

The attached document was submitted to a similar inquiry in 2010. It remains substantially relevant to the current inquiry.

Martyn Bawden
Principal
Kingsgrove High School
Cnr Kingsgrove and Stoney Ck Rds,
Kingsgrove NSW 2208

Kingsgrove High School

Submission to Senate Inquiry into NAPLAN assessment and reporting.

The publication of simplistic NAPLAN data on the “myschool” website is opposed on the following grounds:

- **Inadequate portrayal of school contexts.**

School contexts cannot possibly be portrayed adequately, leaving no possibility of schools being compared on an equal footing. These contexts include non-English speaking (NESB) makeup, socio-economic factors, geographical location, local population and intake demographics.

Kingsgrove High School’s representation on the “myschool” website in February, 2010, took no account of educational programs or disciplines apart from a bland and narrow literacy / numeracy report, and no account of cultural, sporting or other programs at the school. The limited area of reporting assumed a disproportionate importance, by exclusion and by design, and therefore constituted misinformation.

Far more meaningful and contextual depictions of school achievements at Kingsgrove High School are available through regular school newsletters; reporting to the school’s peak parent bodies – the School Council and P&C; production of semester reports on student progress and learning against standardised achievement grades; parent-teacher evenings; and the school’s own website.

The contention is that the “myschool” website fails to provide an adequate portrayal of school contexts.

- **Crude, inaccurate and damaging “ranking” exercises by media**

In the case of Kingsgrove High School, a crude league table, published by the Sydney Morning Herald, placed the school at around 320 of 550 secondary schools in NSW. The data that permitted the construction of this table was obtained from “myschool”.

As an index of school effectiveness, which this table purports to be, there would appear to be a marked contradiction with other, more carefully considered, measures concerning the school:

- a NSW Director-General’s award, in 2009, for growth in Higher School Certificate results;
- a Sydney Regional award, in 2008, for outstanding achievement in the growth of literacy results, as expressed in the Statewide ELLA tests; and
- an analysis of the school’s longitudinal growth data between the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate exams, by Dr Geoff Scott of the NSW

Dept. of Education and Training's Educational Measurement Directorate, leading to his statement to the school Executive in 2008, that "there would scarcely be a school in NSW that had stronger growth data than Kingsgrove High School"

The contention is that league tables constructed by the media, from data supplied by "myschool", are a totally inaccurate representation of school effectiveness; further, that they are likely to continue, even if other more descriptive and growth-related information is placed on the website.

- **The lack of safeguards and protocols for schools doing more than their share of educational "heavy lifting".**

Public comprehensive schools, of which Kingsgrove High School is an example, enrol all students within their drawing area. Within this drawing area, there is no right of selection of enrolments, and the intake typically includes a range of students requiring support, including students with intellectual impairment. Provisions to exempt these students from NAPLAN testing are not always effective (arising, for instance, from the failure of parents to return signed exemption forms), and fail to safeguard the school against the invalidating of its NAPLAN data.

The contention is that the portrayal of simplistic NAPLAN data on "myschool" unfairly disadvantages schools which have no ability to select their enrolments.

Summary

"Myschool" provides information which narrows, over-simplifies and distorts the multiplicity of measures by which schools can and should be judged. Even the narrow measures which it provides are overwhelmingly the product of the abilities of the students which walk through the school gates, not any kind of measure of school effectiveness.

Over-simplification and narrow reporting, in this case, are much worse than no information at all. Not even the side-by-side publishing of other information is likely to change this. It is a particularly poor basis for funding and resourcing of schools, and needs to be dismantled.