



**MDA**

Multicultural Development  
Association

**Senate Inquiry into the administration and  
reporting of NAPLAN testing**

**Submission by the Multicultural Development Association Inc.  
(MDA)**

**30 June 2010**

## Introduction

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) was established in May 1998 to promote multiculturalism and empower people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds through advocacy, community and multicultural sector development, and the delivery of client services. As Queensland's largest settlement agency for migrants and refugees, MDA works with individuals, families and communities to achieve a society which values justice, diversity and equality. MDA settles approximately 1,100 newly arrived refugees annually and currently works with 3,500 migrants and refugees. Most of MDA's clients are from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Over the past five years nearly 33,000 people from Africa were granted visas under Australia's humanitarian program. Over 5,000 of these have resettled in Queensland which is 75% of all refugees resettled in Queensland during this period.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, a significant proportion of MDA's clients over the last five years are from African nations. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of the client groups that are being serviced by MDA through its refugee settlement work.<sup>2</sup>

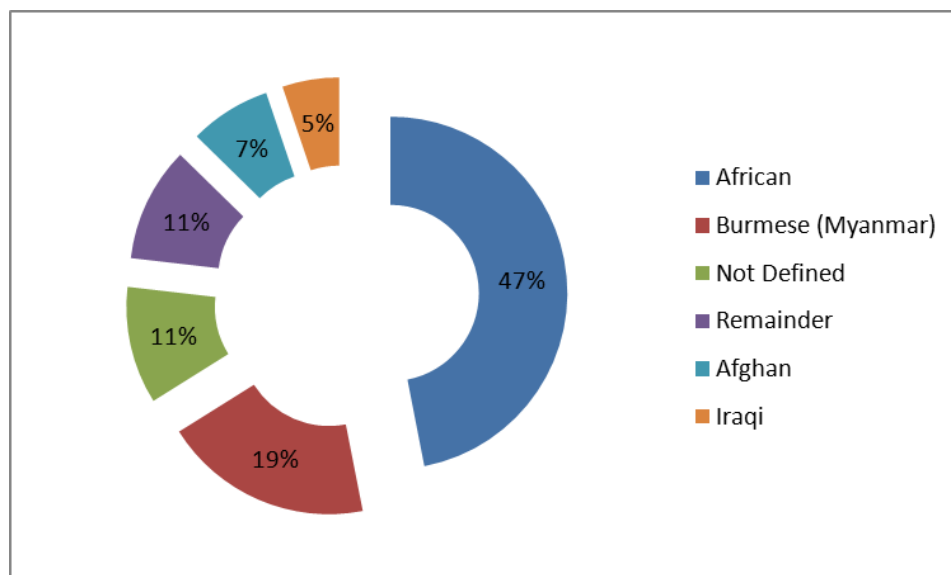


Table 1: Cultural composition of client caseload

As MDA is funded to work on systemic issues for African communities through its African advocacy position, this submission primarily reflects their experiences. However, the issues raised are likely to be equally applicable to all new and emerging refugee communities that are settling in Queensland.

Education, and the development of English language skills through education, are critical to the successful settlement of refugee and CALD youth.<sup>3</sup> Further, as noted by the Australian Human Rights Commission, 'education is a key determinant in predicting health and well-being, longevity, employment, housing and economic

<sup>1</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship figures contained in *New Futures: The Queensland Government's Engagement with African Refugees*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Data from MDA, *Continuing Settlement Services* as at 29 June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Pathways and Pitfalls: The Journey of Refugee Young People in and around the education system in Greater Dandenong* (2004) 21; Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* (2003) 78, 89, 91.

stability'.<sup>4</sup> In delivering settlement services to refugees and migrants and in undertaking its community development and advocacy functions, MDA is uniquely placed to understand and comment upon education for refugee and CALD youth.

