

23 June 2010

Our Ref: 41322

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary,

INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION AND REPORTING OF NAPLAN TESTING

The Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations (QCPCA) welcomes the initiation of this inquiry and would like to submit the following for consideration by the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee:

- NAPLAN is an important piece of teacher assessment and a major step in our education system particularly in Queensland where there has been no standardised testing for year 10 or below for over 30 years. We do however believe that it should not be used in isolation to other forms of assessment.
- In its current form and context NAPLAN should only be used for teachers as a guide. It is not appropriate for the results to be compared with other States and Territories until all States are on an "equal playing field". This includes the introduction of an Australian Curriculum and consistent school starting ages.
- NAPLAN is already affecting teaching practices by encouraging schools to teach towards the important elements covered in the NAPLAN tests.
- Schools could potentially use unethical methods to get better results. For example the exclusion of some students, the potential poaching of students and teachers aiding students during the tests.
- QCPCA have not yet encountered allegations of cheating. We would however stress that tests need to be a single examination and the method of implementation needs to be uniform.
- The external face of the boxes used to deliver NAPLAN examination papers should not be branded "NAPLAN". Some of our members working in schools have indicated to us that there is a potential "loophole". As the staff are required to open the boxes prior to the tests and count the number of papers, at times this is carried out by only one person - This needs to be tightened up.

- Parents report that their children are physically sick leading up to testing - We need to ensure that schools and teachers do not put undue pressure on students with high expectations. We have also received reports that students have been told that if they do not achieve to a high standard they will make their teacher look bad. For small children this can be stressful - especially if they are fond of their teacher.
- Testing has failed to raise standards in the UK and New York, USA and is now seen by many as being counter-productive. NAPLAN does not act as a full assessment of student performance/understanding and its aim is restricted to assessing basic matters in English, Mathematics and Science. The overemphasis on one basic set of skills means that subjects such as music, art and physical education are not given due consideration and time.
- Simplistic reporting of NAPLAN scores gives the wrong impression of the quality of some schools. Those schools, which adopt a selective intake, will almost inevitably get better scores. This reflects the quality of the student, not the quality of education.
- A system to measure the value added should be implemented. In this way, the improvement in students' performance becomes the primary focus. With the data available in NAPLAN, such a system could easily be developed. Such a system could reveal that some schools, perhaps from low socio-economic areas, might perform very well by greatly improving the students relative to the Australian average.

We support the idea that NAPLAN is potentially a useful tool for Australian and Queensland schools but the structure, methodology and content need to be reconsidered in order to realise this potential.

Kind regards,

Margaret Black
QCPCA, State President