

Submission - Naplan Senate Inquiry

This submission is prepared on behalf of the members of Queensland Teachers' Union at Moggill State School. Moggill State School is a primary school of approximately 620 students in the western suburbs of Brisbane. We do not have an enrolment cap on our school, however the neighbouring school of Pullenvale has a cap. This information is imperative when comparing data on the MY School Website.

The biggest failing of NAPLAN and the My School website is that it makes education a competition. As the effects of My School takes place, we will shortly see elite schools developing. This is precisely what has occurred overseas.

NAPLAN does not come from a National Curriculum. Therefore, different concepts were covered at different times across the year and across the States. In order to try to prepare the children for "anything" time was taken away from teaching the regular curriculum at that time in the year i.e. concepts that were to be taught later in the year needed to be taught earlier and therefore other areas had to be overlooked. The curriculum cannot be properly taught when so much time is being spent on practising for a 'point-in-time test'. Teachers need to be allowed to address the curriculum in an effort to improve skills and knowledge which may then improve results. Age differences across States are so unbalanced, as Queensland students are always younger than in other States. Important because young children are growing and developing at such rapid rates and whilst young, even a 6 month or 4 month age difference reflects their differing mental maturity, experiences and stage of readiness etc. Experienced teachers readily see this progression throughout each school year. It is easily noticed when Year 4 students have a 6 week break and enter Year 5 and easily seen by the end of the year.

Time of year chosen for testing- The above comments are related to this as well. Students in Queensland are disadvantaged by the fact that they are tested very early in the year at a consolidated year 5 level, when they are only just beginning to adjust from a Year 4 level. There is a significant and sharp rise in academic levels of expectation from end year 4 to consolidated Year 5 levels after only 3.5 months into the new school year. If students are going to be tested at the current levels, then they should not only be tested at the same chronological age but towards the latter part of the year. Many students have reached the appropriate developmental stage by this time and teachers have been given the time and opportunity to not only teach the skills and knowledge, but also to allow students to apply and develop higher order thinking strategies.

NAPLAN hugely devalues the other 5 key learning areas.

Teachers at Moggill State School have found that preparing children for NAPLAN has caused the most disastrous impact on teaching time in the classroom. Teachers found it very frustrating having to 'teach to a test', rather than focusing on the term's unit of planned work. The curriculum is full enough without having to change focus to prepare for a test which reflects a moment in time. The extra time spent on NAPLAN has to come from somewhere and other important areas have had to take a back seat e.g. Program Achieve, when this is very relevant in trying to build the children up for the stressful situations they are put in with all this testing - particularly the younger students.

There is a whole shift in the curriculum which focuses heavily on literacy and numeracy. Even the preparatory curriculum has changed focus; we are seeing preps taking home readers and these young children are being expected to lift their achievements for reading and writing. The research is being ignored from very successful countries like Denmark. What happens to problem solving for everyday living, creativity and social skills? The test is 'point-in-time' - results cannot possibly be relied on to provide reliable information on children's abilities. Teachers spend a whole year developing an accurate

picture of the children's abilities. Surely this is more reliable information than a one off test.

The moral of teachers is deflated. Teachers want to teach the gifted students, as it inflates their results and makes them appear to be the better teacher. At our school we have a strong gifted and talented program and we cluster the students in classes. Some teachers take the lower achieving students to cater for their needs. If teachers were evaluated on their performance very few teachers would want to take the lower achieving students.

It appears that there is this sudden realisation that students are not performing and then blaming the schools for it. Teachers and administrators have merely been following departmental demands, which have, in many ways, been detracting from our core business - teaching and learning. There is a focus on uniformity and not individuality. There is a very narrow view of school curricula on the My School site. Parents do not see the true, overall picture of a school. Education is a lifelong process whereby we are trying to engender a culture of lifelong learning. We educate the whole young child, in all areas of the curricula. Who is to place more emphasis or more value on 1 or 2 areas when it could be so damaging and stressful to young psyches? Developing primary students can lose their sense of worth and it can generate a negative impact on their view of their capabilities and on the essential enjoyment of learning that teachers strive to inculcate. We also know that ours is not an instant process, wherein the lifelong outcomes can be assessed at a specific point in time.

