

Dear Senate Enquiry,

We live in rural NSW and my son attends our one of our two local public schools. He is in Year One and we believe doing wonderfully. We believe the school provides a well balanced education with opportunities in educational, sporting, cultural, arts and other extra curricular activities. The staff is very hard working and does a magnificent job.

Unfortunately, these wonderful attributes are not noted on the My Schools website.

Our son is always in the top group of his class with literacy, numeracy and other aspects of the curriculum. It will be interesting to see how this equates on a National level in two years time when he sits the NAPLAN tests. Interesting, but not vital in shaping our perspective of our son's achievements or his school. We, unlike many in the community it seems, realise these tests are only assessing such a narrow part of the curriculum that his school offers.

This is why we find it very disappointing when you look at the results of his school on the My Schools website and see the school's results all in the red. We realise that we live in an area with many pockets of low socio-economic status and little parental support for education in the early childhood years. This is certainly reflected in the results. However, the results do not reflect the great job the school is doing with the students on the whole, nor do they reflect the wonderful achievement of many of the other individual students who are competent in the literacy and numeracy areas as well as so many more areas of the curriculum that NAPLAN fails to assess. I think this averaging of results is discriminating against students like my son, whom I believe, when he does his NAPLAN in two years time, will be above the national average. I think that he, in a confidential manner, and the school deserve to be acknowledged in a fairer way, rather than all being placed in a 'below average' grouping.

At a recent P&C meeting, we were discussing the negative aspects of using diagnostic tests such as NAPLAN to create league tables to compare schools. We discussed that even though we have a wonderful school and staff that these league tables may be affecting our enrolments, especially considering that another local Primary School have all their NAPLAN results recorded in the green. At around 170 students at my son's school, there is often concern that our numbers may fall and create the position of a teaching Principal, which we believe would not be in the best interests of the school. One parent brought up that she had heard of parents using the results on the My Schools website when looking at secondary education and as the local high school has their results recorded in the red, they are selecting to send their children out of town, travelling to a rural city 40 minutes away by bus for their secondary education. This has adversely affected the culture and morale of high school students and staff. It has also severely narrowed the curriculum and other activities that can be offered. When the community loses confidence in one of their schools, there is an ongoing spiral downwards and the whole makeup of the town community is affected.

I hope that we will learn from the negative experiences that this type of misuse of data has had in both Britain and the USA on school communities. I also hope that the committee is willing to listen to educational experts in this area and take their advice for the benefit of our school and others like it.

I would hate to think that my son misses out on the well balanced educational experience he is receiving for the sake of his school feeling pressured to 'teach to the test' to ensure they try and lift the students bringing their average results recorded down.

I can only hope that this enquiry recommends the establishment of safeguards to stop NAPLAN data being misused in ways in which it is damaging to our school and community.

Yours sincerely,
Sarah Jones