

The Senate

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Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations  
References Committee

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Administration and reporting of NAPLAN  
testing

November 2010

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# **Senate References Committee on Education, Employment & Workplace Relations**

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council of Educational Research
AEU	Australian Education Union
AHISA	Association of Heads of Independent Schools
APPA	Australian Primary Principals Association
CCD	Census Collection District
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EWG	Expert Working Group
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAP	National Assessment Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SSSG	Statistically Similar School Groups



# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

**2.30** The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA explore and report publicly on ways in which to use below-average NAPLAN test results as a trigger for immediate assistance aimed at helping individual schools and students perform at appropriate levels.

## Recommendation 2

**2.45** The committee majority recommends that ACARA assess and report publicly on the potential benefits of moving to a system that reports the median rather than the mean school performance.

## Recommendation 3

**2.60** The committee majority recommends that MCEECDYA and relevant jurisdictional test administration authorities look at and report publicly on ways to ensure that children with disabilities are not discriminated against and denied the right to participate in national testing.

## Recommendation 4

**2.67** The committee majority recommends that ACARA analyse and report publicly on how NAPLAN tests are serving different groups of Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) students.

## Recommendation 5

**2.75** The committee majority recommends that ACARA investigate and report to MCEECDYA on enhancing NAPLAN to support the diagnostic needs of higher and lower student achievers.

## Recommendation 6

**2.80** The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA expand NAPLAN to include annual testing from years 3 to 10 in order to more accurately track student performance and give parents, teachers and policymakers a far better understanding of how students, teachers and schools, are progressing.

## Recommendation 7

**2.94** The committee majority recommends that MCEECDYA explore ways for state and territory test administration authorities to more strongly enforce security protocols.

## Recommendation 8

**3.36** The committee majority recommends that ACARA prioritises the improvement of the method used to develop like school comparisons and

commits to the introduction of a method based on student-level SES data *for all schools* prior to the reporting of 2011 NAPLAN test results.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**3.66** The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA examine and publicly report on ways to mitigate the harm caused by simplistic and often distorted information published in newspaper league tables.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**3.83** The committee majority recommends that ACARA identify, analyse and report publicly on possible means of strengthening the relationship between NAPLAN tests and the wider curriculum. The committee majority reserves its support for any alignment between the tests and the new national curriculum until the quality of, and community support for, the curriculum become clearer.

#### **Recommendation 11**

**3.99** The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA move to include more contextual information about schools on the *My School* website, reflecting the complex range of factors that affect schools, and acknowledge to users of the website their awareness of the limitations of comparisons based on raw performance data due to extrinsic factors. The committee majority further recommends that ACARA commit to ensuring this contextual information is available ahead of the reporting of 2011 NAPLAN results.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**3.118** The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA comprehensively revise the type of information available on the *My School* website to shift the focus from raw school performance data to value-added measurement of school performance.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 13 May 2010, the Senate referred to the Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations the matter of the administration and reporting of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing. The committee was to inquire into, and report on, the reference by 13 August 2010.<sup>1</sup> On 27 July 2010 the committee presented an interim report notifying the Senate that due to the prorogation of the 42nd Parliament the committee required additional time to complete the inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

1.2 In the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament the committee recommended to the Senate that it re-adopt the reference, with a final report due on 24 November 2010. The Senate agreed to this on 30 September 2010.<sup>3</sup>

### Terms of reference

1.3 Under the terms of reference the committee was to inquire into:

- (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;
- (b) the implementation of possible safeguards and protocols around the public presentation of the testing and reporting data;
- (c) the impact of the NAPLAN assessment and reporting regime on:
  - (i) the educational experience and outcomes for Australian students,
  - (ii) the scope, innovation and quality of teaching practice,
  - (iii) the quality and value of information about student progress provided to parents and principals, and
  - (iv) the quality and value of information about individual schools to parents, principals and the general community; and
- (d) international approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of the results, i.e. ‘league tables’; and
- (e) other related matters.

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1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 122, 13 May 2010, p. 3490.

2 Senate Standing References Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Inquiry into administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing – Interim report*, 27 July 2010.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 3, 30 September 2010, p. 160.

## **Conduct of the inquiry**

1.4 Notice of the inquiry was posted on the committee's website and in *The Australian* newspaper, calling for submissions by 25 June 2010. The committee also directly contacted a number of interested parties, organisations and individuals to notify them of the inquiry and to invite submissions. A total of 268 submissions were received, as listed in Appendix 1.

1.5 The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 29 October and 1 November 2010. A list of witnesses who appeared is at Appendix 2.

## **Acknowledgements**

1.6 The committee thanks all those who contributed to the inquiry by making submissions, providing additional information or appearing before it to give evidence.

## **Background to the inquiry**

1.7 This inquiry was initiated following allegations of schools cheating and manipulating test results by excluding students when the literacy and numeracy tests were held in May 2010.<sup>4</sup> These reports drew attention to and fuelled pre-existing concerns around the use of standardised testing and reporting of test performance, particularly in light of the 2010 launch of the government's controversial *My School* website and media publication of crude league tables ranking school performance.

## **Note on references**

1.8 References in this report to the Hansard for the public hearings held on 29 October and 1 November 2010 are to the proof Hansard. Please note that page numbers may vary between the proof and the official transcripts.

## **Structure of the report**

1.9 This report is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 (this chapter) sets out the administrative arrangements for the inquiry. Chapter 2 provides background information on NAPLAN testing and outlines the issues raised during the inquiry regarding test administration. Chapter 3 covers the presentation of the NAPLAN data on the *My School* website and issues raised regarding the reporting of NAPLAN results.

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4 See for example: Michael Owen and Verity Edwards, 'Teacher faces axe for cheating,' *The Australian*, 14 May 2010, pp 1-2; Melinda Howells, 'Spotlight on NAPLAN as teacher stood down,' *ABC News online* <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/13/2898923.htm>.

## Chapter 2

### National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

2.1 This chapter covers the background to NAPLAN, its purpose, uses of the results data and the issues raised during the inquiry regarding the administration of national standardised literacy and numeracy testing.

#### Background

2.2 Prior to the first NAPLAN tests in May 2008, each Australian state and territory managed its own literacy and numeracy testing regime, commencing in 1989 with the Basic Skills Test in New South Wales. Despite differences in the state and territory regimes, national comparative data was prepared on an annual basis from 1999 through a process called 'equating'.<sup>1</sup> A similar process is still used today to enable comparisons between tests done in different years.<sup>2</sup>

2.3 In July 2003, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed to work towards enhanced collection, consistency and reporting of literacy and numeracy performance data. The *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* prescribed the implementation of national tests by 1 January 2008. In July 2006, MCEETYA agreed that national literacy and numeracy testing for all students in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 would commence in 2008. The NAPLAN tests began to be administered across all states and territories with support from all education ministers.<sup>3</sup>

#### What is NAPLAN?

2.4 The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) commenced in Australian schools in 2008. Each year, all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed on the same days using standardised national tests in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Submission 261*, p. 3.

2 [http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/writing\\_2011\\_faqs.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/writing_2011_faqs.html) (accessed 18 October 2010).

3 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 3.

4 Information available from: [http://www.naplan.edu.au/home\\_page.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/home_page.html) (accessed 14 October 2010).