This submission will outline some key barriers and challenges for refugee and CALD youth in relation to education and the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime. MDA's purpose in providing this submission is to inform the Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, in accordance with Inquiry Terms of Reference (c)(i) and (e), about the significant unaddressed education needs of refugee and CALD youth and to provide recommendations for reform.

## **Part A: Key barriers for refugees, migrants and 'new arrivals' in the Australian education system**

### **1. English language proficiency**

It is widely acknowledged that one of the most significant barriers to education and successful learning outcomes for refugee and CALD youth is limited English proficiency.<sup>5</sup> English skills underpin all Australian school curriculum and are an essential prerequisite to learning, comprehension, writing and completion of tasks and assessment. Proficiency in English not only facilitates students' social inclusion and the formation and maintenance of relationships with teachers and peers, but is a catalyst to effective vocational and employment pathways and successful settlement in the broader community.

Many refugee and CALD youth will have received little or no formal schooling prior to their arrival in Australia. As a result of war, conflict, instability, relocation or general lack of access to schooling in their countries of origin, many students have experienced significant disruption to their education. Some have endured extreme violence, spent long periods in refugee camps, suffered torture, trauma and malnourishment, and are affected by separation from and loss of family members.<sup>6</sup> These experiences can have a lasting and profound effect on the ability of refugee and CALD students to settle into the Australian school system and life in Australia generally.

Against this background, many young people arrive in Australia with some English language proficiency but with variable levels of skills. Some students may be illiterate or have low levels of literacy in their first language which impedes their learning of English as a second language, particularly for some African cultures whose language is oral, not written.<sup>7</sup>

Research indicates that it can take three to five years for second language learners to acquire oral proficiency, but between four to seven years to gain academic English

---

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* – (June 2010) 62.

<sup>5</sup> Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, *Cultural Chasm: The changing cultural and linguistic demographic in Queensland schools and the need for reform* (2004) 7.

<sup>6</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc, *School's In for Refugees – Whole-School Guides to Refugee Readiness* (2007) 29.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 67.

proficiency.<sup>8</sup> For refugee students with disrupted education due to experiences in their countries of origin, academic proficiency may take up to ten years to acquire.<sup>9</sup>

The pace at which classroom lessons are taught and the different methodologies of teaching and learning in Australian schools means that students from a refugee and CALD background often struggle to keep up with their peers, have difficulty understanding mainstream curriculum, and have limited or no opportunity to improve their English skills. Many refugee and newly arrived migrant students, particularly those in mainstream schools, struggle to communicate with teachers, understand and complete tasks, homework and assessment, work in groups or cope with the structure and expectations imposed within a classroom setting. The reduced ability of parents to provide support due to their own limited education and English skills may also exacerbate difficulties associated with English language learning.<sup>10</sup>

These difficulties may result in students experiencing adverse effects associated with health and well-being, including undermined confidence and self-esteem, enhanced social isolation through inability to communicate with peers and students, poor motivation, truancy and mental health issues.<sup>11</sup> The impact of further social exclusion can be particularly profound for students who have experienced prolonged isolation or separation from family due to traumatic experiences in their country of origin.<sup>12</sup>

Difficulties communicating effectively and comprehending school curriculum due to limited English proficiency may cause students to feel embarrassment and frustration, which can generate misbehaviour and ongoing behavioural problems. Some students have become disengaged with the schooling process altogether, with concerning numbers of students dropping out of the education system.

These issues particularly impact upon refugee and humanitarian entrant children from Africa, who tend to have greater educational, welfare and support needs.<sup>13</sup> These needs have generally arisen as a result of previous experiences in their countries of origin, including trauma, torture, time spent in refugee camps, conflict/war, poor physical and psychological health and nutrition, and poverty.<sup>14</sup> These issues may result in exacerbated levels of poor behaviour, and consequently disrupt progress in English language learning and development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Although some bridging programs and specialist intensive language teaching schools exist, including the Federal Government's New Arrivals Program, students are generally exited from intensive schools and programs after a defined period of teaching, such as 6 – 12 months. Often the hours of intensive English language teaching provided will not be sufficient for some students to develop the levels of

