the blaze between 2013 and 2015.

The greatest difference was found in persuasive writing, with affected students gaining almost 30 NAPLAN points ahead of unaffected students.

Grammar and punctuation was also up 21 points, followed by numeracy, up 20 points.

"Interviews with the children show some were distressed by the smoke, but there were other children who found the experience of meeting other kids, making new friends and going on excursions all quite positive," Prof Abramson said.

More than 300 students across 20 primary and secondary schools were interviewed as part of the study, and will be revisited every two years to gauge long-term impacts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO
hazelwoodhealthstudy.org.au