

Additional Comments from Australian Greens

The Australian Greens referred the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing to the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee as we were deeply concerned about the potential adverse impacts of the use of the NAPLAN tests, and in particular the use of NAPLAN results on the *My School* website.

The evidence to the Committee demonstrates that NAPLAN serves a useful function and can provide valuable information for parents, teachers, schools and education authorities but also that there remain genuine questions as to the appropriateness of NAPLAN results being used as a comparative measure for *My School*.

The Australian Greens agree substantially with the findings and recommendations of the majority report. We agree that NAPLAN is an important tool for measuring the literacy and numeracy competency of students but unlike the majority we are not convinced that annual testing is necessary. The Australian Greens have never been convinced that the *My School* website provides useful and meaningful information to parents or the broader community and remain sceptical that NAPLAN provides the most useful information for such a purpose.

Administration of NAPLAN

The Australian Greens support the use of NAPLAN as a tool to identify the literacy and numeracy competency of students. We agree to improve measurement is necessary and that NAPLAN provides information able to be used to improve student learning. The evidence strongly supports NAPLAN as useful for teachers, schools and education authorities in identifying issues with literacy and numeracy. Teachers can use the results to identify students who need additional assistance. Parents can use the results in discussions with teachers about their children's education and progress. Education authorities can use the results as one factor to consider in reviewing their education systems and allocation of resources.

This is not to suggest that NAPLAN is perfectly suited to these tasks. It is after all a point in time test of a limited albeit vitally important set of knowledge and skills. We note the submission of Professor Margaret Wu who raised concerns that the margin of error on the NAPLAN tests meant they were not a sufficiently accurate measure of student performance or progress or school performance. These concerns are important for how the results of NAPLAN are used and the information and context given to those who are using the information.

We share the concerns outlined in the majority report about the suitability of NAPLAN for special needs students and students for whom English is not their first language. Furthermore, we are concerned that more is done to ensure the integrity of the testing from schools asking low performing students to not take the tests or allegations of cheating.

We also note that none of the functions of NAPLAN in assisting parents, teachers, schools and educational authorities in identifying educational progress or problems require the results to be presented to the public at large through *My School*. There is a lot that NAPLAN does not tell us about student, teacher or school performance and progress. The limitations of NAPLAN and the need for contextual information are important concerns in how NAPLAN results are reported and then used via *My School*.

Reporting of NAPLAN and *My School*

The Australian Greens remain concerned by the potential adverse affects of the *My School* website on students, teachers and schools. We accept the evidence presented to the Committee that *My School* and its reliance on NAPLAN has the potential for NAPLAN testing to take on the characteristics of other high stakes testing regimes from overseas. We accept that high stakes testing has been shown to lead to teaching to the test, a narrowing of the curriculum and allegations of cheating. High stakes testing has been a demonstrated educational failure and we must learn the lessons of the UK and US.

The Government assures us that NAPLAN combined with the *My School* website is not high stakes testing and we note that the Government currently uses the results to provide additional resources to schools, not take them away. However, the very fact that schools can be ranked and compared does mean schools do have something at stake. Furthermore, there have been allegations of cheating, of low performing students being asked not to sit the tests and curriculum skewed towards the tests. Of great concern is the issue raised by the Australian Primary Principals Association of the potential for schools to focus on students just below the national benchmarks rather than the students further behind who will not improve the school's score. We must be vigilant in monitoring these types of unintended consequences.

The Australian Greens are already on the record as strongly objecting to the potential for the information on *My School* to be used to create league tables. We were disappointed that despite their stated concerns, the Government did not act sooner and much more strongly to ensure league tables could not be created from the data available on *My School*. We are yet to be convinced that the damage league tables do to parents, student, teachers and school communities is outweighed by the stated goals of transparency and accountability.

The *My School* website attempts to compare like schools to give parents an idea of how their school is comparing to schools with similar socio-economic make-ups. However the ICSEA values have been shown to be flawed with wildly varying school communities considered similar. We agree with the comments of the majority report on the need for improving the methods for comparing like schools.

A key message from the government about the value of *My School* has been empowering parents to make choices for the children's education. The Australian Greens have always supported parents having as much information as possible about

their children's education and their schools. Parents can use the information available to them to engage in discussions with the children's teachers, school community and educational authorities on ensuring the best educational outcomes for their children. However we do not believe the mantra of "choice" is realistic when it comes to comparing schools on *My School*. Parents are constrained in their choices of schools by many factors including geographic location and economic resource. Not all parents can choose to send their children to high performing private schools.

Conclusion

The Australian Greens remain sceptical about the value of the *My School* website. We agree with the majority report that much needs to be done to ensure the website provides meaningful information. We have consistently called for more information to be available to parents and welcome the Government's recent announcement concerning additional information and greater security on the site. In particular we welcome school resources being available as important contextual information for parents.

We want NAPLAN testing and the *My School* website to be productive and useful tools for furthering our children's education, not a misguided government initiative that does more damage. The Australian Greens will continue to closely monitor the evolution of the *My School* website and its use by parents, teachers, schools and the broader community.

Senator Hanson-Young