---

<sup>8</sup> J Miller, J Mitchell and J Brown, *African refugees with interrupted schooling in the high school mainstream: Dilemma's for teachers*, Monash University, <[www.tesol.org.au/.../131\\_African\\_refugees\\_with\\_interrupted\\_schooling\\_in\\_the\\_high\\_school\\_mainstream.doc](http://www.tesol.org.au/.../131_African_refugees_with_interrupted_schooling_in_the_high_school_mainstream.doc)> at 24 June 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 67.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *In our own words - African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues* (June 2010) 15.

<sup>12</sup> The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc, *School's In for Refugees – Whole-School Guides to Refugee Readiness* (2007) 30.

<sup>13</sup> Sandra Taylor, 'Schooling and the settlement of refugee young people in Queensland: '... the challenges are massive' (2008) 27(3) *Social Alternatives* 59.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

proficiency required to complete mainstream school curriculum, deterring students from completing their education. Homework clubs and after-school tutoring programs provide vital support to some students, but most are underfunded or are dependent on volunteers. Through being exited prematurely from intensive programs, students have limited opportunities to acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to participate in mainstream schooling.

Further, in Queensland intensive language teaching schools exist for high school aged students only. Primary aged school children from refugee and CALD backgrounds are instead enrolled in mainstream primary schools and age related year levels, regardless of their previous educational experience or capacity to perform, where they may receive English as a Second Language support but no or limited intensive language support. (Age appropriate education as a barrier for refugee and CALD youth is discussed in greater detail below).

English language barriers have a profound impact on refugee and CALD students when undertaking standardised testing, such as the NAPLAN. The NAPLAN handbook provides that students with a language background other than English who arrive from overseas less than a year before the tests should have the opportunity to be treated as exempt from testing.<sup>15</sup> MDA is aware anecdotally that some parents of students from refugee and CALD backgrounds, including those who have been in Australia for longer than a year prior to the tests, have been requested by schools to exempt their children from NAPLAN testing. Some students from refugee backgrounds were reportedly asked not to attend school on the days when NAPLAN tests were held, while other parents received letters from schools seeking permission for their child not to participate in testing.

Some parents of these students disagree with this practice, and consider that exempting their children from NAPLAN testing makes their child feel more marginalised and stigmatised, and excludes their participation in a process which could potentially provide them with confidence and a sense of academic achievement. However, some parents are reluctant to disagree with the school, and feel obliged to agree with requests to exempt their child.

It has also been reported in the media that some schools have requested parents to exempt from testing students they consider will perform poorly, in an effort to ensure the school's overall NAPLAN results are not lowered, and the reputation of the school is not diminished.<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested that this is an effect of the public reporting of school performance on the *My School* website, and the creation of 'league tables' which rank schools based on student performance.<sup>17</sup> It has also been reported that the Federal Government's allocation of 'reward' funding to schools who achieve performance targets has exacerbated pressure on schools to perform in NAPLAN, further motivating schools to exclude students who may 'underperform'.<sup>18</sup>

The NAPLAN testing process is designed for and targeted towards Australian students who are orally proficient in English and who have already been taught and

---

<sup>15</sup> Ministerial Council for Education and Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, *NAPLAN Test Preparation Handbook 2010* (2010) 4.2.2 <[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p-9/naplan\\_test\\_prep\\_hbook\\_2010.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p-9/naplan_test_prep_hbook_2010.pdf)> at 21 June 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Primary Principals Association, *The Reporting and Use of NAPLAN* (June 2010) 6. The Greens media release, *More unanswered questions on NAPLAN* (18 May 2010) <<http://greensmps.org.au/content/media-release/more-unanswered-questions-naplan-greens>> at 21 June 2010.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

developed basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is not the case for many students from refugee and CALD backgrounds who, as noted above, may have had significantly disrupted schooling or no formal education (resulting in limited literacy and numeracy skills, even in their own language), may have had limited exposure to the English language or who may be experiencing the ongoing debilitating effects of trauma, torture and distress. Their ability to effectively learn may be further inhibited by ongoing settlement issues, including housing and access to services, and instability and adaptation difficulties associated with settlement, as well as intergenerational conflict and lack of parental support in schooling.

