

A submission on behalf of teachers of Pomona State School

Pomona State School teachers do not object to a national testing program. Indeed, most copy, grade and analyse NAPLAN test results, in order for the data to inform their teaching before results are officially made available, as a part of the varied forms of assessment used as a basis for planning. They do, however, have some issues with NAPLAN in its current form, and with the publication of results via the My School website.

Discussion revealed that Year 3, 5 and 7 teachers at this school unanimously felt that 'teaching to the test' for a significant part of Term 1 was necessary to allow their students a chance to perform adequately during the NAPLAN tests. This included repeated practice of the test format rather than just the content and skills embodied by the test. All felt that this displaced other, arguably, more valuable curriculum content, and that desirable pedagogies, such as inquiry-based learning, were abandoned in favour of a teacher-directed approach, because of time constraints. Teachers felt that the principle that NAPLAN materials tested content and skills familiar to the children from teaching in line with the Queensland Essential Learnings was not borne out in practice, and that content which would normally form part of the curriculum later in the year had to be presented before the tests, as past tests demonstrated that it would likely be included. Teachers had reservation!

s about the effectiveness of such teaching, as they felt it did not form part of a logical teaching sequence likely to promote deep understanding and application.

A number of teachers felt that the format of the test favoured certain learning styles over others. For example, the identification of misspelled words favoured the visual learner, who would register the word as 'looking wrong'. Since words not normally included in students' writing were chosen, those students who were able to write with acceptable spelling accuracy at an age-appropriate level due to effective teaching of spelling skills, could none-the-less score badly on the test. Similarly, as the oral spelling component had been removed, auditory learners were not able to display skills they may have had.

Teachers questioned the value of the test as a means of identifying students requiring support. At Pomona School, all those students below National Benchmarks, as well as a number of others, were already identified as requiring support, and were engaged in support programs.

All teachers of Year 3, 5 and 7 classes experienced an uncomfortable degree of pressure related to NAPLAN from various stakeholders. Since the threat to withhold school funding based on test results was perceived to exist, teachers felt pressure from their employer to produce results regardless of the make-up of the particular cohort they taught. In addition, many parents seemed to view NAPLAN success as an end in itself (some even purchasing workbooks alleged to improve children's performance) rather than one indicator of their children's academic progress. Teachers experienced doubt about the process they felt compelled to engage in, when students (especially younger children and Students with Disabilities), exhibited signs of performance anxiety and frustration leading up to and during the tests.

Some of this pressure was deemed to stem from the publication of results in the current form on the My School website. This was released with a good deal of publicity, which seemed to many parents to suggest that by consulting the site they could learn all they might need to know about a school. The information that schools were transparently compared to similar schools via colour coding, gave many parents the impression they were comparing their local schools to each other. In fact, Pomona School is compared mainly to schools in other states, whose students would currently be older at the time of testing. The particular make-up of student populations (for example, Pomona's Year 3-7 students are 64% male) is not acknowledged. Parents have no opportunity to compare the performance of the same cohort over time to determine whether the school demonstrates effective support strategies resulting in improved results. The powerful implication that My School 'reveals

all' is not off-set by well-publicised advice to parents to investigate other aspects of schools in which they are interested. As has been demonstrated by at least one national newspaper, it is all too easy to prepare simplistic 'league tables' from My School data, with the implication that they demonstrate much more than they do.

While Pomona teachers see benefits to national testing, they also believe that tests need to mesh with the expected outcomes of the curriculum at the time of testing, to remove unnecessary stress and allow quality pedagogy and not test readiness to determine teaching decisions. Results need to be meaningfully provided to the community, and funding needs to be directed to areas of need, not used as a 'carrot/stick' to manipulate already hard-working teachers in state schools.