

CHAPTER 3

The Impacts of NAPLAN

Unintended Consequences

3.1 The committee's interim report cites examples presented by a number of submitters to the inquiry that a range of unintended consequences have emerged as a result of NAPLAN testing. These include negative or adverse consequences such as a narrowing of the curriculum or 'teaching to the test'; the creation of a NAPLAN preparation industry which compounds the perception that NAPLAN is a 'high stakes' test; and adverse or negative impacts on students.¹

Teaching to the test

3.2 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) acknowledge that there have been accusations that NAPLAN has resulted in a number of unintended consequences. However, it does not accept there is evidence that negative unintended consequences are endemic. ACARA also contends that some perceived unintended consequences are a result of a misconception of what NAPLAN is designed to achieve:

It is also important to note that some of these reports of unintended consequences have not accurately contextualised the purposes of the program and attributed unrealistic expectations to what NAPLAN should achieve. By way of example, the teacher survey undertaken by Murdoch University in 2012 invited participants to respond to statements such as: 'NAPLAN promotes a socially supportive and positive classroom environment' and 'NAPLAN has meant that students have control over the pace, directions and outcomes of lessons in my class'. Both of these aspects of classroom environment and curriculum planning are clearly the responsibilities of teachers.²

3.3 The Australian Primary Principals Association quoted from an independently conducted survey of primary school principals that showed the curriculum can be altered, even inadvertently, in preparation for NAPLAN tests:

'Teachers, despite knowing that they should not be teaching to the tests, do alter the regular curriculum delivery to 'train' the students in the peculiarities of the tests. Much time is given over even in the previous year to NAPLAN, to enable the students to have the best opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.'³

3.4 ACARA differentiates between negative consequences of preparing for the NAPLAN test, such as replacing the broader curriculum with a teaching-by-rote using

1 Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, *Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy – Interim report*, June 2013, p. 8.

2 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Submission 58*, p. 10.

3 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 19*, p. 5.

NAPLAN past papers, and a welcome focus on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills.⁴

3.5 The Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE) submitted there was no evidence across their schools that the curriculum was being narrowed as a result of NAPLAN testing. The Department fully acknowledges that there have been changes to teaching methods, but these changes are 'entirely appropriate':

[T]he DoE has no evidence to suggest that there is a narrowing of the curriculum in our schools or that teachers are 'teaching to the test' as a result of NAPLAN testing. Whilst the data supports schools in identifying areas for improvement and explicit teaching to address these areas may occur, these processes are entirely appropriate for improving students' learning outcomes.

In fact, the term 'teaching to the test' is often used to refer to just these situations where identification of areas for focus and then implementing appropriate strategies to address needs has occurred. Tasmania asserts that this represents pedagogically sound practice.⁵

3.6 The Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) concurred with the view that NAPLAN has had a transformative and positive impact on a student's education:

The impact on teaching practice is profound, and has led to culture change at schools as teachers have learned to use data and see the positive effects on their student's learning.⁶

Committee View

3.7 The committee accepts there are going to be changes in pedagogy when something as radical as standardised testing is introduced. The extent of these changes and the impacts on other aspects of the curriculum are issues that need careful consideration when analysing the effectiveness of NAPLAN.

3.8 The committee are also concerned with the comments made by ACARA that suggest unintended consequences can be as a result of a miscomprehension over what NAPLAN's intended consequences are. The overarching objectives of Naplan are clear, but as discussed in the previous Chapter, they are not clear at an operational level. To suggest that changes in the classroom are not as a result of NAPLAN is not taking full responsibility for the profound impact that standardised testing can have. This in itself is not a reason not to test, but it is something that educational authorities need to be cognisant of in providing support to schools as part of the NAPLAN process.

4 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Submission 58*, p. 11.

5 Department of Education, Tasmania, *Submission 29*, p. 4.

6 Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 69*, p. 5.

NAPLAN's impact on students

3.9 One of the most contentious aspects of NAPLAN's introduction is the impact national testing has on students. The committee received evidence from numerous submitters that they had experience of students being affected by the testing regime, with the majority of submitters reporting negative impacts.

