

SUBMISSION

INQUIRY INTO THE ADMINISTRATION AND REPORTING OF NAPLAN TESTING

(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

Differing positions are expected in relation to the purpose, conduct and outcomes of NAPLAN testing. It is appropriate that this range of perspectives forms the basis for rigorous interrogation of issues related to the testing program. The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) is supportive of both NAPLAN testing, and the important role the *My School* website has in driving improved student outcomes. DET acknowledges the key role the *My School* Working Party plays in harnessing and synthesising the range of stakeholder perspectives in relation to NAPLAN testing and the publication of school data in the public domain and thereby advising the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in relation to information available on the website. Whilst acknowledging that NAPLAN testing is but one of a number of ways schools can obtain information about literacy and numeracy achievement, DET strongly supports the publishing of school level NAPLAN data, particularly because it:

- provides levels of accountability and transparency at school, system and jurisdictional levels; and
- has the potential to be a powerful tool to drive school improvement.

Further to the MCEECDYA proposals being considered by the *My School* Working Party with the intent of strengthening the capacity of published data to meet accountability, transparency and school improvement imperatives, the Northern Territory also recommends:

- expanding qualitative data about the school available through *My School* to enhance contextual interpretation of student outcomes;
- affirming *My School* as primarily a vehicle for enhancing school performance;
- expanding the breadth of, and refining, student level data available through the *My School* so that a comprehensive picture of the school's social, linguistic and geographic context is available. For instance, 40% of learners in the Northern Territory have a language background other than English and of this 40% is made up of significant numbers of Indigenous students living in remote communities where English is infrequently used outside of the school and is therefore experienced as a foreign language. Refined information in relation to language background for instance, can contribute to more informed analysis, interpretation and judgements about individual school's performance, at the same time limiting opportunities for published information to be used to arrive at de-contextualised comparisons between schools and or jurisdictions;
- including the facility to identify the numbers of students identified as having special learning needs but who still participate in the test;
- factoring language background into the index of socio-educational advantage (ICSEA);
- including the facility for principals to provide comment about NAPLAN-related information and data published on *My School*.

(b) The implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data.

My School provides an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen data-informed practice in all Australian schools. The Northern Territory strongly supports actions that aim to ensure NAPLAN data is used for its intended purposes, and that safeguards and protocols are in place to support those who use, analyse or make judgements in relation to the data do so in an informed way. In relation to this, it is acknowledged that the *My School* Working Party is considering actions that would minimise the misuse of testing and reporting data.

(c) The impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:

Across the range of school contexts in the Northern Territory, there is considerable variation in the impacts of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime in relation to student learning and teaching practice. Jurisdictions have a responsibility to provide quality accessible information about the purpose and outcomes of NAPLAN testing to parents and other stakeholders so to minimise misunderstanding in relation to the testing.

(i) The educational experience and outcomes for Australian children

Australian children deserve a world-class education and the NAPLAN testing regime provides a transparency and accountability mechanism for schools Australia-wide. NAPLAN testing establishes that English literacy and numeracy are valued elements of the learning process for all children. Nationally, NAPLAN establishes literacy and numeracy as core business for all children in all Australian schools. NAPLAN data provides useful comparisons between schools, within systems and across jurisdictions and has application as a literacy and numeracy diagnostic tool, although this application is very limited for high and low end achievers. NAPLAN data provides nationally comparable data to assist with school level target setting. In many of Northern Territory's remote schools Indigenous children have historically demonstrated very low achievement of national literacy and numeracy standards. Many of these learners start from such low baselines of English literacy and/or numeracy competency that in many cases no meaningful diagnostic data is able to be gathered from the NAPLAN test to inform process and practice for improving outcomes for this group of students.

(ii) The scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice

The testing regime has the potential to lift the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice nationally. The NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime provides teachers with evidence upon which to identify classroom and whole-school strategies to drive school improvement. The Australian curriculum provides an unprecedented opportunity to align national literacy and numeracy practice including establishing literacy and numeracy as dimensions across all learning areas, make recommendations about targeted pedagogy for different learner groups, and develop innovative literacy and numeracy teaching resources including professional learning. Improved levels of data literacy amongst Northern Territory principals and teachers, and a growing appreciation of the diagnostic value of the tests for many students will continue to positively impact on teaching practice. A principal commented that, "...NAPLAN testing has led to a reinvigoration of many areas of the curriculum." This reinvigoration includes states and territories increasingly sharing resources and diagnostic tools, and teachers reflecting on teaching and learning across all areas of the curriculum, and expanding the application of targeted, explicit teaching strategies. The NT attracts significant numbers of interstate teachers; national alignment of literacy and numeracy process and practice will benefit these teachers, as well as students.

NAPLAN assessment and reporting data does not provide diagnostic information that can be used to guide teaching practice for a percentage of children including those with special needs or who have a language background other than English.

(iii) The quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community

NAPLAN testing provides stakeholders, including the media, with significantly expanded amounts of information about literacy and numeracy at school, system and national levels. In general this is quality information but there is a need to ensure that its value is maximised through processes that develop ongoing understandings of what the information means for future teaching and learning that will lead to ongoing student and school improvement, and to minimise sensationalist or inaccurate reporting to the public. Data that identifies poor literacy and/or numeracy outcomes at school or classroom level is a

powerful tool upon which principals, teachers and parents can base strategies for improvement. It is critical that all stakeholders have the necessary skills and understanding to contribute positively to addressing poor performance, each aware of their role and responsibilities either as a school leader, teacher or parent. It is recommended that information be provided on the My School site that assists stakeholders to understand the place of NAPLAN testing within the wider realms of student literacy and numeracy assessment – most of which is ongoing and occurs at school level. This information could also include reference to the importance of school-based assessment and how teachers can use NAPLAN data to triangulate /verify their judgements of student learning.

(d) International approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results, ie. “league tables”

It is recommended that the Inquiry conduct research into the range of international approaches to the publication of comparative testing data, and the outcomes of publication.

(e) Other related matters

Test design and content

It is recommended that opportunities be explored to modify the test design so that the process enables the gathering of quality, nationally comparable literacy and numeracy data on every child. Data currently gathered by NAPLAN does not meet all students' diagnostic needs, in particular the needs of the highest and lowest achieving children, and in particular Year 3 students. To fully enable equity of access to test item content, especially by students living in remote and rural contexts, rigorous interrogation should be conducted of the contextual bias of test items. There is also a need for the range of difficulty of test items to be reconsidered to maximise information gathering opportunities at the top and lower ends of student ability.

School level security issues

The public presentation of NAPLAN data on *My School* has added an additional high stakes element to NAPLAN testing. This high stakes element resulted in some teachers/schools attempting to gain unfair advantage for students during 2009 testing through, for example, the early opening of tests to pre-prepare students, and altering student responses on test papers. Strategies to minimise practices such as these should be explored.

National reporting tool

There is a need for ACARA to implement a national reporting tool to ensure Australia-wide rigor and consistency in the reporting of student outcomes, and which links a student's NAPLAN achievement with their achievement across learning areas.

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