Further, while students with a language background other than English may be entitled to special provisions in undertaking NAPLAN, such as additional testing time to enable them to access and complete tests, this does not necessarily translate to improved outcomes for those students. In the absence of intensive support and early intervention to improve the literacy, numeracy and education skills of refugee and CALD youth, many of these students may experience ongoing difficulties with future NAPLAN tests, as well as the standard school curriculum.

The broader systemic issues around English language proficiency for students from refugee and CALD backgrounds, which affects all aspects of education including NAPLAN, requires urgent consideration by Government in order to improve educational outcomes for those students and to implement strategies and policies for reform.

## **2. Age appropriate education**

Problems associated with language barriers and low levels of English proficiency are also exacerbated by the issue of age appropriate education. Many students from CALD backgrounds, particularly those who were refugee and humanitarian entrants have experienced disrupted education, often missing years of school due to war or strife in their home country, or extended periods of time in refugee camps. Upon arrival in Australia, they are placed in a grade appropriate to their age, rather than their level of education or ability. Consequently, the syllabus covered may be several grade levels beyond their current ability, imposing significant barriers upon students.

For many African students in particular, this system of age appropriate placement may be confusing and unfamiliar as in their home countries students are generally placed in grades which reflect their previous learning and ability, regardless of age.

As noted above, these difficulties are also compounded by the absence of intensive language schools and programs for primary school aged children from refugee and CALD backgrounds. Without ongoing intensive support, many students struggle to cope with the curriculum and to attain the standard of literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to their age group, impacting on their overall ability to adequately learn, perform and participate.

## **3. English as a Second Language Support**

The language difficulties experienced by refugees and CALD youth are often compounded by a lack of appropriate English as a Second Language (ESL) support and services in schools.

The learning needs of refugees significantly differ from most other students. While the Commonwealth funds each State to deliver ESL at various schools, there is concern that current ESL courses and levels of ESL support provided are insufficient

to address the learning needs of many refugee and CALD students. ESL programs have traditionally been designed to cater for migrant children with significant prior schooling.<sup>19</sup> There is growing research which indicates that pedagogical practices used for traditional ESL students (often migrants and Indigenous students) have limited success when applied to refugee young people, and do not necessarily meet their often complex and varying needs.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly the case where those reliant on ESL support are increasingly from refugee backgrounds, have had disrupted, limited or no previous education and have suffered trauma and instability. Ongoing social and emotional support, in addition to specialised, continuous intensive learning programs may be required as a foundation to satisfactory and meaningful participation in education.

In Queensland, funding for ESL support is available for refugee students and is determined through an index-based allocative model with schools which is often questioned for its effectiveness (considered slow and bureaucratic) and fairness in reaching those who most need assistance. There is currently no formalised Queensland Education ESL policy (although it is understood that the Queensland Education is in the process of developing one) with no consistent ESL Policy applicable across all state schools. Further, it is understood that Queensland presently has no formal policy targeting refugee students, with funding for those students available through standard ESL support programs.

While some state high schools have specific ESL units, this does not apply to all schools, impacting on the learning opportunities for refugee and CALD youth at those schools. ESL support offered in schools is also sometimes viewed as a separate learning component, rather than an integral learning strategy, and is offered at limited times (generally only several hours each week) depending on the level of funding and resourcing provided to schools. Furthermore, the importance and priority accorded to ESL programs in schools is highly dependent on the level of commitment by the relevant schools rather than as part of a consistent broader education policy for refugee and CALD students.