3.10 The Australian Primary Principals Association commissioned CANVASS to carry out a survey to gauge the views of Primary Principals across the country. *Primary Principals: Perspectives on NAPLAN Testing & Assessment* (the survey), found that 'sixty-six percent of respondents said NAPLAN testing has a negative impact on the wellbeing of students.'⁷ According to the survey, 'the greatest impact of NAPLAN is on student wellbeing'.⁸

3.11 While the survey did not find that all students suffered adverse impacts from the testing, it did cite examples of the type of impacts that some respondents claimed the testing had on their students:

- Pressures surrounding NAPLAN trigger self-esteem issues and anxiety, leading to disengagement, absenteeism, apathy and behavioural problems e.g. playground fights
- Particular logistical difficulties for disabled students sitting the tests
- The demands of extra-curricular tutoring for NAPLAN impacting on student welfare
- Student boredom and a lack of enjoyment in the NAPLAN preparation.⁹

3.12 The Whitlam Institute also carried out research into the impact of the testing on students. This research reported that educators, as well as parents, are concerned with the effects on students:

The evidence from the data suggests that a large proportion of educators are reporting that at least some students are suffering health and well-being issues as a result of the NAPLAN. Difficulties include physical responses such as crying, sleeplessness, and feeling sick, as well as psychological responses such as an inability to cope emotionally, feelings of inadequacy, and concerns about the ways in which others might view them. Respondents also reported significant numbers of parents raising concerns about the impact of the tests on their children's well-being.¹⁰

7 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 19*, p. 3.

8 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 19, Attachment 1, CANVASS Report, Primary Principals: Perspectives on NAPLAN Testing & Assessment*, p. 6.

9 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 19, Attachment 1, CANVASS Report, Primary Principals: Perspectives on NAPLAN Testing & Assessment*, p. 14.

10 The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, *Submission 26*, N. Dulfer, Prof. John Polesel and Dr S. Rice, (2012), *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – An Educator's Perspective*, p. 17.

3.13 Epping Heights Public School reported the biggest impact on their students has been an 'increase in anxiety'. It highlighted potential long term issues with students' activities being focussed on two elements of learning at the expense of other activities which are also important for children to develop:

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?¹¹

3.14 The Australian Council of State School Organisations submitted that feedback from parents has indicated that their students are adversely impacted by the testing and this can more evident in students at a younger age and also in more rural and remote schools:

Clearly we see students display signs of stress or sickness leading up to the NAPLAN testing regime, parents have expressed their concern with regard to their child either not wanting to go to school or are anxious about the exam.

Anecdotally the negative impacts on wellbeing appear greater in rural and remote schools, this we believe is due to the smaller sizes of the community and the ease of which whole school results can identify individuals.¹²

3.15 However the committee received evidence that research also showed that stress was the most reported impact, but this is the likely response to any test and therefore perfectly normal:

While test anxiety is of concern, NAPLAN testing has in no way created hysteria beyond what would be expected of any test situation. Being anxious about a test is quite normal and probably a useful emotion that all humans experience as part of life's great tapestry. To mount a case that somehow NAPLAN is damaging a generation of children says more about parenting than it does about the test itself. I am yet to be at a school that doesn't make every effort to support children through NAPLAN in a positive and encouraging manner.¹³

Committee View

3.16 The committee accepts that anxiety will be a factor for some students in any testing environment. What makes NAPLAN of particular significance is the

11 Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

12 The Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 81*, p. 3.

13 The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, *Submission 26*, N. Dulfer, Prof. John Polesel and Dr S. Rice, (2012), *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – An Educator's Perspective*, p. 18.

perception of NAPLAN as a 'high stakes' test. This is an issue which is considered in later in this Chapter and the committee reserves its views to that section.

NAPLAN's impact on students with specific needs

3.17 The committee received submissions from a number of organisations on the impact NAPLAN testing has on students with various diverse need including those with disabilities, indigenous students, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds which includes refugees and migrants.

Students with disabilities

3.18 Adjustments are permitted for students with disability to support their access to the tests and facilitate maximum participation, and are intended to enable access to the tests on an equivalent basis to students without disability.¹⁴

3.19 ACARA's submission explained that students with disability are 'encouraged to take part in NAPLAN', and special provisions to support individual students with disability and special needs are outlined in the *National Protocols for Test Administration*.¹⁵ However submitters raised a number of issues with this, that can impact both schools and individual students.

