

Our school is a QLD State School with over 1000 students. It plays a vital role in providing high quality public education within the community and is renowned for its community spirit. Continual focus on the students, combined with all our energy, passion and commitment, goes into providing the best possible opportunities for all. Ensuring our students are receiving quality teaching and learning within a positive fun-filled school and learning environment is reflected in the positive messages about their experiences that are frequently passed on by parents and carers. The negative impact of NAPLAN on our school is increasingly obvious and we feel that the government's priorities are re-directing our efforts and attention and adding undue stress on students, teachers and schools.

Students

NAPLAN has narrowed the curriculum by focusing on the knowledge/understanding levels of Maths and English, thus these become the focus for an extended period. All curriculum areas suffer either directly or indirectly. Our once broad, rich, classrooms have become narrow, dirt tracks as the knowledge we impart becomes restricted to what rumour says is on the TEST! Other KLAs, such as The Arts become a treat. Is there to be a NAPLAN for The Arts, Science and Music etc? A school that offers opportunities for students to succeed in a variety of areas at a high level is a better school than one with high NAPLAN results.

There is a general feeling of discontent from students. Much more enthusiasm is shown toward the regular class program. A lot of time is spent building student's confidence - vital at this stage of their lives. We ensure we never test what we haven't taught because it is demoralising for students. Then along comes NAPLAN – a stressful exam given to primary students from 7 years of age, this is not reasonable.

After the practice sessions and the emphasis on timed individual work, many students lose their enjoyment of school in such a high pressure time. There is strongly evident stress on the students and this is a very real concern thanks to the media/government etc. Pressure on the students also comes from home and the parents are stressed too. They are buying test books and pushing their children at home. Parents have reported that their year 2 students are already dreading Year 3. We try hard to minimise the stress however NAPLAN is on TV, radio and papers constantly for an extended period of time.

Particularly stressful for students with learning difficulties. We are setting them up for failure and creating anxiety. NAPLAN is developmentally inappropriate.

Teachers/Teaching

Naplan has had a big impact on the teaching practices of teachers. Normal teaching programs are interrupted dramatically.

We become driven by NAPLAN preparation and it causes the shelving or downgrading of many long term investigative type activities. We used to do rich tasks full of Higher Order Thinking, Connectivity, Substantive Conversation, Problem Solving, Metalanguage, Deep Understanding, Deep Knowledge – all of which lead to lifelong learning. Now we practise colouring bubbles and fudging answers for questions (some of which we can't possibly know the answer to).

We are encouraged to engage children by teaching within the context of an integrated

and yet during NAPLAN we become very skills focussed in a decontextualised environment. We need to constantly push children hard to complete unit work based on Essentials while simultaneously working on NAPLAN test practice tasks. NAPLAN test formats and items become the focus until May. The time spent in preparation ranges from the equivalent to one day a week, to most first and half of second, term.

Teachers of all year levels are becoming stressed. Year One teachers feel the pressure from questions such as 'how are you preparing your students for NAPLAN in two years time?' This is at a time when the children are just beginning their journey to learn how to read and write.

A lot of time is spent teaching to the test. This is not meaningful or valuable in an already crowded curriculum. Children tire of doing the practise activities, such as narrative writing and more narrative writing.

Point of time testing, means that all test concepts have not yet been covered and are consequently rushed through and not thoroughly taught.

NAPLAN tests are not useful for their diagnostic capability. The tests could be of some use as a general tool if schools did not bother to attempt to teach to them, however with the pressure on performance, this is not an option.

So much more needs to be looked at than just the right or wrong answer. Where is the emphasis on process which our Essential Learnings are founded on? Data! It can be tweaked and twisted to say whatever you want it to say. What use is data on unrelated, untaught work and it prevents us getting real data on real, related, higher order subjects. Students who cannot yet read have managed to pass the NAPLAN reading test.

We need to question how many teachers actually look at the results. Who has the time to use meaningless data? What is overlooked in the process?

School

An inordinate amount of time is consumed to organise and administer the tests.

Checking/counting of papers alone takes up to a week in a large school.

The re-organisation of timetable, including for covering Non Contact Time, is very time consuming for administration. Much of the testing is about management of the test – thus taking away from leadership around curriculum initiatives etc.

QLD primary schools have to do PREP Portfolios; Year 2 Net; Year 3 NAPLAN; Yr 4 QCAT's; Yr 5 NAPLAN; Year 6 QCAT's; Year 7 NAPLAN. High schools on the other hand, have only Yr 9 NAPLAN and QCAT's. Pressure on primary schools unreasonable. We receive a firm and clear set of expectations regarding the performance of our students. This is primarily one of an increase in our results (regardless of what the last set of results was).