2.5 Parents receive individual reports for their children, showing how each child performed compared to the national average, and, in some states and territories, compared to the school average. Schools are provided with detailed student results at the same time as, or sometimes before, parents, depending on the timing of school holidays in individual states and territories. After that:

The results are released to the public in two stages. The first stage is the NAPLAN Summary Report, released in mid September, showing results at each year level and domain by state and territory and nationally. The second stage is the NAPLAN National Report that includes detailed results by sex, Indigenous status, language background other than English status, parental occupation, parental education, and geolocation (metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote). The National Report is released at the end of the year of testing.<sup>5</sup>

2.6 Testing at the national level is not a new concept and is conducted in countries such as Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States among others.<sup>6</sup> Methods, of course, vary. In Canada, for example, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program tests sample student groups in reading, mathematics and science literacy. Results are used by jurisdictions to validate data from their own, separate jurisdiction-level assessments, as well as Canada's results in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests.<sup>7</sup>

2.7 A report on assessment systems published by the United Kingdom Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency in 2007 provides details on a number of national assessment systems, such of that of France, where full student cohort literacy and numeracy testing is in place for Year 3 and Year 6 students and results are published by the Ministry of National Education's Division for Assessment, Evaluation, Potential and Performance.<sup>8</sup>

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5 For information on timing see [http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/naplan\\_release\\_2010\\_faqs.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/naplan_release_2010_faqs.html) (accessed 5 November 2010). Examples of student reports can be found at [http://www.naplan.edu.au/reports/student\\_report.html](http://www.naplan.edu.au/reports/student_report.html) (accessed 5 November 2010).

6 Eurydice, *National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organisation and Use of Results*, European Commission, 2009, pp14-18. For South Korea see *School Accountability Framework Review: National and International Perspectives and Approaches*, South Korea, <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/accountability/Docs/SOUTH%20KOREA.pdf> (accessed on 22 October 2010). For Canada see Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, website <http://www.cmec.ca/Programs/assessment/pancan/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 3 November 2010).

7 For information on Canada's national assessment system see <http://www.cmec.ca/Programs/assessment/pancan/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 3 November 2010).

8 See Catherine Andrews et al, *Compulsory assessment systems in the INCA countries: Thematic Probe*, [http://www.inca.org.uk/pdf/Compulsory\\_assessment\\_systems.pdf](http://www.inca.org.uk/pdf/Compulsory_assessment_systems.pdf) (accessed 3 November 2010).

2.8 The committee majority notes the Australian Primary Principals Association's position on NAPLAN as being only one element of the education system:

...NAPLAN is only one source of information about student achievement and the primary curriculum is designed to promote the social and emotional development of children as well as their academic attainment across all areas of the curriculum.<sup>9</sup>

### **Who manages NAPLAN?**

2.9 Following agreement at a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in October 2008, a national education authority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), was established in December 2008 by the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008*. One of the authority's key tasks is to assess the literacy and numeracy capabilities of the student population, and to this end ACARA manages NAPLAN. It should be noted that NAPLAN is just one aspect of the broader National Assessment Program (NAP).<sup>10</sup>

### ***How are the tests developed?***

2.10 ACARA explained that the process for developing the tests is comprehensive and involves input from experts providing services under contract, supported by expert review and state and territory officials. The process takes around 12 months and has five phases: test development; administration; marking; analysis; and reporting of results.<sup>11</sup>

### **What is the purpose of NAPLAN?**

2.11 ACARA notes that the main purpose of NAPLAN testing is:

to identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community.<sup>12</sup>

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9 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 2.

10 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 1-3. The National Assessment Program (NAP) encompasses all assessments endorsed by MCEETYA (now MCEECDYA). The ongoing assessment program monitors progress towards national education goals and includes NAPLAN tests, sample assessments in science, civics and citizenship, ICT literacy, and Australia's involvement in international assessments. For more information on the NAP see [http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/nap-national\\_assessment\\_program,16358.html](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/nap-national_assessment_program,16358.html) (accessed 2 November 2010).

11 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 4-8. Also see Appendix 3 of the ACARA submission for a technical explanation of test development.

12 Information available from: <http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/napfaq.html> (accessed 14 October 2010).

2.12 The first step towards improvement is the identification of areas of need. As succinctly put in a highly regarded report on the world's top-performing school systems by McKinsey & Company:

All of the top-performing systems...recognise that they cannot improve what they do not measure.<sup>13</sup>

2.13 A large number of submissions considered NAPLAN tests to be useful diagnostic tools.<sup>14</sup> Others described NAPLAN testing as '...an important advance in addressing poor performance'.<sup>15</sup> The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) stated that NAPLAN:

...can help in the development of targeted programs for the professional development of teachers and school improvement...[and]...has unique value in that it provides state/territory and national data that allows principals a broad brush comparative benchmarking of student achievement.<sup>16</sup>

2.14 The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations echoed these views:

Council strongly supports national NAPLAN testing which provides parents with an additional resource on the progress of their child's education and has the opportunity to strengthen partnerships in learning between parents, teachers and schools.<sup>17</sup>

2.15 The Independent Education Union of Australia submitted that:

...the primary purpose of assessment and reporting is to provide meaningful information so as to improve student learning. The reporting process must be an integral part of the teaching and learning process.<sup>18</sup>

2.16 The committee majority also notes the submissions which did not consider NAPLAN tests to be necessary or beneficial, but instead, for example, found them to

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13 Barber, M and Mourshed, M, *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*, McKinsey & Company, p.38. Available at [http://www.mckinsey.com/App\\_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds\\_School\\_Systems\\_Final.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/SSO/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf) (accessed 19 October 2010).

14 See for example Australian Council for Educational Research, *Submission 192*; Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 228*; June Teachers Association, *Submission 147*; Australian Council for Educational Leaders, *Submission 238*; ACT Department of Education and Training, *Submission 272*.

15 Additional information provided to the committee, Ben Jensen, *Measuring What Matters: Student Progress*, Grattan Institute Report No 2010-1, January 2010, p. 4.

16 Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), *Submission 207*, p. 1.

17 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 9.

18 Independent Education Union of Australia, *Submission 222*, p. 3.

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be a '...low-cost, broad-brush, rough assessment guide, not a fine-grained diagnostic tool'.<sup>19</sup>

### ***How test results are used***

2.17 ACARA noted that uses of NAPLAN data include:

- Students and parents may use individual results to discuss achievements and progress with teachers.
- Teachers use results to help them better identify students who require greater challenges or additional support.
- Schools use results to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching programs and to set goals in literacy and numeracy.
- School systems use results to review programs and support offered to schools.<sup>20</sup>

2.18 The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) identified the following uses for the data:

- to identify individuals who are not meeting minimum literacy and/or numeracy expectations for their year level;
- to identify, at a school level, areas of the curriculum in need of further teaching and emphasis;
- to monitor the performance and progress of social inclusion priority groups such as Indigenous students;
- to set targets for improvement at school, regional, state or national levels; and
- to monitor changes in literacy and numeracy standards over time.<sup>21</sup>

2.19 The committee majority notes that NAPLAN data enable a direct comparison of results from one year to the next. NAPLAN helps schools identify successful programs and identify areas in need of improvement. Importantly, it assists education systems and governments to identify schools performing well or poorly<sup>22</sup> which informs the allocation of resources.

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19 Jacqui Frew, *Submission 252*, p. 1. See also Maria Logan, *Submission 245*, p. 1; Phil Cullen AM, *Submission 20*, p. 1; James Ryan, *Submission 249*, p. 1; Bernadette Dunne, *Submission 83*, p. 1; Margaret Fahey, *Submission 250*, p. 1; Helen Russell, *Submission 124*, p. 1; NSW Teachers Federation – Barrack Heights Public School, *Submission 164*, pp 1-2.

20 Information available from: <http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/napfaq.html> (accessed 14 October 2010).

21 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 2.

22 Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. 4.

