

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and overview

Referral

1.1 On 15 May 2013 the Senate referred to the Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations the matter of the effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) for inquiry and report by 27 June 2013.¹ The committee called for submissions and published a total of 93 submissions. The committee conducted a public hearing in Melbourne on 21 June 2013.

1.2 The committee determined that the evidence provided in submissions, combined with evidence provided by witnesses during the committee's hearing demonstrated that the committee required more time to adequately discharge its reference and present a properly considered report. The committee's interim report provided a snapshot of the key issues, however did not reach any conclusions or make any recommendations.

Terms of reference

1.3 The terms of reference determined by the Senate required the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee to inquire and report into:

The effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), with specific reference to:

- (a) whether the evidence suggests that NAPLAN is achieving its stated objectives;
- (b) unintended consequences of NAPLAN's introduction;
- (c) NAPLAN's impact on teaching and student learning practices;
- (d) the impact on teaching and student learning practices of publishing NAPLAN test results on the My School website;
- (e) potential improvements to the program, to improve student learning and assessment;
- (f) international best practice for standardised testing, and international case studies about the introduction of standardised testing; and
- (g) other relevant matters.²

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 2013, pp 3928–3929.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, 2013, pp 3928–3929.

Conduct of the inquiry to date

43rd Parliament

1.4 During the 43rd Parliament notice of the inquiry was posted on the committee's website and advertised in *The Australian* newspaper, calling for submissions by 7 June 2013. The committee also wrote to stakeholders to notify them of the inquiry and invite submissions. The committee published a total of 93 submissions.

1.5 The committee conducted a public hearing in Melbourne on 21 June 2013. A list of witnesses who gave evidence before the committee is at Appendix 2. Copies of the Hansard transcript from the committee's hearings can be accessed online at <http://aph.gov.au/hansard>.

44th Parliament

1.6 The committee decided to readopt this inquiry and published 6 further submissions to add to the 93 published with the interim report. A list of all 99 submissions is included at Appendix 1. This appendix also includes information on documents tabled by the committee during the course of the hearing. A number of submissions were redacted prior to their publication to protect personal details.

The 2010 inquiry

1.7 This committee completed an inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing in November 2010.³ The terms of reference for that inquiry were:

- (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.⁴

3 Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, *Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN testing*, November 2010.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, 13 May 2010, p. 3490.

1.8 The committee majority at this time made twelve recommendations targeted at reforming the NAPLAN assessment program. Recommendations included reforms to the publication and representation of test data, arrangements for students with a disability, provision for students with a language background other than English, measures to ensure the integrity of the testing process, reforms to the *My School* website and management of publication of league tables in the media. Government Senators (The Australian Labor Party at the time of the 2010 inquiry) and the Australian Greens also appended dissenting and additional comments to the report.

1.9 The Australian Government, in consultation with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the relevant COAG council, has since implemented a number of the recommendations and introduced changes to the *My School* website.⁵

Structure of the report

1.10 This report is divided into five chapters. Chapter one sets out the administrative arrangements for the inquiry as well as an update of the recommendations from the committee's 2010 inquiry into *The administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing*.

1.11 Chapter two considers NAPLAN's objectives and whether or not they have been achieved. It also provides a background to NAPLAN testing in Australia and why NAPLAN was introduced.

1.12 Chapter three considers the impacts of NAPLAN on students, teachers and schools. It then discusses the *MySchool* website and what effect the publication of NAPLAN results has on the process.

1.13 Chapter four considers potential improvements to the NAPLAN testing program that may contribute to improved student learning and assessment.

1.14 Chapter five examines international best practice for standardised testing.

Acknowledgements

1.15 The committee extends its gratitude to the large number of individuals and organisations who made submissions to this inquiry, and to witnesses who offered their time to give evidence at public hearings and provided additional information. Both contributed greatly to shaping the committee's deliberations and report.

5 Australian Government Response to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee Report on the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing, August 2011.