Given the growing numbers of refugee and CALD students, their differing levels of education, learning needs and cultural backgrounds, insufficient resources and the absence of an overriding ESL and refugee framework, it is arguable that some ESL teachers may struggle to support refugee and CALD students.

Additional funding and resourcing would enable the provision of greater intensive, ongoing language and teaching support to facilitate the development of refugee and CALD students' literacy, numeracy and other skills throughout their schooling. It would also enhance their ability to perform, at the very least, to the national minimum standard in all aspects of their education, as well as NAPLAN. In this regard, improved support for ESL programs is considered essential.

---

<sup>19</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 17.

<sup>20</sup> R Sidhu and S Taylor, Educational provision for refugee youth in Australia: left to chance? (2007) 43 *Journal of Sociology* 283.

#### 4. Other common barriers

The Australian Human Rights Commission in its recent *African Australians Report* noted that other factors adversely impacting on refugee and CALD students' access to education and educational experiences include<sup>21</sup>:

- Lack of cultural competency and flexibility of schools to meet student needs;
- Discrimination, prejudice and negative attitudes about the ability of refugee and migrant students to succeed;
- Lack of familiarity with teaching methodology and learning styles of Australian schools;
- Issues of social exclusion and sense of belonging in the school environment; and
- Lack of understanding of the culture and background of refugee and migrant students.

The report also cited negative stereotypes held by some teachers and others about the capacity of African Australians to learn as the most commonly recognised barrier to both education opportunities:

*Community respondents, particularly young people, reported being adversely affected by teachers who reinforced problematic and limiting views about the capabilities of African Australian students to attain academic success'.<sup>22</sup>*

These systemic issues reflect ongoing challenges common to refugee and CALD youth from many nations, necessitating a national response to consider these issues and improve the ability of the states' and territories' education systems to respond to the needs of this cohort.

#### **Part B: National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**

This part of MDA's submission raises specific issues for refugee and CALD students arising from the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime, and provides recommendations for consideration and reform.

##### **i) Purpose of NAPLAN and funding**

The NAPLAN website states that the purpose of the NAPLAN is:

*to identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community.<sup>23</sup>*

---

<sup>21</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *In our own words - African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues* (June 2010) 14-16.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *African Australians: human rights and social inclusion issues project: A compendium detailing the outcomes of the community and stakeholder consultations and interviews and public submissions* (June 2010) 66.

<sup>23</sup> See <<http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/faq.html>> at 16 June 2010.



The then Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP advised Parliament in August 2009 that a key component of the NAPLAN process is:

*the identification of those students who have not achieved the minimum national standard for their year level, and, who need further help to achieve the skills they require to continue in schooling. The data from the NAPLAN test results gives schools and systems the ability to compare their students' achievements against national standards and with student achievement in other states and territories. It also allows the monitoring of progress over time.*<sup>24</sup>

However, the correlation between NAPLAN test results and funding of schools remains unclear. Media reports suggest that general school funding is not based on NAPLAN data, but that information obtained through the NAPLAN process is used to allocate funding for literacy and numeracy to the states/territories through the COAG National Partnerships Agreement.<sup>25</sup>

Mixed reports about the relationship between NAPLAN and school funding and the purpose of NAPLAN testing generally has created confusion and uncertainty for students, parents, teachers and schools. It is also unclear to what extent schools with refugee and CALD students and other students who experience social and economic disadvantage are receiving reward funding and facilitation payments to improve services for those students.

***Recommendation One: A clear policy statement providing information and clarification in relation to the purpose of NAPLAN and the link between NAPLAN results and funding of schools should be released by the State and Federal Governments. Further, enhanced information and greater transparency around these issues is required to provide clarity and ensure ongoing public understanding of and confidence in the NAPLAN regime.***

## **ii) Examination environment – impact on survivors of trauma**

MDA has received feedback that the way in which NAPLAN tests are conducted may unfairly disadvantage and adversely impact upon some refugee and CALD students who have pre-arrival experiences of trauma, torture and/or loss by failing to consider these factors in administering and invigilating the tests. Environmental factors including the layout of the examination room and the space provided to individual students, the invigilator patrolling the room and the perceived authoritarian nature and formality of the testing process may negatively affect students with histories of trauma through exacerbating anxiety, undermining their ability to perform and impeding access to an equitable testing process.