2.20 State and territory governments have welcomed NAPLAN testing and confirmed that results are used:

...for system level reporting, for school accountability and for strategic planning. This data has enabled jurisdictions to target their support in resourcing schools and students with the greatest need... Moreover, the real power of the data derived from NAPLAN testing is through jurisdictional analysis whereby schools, and individual teachers, have access to a thorough diagnostic analysis of the performance of each student on each test, provided on a question by question basis.<sup>23</sup>

2.21 The government of South Australia reported that results also help education departments apply measures which assist in developing intervention plans for students who do not meet minimum standards.<sup>24</sup>

2.22 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Acting General Manager, Strategic Policy and Performance, Department of Education, Tasmania, explained how jurisdictions use test data collected:

The NAPLAN tests are used extensively to support schools. Our jurisdiction, and others, provides the information back to schools. A lot of analysis is done that supports the schools. Workshops are run to help the schools to interpret the results and use them effectively to support their teachers. We also conduct workshops to assist senior people within schools to interpret the information and, where appropriate, we provide additional support for schools in relation to teacher development. Also, funding is provided to support the additional programs to improve the outcomes for students, where they are identified as performing below where we would expect them to be.

In Tasmania we also use the NAPLAN results to link to the teachers' assessments... We link the results of NAPLAN to those assessments and we provide the information back to the teachers to give them an objective piece of information that says that your assessments are consistent with the students' performance on the actual national tests.<sup>25</sup>

2.23 In addition, the data can be used by parents and caregivers to make informed decisions about the education of their child. Standardised tests allow parents to see how their children are performing compared to the national average, and are supported as an additional resource enabling parents to measure their children's educational progress.<sup>26</sup> As noted by Professor Geoff Masters et al:

Parents and caregivers require valid and reliable information to evaluate the quality of the education the children are receiving, to make informed

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23 Department of Education Tasmania, *Submission 162*, p. 2.

24 The Government of South Australia, *Submission 269*, p. 1.

25 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 37.

26 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 9.

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decisions in the best interests of individual students, and to become active partners in their children's learning. They require dependable information about the progress individuals have made) the knowledge, skills and understandings developed through instruction), about teachers' plans for future learning, and about what they can do to assist. There is also considerable evidence that parents and caregivers want information about how their children are performing in comparison with other children of the same age. And, if they are to make judgements about the quality of the education their children are receiving, they require information that enables meaningful comparisons across schools.<sup>27</sup>

2.24 The Australian Parents Council, putting aside its reservations about the way NAPLAN results are currently used, recognised that parents need and are entitled to information on their children's education and progress.<sup>28</sup> The Australian Education Union submitted that parents have a right to know about their children's progress, but stated that '...there is no inherent right to information concerning other children at the school'.<sup>29</sup>

2.25 Barrack Heights Public School members of the NSW Teachers Federation called for more safeguards around the use of test results in order to prevent profit-based organisations, such as media outlets and real estate agencies, from manipulating data for financial gain.<sup>30</sup>

2.26 This tension between the rights and advantages of parents and teachers accessing information on student progress on the one hand, and how this information was being used on the other, was evident in other submissions too:

The results of testing should be used to inform the teacher on the progress of students, the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and to give feedback to students and parents. Test results should not be used to make odious comparisons between schools.<sup>31</sup>

2.27 Dr Ben Jensen emphasised how test result data should be used:

Any measure of school performance should not be viewed as an end in itself; they should be a basis of action. NAPLAN and My School should trigger actions that help Australian students.

First, NAPLAN results could be used to trigger actions to help underperforming students. Actions should be taken once a student performs at or below minimum literacy levels in the NAPLAN assessments and a development program and perhaps special assistance introduced until they

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27 Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. 1.

28 Australian Parents Council, *Submission 233*, p. 4.

29 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 43.

30 NSW Teachers Federation – Barrack Heights Public School, *Submission 164*, p. 1.

31 Montagu Bay Primary School Association, *Submission 194*, p. 1.

are performing at appropriate levels. This has been successful in numerous high-performing countries. Second, schools labelled as underperforming on My School should be placed on a development program until they are performing at adequate levels. We are failing the students in these schools and we all need to ensure that these problems are addressed.<sup>32</sup>

### *Committee majority view*

2.28 The committee majority agrees with the fundamental importance of literacy and numeracy, as supported by educational research. It understands that NAPLAN tests, while not in the traditional sense designed as 'diagnostic' assessments, can identify strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy, and recognises the importance of measuring literacy and numeracy.<sup>33</sup> The committee majority notes the many uses for NAPLAN data and agrees that standardised testing is a useful instrument for informing system-wide policy decisions such as the allocation of resources. It helps schools to identify strengths and weaknesses of programs, allows for the comparison of results each year to identify trends and enables parents to follow performance and make informed decisions about the education of their children.

2.29 The committee majority is particularly drawn to the concept of providing underperforming students with a development program, the provision of which would be directly triggered by low NAPLAN results.

### **Recommendation 1**

**2.30 The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA explore and report publicly on ways in which to use below-average NAPLAN test results as a trigger for immediate assistance aimed at helping individual schools and students perform at appropriate levels.**

### **Issues raised during the inquiry**

2.31 Many submissions referred to national testing as a useful diagnostic tool, and supported it purely in that capacity.<sup>34</sup> The main issues raised in submissions and at the public hearings related to how the results are subsequently published and used. These issues are addressed in Chapter 3. However, submissions did raise some concerns in regard to standardised testing itself, and these are discussed below.

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32 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 14.

33 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 2.

34 Seymour College, *Submission 263*; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), *Submission 207*; Montagu Bay Primary Association, *Submission 194*; Sharon Melink, *Submission 219*; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, *Submission 270*; Government of South Australia, *Submission 269*; Australian Council for Educational Leaders, *Submission 238*, p. 4.

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***Test methodology and data reliability***

2.32 Professor David Andrich in his submission to this inquiry noted:

The benefits that can arise from NAPLAN are based on the assumption that the quality, administration, analysis and reporting of the assessments is of the highest quality. If it is not of the highest quality, then unfortunately the assessments can not only be of little use, but can even be counterproductive. Because Australia has substantial skills and resources in educational assessment, there is no reason that NAPLAN should be of anything but highest quality.<sup>35</sup>

2.33 A number of questions regarding the reliability of NAPLAN test methodology and data were drawn to the committee's attention. Some submissions suggest the tests may be prone to error, unreliable, or for varying reasons and to varying degrees unsuitable in assessing student or teacher performance,<sup>36</sup> for example because they '...are not sufficiently long to produce data of sufficiently high reliability to enable individual intervention or clinical style decisions to be made'.<sup>37</sup>

2.34 Associate Professor Margaret Wu of Melbourne University had concerns regarding margins of error when using NAPLAN tests to measure student performance. Given that NAPLAN consists of only one 40-question test per subject area, Associate Professor Wu concluded that scores in fact contain large margins of error and as such '...do not provide sufficiently accurate information on student performance, student progress or school performance'.<sup>38</sup> This can be additionally problematic as student scores are used to measure school performance, when in fact

...the publication of NAPLAN results on the My School website should be deemed as providing false information to the public, as the red and green bars do not in any way show school performance as claimed by the government.<sup>39</sup>

2.35 Associate Professor Wu concluded that it is 'educationally unsound' to ask parents to make judgements on schools on the basis of NAPLAN results, and expressed her view that scores should not be published or accepted by the public

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35 David Andrich, *Submission 149*, p. 1.

36 Spensley Street Primary School, *Submission 232*; Emerald State School, *Submission 259*; Rosey Nelson, *Submission 223*; Karen Carpenter, *Submission 195*.