3.20 One of the issues for many of these submitters is the danger that resources for a school are influenced by NAPLAN test results which can be impacted by a number of factors, often outside of the control of the school. According to evidence received there is pressure placed on a school to ensure it receives the best possible test results and this can lead to the exclusion of students with special needs. Epping Heights Public School raised this issue:

There are a number of students in our school with learning difficulties that require additional support but we receive very little support because the majority of our students achieve good results. We wonder if it is fair that these students are judged by the results of others in their cohort. Alternatively, it seems wrong that schools prevent students with difficulties from sitting the NAPLAN as it will 'bring down' their results.¹⁶

3.21 Submitters argued that the inherent comparative nature of national testing is incompatible with including students with varying degrees and type of special needs. Professor Joy Cumming urged caution in comparing results across schools, or even classes within schools for this reason:

Schools may use results to compare class results in terms of raw performance. Such results do not provide information on class differences in achievement, proportion of students with disability, or from language

14 For NAPLAN, disability is defined as per the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

15 ACARA, *Submission 58*, p. 14.

16 Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

backgrounds other than English. Therefore, comparisons across classes need to be made with caution.¹⁷

3.22 Professor Cummings' submission goes on to discuss the range of adjustments utilised in other testing environments around the world that can level the playing field, but that have not been introduced in Australia to the necessary degree:

NAPLAN administration at present makes inadequate allowance for the appropriate assessment of students with disability. They must participate in the standard NAPLAN tests with a small range of adjustments.

...

The question still arises as to whether the current approach to NAPLAN testing is compliant with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* or whether students with disability are being indirectly discriminated against in current practices, through being expected to meet participation requirements that they are not able to meet but that students without disability can meet. The test forms do not enable students with disability opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do.¹⁸

3.23 Data is also published on the MySchool website about the level of NAPLAN participation for each school, broken down by exempt, absent and withdrawn. This data is compared to the national average.¹⁹ Significant work is currently being undertaken by all governments to implement a Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with disability.²⁰

Students from a non-English speaking background

3.24 While the committee understands students from non-English backgrounds are exempt from the test if they have been in Australia for less than one year,²¹ it received evidence that students arriving from areas of conflict or traumatic events this may not be sufficient to put them on a par with other students.

3.25 A submission from the Multicultural Development Association (MDA) and Townsville Multicultural Support Group (TMSG) cited research that found students from refugee backgrounds are particularly vulnerable:

Students of refugee background are particularly vulnerable due to the significant interruptions to schooling and the social and psychological impacts of their refugee journey. Many students may have experienced

17 Professor Joy Cummings, *Submission 24*, p. 13.

18 Professor Joy Cummings, *Submission 24*, pp 29-30.

19 ACARA, *My School Fact Sheet*, Feb 2011, p. 1, http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/About_NAPLAN.pdf (accessed 25 March 2014).

20 Department of Education, *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability Fact Sheet*, Feb 2014, p.1, http://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/attachment_2_-_nationally_consistent_data_collection_-_schools_factsheet_0.pdf (accessed 25 March 2014).

21 ACARA, *My School Fact Sheet*, Feb 2011, p. 1, http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/About_NAPLAN.pdf (accessed 20 February 2014).

forced migration, significant loss, violence, and trauma. These experiences impact on students' ability to learn in the school environment and require a whole of school response.²²

3.26 The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English also reported negative impacts on students from Non-English speaking backgrounds:

I was confronted with having to watch a number of intelligent and capable EAL students (who had been in Australia just over one year) not cope at all with all the tests and feeling frustrated and upset. In the end, they became so frustrated that they started making jokes about it and treating it as a waste of time. The Naplan tests are all very well for those who are successful academically, for children who do not meet the set benchmarks or are disadvantaged in some way, the tests are an attack on their self-esteem as they reinforce the message that they are failing.²³

3.27 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations was supportive of the government's efforts to improve educational outcomes for all students, and accepted that standards are necessary to ensure a certain level of education across the country. However they argued the NAPLAN tests are not an appropriate mechanism for measuring skills of those students where English is not their first language, or students that are culturally diverse from the educational mainstream in Australia. According to their submission, this because the tests make the following assumptions:

- students' proficiency in English relates to their maturity and their grade level in Australian schools
 - students' development in English follows an English-as-a-first-language pathway
 - students have a knowledge base related to "*the curriculum in each state or territory*" (as stated on the NAPLAN website)
 - students are urbanised
- and sometimes that:
- students are from middle class Anglo-Australian backgrounds.²⁴