It is a completely irrational concept that schools can continually keep improving. We have years when particular cohorts are strong and others when they are weak (many with learning difficulties etc). Our results can fluctuate with these different groups. How can 2009 results be compared to 2010 with 100% different students, backgrounds etc? How are percentage improvements determined? Is this what education has become? It's no longer about the students. It's about adding colour to graphs. It's about schools' reputations, contracts, teacher's jobs. The kids are the forgotten integer in this equation. We are very concerned about a possible exodus from State to Private schools. Even if published data did reflect the fact that private schools select on ability, offer scholarships

and don't have the majority of the states' ESL and Special Needs students, parents would only see black and white (or should we say red and green).

We agree that we are here to achieve better results from the children, but it should not be governed by funding from National test results.

Wide reading about international systems in journals shows a common theme – high stakes testing results in shallow teaching – no time to teach for understanding. One teacher's experience teaching in Fiji notes that 'this is a culture where children learn to regurgitate for exams rather than to learn with purpose.' Lower ability in higher order thinking adults in the workforce = productive problem solvers.

Teachers from Canada and the U.K reveal appalling stories of teachers being forced to cheat to keep their positions.

An ex Torres Strait teacher was part of a system who put ESL students in years 3, 5 and 7 through the test. The students mostly couldn't read or comprehend its content. This was done knowing they would fail and should be exempt.

To date our school has performed well on NAPLAN however we are still vehemently opposed to NAPLAN and MySchool. MySchool is not comparing us with 'real' like schools, such as those with same status(State) , similar in size, and within an hours' drive of our school.

With the onus on school performance to be measured against like schools, the competition drives the tests as learning episodes (teaching to the tests). This stops them being a meaningful point in time diagnostic tool and turns them into a negative task driven event.

MySchool doesn't compare schools instrumental music programs, sporting facilities or school environment. It's just the data on one point in time test.

Reports are also in that houses have been devalued due to local schools performing poorly.

In summary, we believe that parents generally tend to know where their children are in the world and that testing upon testing rarely offers any new information or surprises.

Similarly, teachers soon work out where their students are sitting in the scheme of academia, and a point in time test is of little consequence to them.

Everyone is born with a certain level of intelligence and it is likely that intelligence at age 5 predicts better than any other variable a child's future educational progress and attainment. Of course environmental factors likely have some influence over the following years however the child who starts school with A's will likely finish school with A's and likewise the child with D's to begin, will graduate with a similar mark. Of course there are variances to this. The teacher's vital job in empowering all students individually cannot be underestimated, nor can it be TESTED. A 'one off' test does little to assess children's true capacity to learn.

We as a school, as teachers and for most of us, as parents, know that parents judge a school on many things, yet there is such a great Governmental emphasis on NAPLAN. We hear that the tests are meant to be low key, not high stakes business. Yet why all the pressure to perform from State Departments, if this is the case? Previous results have meant that auditors are in the schools, adding more unnecessary stress to staff, from

principals to teachers. Once again, this is taking valuable time away from the things that matter – teaching!

Not everyone can be a winner if schools are ranked. There will always be losers. No matter how much everyone improves each year, there will still be ‘losers’ who will suffer the consequences.

Testing faults include that multiple choice answers can be fluked or guessed giving an inaccurate result. The issue of cheating has also arisen. Some schools ‘assist’ children to do the test. With the huge pressure on administration, teachers and kids, this is not surprising. Some schools financial future depends on the success (private schools). Improving teaching and learning and subsequent outcomes is a positive thing BUT if the methods to get there become overbearing, then it will be increasingly difficult for schools to give students a rounded education.

Why do we need NAPLAN anyway? Everything has been going along fine – there have always been high achievers and low achievers, and students continue to graduate school with great success. What is this all about?

RECOMMENDATIONS

NAPLAN in its current form should be scrapped immediately. If it isn’t some ideas include:

Finish test with an easy question so that the children can feel good about themselves. NAPLAN gets harder and harder so everyone finishes feeling inadequate. Good tests cater for visual, aural and kinaesthetic learners.

Have test at beginning or end of year. May is inappropriate as 2/3 of the year’s work has not been taught.

Teachers should not supervise their own class. They should exchange classes for the test time.

Further issues relating to NAPLAN currently include the long delay before schools receive results so when they do arrive there is not much that can be done for Year 7 students. High schools take little information about the children. Are they using the NAPLAN results?

The time constraints of timed writing tasks are totally unrealistic and cause many good writers to fail and lose enjoyment of writing.

The above submission has attempted to include the views/ideas of over 50 classroom teachers, specialist teachers and administrators. Naturally there is variation in individual responses however overall this submission hopes to cover the central idea of the majority. Please excuse the rushed (point form) nature however circumstances meant restricted time to respond.