37 The Assessment Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Submission 188*, p. 1.

38 Margaret Wu, *Submission 208*, p. 4.

39 Margaret Wu, *Submission 208*, p. 2.

without awareness of the impact of random fluctuations on results. She advocated against accepting scores '...if the confidence level of the results is not revealed'.<sup>40</sup>

2.36 The Australian Education Union (AEU) further illustrated the problem presented by the margin of error in NAPLAN tests:

If you are examining literacy, for example, there might be, for argument's sake, 1,000 things you expect a child to know at nine years of age. They may know 600 of them. They do not know 40 per cent of them and do know 60 per cent of them. Depending on how you pick the test items, they may be picked disproportionately from the 40 per cent they do not know or they may be picked disproportionately from the 60 per cent of facts they do know. When you take that into account, that is where the measurement error for a test arises from.

With a test of 40 items, which the NAPLAN tests are, the measurement error for a student is around 12 per cent. For example, a student whose parents are advised that they have achieved a score of 60 per cent in a literacy test in fact has a score somewhere between 72 and 48. How people can ascribe usefulness to the data or to the My School website in the way that they have is totally beyond belief.<sup>41</sup>

2.37 Professor Geofferey Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), which develops NAPLAN tests under contract to ACARA and manages the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the OECD, emphasised that the assessments are '...firmly grounded in 20 years experience through the state literacy and numeracy testing programs.'<sup>42</sup> Professor Masters explained that:

NAPLAN is also pretty firmly grounded in international best practice in tests of this kind. Of course, they are point-in-time tests, so they are limited in that sense. They only assess part of what is important in schools. There is inevitably a degree of imprecision, measurement error, around the estimates that they provide. But they do represent best practice internationally. Part of the reason that the Australian Council for Educational Research are managing the PISA tests for the OECD out of Melbourne is that we do have international expertise in the analysis and reporting of data, and we are applying that to the NAPLAN tests.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Margaret Wu, *Interpreting NAPLAN Results for the Layperson*, <http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news/naplanforlayperson20091022.pdf> (accessed on 14 October 2010); video of Associate Professor Wu's analysis of the limitations of NAPLAN data [http://www.nswtf.org.au/media/latest\\_2010/20100921\\_wu\\_address.html](http://www.nswtf.org.au/media/latest_2010/20100921_wu_address.html) (accessed 18 October 2010).

41 Mr Robert Lipscombe, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 58.

42 Professor Geofferey Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 47.

43 Professor Geofferey Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 47.

2.38 Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer of ACARA, stated that NAPLAN tests:

...are provided to give an overall snapshot, and for that reason, unlike what was said earlier, we do not provide a score to parents. There is no score provided. In fact, a sheet similar to the one I have here is what is provided. It gives no score at all. It is quite a large dot on a continuum to indicate the position of the students, recognising that there is, indeed, always imprecision in our measures. However, as we aggregate those measures up to a school level and to a system level, then the more reliable those data become.<sup>44</sup>

2.39 Professor Masters made the important point that there is a distinction between measures of student, teacher and school performance:

Some people believe that it is possible to go fairly easily from measures of student performance to measures of teacher performance, school performance or system performance. I do not share that view, and I think most of my colleagues at ACER do not share that view, but it is a commonly held view... I think that at ACER and also at ACARA we have not believed that... [it]...is either educationally or statistically valid...to [as is the case in the UK] move quickly from test results to a number or measure for each school in the country, and that measure is supposed to represent the school's performance so every school can be lined up and ranked on the basis of this one number, based entirely on the test results.<sup>45</sup>

2.40 MCEECDYA met on 15 October 2010 to discuss enhancements to the *My School* website recommended by ACARA's *My School* Working Party. The enhancements, most of which will be implemented in December 2010, include depictions of margins of error. Indications of the range in which school average performance may be located, with 90 per cent confidence, will be displayed alongside result data.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

2.41 The committee majority supports NAPLAN tests based on the understanding that they are grounded in international best practice. The committee majority recognises the concerns raised about test quality, and acknowledges that NAPLAN tests are subject to the same limitations in precision which apply to all such assessments. The committee majority believes that the current structure and appearance of the government's *My School* website is leading users to draw unintended or mistaken conclusions about how much can be inferred about teacher and school performance from the student test result data presented.

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44 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 69.

45 Professor Geofferey Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 48.

46 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 6.

2.42 The committee majority strongly supports the abovementioned MCEECDYA initiative on the premise that confidence levels will be displayed on the *My School* website with adequate prominence, thus providing the community with a greater awareness of the complexities of the test result data.

### ***Testing smaller student cohorts***

2.43 The committee was also made aware that using mean school scores to measure school performance is problematic where small cohorts are involved. In such cases the performance of just a handful of students, sometimes one or two, who achieve extremely high or low scores can have an excessive and over time erratic effect on the overall school result.<sup>47</sup>

2.44 The committee majority supports the Tasmanian Department of Education's belief that the median may be a better and '...more stable measure for schools with small student populations'.<sup>48</sup>

## **Recommendation 2**

**2.45 The committee majority recommends that ACARA assess and report publicly on the potential benefits of moving to a system that reports the median rather than the mean school performance.**

### ***Data for researchers***

2.46 The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) suggested that MCEECDYA amend the guidelines and protocols covering access to NAPLAN data so that qualified researchers can obtain access to de-identified data.<sup>49</sup> The committee majority supports MCEECDYA investigating how this request can best be met.

### ***Testing year 3 is too early***

2.47 It was suggested in a small number of submissions that Year 3 NAPLAN tests are too difficult and 'developmentally inappropriate' for this age group, and will ultimately shift teachers' focus onto, for example, persuasive essay writing at a time when they would otherwise focus instead on more basic writing skills.<sup>50</sup>

2.48 Professor Brian Caldwell posed the question:

...[A]re the problems facing Australia so serious that we require students as early as year 3 to complete 40 to 50 mostly multiple choice tests when the

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47 Department of Education Tasmania, *Submission 162*, p. 6; Australian Education Union (South Australia branch), *Submission 79*, p. 12; New South Wales Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 229*, pp 5-6, *Submission 209*, p. 5.

48 Department of Education Tasmania, *Submission 162*, p. 6.

49 APPA, *Submission 228*, p. 10.

50 *Submission 47*, p. 1; *Submission 46*, p. 1; *Submission 42*, p. 1; *Submission 30*, p. 1.

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information that is furnished and the strategies that should be adopted have been known for at least a decade?<sup>51</sup>

2.49 In its submission the Northern Territory Government also touched on the question of NAPLAN and Year 3 students, saying that the diagnostic needs of the highest and lowest student achievers, particularly those in Year 3, are not currently addressed by NAPLAN.<sup>52</sup> The submission suggests a 'rigorous interrogation' of contextual bias and reconsideration of '...the range of difficulty of test items...to maximise information gathering opportunities at the top and lower ends of student ability'.<sup>53</sup>

### *NAPLAN and special needs students*

2.50 Some submissions were concerned about low NAPLAN scores attained by special education students or students with learning difficulties causing a distorting effect on school performance.<sup>54</sup> The NSW Teachers Federation quotes a principal who received an apology from the parent of a child with severe learning disabilities because that child would impact negatively on the school results. This all points to '...a perverse incentive for schools to exclude students who are most in need of support'.<sup>55</sup>

2.51 One suggestion to address this issue was vetting such results prior to reporting NAPLAN test scores on *My School*.<sup>56</sup> Following this suggestion would mean that special education students would still be tested and their teachers and parents given results, but that their scores would not impact on the overall school results.<sup>57</sup>

2.52 Another concern raised in submissions was that if schools fear underperformance they may discourage students with learning difficulties, those from non-English speaking backgrounds or those who are low achievers from sitting the tests.<sup>58</sup> There was some media reporting alleging that schools discouraged students from attending on test days if they knew their results were likely to pull the school's overall performance down.<sup>59</sup>

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51 Professor Brian Caldwell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2010, p. 2

52 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 270*, p. 3.

