

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012-2013**

Agency - Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority

DEEWR Question No. EW0533_13

Senator McKenzie provided in writing.

Question

ACARA - National literacy and numeracy tests discrimination

The Australian this week said that research shows 'national literacy and numeracy tests discriminate against indigenous children in remote communities'. The tests apparently 'use reading materials about unfamiliar situations and require a level of grammatical knowledge often lacking in students for whom English is a second language'. Examples highlighted included culturally unfamiliar questions around 'a movie poster including the name of the director, the rating and session times, and a paperboy delivering newspapers to letterboxes, which are foreign concepts to children in remote communities'. Rob Randall is quoted in response as saying 'some of the points raised were worth considering ""but there is nothing that would support saying no to NAPLAN"". Can you elaborate? What is ACARA's position on the recently released research? When was ACARA first made aware of this issue? Is ACARA intending to take any action as a result of this research? REF: Naplan questions unfair to remote kids (Australian October 16 2012)

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/naplan-questions-unfair-to-remote-kids/story-fn59nlz9-1226496623433>.

Answer

ACARA has provided the following response.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a standardised testing program that is administered and scored in a consistent manner for all students in the country. The tests are designed in such a way that the questions, administration conditions, scoring procedures and analysis are consistent for all students.

The tests also identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills that provide the critical foundation for their learning. While it is recognised that all students do not have the same background knowledge, competency in Australian English is essential for all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to allow them to participate fully in Australian society.

NAPLAN tests are standardised and serve a national comparability purpose. The test development process is designed to ensure that test content is aligned to the curriculum expectations of each state and territory, and they will be based on the Australian Curriculum in a few years' time. The development process includes having each state and territory review all proposed test items for cultural appropriateness.

Specifications for the development of NAPLAN tests state that:

The assessment should allow equity of access for students of both genders and from different cultures and language backgrounds. In keeping with MCEECDYA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014, test developers must ensure that NAPLAN tests are not culturally biased against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Given the diversity of the student population across Australia, it is expected that contexts presented in test questions should be relevant and accessible, but need not be restricted to those experienced personally by students.

The research in question overlooks a fundamental premise of NAPLAN tests, namely that the national tests are designed to be standard for all students. Indigenous students are part of the national student population and participate with all other students. Their performance is as relevant to the national picture as students who are not from an 'English as an alternative language or dialect' (EALD) background. The results for indigenous students provide, among other things, an indication of their level of literacy in standard Australian English. This is an important tool for becoming active and informed citizens, one of the national goals of schooling. It should be noted that the research drew predominantly on the 2008 NAPLAN tests. Continuous quality review of the tests has resulted in ongoing improvements to the program since 2008.

ACARA has been mindful of the diverse needs, backgrounds and exposure of students to varying experiences since taking responsibility for the development of the 2011 NAPLAN tests in 2010.

ACARA will continue to develop NAPLAN tests in a way that takes account of the relevance and appropriateness of all test items to all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.