Students from a refugee or CALD background with a history of trauma and ongoing mental health issues could be accommodated through the 'special provisions' noted in the NAPLAN handbook<sup>26</sup> to prevent any disadvantage arising as a result of trauma issues. Consultations with mental health and trauma experts as to an appropriate examination environment for those students should be undertaken and special

<sup>24</sup> Hansard, House of Representatives, Question No. 815, Literacy Levels, 12 August 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Chamberlain, 'NAPLAN funding a Puzzle' (22 May 2010) *Local Gold Coast News* <[http://www.goldcoast.com.au/article/2010/05/22/220385\\_gold-coast-news.html](http://www.goldcoast.com.au/article/2010/05/22/220385_gold-coast-news.html)> at 21 June 2010.

<sup>26</sup> See the special provisions noted in Part 5 of the Ministerial Council for Education and Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, *NAPLAN Test Preparation Handbook 2010* <[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p-9/naplan\\_test\\_prep\\_hbook\\_2010.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p-9/naplan_test_prep_hbook_2010.pdf)> at 21 June 2010.

provisions implemented. School principals must be proactive in identifying those students who require such assistance in order to make appropriate arrangements for them.

***Recommendation Two: It is recommended that refugee and CALD students with a history of trauma and ongoing mental health issues have access to special provisions to ensure they are not unfairly disadvantaged when participating in NAPLAN testing. Mental health and trauma experts should be consulted to provide advice about provisions which could be made for such students to ensure equitable access to the testing process.***

### **iii) Adequacy of information provided to parents from CALD backgrounds**

In discussing the purpose of NAPLAN and providing information and resources to parents it is essential that information is presented in multiple languages to enable parents from CALD backgrounds to be properly informed and to understand the NAPLAN regime. This is particularly necessary for those parents who are asked by schools to exempt their child from testing, to enable greater understanding of the purpose of NAPLAN testing and to ensure those parents are equipped to make a fully informed decision about their child's participation in NAPLAN testing.

***Recommendation Three: That information and resources about NAPLAN be provided in multiple languages to ensure greater understanding about NAPLAN and informed decision-making about student participation by parents from CALD backgrounds.***

### **iv) Data collection and reporting of information**

In reporting NAPLAN results and providing information about individual school's results on the *My School* website, specific characteristics about the diverse student populations participating in testing are not publicly reported. It is therefore difficult to determine how students from refugee and other migrant backgrounds are performing.

For example, in the *2009 NAPLAN Summary Report* neither the cultural and linguistic diversity of students within particular schools nor their geographical location are considered (i.e. whether they reside in a rural or regional area). Although students from refugee and CALD backgrounds tend to be placed in schools which provide specialised support services or alternatively schools in lower socio-economic areas where refugee and CALD students have generally been settled, the NAPLAN results reported do not reflect this. Additionally, information is not provided about whether participating students or their parents were born in Australia, or of levels of English language proficiency.

Significantly, the reporting of NAPLAN results currently does not distinguish between students from refugee and newly arrived CALD backgrounds with disrupted educational experiences and little or no English proficiency, and migrant students who have arrived in Australia with strong educational experiences and some English proficiency. Rather all students are classified as having a Language Background Other than English, which comprises not only refugees and CALD students, but students who are proficient in English, or speak languages other than English at home.

