

A PREFERRED SCENARIO FOR NAPLAN AND MYSCHOOL

This scenario was written by Professor Brian Caldwell and forms part of his evidence to the Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing. It is based on recommendations in Chapter 9 of Caldwell, B.J. & Harris, J. (2008). *Why not the Best Schools: What we have learned from outstanding schools around the world*. Melbourne: ACER Press.

It is 2020. There is now a higher level of transparency and more testing in Australia's schools than in the past. However, approaches associated with NAPLAN and the MySchool website at the start of the decade, when every student in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 was required to do several 40 to 50 minute, mostly multiple choice 'high stakes' national tests each year, have been abandoned. A united profession and the public at large soon realised that expectations had not been realised and the scheme was become increasingly and seriously dysfunctional. It inhibited rather than supported the transformation¹ of schools. There was marginal improvement in student achievement in the early part of the decade but results soon flat-lined². Changes in levels of achievement against national standards are now monitored through periodic testing of samples of students in jurisdictions around the country.

Long-overdue reforms in teacher education starting in 2011 meant that teachers became expert in skilful testing, diagnosis of need and immediate support of their students in an unprecedented and comprehensive approach to personalising learning. Every school has teachers and other professionals on call who give immediate support to their colleagues to ensure that no student falls behind³. A re-modelled national agency prepares tests that schools can choose if they wish, but the high level of professional skill ensures that most schools design their own and use an array of approaches to assessment. This agency works through each jurisdiction to monitor schools to ensure they are doing this well⁴.

Parents obtain real-time online reports of how their sons and daughters are progressing⁵, and online comparisons of schools in MySchool were phased out from 2012. They were of dubious validity, difficult to understand and the subject of seemingly endless debates among academics, policymakers and practitioners.

Teaching to the test and the narrowing of the curriculum are dysfunctions of the past. The curriculum has been broadened to address the range of knowledge and skills demanded in the 21st century⁶. Schools have far more autonomy than in the past⁷, with many opting for an international rather than national curriculum, but they operate within robust frameworks of accountability. Innovation and creativity flourish and there has been a resurgence in the arts and science. New world-class facilities have been an important factor in attracting able people to the profession⁸. There is a passion that has not been evident for several decades.

¹ Transformation is defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings

² This occurred in England in the first decade of the 20th century

³ These practices are major factors in accounting for success in Finland

⁴ This approach is currently employed in New Zealand

⁵ Several schools and school systems have made good progress in this approach

⁶ A related international project in which Australia is a partner is now underway

⁷ A national rollout of higher levels of autonomy for government schools will commence in 2015

⁸ A good start has been made, supported by initiatives in Building the Education Revolution in some instances