53 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 270*, p. 3.

54 *Submission 39*, p.1; Sir Joseph Banks High School, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

55 New South Wales Teachers Federation, *Submission 169*, p.12.

56 Sir Joseph Banks High School, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

57 Sir Joseph Banks High School, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

58 Multicultural Development Association, *Submission 265*, p. 5; Save Our Schools, *Submission 262*, pp 62-63, Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 27; Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 237*, p. 2.

59 *Submission 13*, p. 3; Farrah Tomazin, 'Doubt on state's national testing', *The Age*, 14 May 2010, p. 5; Justine Ferrari, 'Gillard to check on NAPLAN absentees', *The Australian*, 13 May 2010, p. 8; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/11/2896141.htm> (accessed 19 October 2010).

2.53 The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations stated that some parents had reported having to provide schools with written requests before children with a disability could sit NAPLAN tests.<sup>60</sup>

2.54 On this point, ACARA clarified:

Every child is eligible and is encouraged to participate in the testing. In the circumstances of students with significant disabilities, a decision is made in consultation between the principal and the parents as to the impact that testing might have on the student from the perspective of either their ability to perform or their inability to perform – the effect that might have on their confidence and their self-esteem. The requirements for that process are clearly set out in the administrative handbook, which is provided to principals in every school.

I suspect what we are looking at is a situation where a parent has had a discussion with a principal about the participation of a student and the principal might as a matter of prudence have decided that it might be worth confirming in writing the parent's consent for the child to participate so that there is no misunderstanding of the circumstances.<sup>61</sup>

2.55 The committee notes that the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is working towards developing a nationally agreed definition of disability.<sup>62</sup>

2.56 Following particular allegations in Victoria that some students who did not sit the tests did not meet criteria for exemption, such as having an intellectual disability, the Education Minister Bronwyn Pike MP reported that between 4.7 and 8.6 per cent of students were absent or withdrawn from school on the day of NAPLAN testing, which was particularly high. To address this, the Victorian government has requested that principals formally agree to ensure the highest possible level of participation.<sup>63</sup>

2.57 At its October 2010 meeting MCEECDYA formally endorsed ACARA's proposal to include student participation data more prominently on the *My School* website, including absences, exclusions and withdrawals.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

2.58 The committee majority notes that the NAPLAN Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) website advises that all Australian governments have committed to promoting

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60 Mrs Elizabeth Singer, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 31.

61 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 70. For definitions concerning student participation in NAPLAN testing see 'National Protocols for Test Administration,' ACARA, *Submission 261, Attachment 6*, pp 3-7.

62 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 4.

63 Farrah Tomazin, 'Doubt on state's national testing', *The Age*, 14 May 2010, p. 5.

64 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 3.

maximum participation of students in the national assessment process.<sup>65</sup> Common national practices for providing students with special support, adjustments and accommodations for the administration of the NAPLAN tests have been agreed.<sup>66</sup>

2.59 The committee notes the concerning evidence and allegations of schools attempting to manipulate test results by urging potential low achievers to stay home. Despite the relatively small number of such cases and the commitment from federal, state and territory governments to address the issue by tracking participation rates, the committee majority is deeply concerned that parents of children with a disability be given adequate opportunity to access information about their children's progress, to which they are entitled like any other parent.<sup>67</sup>

### Recommendation 3

**2.60 The committee majority recommends that MCEECDYA and relevant jurisdictional test administration authorities look at and report publicly on ways to ensure that children with disabilities are not discriminated against and denied the right to participate in national testing.**

#### *NAPLAN and learners of the English language*

2.61 The committee received submissions calling attention to possible inadequacies of the NAPLAN tests for some Indigenous students who may not speak Standard Australian English as their first language but are not treated as students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). Queensland Indigenous ESL and FNQ (Far North Queensland) Language Perspective stated:

The current measures of disaggregation according to Indigenous status, students with a language background other than English (LBOTE) and the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage provide a false and pernicious picture of Indigenous learner performance and are leading to inappropriate and wasteful measures of intervention.

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65 See <http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/napfaq.html> (accessed 4 November 2010).

66 Special provisions which typically reflect the support normally provided in the classroom may be provided to students with disabilities or special needs. Additionally, students can be exempted from one or more NAPLAN tests if they have significant intellectual or functional disability. However, this is not automatic and parents may choose for their child to participate. Signed parent/carer consent forms are required for students exempted from the tests. Information available from: <http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/napfaq.html> (accessed 15 October 2010). For detailed information on definitions concerning student participation in NAPLAN testing see 'National Protocols for Test Administration,' ACARA, *Submission 261, Attachment 6*, pp 3-7.

67 Justine Ferrari, 'Gillard to check on NAPLAN absentees', *The Australian*, 13 May 2010, p. 8; Jewel Topsfield, 'Gillard to track national testing turnout', *The Age*, 13 May 2010, p. 4.

...[W]ithout the requirement of second language assessment in schools for students being tested on NAPLAN, Indigenous learners are generally not placed within the LBOTE group.<sup>68</sup>

2.62 NAPLAN may also have limitations in capturing the progress of students starting to learn English as a second language,<sup>69</sup> which again may affect not only children of recent migrants, but also some Indigenous students who speak non-standard English dialects.<sup>70</sup>

2.63 Submissions argued this is because NAPLAN tests do not collect adequate information about students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect, and may not recognise them as such before reporting their sub-standard results.<sup>71</sup>

2.64 Suggestions for addressing this included the collection of more specific data for students from a non-English speaking background.<sup>72</sup> Disaggregated data would enable specific support to these categories of students.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Committee majority view*

2.65 The committee majority supports the collection of more specific student data which would then be used to ensure appropriate support is available.

2.66 The committee majority notes that the *My School* website will in future display the percentages of students from a non-English speaking background.<sup>74</sup>

#### **Recommendation 4**

**2.67 The committee majority recommends that ACARA analyse and report publicly on how NAPLAN tests are serving different groups of Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) students.**

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68 Queensland Indigenous ESL and FNQ Language Perspectives, *Submission 230*, p. 1.

69 *Submission 4*, p. 1; for discussion of NAPLAN performance by students from different migrant backgrounds see Save Our Schools, *Submission 262*, pp 57-58; Meryl Child, *Submission 107*, p. 1.

70 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 270*, p. 1; *Submission 17*, p. 1. For detailed information regarding recent migrants see Multicultural Development Association, *Submission 265*.

71 For details see Queensland Indigenous ESL and FNQ Language Perspectives, *Submission 230*, pp 1-4. See also ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 14.

72 Queensland Indigenous ESL and FNQ Language Perspectives, *Submission 230*, p. 1.

73 Multicultural Development Association, *Submission 265*, p. 14; Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA); Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA); and Australian Linguistic Society (ALS), *Submission 241*, p. 3.

74 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 3.