It is not known whether this data is currently collected from schools, or individual students as part of the NAPLAN process. If it is not presently collected, it is

considered that this data should be collected as it is invaluable in determining the needs of refugee and newly arrived CALD students, and the geographical areas where further resourcing and implementation of services and programs to improve literacy and numeracy is required. In particular, given the variation in educational experience and background of students with a 'Language Background other than English' (including refugees and newly arrived CALD students), specific data should be collected about students within that group (for example, country of origin, level of previous education, level of English proficiency, whether their family were humanitarian entrants, etc) to determine which groups require targeted and additional support and assistance.

Further, longitudinal studies should be conducted through monitoring the performance of select students from a variety of schools, social populations (including refugee and CALD students) and geographical areas to determine whether their literacy and numeracy skills improve over time, the results of which can ultimately be used to better determine school and student population support needs.

The data noted above should also be reported publicly in the interests of transparency and accountability, and to ensure the varying characteristics and needs of students with a Language Background Other than English are recognised, identified and addressed.

***Recommendation Four: It is recommended that specific data around students with a Language Background Other than English be collected during the NAPLAN testing process and publicly reported to enable targeted support to be provided to those groups with higher needs, such as refugee and newly arrived CALD students, and to ensure greater transparency. A longitudinal study should also be conducted to monitor and analyse the performance and progress of different students over time (including refugee and CALD students) in order to better determine school and student support needs.***

#### **v) Support following NAPLAN**

As noted in Part A above, upon arrival in Australia many students from refugee and CALD backgrounds will have limited English proficiency. Secondary students are often exited from intensive language support programs prematurely due to the limited availability of spaces and the need for schools to accept new arrivals into their programs. Students who are exited are transitioned into mainstream secondary schools, where many struggle and experience considerable difficulties with the standard curriculum. This is in no way attributable to an inability to learn or low intelligence but rather is a direct reflection of limited English language ability.

As noted above, there is a lack of intensive support schools and programs available to primary school aged refugee and CALD students. Primary school students who need ongoing intensive support to develop their English language, literacy and numeracy skills are therefore less likely to have those needs addressed. This is particularly so for those primary school aged children who have received no previous education or only limited schooling, and who are placed in year levels according to their age rather than current ability.

Sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the English language underpins all Australian school curriculum and learning. One of the primary purposes of NAPLAN is the *identification of students who need further help to achieve the skills they require to continue in schooling*. It is not widely known and understood to what extent additional support has been provided to date to refugee and CALD students who

have underperformed in NAPLAN testing. However such support, particularly ongoing intensive support is crucial to enhance literacy and numeracy learning and understanding and English language skills, and to facilitate the attainment of successful educational outcomes.

Accordingly, an early intervention approach through increased funding and support for services, programs and initiatives, including ESL, is essential to improve the English language, literacy and numeracy skills of refugee and CALD students. Providing support to those students as early as possible in their schooling is crucial to ensuring greater opportunities of success in education, improving retention rates of secondary schools students, and accessing employment and training upon leaving secondary school.

***Recommendation Five: It is recommended that early intervention strategies including increased funding and support for services, programs and initiatives (including ESL) to improve the English language, literacy and numeracy skills of refugee and CALD students be implemented to support those students at an early stage in their schooling, provide greater opportunities of success in education, improve retention rates of secondary schools students, and improve employment and training upon leaving secondary school.***

It is further noted that an early intervention approach requires enhanced funding and support for refugee and CALD students prior to their engagement with mainstream schooling. The introduction of further specialised intensive schooling programs for refugee and CALD students such as those currently in place in Milpera State High School and Woodridge State High School, which prepare those students for participation in mainstream secondary schools, should be considered. As noted above, intensive schools contribute significantly to bridging the gap in English language preparation and schooling.

Presently in Queensland it is understood that these intensive schools operate in Brisbane and Logan only and not in regional and remote areas, such as Toowoomba, where large proportions of refugees and CALD communities are settled. Students in regional and remote areas would benefit immensely from similar intensive support schools. As noted above, as there are no intensive language support primary schools operating in Queensland, there is also a substantial gap in education service provision for primary aged school children from refugee and CALD backgrounds.

