

Inquiry: Administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing.

I am writing this submission as a teacher in a primary school. This submission is being made on behalf of myself and the other teachers at my school.

Terms of Reference

c) The impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:

i) The educational experience and outcomes for Australian students

Students with a disability

As a school with a special education support unit we have concerns with the impact of and the potential misuse of NAPLAN data could have for our students. Students with special needs are currently being catered for, either in special classes or those receiving extra support in mainstream classes, and are generally accepted by the school community.

If a school's success is going to be measured based on its NAPLAN results there is a fear that students who perform poorly on the NAPLAN such as students with special needs could be ostracised or castigated by the once supportive community.

The pressure placed on schools and parents of students with special needs because of this focus on NAPLAN results will detract from the fantastic work that is done for these students. These students and school communities will suffer.

iv) The quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community

Students with a Non English Speaking Background

As a school with approximately 82% of students from a Non English Speaking Background (NESB) we find the current presentation of data to be very misleading. The NAPLAN data presented on the My School Website does not indicate the actual make up of schools such as if the school has a high proportion of students from a NESB or a high number of students from a refugee background. In fact the only culture mentioned is that of students from an Indigenous background. The underlying implications of singling out those students are highly discriminatory.

Our school takes students from a NESB when enrolled in Kindergarten from a situation at home where they have barely been exposed to English and immerses them in the English language. There is nowhere on the My Schools website where the NAPLAN data is shown to indicate the value added information or growth given to these students from a NESB. Not to mention for those new arrivals who enter the country in Year 2 for example and have to sit the NAPLAN test in Year 3 with barely a year of exposure to English. Where is this information shown to parents and the general community when they look at the NAPLAN results?

e) Other related matters.

“Choice”

The way the data from the NAPLAN is being presented on the My Schools website and subsequently being portrayed in the media as a comparison between schools with the notion of providing parents with more choice is actually based on a falsehood, especially in terms of public schools.

Our school in Sydney's western suburbs is situated in a growing community and is currently closed to out of area enrolments. Our results on the NAPLAN test are quite good and significantly better than a lot of the schools in the area. However as we are closed to out of area enrolments parents with students from surrounding schools do not

have the choice to enrol their children in our school unless they move into the area. This example clearly outlines the false impression of choice that parents are supposed to have.

Growth

In relation to the notion of choice is the idea of unsustainable growth. If the NAPLAN results are designed to help parents “choose” which school to send their children to, this implies that some schools are going to be more attractive than others and so some schools will see an increase in student enrolments while other schools will see a decline in student numbers.

Schools are built on locations with defined areas. The school site does not have limitless boundaries with which to grow into as the student enrolments increase. Schools have a defined number of classrooms and resources based on student numbers and while these can increase to a degree, there comes a point where a school will not be able to adequately cater for extra enrolments because of a limit of space, (which is why there is the out of area enrolment policy).

Similarly as student numbers decrease in a school as parents “choose” to take their children to another school the resources that already exist at this school will go unused. Clearly this notion of “choice” has far reaching effects not only for parents and children but also the sustainability of schools.

In conclusion

We are strongly opposed to the misuse of the NAPLAN test data for the purposes of comparing schools as the NAPLAN test was designed to be a diagnostic test to inform parents of their children’s progress and to inform teachers about the students’ progress so as to further inform the teaching and learning programs in a school.

We feel that by creating this comparative situation only takes away from the validity of the NAPLAN test and in terms the validity and quality of what will be taught in schools. Schools will be forced to teach to the test if they hope to succeed in this ranking system and this will be to the detriment of the students and the school community.

Teaching is about providing students with the transferable skills and the ability to think, question and investigate. It is not about teaching students to get good marks on a test, which is what the ranking system does as is evidenced in international systems such as the UK and America.