The pressure to continue to improve, even when the marks are high, is unreasonable on students and staff. Maintain yes, but not continually improve by a set percentage each year. The cohort of children is different, and teachers are being asked to improve a different cohort of students. The year 5 teachers need to improve the results of the year 3 students from 2 years ago. The improvement figures don't correlate to the data. Every class/ cohort is different. Any teacher knows that. There are many factors that contribute to a good education. There is an enormous amount of information around the research of the effects that parent participation has on a child's success at school. This research has been completely ignored and the focus is on teachers' poor teaching. Different cohorts each year compare previous year's class data. The data is really only valid as a whole-school general overview of areas in Literacy and Numeracy which could be prioritised for strengthening after comparing series of tests.

The results have been used to identify kids in the gifted and talented area and in the learning support area.

Eight year old children should not be exposed to the stress of this type of testing. (It probably is equally as inappropriate for other primary aged children). They are not nearly old enough to understand that the focus is not on them, but on teachers and schools. Anxiety resulting from such testing can have long term effects in children so young. Teachers try to minimise stress, but between the media and departmental demands, children, sensitive as they are to the environment, are bound to pick up on it all and will be stressed unnecessarily by this 'moment in time' test of their abilities.

Some students were visibly stressed over the tests and required lots of reassurance - I have been told of bed wetting issues.

This is not what we are trying to achieve at schools - stressed students, particularly young students trying to achieve at schools - stressed students, particularly young students trying to deal with testing that is not from their regular curriculum cannot be good teaching practise nor a productive pedagogy!

The emphasis on "teaching to and for the test", for the first 3 hectic months of the year, definitely takes away from many other areas of education the students should be

experiencing and gives them a very skewed idea of what education is about and what we as a society value most.

Inaccurate, sometimes ridiculous, comparison/criteria"Like Schools". More emphasis should be placed on comparison to other same - State and local schools. What about long term data - how many students from these schools go onto university, how many students commitment suicide, what is the percentage of drug use and teenage pregnancy? Education is also about life skills and in some areas these are more important than literacy and numeracy. Whilst education improves social status, there are also other components to an education for life.

Schools that have enrolment caps have a great advantage and can therefore inflate their results. At a school like Indooroopilly State School, where only 30% of the children enrol from the catchment area - the remaining 70% come from outside the catchments area. Children are allowed to enrol in the school if they are high academic achievers. Low achieving students cannot enrol in the school as they wouldn't meet the rigorous academic standard to be maintained on the My School website. It is not that the teaching is better, it is that the parent's motivate their children and value education and already come from backgrounds where education is highly valued with many parents having university degrees. The same applies for Ironside State School and Rainworth State School.

The My School website compares state achievements which compares apples and carrots. It has a narrow view of using the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage to group like schools. Age surely has to be one of the most important criteria to make comparisons. All commercial tests use chronological ages to compare data.

The biggest failing of NAPLAN and the MY School website is that it makes education a competition. Education is not a competition - children need to be treated as individuals and be supported to achieve to the best of their ability. They must not feel that they are failures because they haven't achieved a band..... on NAPLAN.

England and USA went down the track of national testing. One needs to research the results of the process. Both these countries realised the impact and affects of National Testing and have abandoned this type of testing.

What do we want to see happen to improve the situation?

1. Abolition of League Tables - all children are entitled to a decent education. The effects of league tables needs to be thoroughly researched and the question asked, 'Do we want to go down this avenue?'
2. Abolition of state comparisons due to state age disparity, immigration/ NESB and ATSI.
3. National Curriculum before National Testing (would prefer not to see national testing).
4. Teachers/Schools cannot be compared on NAPLAN results as the starting points and cohorts from year to year are very different.
4. Research into best practice worldwide.

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