

Epping Heights Public School
128 Kent St
Epping NSW 2121
Australia

Attention: Committee Secretary

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Senate Inquiry into administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing

Submission by the staff of Epping Heights Public School to address the terms of reference listed below.

(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,*
- (iv) the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community;*

As teachers we are deeply concerned about the future of education in Australia. We feel the publication and misuse of NAPLAN data has already had a negative effect on the teaching and learning in schools. There is increasing pressure by our communities, education directors and others to ensure good test results for our students. This pressure may ultimately result in a narrowing of the curriculum, to teach to the test, and be at the expense of a balanced, deep and meaningful education. Even the most assured teachers feel they need to 'prepare' students for NAPLAN. This impacts greatly on the teaching and learning of students, creates anxiety among students and undermines the value of areas that fall outside of the testing regime.

Currently we have specialist music, sport, dance and computer programs in our school. Many of our students show talent in these areas. Some show talent in literacy or numeracy but few achieve highly in all these areas. By providing varied experiences to young children in their formative years, we foster confidence, individuality, self acceptance and acceptance of others. Students have the chance to learn what they are good at, what they like and are encouraged to try in all areas because if they can achieve in one area there is no reason that they can't achieve in others. Our students enjoy excursions, incursions, celebrating special days and many wonderful enriching school experiences that offer not only learning opportunities but also engage students in their own education. The more emphasis placed on NAPLAN the less value and time is given to other essential areas of a quality primary school experience. We now have a situation where a growing number of students are tutored extensively in order to perform well in tests including NAPLAN. For these students their life experience is already affected by less time being given to developing interests, talents and creative thinking. In a rapidly changing world, students need skills to become life-long learners, adaptive and multi-skilled. How will students who have been coached to a narrow set of criteria succeed at a tertiary level and beyond to become well educated, creative and well-rounded citizens?

We currently have Annual School Reports published on school websites that provide broader information about individual schools than the limited information provided on the MySchool Website. The Annual School Report gives parents a balanced view of the school and its' community with far more detailed information about a wide range of disciplines including academia, the arts, sport and welfare areas. School communities readily have access to this information. The MySchool Website provides an extremely narrow view of a school. This narrow information is not intended for use as ranking data

however that is exactly how it has been used. What purpose would this information be to others outside of our own community? Members of the press would maintain that it is a matter of freedom of information. We maintain that it is a privacy issue when students as young as 8 years old have their results, albeit in a group, published for all.

It saddens us as teachers when we hear and are involved in conversations where parents are choosing a school based on these rankings. It is also shocking to us when our value as teachers is credited by the 'rank' of our school. Epping Heights Public School has an excellent reputation and our students receive a wonderful public education. Our 'rank' is high but we are well aware that due to the socio-economic make up of our community, the students at our school have every advantage to perform well at school. We commend the excellent work by teachers across the state. In many ways the challenges faced by other schools and communities makes our work hard to compare. We maintain that in such schools the welfare programs and civics education are more important than any ranking that could be applied.

One very important drawback of our school achieving well on NAPLAN and previously the Basic Skills Tests is that our school has no allocation for a support teacher learning. There are a number of students in our school with learning difficulties that require additional support. Do these students not count because of the results of others in their cohort? On the other hand, should schools prevent students with difficulties from sitting the NAPLAN as it will 'bring down' their results? Sadly, this already happens in some schools. Should schools not accept the enrolment of students with disabilities or learning difficulties in the first place? Schools are a reflection of their communities. If social, economic and employment issues are present in the community it will be reflected in the local schools. If there is enough pressure to improve students' results, without the tools or support to do so and without broader social change, educators will be under a great deal of pressure to get results, regardless of the means.

Schools are well aware of the challenges and successes of their students. Being publically ranked poorly does not change that or have any positive influence. Prior to the launch of the MySchool website education bodies and governments had all this information about schools. What difference has the publication had on the funding or educational leadership in our schools? Does the senate committee believe that by allowing the publication of league tables the outcomes of students will improve? If so, how? How much money has been spent on the MySchool Website that could be a better used supporting students and schools?

Finally, we would like to raise the issue of educational equity. Schools and the students who make up those schools are being tested, judged and publically ranked based on the results of a test that is not based on any current curriculum. Is the test better aligned with the NSW syllabus or the Queensland syllabus? There are many curriculum differences across Australia being presented to students as evidenced by the current work being put into the National Curriculum. In the writing section of NAPLAN the genre of writing had to be revealed because a number of states did not teach text types and so were at a clear disadvantage. This is not equitable and again undermines the value of the data from these tests. The National Curriculum is not due to be fully implemented for years. Before then what equity will exist for students sitting these tests?

The staff at Epping Heights Public School thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Prepared by Heather Gerard on behalf of the staff at Epping Heights Public School.