3.28 Mr Leonard Freeman, Principal at the Yirrakala School in the Northern Territory contended that culturally specific content in the NAPLAN tests place students from indigenous and refugee backgrounds at a disadvantage. His submission provides some examples of where a student without similar cultural experiences would not be able to comprehend the scenarios in question:

The stimulus texts [...] focussed on included a narrative about a paperboy and an advertisement for a movie which included the title of the movie, session times, classification details and the price of admission []. While

22 Multicultural Development Association and Townsville Multicultural Support Group, *Submission 60*, p. 2.

23 Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, *Submission 74*, p. 4.

24 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations, *Submission 79*, p. 9.

cinema posters and newspaper deliveries are common place in cities and town across Australia, there are no cinemas or delivery boys in remote Indigenous communities.

...

The story begins with the householder complaining to the newspaper boy 'you left the paper jutting out of the back of my box' and we also learn the owner had previously complained the paper needs to be left 'in line with the fence'. This question was designed to test whether students could infer the meaning of new words and constructions. Yet to do so the students need to be familiar with the cultural context, in this case the students need to know that houses have a box on their fence line where mail and newspaper deliveries are left. If the student has grown up in a remote community or refugee camp where there are no letter boxes and few houses have fences they will not be able to access the meaning of the text.²⁵

Committee View

3.29 The committee shares the concerns of some submitters that while provision for students with disability and special needs is made, it is still leaving the students with disability at a disadvantage from those without disability. This in turn can lead to a distortion in test results that can impact the student and the school, especially if the impacts can affect resource allocation.

3.30 This is one of the reasons the committee is considering whether national testing based on samples of schools and students may be a better option than the almost universal tests currently carried out. It may be that adaptive testing introduced through NAPLAN Online could tailor the test to the abilities and progress of the individual student, and if this is the case, the committee would strongly support this approach.

Recommendation 2

3.31 The committee recommends that when designing adaptive testing for NAPLAN Online the needs of students with disability are taken into account.

3.32 The issue of NAPLAN testing for students from a non-English speaking background is one that elicits strong opinions. The committee understands students are given a one year grace period before they are expected to take part in the NAPLAN process, but in the committee's view, this is not sufficient to provide a level-playing field with native English speakers.

3.33 The committee also notes the assertion by ACARA that 'test developers must ensure NAPLAN tests are not culturally biased against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students'.²⁶ While this is welcome, it still places students from a culturally diverse background, (which includes Indigenous students) at a distinct disadvantage. Similarly to students with disability and special needs, this has the potential to impact

25 Leonard Freeman, *Submission 71*, p. 3.

26 ACARA, *Submission 58*, p. 14.

both the individual student and the school. Again, the committee is optimistic that the introduction of adaptive testing will have a positive impact of this student cohort.

Recommendation 3

3.34 The committee recommends that when designing adaptive testing for NAPLAN Online the needs of students from a non-English speaking background are taken into account.

The impacts of the My School Website – A 'High Stakes' test?

3.35 The development of the NAPLAN testing and reporting regime has led to frequent accusations the test has become 'high-stakes'. It is not the tests themselves that make it 'high stakes', or even the impact on individual students, but the way the data is used. If substantial resources are allocated to schools on the basis of NAPLAN results, then schools understandably deem them to be of significant importance. If the tests results are used to construct league tables, the effects on schools and parents become significant.

3.36 Almost all submitters described the tests as 'high stakes', and most were critical of what they consider to be a disproportionate significance placed on the results. The NSW Primary Principles Association commented that the tests themselves are not high stakes for the pupils, because there is 'no personal consequences'²⁷ for them, however this is not the case for the school or broader community:

Students are not denied advancement in the school system as a result of their performance in the tests. More and more however, the public and the education community are hearing that the tests are high stakes tests. What is done with the results and how the results are used in the public arena is consistent with a high stakes assessment.

