

Spensley Street Primary School

The Spensley Street Primary School Staff and School Council wishes to make a submission regarding the NAPLAN and the My School website.

We understand that it is important and necessary for the government to collect data from schools, but we object to the manner in which this is done. We do not believe it is in students' or schools' best interests for this information to be published on the My School website.

We have several concerns about the My School website. We believe that the data will be used to rank schools, and that unfair and damaging comparisons will be made. The ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Education Advantage) ignores some important factors which influence NAPLAN test results, e.g. differences in the ethnic composition of student populations, proportion of students with disabilities, differences in school size, and major funding differences.

We also dispute the validity and reliability of the NAPLAN test results, and we do not believe that one simple test can provide an adequate measurement of student growth and achievement. Publication of NAPLAN data has resulted in a 'high stakes' approach to the test, meaning that this one assessment tool has taken on a significance it does not deserve. Our concerns about the NAPLAN are as follows:

Evidence shows that the NAPLAN has already narrowed school curriculums. Resources are focused on those subjects which are tested – English and Maths. Schools are spending valuable resources on test-preparation materials, at the expense of extra teaching support and other subject areas.

Schools are under pressure to spend class time preparing students for the tests, taking time away from valuable learning. The learning becomes based on what will be tested, rather than what is worth learning. In many cases, schools are 'teaching to the test'. Such preparation also makes comparisons of the data unfair.

Test results can be manipulated. Some low-achieving students are encouraged not to sit the test. There are stories of teachers changing answers, and coaching particular students who are deemed likely to do well.

The tests themselves are limited; they only test what can be quantified. The focus is on 'mechanics' rather than higher-order thinking skills. They are also poor quality assessments because they are out of context with what is being taught at a particular time. Test results are of limited usefulness for teachers because the results are not available for months.

The data is not reliable. A single test done on a single day will certainly result in significant errors in data.

Test results have the potential to incorrectly label students. They can have a negative impact on students with learning difficulties or poor self-esteem. This one-size-fits-all approach does not take into account the different learning rates and styles of individual children. And because the results are standardized, success for some is based upon failure for others.

The current system of publishing NAPLAN results is demoralizing for teachers and

schools. Teachers experience high levels of stress, and many are now resisting taking responsibility for Year 3 and 5 classes. Creativity and new ideas are not encouraged. Teachers are becoming de-skilled at assessing student progress. Schools are failing to provide sufficiently broad and reliable information about individual children. Parents are confused by the data and teachers are forced to defend their own judgements about student progress, as the NAPLAN marking scheme is inconsistent with VELS. The current approach will deepen the inequalities in our education system. It is extremely damaging for schools that do not do well, which are often in poorer areas. This will result in greater isolation for struggling students in marginalized schools. It is likely that there will be a drift of higher-achieving students from public to private schools.

The way that NAPLAN results are currently used to make unfair comparisons between schools is clearly having a damaging effect on our education system. It undermines the real purpose and achievement of schools, and it is demoralizing for teachers. And we know that it is teaching, not testing, that makes a difference to student learning.

Spensley Street sub-branch  
Australian Education Union