

I am a Music teacher at Bega High School. I have been a teacher since 1972.

Naplan tests have been around for many years now. They were designed as one of many diagnostic tools for students, parents and teachers to see how students were achieving with basic literacy and numeracy skills. As such, they have been successful in achieving this aim.

It was only last year, when they were put on the My School website, resulting in league tables being created, that they became controversial, with reports of cheating and manipulating the system to achieve the best possible statistical results. (This is ironic in that, by creating the My School site as it is, the government was manipulating statistics.) "Improved security" was never needed before when they were used as they were meant to be.

The site was rushed and not thought through. The results for each school have such wide statistical variations they become meaningless. In most instances, like schools are not alike. (I would argue no two schools are alike.) Other than the "blurb" each school was allowed to write, there is nothing on it to tell us what a school is like. That Naplan test results are the only statistical results on the site is a travesty.

Naplan tests are done for literacy and numeracy only, on ONE DAY of a school year, in Years 3,5,7,9. To then rank schools on that is absurd. It is also highly unlikely the government didn't see this ranking would happen. That they went ahead with the My School site as it is, means they were complicit in the league tables being created and so have little understanding of schools and what is achieved in them.

Schools are so much more than spelling and adding up.

The subjects covered are enormous. Try English, Maths and Information Technology, History in all its forms, Science, the Social Sciences, Creative Arts and Languages, Sport combinations, Industrial Technology, Hospitality, courses in conjunction with TAFE, school based traineeships. These are only a start, I've left out many. Have a look at the list of subjects offered in the NSW Higher School Certificate. And all of this has been reduced to a mark for a school on the My School website for one test done on one day in years 3,5,7,9. If it wasn't so serious it would be laughable.

Schools do more than teach. They have the overall wellbeing of the student as a main concern. I am the Year 11 Advisor at my school. We are always considering what is best for each student. We advise on courses, career opportunities, how to cope with life and all its permutations. We look to the future and strive to give all students the best possible start for the rest of their lives. And this has been reduced to a mark for a one day test done in years 3,5,7,9.

A comment on the actual tests. Year 7, in NSW, do the tests after being in high school for only 13 or 14 weeks. As they are still having trouble finding their way around the school after this very short time, how their results reflect on the literacy and numeracy taught at their high school is impossible to fathom. Yet the papers used it in their league tables to rank high schools. Check out what the Sydney Morning Herald did. And it is supposed to be a serious and responsible broadsheet.

Reporting of results like this was introduced into Britain in the early 1990s. It originally started off with the good intention of identifying poor performing students and helping them improve. (Sound familiar?) It was soon reduced to a straight ranking of schools, with no consideration of external factors in that ranking. Teaching to the test became the norm. Ireland and Scotland abandoned it. England has also decided to change it this year because they realise it doesn't work. I'm sure the students have improved at doing the test. Their overall schooling has gone backwards.

One anecdotal story I heard. An Australian teaching in England had the topic to teach "The earth, sun and moon." She decided to teach the Solar System in conjunction with it. She was told not to do this. The test would be on the earth, sun and moon. Only teach the earth, sun and moon.

Since the My School website was launched with its emphasis on Naplan results, schools have been bombarded with information from various companies on resources to teach how to do Naplan tests. Naplan tests have been given more prominence by various state education authorities. They are taking on a life of their own, all because of the unethical way they are being used.

Most people seem to think they are experts on schools. After all, they all went to one at some time. This is like me saying I'm an expert on hospitals because I've been a patient in one.

Schools are not like a company which sells services or a commodity that creates profits and losses. Schools don't have services and commodities. They have children. Each child is an individual and is treated as such.

Schools don't produce profits and losses. They produce the citizens of tomorrow. They cannot be statistically analysed. They can NEVER be ranked as an infinite number of variables are attached to each school. Until this is realised no government will come to terms with what is really needed in Education. The My School website as it is, and the Naplan tests as they are now being used, are certainly not some of these needs.

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