In short, NAPLAN is a low stakes assessment, the results of which are being used in a high stakes methodology. The recognition needs to be that NAPLAN is one test on one day and a snapshot at best of individual performance.²⁸

3.37 The Whitlam Institute's report, *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – An Educator's Perspective*, discussed earlier in this report, surveyed educators on their perceptions of the test and whether they considered it to be 'high stakes'. Their response concurred with other research:

Respondents' perceptions of the purposes of NAPLAN and their views of what impact reported poor results could have on schools strongly suggest that NAPLAN is viewed by the teaching profession as 'high stakes testing,'

27 NSW Primary Principles Association, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

28 NSW Primary Principles Association, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

confirming views already expressed by Lingard (2010) and Lobascher (2011).²⁹

3.38 The Whitlam Institute had previously conducted a literature review into the impact of high stakes testing and concluded there were serious impacts on student and their families, and arguing this was a consequence of publishing the test data on the My School website:

[T]he publication of NAPLAN results on the My School website, with the associated publicity and impact on schools and students, means that NAPLAN may be defined as constituting high stakes testing.³⁰

3.39 Other submitters argued that because NAPLAN is a test of literacy and numeracy only, and the results are subsequently published on the My School website, this marginalises other elements of the curriculum because schools are under pressure to concentrate on those results that are published:

The almost complete attention to testing of only certain kinds of literacy and numeracy skills serves to marginalise the other curriculum areas, especially in primary schools. This is inevitable when the stakes are raised by publication of results on My School. This often causes standards in these curriculum areas to be compromised as they received insufficient attention in the school program.³¹

3.40 According to submitters, it is not only schools that are subject to the pressure associated with NAPLAN being regarded as a 'high stakes' test. Some parents also see the emphasis placed on NAPLAN through the press and feel pressure to prepare their child to do well in the exams. Fintona Girls submitted that in their experience:

..[i]t is difficult to reassure parents that these tests simply provide one measure of a child's performance in a specific place in time when the results are made available on the *My School* website and performance league tables that use NAPLAN data appear in *The Australian* (as they did on June 1st, 2013).

...

As long as NAPLAN is the only measure used in the *MySchool* website to measure achievement, many schools will teach the tests and parents will do all that they can (including tutoring and purchasing commercial products) to enable their child to do as well in the tests as possible.

3.41 Other submitters also commented on the typical reportage of the NAPLAN test results and how this compounded the perception of NAPLAN being 'high stakes':

29 The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, *Submission 26*, N. Dulfer, Prof. John Polesel and Dr S. Rice, (2012), *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – An Educator's Perspective*, p. 9.

30 The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, *Submission 26*, N. Dulfer, Prof. John Polesel and Dr S. Rice, (2012), *The Experience of Education: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families – An Educator's Perspective*, p. 10.

31 Australia College of Educators, *Submission 30*, pp 3-4.

The publication of school NAPLAN results on the My School website and the way that some parts of the media report and comment on these results have caused many people to quite inappropriately view them as a valid measure of whole-school performance. The tests probe only a very narrow slice of the whole school curriculum and are not designed and are not adequate to support this sort of evaluation.

A supplement entitled “Your School” issued with *The Weekend Australian* of 1-2 June, 2013 is a good example of the misleading practice described above. The supplement included pages headed “The nation’s top 100 primary schools” and “The nation’s top 100 secondary schools”.³²

3.42 The effect on teaching has also been profound according to Jenny Cullen, an experienced educator and Assistant Principal. She described the situation before and after test results were published on the My School website:

Prior to the introduction of this comparative website, NSW had been conducting Basic Skills Tests for many years each August. In primary schools, children were usually given 2 or 3 practice test experiences so they became familiar with test conditions and multiple choice questions.

After the introduction of My School website, the stakes were instantly raised. For months in advance of NAPLAN, teachers in Yrs 3 and 5 now shape their teaching to the test. Children sit many practice tests. In some classrooms they write each week in the NAPLAN test condition of 40 minutes with no assistance during this time[...]Teachers feel pressured and judged. The results are pounced upon nervously.³³

3.43 The School of Education at Deakin University described the publication of NAPLAN results on the My School website as a 'summative judgement', that is not a fair and true reflection of all the elements that make up an effective learning environment. The publication of the results also takes away from the positive aspects of a standardised test where the goal it is to 'diagnose the literacy and numeracy needs of individual students':