### *Indigenous student performance*

2.68 The committee majority notes the situation in the Northern Territory, where Indigenous students comprise over 40 per cent of the student population, with particular concern. International testing shows that Indigenous students are overrepresented in the lowest performance categories for both literacy and numeracy, and underrepresented in the highest.<sup>75</sup> This trend is evident nationally as well, with Indigenous students considered the most educationally disadvantaged.<sup>76</sup>

2.69 The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reports a marked difference in NAPLAN results in the Northern Territory, where only between 62.5 per cent and 77.0 per cent of students reach the national minimum standard in all domains and in all years. All other states and territories perform well against the national benchmark, with varying room for improvement. The committee notes that this difference between the Northern Territory and other states and territories reflects particularly negatively on educational outcomes for Indigenous students, who comprise 40.7 per cent of the school population in the Northern Territory. NAPLAN results for non-Indigenous students in the Northern Territory are comparable to other jurisdictions.<sup>77</sup>

2.70 The committee is aware of evidence which suggests that students who begin to fall behind without being caught and helped to catch up will continue to fall further and further behind, making these achievement gaps increasingly difficult to close as time goes by.<sup>78</sup>

2.71 Speaking before the committee, Dr Peter Hill emphasised the importance of addressing quality of teaching in areas of greatest student need:

I think that what you said earlier about the heart of the matter being teacher quality is absolutely true. All of the international surveys point to teacher quality – or quality of teaching, should I say – being the key in all of this. What we need to use *My School* for is to understand where the problems are and then to have strategies that can come in, address quality of teaching... I am thinking particularly of our Indigenous students; we cannot have any pride at all in our record of achievement there. We need to put in additional resources and do what we can to improve the quality of the teaching that those students experience.<sup>79</sup>

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75 Sue Thomson and Lisa De Bortoli, *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia Measures up*, PISA 2006 survey of students' scientific, reading and mathematical literacy skills, 2008, [http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PISA2006\\_Report.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/PISA2006_Report.pdf) (accessed 18 October 2010).

76 COAG Reform Council, *National Education Agreement: Baseline performance report for 2008*, Sydney, p. 74.

77 It is also important to note that meeting the national standard only indicates a basic, not necessarily a high, level of literacy and numeracy. See COAG Reform Council, *National Education Agreement: Baseline performance report for 2008*, Sydney, p. 84.

78 Professor Geofferey Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 53.

79 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 75.

2.72 The above sentiment was echoed by Professor Brian Caldwell, who stated that '...there is almost unanimity among researchers and policymakers that the most important resource of all is the quality of teaching'.<sup>80</sup>

### *Committee majority view*

2.73 The committee majority believes that, in order to produce a more accurate and detailed picture of students who are achieving below the benchmarks, ACARA should investigate ways to provide access to rich information on lower achievers so that targeted support and resources can be made available.

2.74 The committee majority also believes that more emphasis must be placed on nurturing and developing the professional skills of teachers, in particular those working to improve outcomes for lower student achievers.

### **Recommendation 5**

**2.75 The committee majority recommends that ACARA investigate and report to MCEECDYA on enhancing NAPLAN to support the diagnostic needs of higher and lower student achievers.**

### *Expanding testing*

2.76 Dr Ben Jensen, Director of the School Education Program at the Grattan Institute, explained that the best predictor of a student's likely performance on a given day is their performance in the previous year:

There has been a lot of work done on this in the United States. In some states where there is serious testing in a wide variety of subjects it is annual or more frequently than that. They actually do not bother using the socio-economic background characteristics of students because it just drops out of the model. It is not important; it does not matter. What is much more important is your progression, how much you have progressed and, of course, where that begins.<sup>81</sup>

2.77 Dr Jensen, while not advocating increased frequency of testing, explained that the two-year gap between tests in Australia means that extrinsic factors such as socio-economic background have an increased opportunity to influence individual student performance.<sup>82</sup> Australian students currently take NAPLAN tests only four times over the course of their schooling, in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. More frequent testing would lessen the influence of extrinsic factors and provide a more accurate picture of student progress.

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80 Professor Brian Caldwell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2010, p. 5.

81 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 15.

82 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 15.

2.78 More frequent testing would also enable schools and policymakers to more accurately capture the progress of students who change schools between primary and high school. Currently, *My School* includes comparisons of Year 7-12 high schools and P-7 primary schools, despite the fact that in some jurisdictions Year 7 is the first year of high school and students may have been at a different school three months prior to the NAPLAN tests.<sup>83</sup> The absence of information on student performance in Years 6 and 8 makes it difficult to ascertain which school, the primary or the high school, is responsible for student performance in Year 7.

### *Committee majority view*

2.79 The committee majority supports the collection and reporting of information about progress in schools and believes it should be expanded. In order to provide parents, teachers and government with the best possible record of student progress and immediately begin to address serious gaps between our highest and lowest achievers, a national test designed to measure improvement for students should be conducted every year. The committee majority believes that more frequent testing would help drive momentum for helping underperforming students.

### **Recommendation 6**

**2.80 The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA expand NAPLAN to include annual testing from years 3 to 10 in order to more accurately track student performance and give parents, teachers and policymakers a far better understanding of how students, teachers and schools, are progressing.**

### *Timing of test administration*

2.81 Submissions pointed out that students are assessed against their respective year standard before being taught most of the year's curriculum because tests are administered in the first half of the year (with results not available until the second half). It was argued that this could disadvantage students whose schools teach relevant material later in the year, and could lead schools to alter teaching plans in order to attain better NAPLAN results.<sup>84</sup>

2.82 The timing of the tests also means that by the time teachers and parents receive student results, in the second half of the school year, it is too late to incorporate any resulting teaching requirements into that year's teaching program. This may have led to some schools pressuring teachers of Year 1 and 2 students to prepare students for concepts tested in Year 3 NAPLAN tests.<sup>85</sup>

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83 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 20.

84 *Submission 13*, pp 1-2; *Submission 105*, p. 1. For more on pressure to alter teaching methods see for example Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, pp 23-24.

85 New South Wales Teachers Federation, *Submission 169*, p. 12.

2.83 Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer of ACARA, explained that:

The purpose [of national testing] has been to get a snapshot of student performance for reporting back at different levels: at the parent level, at the school level, at the jurisdiction sector level and the national level. That was the purpose from the beginning, and the purpose has never been diagnostic assessment.

Diagnostic assessment means that we look at the reasons why students are, perhaps, not performing. For that purpose we need an immediate feedback; these tests are broad in scope and would not be very useful for diagnostic purposes, particularly as the results come through very late.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

2.84 The committee majority believes that the government's poor communication of the intended purpose of NAPLAN tests has led to widespread community misunderstanding or confusion about the capacity of the tests to diagnose why a child is performing at a particular level. The committee majority notes that then-Education Minister the Hon. Julia Gillard MP may have helped perpetuate an erroneous perception of the purpose of NAPLAN tests by stating about test result data:

It's important to teachers; they do value this diagnostic information to work out what they need to do next for the children in their class.<sup>87</sup>

2.85 The committee majority believes that a better communication strategy is needed to explain the true purpose of NAPLAN tests.

### ***Security of the tests and allegations of cheating***

2.86 The committee majority notes media reports of teachers and schools allegedly cheating to boost their NAPLAN results.<sup>88</sup> Save Our Schools pointed out that schools and teachers can cheat in various ways and argued that this calls into question the reliability of NAPLAN tests in measuring school performance.<sup>89</sup>

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86 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 69.

87 The Hon. Julia Gillard MP, transcript of interview on the ABC's *Lateline*, 5 May 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2010/s2891489.htm> (accessed 4 November 2010).

88 Jared Owens and Naomi Lim, 'Principal stood down over tests', *Weekend Australian*, 2 October 2010, p. 5; Lisa Martin, 'Seven schools in NAPLAN cheating', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 2010; Jewel Topsfield, 'Schools cheating on national tests', *The Age*, 12 May 2010, p. 3.

