

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and overview

Referral

1.1 On 15 May 2013 the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee for inquiry and report:

The effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), with specific reference to:

- (a) whether the evidence suggests that NAPLAN is achieving its stated objectives;
- (b) unintended consequences of NAPLAN's introduction;
- (c) NAPLAN's impact on teaching and student learning practices;
- (d) the impact on teaching and student learning practices of publishing NAPLAN test results on the My School website;
- (e) potential improvements to the program, to improve student learning and assessment;
- (f) international best practice for standardised testing, and international case studies about the introduction of standardised testing; and
- (g) other relevant matters.¹

Conduct of the inquiry to date

1.2 Notice of the inquiry was posted on the committee's website and advertised in *The Australian* newspaper, calling for submissions by 7 June 2013. The committee also wrote to stakeholders to notify them of the inquiry and invite submissions. The committee published a total of 93 submissions, as listed at Appendix 1. This appendix also includes information on documents tabled by the committee during the course of the hearing. A number of submissions were redacted prior to their publication to protect personal details.

1.3 The committee conducted a public hearing in Melbourne on 21 June 2013. A list of witnesses who gave evidence before the committee is at Appendix 2. Copies of the Hansard transcript from the committee's hearings can be accessed online at <http://aph.gov.au/hansard>.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 2013, pp 3928–3929.

Background

1.4 NAPLAN is an annual assessment of Australian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 that tests students in reading, writing, language and literacy. The test has been conducted in May each year since 2008, and results are available four months later in September. Since 2010 results have been available publically on the *My School* website at an individual school level.²

1.5 This committee completed an inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing in November 2010.³ The terms of reference for that inquiry were:

- (a) the conflicting claims made by the Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing;
- (b) the implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data;
- (c) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:
 - (i) the educational experience and outcomes for Australian students,
 - (ii) the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice,
 - (iii) the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals, and
 - (iv) the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community; and
- (d) international approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results, i.e. ‘league tables’; and
- (e) other related matters.⁴

1.6 The committee majority made twelve recommendations targeted at reforming the NAPLAN assessment program.⁵ Recommendations included reforms to the publication and representation of test data, arrangements for students with a disability, provision for students with a language background other than English, measures to ensure the integrity of the testing process, reforms to the *My School* website and management of publication of league tables in the media. Government Senators and the Australian Greens also appended dissenting and additional comments to the report. The Australian Government, in consultation with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the relevant COAG council, has since implemented a number of the recommendations and introduced changes to the

2 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 69*, pp 7–8.

3 Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, *Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing*, November 2010.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, 13 May 2010, p. 3490.

5 Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, *Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing*, November 2010, pp xi–xii.

My School website.⁶ However, submissions to the committee suggest that a significant number of important recommendations have not yet been implemented by the government.⁷

The need for an interim report

1.7 Since its introduction in May 2008, and the subsequent publication of results on the *My School* website from 2010, the NAPLAN testing program has been the subject of discussion, research and controversy. This deep interest has been reflected in the current inquiry, which has seen the committee receive a high volume of submissions from individuals and organisations, including parents, teachers, principals, academics, and schools.

1.8 When referring the inquiry to the committee, the Senate set 27 June as the date by which the report should be tabled, and given that this is likely to be among the last sitting days before the general election, it is not practical to extend the reporting date. The evidence provided in submissions, combined with evidence provided by witnesses during the committee's hearing on Friday, 21 June 2013, demonstrate that the committee requires more time to adequately discharge its reference and present a properly considered report on this very important matter of public policy.

1.9 Therefore, Chapter 2 of this Interim Report provides a snapshot of the key issues identified thus far, but does not delve any deeper into the different views put by submitters, or come to any conclusions on them. However, the committee does note the possibility that the Senate may re-adopt this inquiry in the 44th Parliament, following a likely recommendation to that effect from this committee once it is reconstituted. Such a course of action would ensure that the issues raised by submitters could be properly and comprehensively examined and reported on.

Note on references

1.10 References in this report are to the proof Hansard. Page numbers may vary between the proof and the official transcript.

Acknowledgements

1.11 The committee extends its gratitude to the large number of individuals and organisations who made submissions to this inquiry, and to witnesses who offered their time to give evidence at public hearings and provided additional information. Both contributed greatly to shaping the committee's deliberations and report.

6 Australian Government Response to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee Report on the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing, August 2011.

7 For a discussion of the 2010 inquiry and outstanding recommendations see: Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, p. 3.