This goal, however, is being compromised by the publication of results on the MySchool website, which reduces the test results to summative judgments of a whole school’s performance, sometimes unfairly stigmatizing the school in the eyes of a general public that does not fully appreciate the complexities of teaching and learning and the complex judgments involved in assessing students’ abilities, especially with respect to addressing the needs of culturally diverse and disadvantaged communities.³⁴

3.44 The Australian Education Union (AEU) discussed the committee's previous inquiry into NAPLAN and emphasised the research available to the committee then had since been supplemented by further evidence from both Australia and

32 Australian Association for the Teaching of English, *Submission 40*, p. 3.

33 Jenny Cullen, *Submission 36*, p. 1.

34 School of Education, Deakin University, *Submission 45*, pp. 4-5.

internationally, of the negative impact on teachers and students from high stakes testing:

[T]he existing body of evidence on high-stakes testing in general, and NAPLAN in particular, has been supplemented by both international research literature and recent Australian research.

3.45 The AEU urged the Committee and the government to take notice of the research and reconsider the publication of data on the website in its current form:

We urge this Inquiry to heed the evidence-based findings about the largely negative impact of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning in the context of the NAPLAN program and publication of NAPLAN data on the My School website.³⁵

3.46 However the perception of the My School website as a basis for comparative analysis is very different for the educational authorities who require various tools to be able to address deficiencies across their area. Tasmania's Department of Education espoused the benefits of the My School website, while being conscious of the potential pitfalls:

The DoE considers that overall the *My School* website supports processes of accountability, evaluation, collaborative policy development and resource allocation within school communities. It also provides valuable comparisons of a school's data sets with those of a group of other schools with similar socioeconomic status (SES) profiles as a context.

However, the DoE does acknowledge the potential of *My School* data to be used to create simplistic league tables which do not take into account the local context and factors such as SES.³⁶

3.47 ACARA also defended the publication of NAPLAN results. ACARA's submission lists what it terms as 'clear advantages' of the publication of NAPLAN data and emphasises that every effort is made to avoid the compilation of league tables. Amongst the advantages they cite include:

- Encouraging discussion between parents, the wider community, and schools about school improvement.
- Illustrating the improvements that are being made in schools, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, and celebrating the positive contributions of teachers and schools. In particular, gain data can be used to highlight the improvements made by students between the test years.
- Encouraging professional discussions between schools on strategies that have been used to improve student literacy and numeracy skills. *My School* allows principals and teachers to identify schools with a similar student cohort which may be achieving a higher level student gain.

35 Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, p. 13; p. 17.

36 Department of Education, Government of Tasmania, *Submission 29*, p. 5.

- Challenging schools in which students are achieving above average results to compare themselves to schools with similar student cohorts and examine whether students are improving at the rate expected or whether the school and its students are ‘coasting’.
- Providing a breakdown at a school level of the percentage of students achieving results in each proficiency band. This allows both the school and the community to monitor the progress of each student cohort and ensure that teaching practices are improving results for all students.³⁷

3.48 Data is published but sanctions to schools and teachers on this basis are not applied. In many cases, additional funding or other forms of assistance has been provided to schools that have not been performing as well as expected. The Department indicated that schools identified as having below average student outcomes in literacy and numeracy have been allocated additional funding of \$11 million in total, to assist them raise literacy and numeracy performance.³⁸

Committee View

3.49 The committee accepts that data obtained from NAPLAN is of significant value to stakeholders including students, schools, parents, education authorities, the wider community, and state and national governments and the provision of this data through MySchool has enabled greater understanding about the performance of schools. However there are also significant disbenefits from publishing the data in a manner that as part of its functionality either compares itself, or allows easy comparison between schools.

3.50 The committee further accepts that the Department and ACARA discourage the use of the data to develop league tables, but this does not diminish the facts that this occurs. One of its core elements of the *MySchool* website is the ability to compare schools, but given the number of variables involved in the testing process, and the almost infinite variation in students, a true comparison is not possible.

3.51 For this reason the committee would still like to see the data published, but some of the core ranking and comparative functionality removed from the website. This would allow for data to be published to schools and parents and education authorities, but it would limit the disingenuous use of the data to rank schools.

Recommendation 4

3.52 The committee recommends that ACARA closely monitor the use of NAPLAN results to ensure results are published to assist the Government to deliver extra, targeted funding to schools and students who need more support, rather than the development of league tables.

37 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Submission 58*, pp 16-17.

38 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 29*, p. 6.