89 Save Our Schools, *Submission 262*, pp 68-72; ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, pp 12-13.

2.87 Submissions identified that increased accountability pressure may unintentionally increase the likelihood of cheating.<sup>90</sup> A number of suggestions were made to address this issue. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations recommended a review of the document that outlines how tests should be conducted.<sup>91</sup> The New South Wales Primary Principals' Association suggested publishing clear and uniform delivery protocols and highlighting the consequences of any breaches.<sup>92</sup>

2.88 Responsibility for test material during development falls to ACARA, which '...prescribes security requirements for states and territories, schools and principals in a nationally agreed document – *National Protocols for Test Administration*.' State and territory jurisdictions are responsible for security during test administration. Test administration authorities in states and territories are responsible for investigating any allegations of security breaches.<sup>93</sup>

2.89 The committee majority is aware that MCEECDYA has endorsed a range of measures aimed at enhancing test administration security. ACARA is now working with state and territory authorities to strengthen test security for 2011, and is:

...mounting a multi-level communication strategy in 2011 to further develop understanding of the required protocols for the management of test materials on the part of schools, principals and staff.<sup>94</sup>

2.90 ACARA has informed the committee of plans to include annual statements on its website detailing all reports of security breaches, the status of reported cases and outcomes of any subsequent investigations. Schools and individuals will not be identified. Education ministers are currently considering a draft of the first statement.<sup>95</sup>

### *Committee majority view*

2.91 The committee majority believes that the community should be able to have confidence in the testing process and that uniform test administration guidelines should be developed and made publicly available as a matter of priority.

2.92 The committee majority notes that steps have been taken by state and territory education departments to investigate and address allegations of cheating, with more

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90 Save Our Schools, *Submission 262*, pp 68-72; Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 5; ABC online, 'Claims of cheating on NAPLAN tests', <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/12/2897008.htm> (accessed 20 October 2010).

91 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 13.

92 News South Wales Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 229*, p. 4.

93 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 8.

94 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 8.

95 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 8.

than 51 separate investigations under way.<sup>96</sup> The committee majority recognises that the government has been firm in its commitment to supporting investigations into all allegations of cheating.<sup>97</sup>

2.93 The committee majority also notes that the Australian Primary Principals Association has developed and sent to the government for consideration a set of principles and a number of proposed safeguards aimed at mitigating a range of negative impacts and adverse effects of the test administration and reporting regime.<sup>98</sup>

## **Recommendation 7**

**2.94 The committee majority recommends that MCEECDYA explore ways for state and territory test administration authorities to more strongly enforce security protocols.**

## **Conclusion**

2.95 The committee majority believes that NAPLAN is an important foundation for measuring the performance of students but needs to be strengthened in a number of ways. It needs to provide a more accurate and detailed picture for all students, particularly those not meeting performance standards. Test developers need to gradually look at ways in which to reduce the margin of error in order to turn NAPLAN into a more accurate tool. Furthermore, to provide an even better understanding of student progress trajectories year on year, the committee majority believes that national testing should be conducted every year. This would be particularly beneficial for students who do not meet national benchmarks as it would help build a sense of urgency and reduce the delay in delivering targeted assistance. These enhancements will provide a more accurate and detailed picture of students' ability without the influence of extrinsic factors, and will provide policymakers and schools with an informed picture of which educational programs are working and which ones are not.

2.96 Building on the enhancements outlined above, the committee majority also believes that substantial work is required to address the significant issues raised during the committee's inquiry in relation to the reporting of NAPLAN data on the *My School* website. These matters are covered in the next chapter.

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96 Jared Owens, 'Principal stood down over tests', *Weekend Australian*, 2 October 2010, p. 5.

97 Michael Owen, 'Teacher felt under pressure over tests', *Weekend Australian*, 15 May 2010, p. 6.

98 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 7.

# Chapter 3

## My School website

In education, good decision making is facilitated by access to relevant, reliable and timely information. Dependable information is required at all levels of educational decision making to identify areas of deficiency and special need, to monitor progress towards goals, to evaluate the effectiveness of special interventions and initiatives and to make decisions in the best interests of individual learners.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

3.1 In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that greater transparency and accountability for school performance was essential 'to ensure that every Australian child receives the highest quality education and opportunity to achieve through participation in employment and society'.<sup>2</sup> It also agreed that high-quality reporting is important for students, parents, carers and the community and should include:

- streamlined and consistent reports on national progress, including an annual national report on the outcomes of schooling in Australia;
- national reporting on performance of individual schools to inform parents and carers and for evaluation by governments of school performance; and
- provision by schools of plain language student reports to parents and carers and an annual report made publicly available to their school community on the school's achievements and other contextual information.<sup>3</sup>

3.2 To provide the public with information on each school, COAG agreed that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) would:

...be supplied with the information necessary to enable it to publish relevant, nationally comparable information on all schools to support accountability, school evaluation, collaborative policy development and resource allocation.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Geofferey Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. 1.

2 COAG Communiqué, 29 November 2008.

3 COAG Communiqué, 29 November 2008.

4 COAG Communiqué, 29 November 2008.

3.3 ACARA would then provide information on each school and this would include:

...data on each school's performance, including national testing results and school attainment rates, the indicators relevant to the needs of the student population and the school's capacity including the numbers and qualifications of its teaching staff and its resources. The publication of this information will allow comparison of like schools (that is, schools with similar student populations across the nation) and comparison of a school with other schools in their local community.<sup>5</sup>

3.4 The committee majority notes that COAG intended school performance data to be published in the context of broader information about a school's students, teachers and resources.<sup>6</sup>

3.5 In August 2008 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed that an Expert Working Group (EWG) convened by the Australian Government would provide a report to ministers on relevant measures to guide school evaluation, accountability and resource allocation. In late 2008, EWG commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to provide advice on national schools data collection and reporting for school evaluation and resource allocation. The report recommended the use of NAPLAN results as the basis for the comparative performance of schools.<sup>7</sup> It noted that few countries have developed measurement scales along which gain and growth can be measured for all students. The report concluded that NAPLAN is an effective way to assess whether a school is making a difference in a student's numeracy and literacy skills by measuring improvement across the years:

The NAPLAN measurement scales enable status, gain and growth to be measured across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 and in this sense represent world's best practice in the measurement of student progress.<sup>8</sup>

3.6 Regarding public reporting, the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) report recommended that:

For the purpose of providing public information about schools, a common national website should be used to provide parents/caregivers and the public with access to rich information about individual schools.<sup>9</sup>

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5 COAG Communiqué, 29 November 2008.

6 See also Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper prepared for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. v.

7 See also Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. 13.

8 Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. 17.

3.7 The ACER report noted that it would be important that characteristics that are known to be correlated with student outcomes are taken into consideration:

Research consistently shows a correlation between students' socio-economic backgrounds and their level of school attainment. For this reason, the socioeconomic backgrounds of a school's student intake also must be taken into consideration in any evaluation of the school's performance...

The socio-economic backgrounds of students in a school can be measured either at the level of the school, eg, using data from the ABS census collection districts for the home addresses of the students attending the school) or by aggregating information about the SES backgrounds of individual students in the school.<sup>10</sup>

3.8 The ACER report was considered by MCEETYA in April 2009, and the ministerial council agreed that, from 2009, ACARA would be responsible for publishing relevant, nationally comparable information on '...a common national website [which would]...provide parents/caregivers and the public with access to rich information about individual schools'.<sup>11</sup> This would include publication of the 2008 NAPLAN data and associated contextual information. The information would enable comparison of each school with other schools serving similar student populations around the nation and with the best-performing school in each cohort of 'like schools'. MCEETYA noted that this information is intended to support accountability, school evaluation, collaborative policy development and resource allocation.<sup>12</sup>

### Use of ICSEA values

3.9 As noted by ACARA, the best way to compare the performance of schools in the NAPLAN tests would be to find groups of schools with students of similar abilities on commencing school. However, no such measures of starting abilities are available nationally.<sup>13</sup> The data used instead is Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data which is also used to allocate funds to non-government schools and to identify enrolling students from similar social backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>

3.10 Noting that ACER had emphasised the clear links between a student's socio-economic background and educational outcomes, ACARA decided to use

9 Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. viii.

