

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 May 2010, the Senate referred to the Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations the matter of the administration and reporting of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing. The committee was to inquire into, and report on, the reference by 13 August 2010.¹ On 27 July 2010 the committee presented an interim report notifying the Senate that due to the prorogation of the 42nd Parliament the committee required additional time to complete the inquiry.²

1.2 In the 43rd Parliament the committee recommended to the Senate that it re-adopt the reference, with a final report due on 24 November 2010. The Senate agreed to this on 30 September 2010.³

Terms of reference

1.3 Under the terms of reference the committee was to inquire into:

- (a) the conflicting claims made by the Government, educational experts and peak bodies in relation to the publication of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing;
- (b) the implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data;
- (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,
 - (iii) the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals, and
 - (iv) the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community; and
- (d) international approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results, i.e. ‘league tables’; and
- (e) other related matters.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 122, 13 May 2010, p. 3490.

2 Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Inquiry into administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing – Interim report*, 27 July 2010.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 3, 30 September 2010, p. 160.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.4 Notice of the inquiry was posted on the committee's website and in *The Australian* newspaper, calling for submissions by 25 June 2010. The committee also directly contacted a number of interested parties, organisations and individuals to notify them of the inquiry and to invite submissions. A total of 268 submissions were received, as listed in Appendix 1.

1.5 The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 29 October and 1 November 2010. A list of witnesses who appeared is at Appendix 2.

Acknowledgements

1.6 The committee thanks all those who contributed to the inquiry by making submissions, providing additional information or appearing before it to give evidence.

Background to the inquiry

1.7 This inquiry was initiated following allegations of schools cheating and manipulating test results by excluding students when the literacy and numeracy tests were held in May 2010.⁴ These reports drew attention to and fuelled pre-existing concerns around the use of standardised testing and reporting of test performance, particularly in light of the 2010 launch of the government's controversial *My School* website and media publication of crude league tables ranking school performance.

Note on references

1.8 References in this report to the Hansard for the public hearings held on 29 October and 1 November 2010 are to the proof Hansard. Please note that page numbers may vary between the proof and the official transcripts.

Structure of the report

1.9 This report is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 (this chapter) sets out the administrative arrangements for the inquiry. Chapter 2 provides background information on NAPLAN testing and outlines the issues raised during the inquiry regarding test administration. Chapter 3 covers the presentation of the NAPLAN data on the *My School* website and issues raised regarding the reporting of NAPLAN results.

4 See for example: Michael Owen and Verity Edwards, 'Teacher faces axe for cheating,' *The Australian*, 14 May 2010, pp 1-2; Melinda Howells, 'Spotlight on NAPLAN as teacher stood down,' *ABC News online* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/13/2898923.htm>.