

From:
Mr. Kenneth Allan James Case

I have significant concerns about the NAPLAN tests being used to rank schools on the Myschool website. I believe that they will have a negative impact on students, teachers, schools and school communities. I also believe that it will take years to undo the damage caused by this folly.

The tests were not designed for ranking schools. They were designed to give students, parents and teachers some indication of the student's progress in a national context. This is quite a different cause and so if the tests are to be used for a different purpose then they should be redesigned. But then it would be too transparent and parents would too easily see the damage.

As a teacher by trade I am very concerned that the use of the Myschool website to rank schools will lead to schools and teachers teaching to the test and will break down the collegiate nature of teaching. If I or my school is too be judged against others I will not be inclined to share the work I am doing for fear that it will advantage others who are competing against me. I don't recollect any sporting coach lending a hand to a team down the road so that they can improve their results and be more competitive. It hasn't been noticeable between the Crows and Port Power to date.

I taught in the UK in 1993 on exchange. We taught to the test as our school's reputation depended on it. We did this every week at the expense of other aspects of teaching and learning. I learnt while I was in the UK that here in Australia we copy many aspects of the UK experience. Unfortunately we usually do so after the UK has learnt from their experience and either ditched it or moved on. It seemed to me that the empire builders back here pick up an initiative and then take between 3 to 5 years to develop their empire around this idea meanwhile the UK moves on.

As I move around schools I have heard of parents intending to enrol their students at a secondary school being asked how their child scored in NAPLAN. They felt that the question was asked because of the fear that a low achieving child might have on the school's scores and ranking on the Myschool website. They also felt threatened by it fearing themselves that their child would not be as welcome.

Surely when there is such a strong and broad outcry across the teaching fraternity it should cause government to rethink what it is embarking on. It would be such a pity if decisions were made on the basis of government taking on "unions" instead of looking at the facts. Why wouldn't the government trust that teachers, principals and communities want what is best for their children.

Please listen to these concerns.

I do not object to teachers, principals and schools being accountable for their work however improvement will not occur through forcing everybody to compete with each other instead of collaborating and sharing good practice. As teachers we would never consider shame as a tool for encouraging a student to do better and yet this is precisely what is suggested here, and it is precisely what it will lead to.

I also believe that it is a lazy government that builds a veneer of action which is what the Myschool website is. It does nothing to actually resource or develop strategies for improvement.

I do not understand how telling people that they work at the worst school will lead to them improving the school. I believe it is more likely to lead to the best teachers going to the best schools.

How different would it be if instead of teachers and leaders serving time at poor schools it was seen as the pinnacle of their career.

Labor politicians should look carefully at the rankings of schools on the myschool website. The schools at the bottom of the rankings are pretty much all in Labor held electorates. Does this mean that these Labor MHRs are not looking after their electorates as well as the Liberal MHRs whose schools generally do so much better.

Our children would be best served if our governments properly resourced schools and if the wealth of this nation was equitably shared around. Is this too hard for governments so they opt for the much easier veneer. Seen to be doing something rather than actually doing something???

Thank you.

Ken Case