

## Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration –

Following participation in the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia I have agreed to provide a view about the effect the publication of NAPLAN results has on schools with New Arrivals Programs. I have also included a document summarising the relationship between the Limestone Coast Migrant resource Centre and the North School in the establishment of the first humanitarian refugee program in regional South Australia.

Considerations concerning the impact of NAPLAN testing on schools willingness to openly welcome Humanitarian Refugees. This includes the compounded impact of welcoming any children with complex social, economic, intellectual and educational backgrounds.

As school leader I have always valued data including that from state and national tests. Such information was useful in setting school targets and direction. The recent political decision to publish test data has had, and will continue to have, a damaging affect on many schools and their willingness to include those who cannot achieve high scores.

It is well known that New Arrivals from a Humanitarian Refugee background, where children have had no understanding of western life, deprived early years, no English and no education it takes many years to operate at an age appropriate level. Very often the children are not literate in their own language and do not understand even basic mathematical concepts. Survival has been their focus. These children are often fearful and traumatised and take some time just to adjust to their new life. Those coming from an Asian language background are further challenged because of the significant differences in language structures. For NAPLAN these children are counted with our mainstream students and thus significantly effect our school's results and local standing. We cannot sort the data to remove children with significant intellectual disabilities, family trauma, autism, serious mental health issues or New Arrivals status.

The end result of our changing percentage of new arrivals and children with disabilities is that the data is no longer useful and cannot be compared year by year or in fact across schools. It is a pointless exercise to point out the complexities to people who have not had our experience, it is beyond their experience and understanding. Community members looking at the web or a simplified graph simply see a number and do not delve further. Quite frankly in today's climate anyone interested in progressing their career and or their school's reputation would avoid including students from humanitarian refugee or poverty backgrounds, or those with intellectual disabilities. There are much easier jobs to be had.

Tests like NAPLAN claim to compare similar schools but this is a very unsophisticated tool. It does not balance important factors like: the state system you are in and their education funding, differences in regional vs. metropolitan services and teacher experience, the numbers and types of migrants (skilled vs. refugee, Asian vs. European, educated vs. not educated), levels and severity of disability. A close look at my supposedly like schools showed huge variations. So many of the comparisons are unfair. When I asked if our school could have a truly "like school" it was made clear that this would not be possible. With simplistic data on public display families judge our school from a web site alone with no reference to the qualifying statements.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, receiving schools are keen to take students if they are likely to perform well in NAPLAN. The unnatural selection processes that now occurs further divides our communities and make the chance of a truly inclusive community harder to achieve. This is the experience on the ground, which is particularly evident in a regional town. A colleague explained that only 68% of his children reached national benchmark but having removed the New Arrivals and Special class children 100% had reached the national benchmark. This carefully calculated data however is not likely to be published.

Those schools who look out for the less able are pressured to reach the "average". This constant pressure has a demoralising effect on schools such as ours, where extra commitment and energy is a daily expectation – and given willingly. The added threat is that those schools that are scoring well get more money. Our improvement is impossible to measure with yearly changes in complexity – no two years are the same. The thought that those teachers who have an easier job to do get additional pay because the children get good scores is just another inequity.

My staff are amazing and invest above and beyond for the children. Despite this we frequently find it hard to get experienced staff and it is getting harder. I believe the alienation and potential demoralisation of schools such as ours is a real possibility. In the later years of employment the effect will be less for me and my career – the future leaders, teachers and children will, I suspect, wear the impact of the decisions made by this generation of politicians.

## School: Mt Gambier North R-7 School (SA)

The partnership between Mt Gambier North R-7 School and the Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre was developed to establish the first humanitarian refugee program in regional South Australia.

In 2003 a Regional Prosperity through Population forum was held with over 140 key stakeholders in attendance. All tiers of government agreed that regional settlement would provide: a more balanced geographical distribution of refugees; easy access to housing; reduced competition for services; support for rural population growth; more opportunities for employment and, as it would match the rural background of humanitarian entrants, would be less traumatic. The National Regional Settlement Program was therefore initiated. One of the recommendations was to initiate an Inward Migration Strategy. A committee was formed and strong representation to the Department of Immigration highlighted Mt Gambier's readiness to be selected as one of the thirteen pilot locations across Australia that was suitable for regional settlement of refugees.

The Migrant Settlement Committee, established in 2004, was responsible for planning and overseeing the implementation, service mapping, cultural awareness activities, training and communication between networks. The school was identified as a New Arrivals School and in sharing a unique set of challenges, the partnership with the Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre became stronger as we learnt to rely on each other.

In May 2007 a Limestone Coast Migrant Resource Centre Manager was appointed to regional South Australia and shortly afterwards she came to enrol two children at the school. With an immediate need for families to feel welcomed, and for the school to develop skills in working with humanitarian refugees, a partnership began. Since June 2007 the school has enrolled a large number of refugees. The school focuses on contextual learning with a dedicated Landcare area for engaging students and the community.

Developing expertise in literacy and numeracy were priorities as the school lacked any experience in teaching English as a second language. There was a very low level of English knowledge among the refugees and there were no direct bi-lingual service or appropriate translation services. From the outset the school and the Migrant Resource Centre worked together to identify issues of concern and find solutions. Together they addressed new needs by establishing a secondary program at the High School and providing holiday and homework learning programs for the whole community. The lack of specialist services such as psychologists, trauma counselling, cultural resources and professional learning meant that the on-going collaboration is essential. At any time, the cultural make up of the group could change, bringing new demands.

The need for refugees to be welcomed is essential and both partners work hard to keep the local community informed through the media, school newsletters and in our day to day work. We acknowledge people for their support and identify the advantages for the whole community. This has paid off, with the mainstream community embracing the New Arrivals, resulting in support from a wide range of organisations and volunteers.

Life skills sessions run in response to needs identified daily. Some of the issues addressed are: how to cross the road, mow the lawns, use a water softener and go shopping. The Migrant Resource Centre Manager runs workshops using service providers, business and volunteers, while the school includes activities like road safety in the curriculum. Community Groups such as the Bike Users Group provide their expertise for free, while teachers volunteer time to teach swimming during vacations. Meanwhile Community Health and the local Police provide specific programs on request.

There are economic benefits derived from the influx of new families helping to stem population decline. The community benefits from greater diversity and work force participation. Networking and relationship building between organisations has been extended and strengthened as a result of the forged partnerships. The Migrant Resource Centre undertakes training of volunteers and supports the school's bilingual support workers. This experience has enabled adults and students to help others and be acknowledged for their

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