Further, although many schools in the Brisbane metropolitan region provide ESL program support to students from CALD and refugee backgrounds, Milpera State High School in Brisbane's outer Western suburbs is the only school in Brisbane dedicated specifically to the provision of intensive education and settlement support programs. Increasingly in Brisbane and the greater metropolitan area, refugee and CALD families are being settled in the far northern and southern suburbs. As such, students must travel considerable distances in order to access the services offered at Milpera. Accordingly, it is recommended that funding and support be made available to establish additional intensive support schools throughout Brisbane to facilitate improved access to intensive school services.

Improved support when transitioning to mainstream schools should also be introduced to better identify and address refugee and CALD students' needs.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW Inc, *Submission to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs: Need for increased ESL support in NSW state schools* (2006) 4.

Funding and resourcing for increased out of school learning support, such as homework clubs, tutoring and social support is also required.<sup>28</sup>

These measures would significantly contribute to the development of improved literacy, numeracy and English skills of refugee and CALD students, leading to enhanced educational outcomes for those students.

***Recommendation Six: It is recommended that enhanced funding and support be provided to refugee and CALD students by the Federal and State Governments in order to:***

***1. Introduce further specialised intensive schools and programs for primary and secondary refugee and CALD students in metropolitan, regional and rural areas to prepare those students for participation in mainstream schools, and enable their development of literacy, numeracy and English skills;***

***2. Improve support for students when transitioning to mainstream schools; and***

***3. Fund and resource increased out of school learning support, such as homework clubs, tutoring and social support.***

## **Part C: Summary of Recommendations**

In order for refugee and CALD students to overcome the education barriers detailed above, and to improve the NAPLAN assessment and reporting process for those students the Multicultural Development Association provides the following recommendations:

### ***Recommendation One:***

A clear policy statement providing information and clarification in relation to the purpose of NAPLAN and the link between NAPLAN results and funding of schools should be released by the State and Federal Governments. Further, enhanced information and greater transparency around these issues is required to provide clarity and ensure ongoing public understanding of and confidence in the NAPLAN regime.

### ***Recommendation Two:***

It is recommended that refugee and CALD students with a history of trauma and ongoing mental health issues have access to special provisions to ensure they are not unfairly disadvantaged when participating in NAPLAN testing. Mental health and trauma experts should be consulted to provide advice about the appropriate examination environment and provisions which could be made for such students to ensure equitable access to the testing process.

### ***Recommendation Three:***

It is recommended that information and resources about NAPLAN be provided in multiple languages to ensure greater understanding about NAPLAN and informed decision-making about student participation by parents from CALD backgrounds.

---

<sup>28</sup> Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Strengthening Outcomes – Refugee Students in Government Schools* (2008) 36.

***Recommendation Four:***

It is recommended that specific data around students with a Language Background Other than English be collected during the NAPLAN testing process and publicly reported to enable targeted support to be provided to those groups with higher needs, such as refugee and CALD students, and to ensure greater transparency. A longitudinal study should also be conducted to monitor and analyse the performance and progress of different students over time (including refugee and CALD students) in order to better determine school and student support needs.

***Recommendation Five:***

It is recommended that early intervention strategies including increased funding and support for services, programs and initiatives to improve the English language, literacy and numeracy skills of refugee and CALD students be implemented to support those students at an early stage in their schooling, provide greater opportunities of success in education, improve retention rates of secondary schools students, and improve employment and training upon leaving secondary school.

***Recommendation Six:***

It is recommended that enhanced funding and support be provided to refugee and CALD students by the Federal and State Governments in order to:

1. Introduce further specialised intensive schools and programs for refugee and CALD students in metropolitan, regional and rural areas to prepare those students for participation in mainstream secondary schools;
2. Improve support for students when transitioning to mainstream schools; and
3. Fund and resource increased out of school learning support, such as homework clubs, tutoring and social support.