10 Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, pp 23-24.

11 'Reporting & Comparing School Performances,' *MCEETYA communiqué*, 20 April 2009, <http://www.appa.asn.au/index.php/appa-business/news-items/521-mceetya-paper-reporting-a-comparing-school-performances> (accessed 8 November 2010).

12 *MCEETYA Communiqué*, April 2009.

13 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 11.

14 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 11.

socio-economic indices as a starting point to build a comparative tool for student populations. ACARA noted that the ABS produces four indices of socio-economic status, the Socio-Economic Indicators for Areas (SEIFA). Although the indices correlate positively with student achievement they were not designed to predict educational attainment. Therefore a new index was developed, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA):<sup>15</sup>

ICSEA uses the SEIFA variables and school data to create an index that best predicts schools' average performance on NAPLAN tests. The variables that make up ICSEA include socio-economic characteristics of the small areas where students live (in this case an ABS census collection district (CCD)), as well as an index of remoteness, and the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at the school.<sup>16</sup>

3.11 The steps taken to calculate an ICSEA value for each school are detailed in the ACARA submission.<sup>17</sup> ICSEA places schools on a numerical scale, for example:

- a school in a regional town with a student population drawn largely from relatively disadvantaged households may have an ICSEA value of about 850;
- a school in a metropolitan area which draws its students from relatively advantaged households may have an ICSEA value of about 1150; and
- a school in a remote Indigenous community may have an ICSEA value of about 540.<sup>18</sup>

3.12 ACARA noted that some schools will not have an ICSEA value because of the nature of the student population—for example, a school solely for children with intellectual disabilities. ACARA also noted:

In a small proportion of cases, ICSEA may provide an inappropriate measure of the socio-educational level of the school. This can occur in instances where there is a mismatch between students' actual levels of socio-educational advantage and that of the CCD values associated with their addresses. An example would be remote schools where the ICSEA values are inflated where a mining community is located in an otherwise disadvantaged remote community.<sup>19</sup>

3.13 Statistically Similar School Groups (SSSGs) were checked with state and territory departments and non-government sector authorities prior to the *My School* website going live. As a result of this checking, the ICSEA values of around 650 out

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15 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 11.

16 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 11.

17 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 11-12.

18 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 12.

19 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 12.

of approximately 10,000 schools were revised before the website was launched.<sup>20</sup> These changes were reviewed by an expert panel. The use of the ICSEA index on the website was endorsed by MCEECDYA in September 2009.<sup>21</sup>

### **Publishing contextual information**

3.14 ACARA is required to publish contextual information on schools on the *My School* website. Education ministers agreed the *Principles for Reporting on Schooling* in Australia which include:

- the protection of individual student privacy;
- not publishing comparative data without contextual information; and
- the publication of error margins, caveats and explanatory notes to ensure accurate information.<sup>22</sup>

### **Website launch**

3.15 The design of the *My School* website was endorsed by MCEECDYA in September 2009, and the website was launched on 28 January 2010. It provides profiles of almost 10,000 schools, contextual information and NAPLAN results that can be compared with results from statistically similar schools.<sup>23</sup> Detailed information on website content is available from the ACARA submission.<sup>24</sup> ACARA reported that as at 25 June 2010 the website had received 2,445,308 visitors and 3,368,847 visits.<sup>25</sup>

### **Further development of the *My School* website**

3.16 The committee majority notes the intention to develop the *My School* website in stages.<sup>26</sup> ACARA advised that it was asked by education ministers in a series of meetings in 2009-10 to investigate proposals for enhancing the website by:

- showing school financial data;
- including nationally comparable senior secondary information;

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20 ACARA, answer to question on notice, 29 October 2010.

21 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 13. The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) was established in July 2009, when the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a realignment of the roles of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE). For more on MCEECDYA see [http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/about\\_mceecdya,11318.html](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/about_mceecdya,11318.html) (accessed 10 November 2010).

22 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 13.

23 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 13.

24 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 13-24.

25 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 24.

26 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 4.

- including satisfaction with schooling;
- showing student population indicators;
- including growth data on literacy and numeracy achievement;
- listing teaching staff and levels of expertise;
- using student-level data to compute ICSEA;
- making other enhancements to ICSEA;
- providing increased contextual information; and
- taking action to minimise misuse of *My School* data.<sup>27</sup>

3.17 However, the committee majority believes the response so far is inadequate to deal with the level of concern in the community and raised during the inquiry, as discussed below.

### **Issues raised during the inquiry regarding the *My School* website**

3.18 The committee majority notes the large number of issues raised regarding the *My School* website.<sup>28</sup> Many of these focused on misuse of data obtained from the website.<sup>29</sup> Many also questioned the reliability of school comparisons based on ICSEA values.<sup>30</sup> Other submissions stated that *My School* might be placing excessive emphasis on 'point in time measures of student achievement', thereby undermining what they saw as the intended diagnostic aims of NAPLAN.<sup>31</sup>

3.19 Some, such as the South Australian branch of the Australian Education Union, raised serious questions about the *My School* website's role as the foundation of the government's 'transparency agenda', explaining that the government already had direct access to a wide range of information on school performance and socio-economic status from existing sources.<sup>32</sup>

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27 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 25-26.

28 For example, see Australian Parents Council Inc., *Submission 233*, p. 3; Tim Cowgill, *Submission 53*; ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*; Geoffrey Lacey, *Submission 138*, p. 1; Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*; New South Wales Secondary Principals Council, *Submission 167*.

29 For example, see Kenneth Allan James Case, *Submission 50*, p. 1; ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*; Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*; Trina Wood, *Submission 122*, p. 1; and Eastern Creek Public School, *Submission 133*, p. 1.

30 Girraween Public School, *Submission 132*, p. 1.

31 Australian Council for Educational Research, *Submission 192*, p. 5.

32 Australian Education Union (SA Branch), *Submission 79*, p. 2.

3.20 Teachers also expressed concern, one stating that NAPLAN tests '...are taking on a life of their own, all because of the unethical way they are being used'.<sup>33</sup> These concerns are fundamental and call into question whether the website in its current form is presenting useful information.

3.21 The Australian Education Union (AEU), whilst reiterating its in principle support for effective assessment, stated:

Our concerns stem from the fact that we believe that the policy mix advanced by the government has the potential for perverse consequences, perverse consequences which undermine our capacity to deliver sound educational programs for children... [W]e are concerned by a series of policy statements and announcements of government that allocate or attach to NAPLAN something for which it was never designed and something for which it cannot be used—that is, school performance measurement. That remains our central point of contention and concern, because stemming from that is the misuse of that student data for purposes never intended. Therein begin the perverse consequences.<sup>34</sup>

The AEU also expressed its belief that problems have emerged as a result of the creation of the *My School* website being '...driven by political imperatives and political timetables'.<sup>35</sup>

3.22 The section below describes in more detail some of the issues raised in submissions and then outlines the committee majority's suggestions for improving the presentation and usefulness of the data presented on *My School*.

### ***Using ICSEA values to group 'like schools'***

3.23 A large number of submissions expressed deep dissatisfaction with the use of ICSEA values to inform school comparisons on the *My School* website.<sup>36</sup> The issues focused on the validity of groupings of statistically similar schools on the *My School* website.

3.24 The committee majority notes that the ICSEA value is currently calculated by looking at the community a school is located in, not data pertaining to the actual socio-economic status of a school's enrolled students.<sup>37</sup> This means that schools

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33 Brenda Montgomery, *Submission 120*, p. 2.

34 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 56.

35 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 58.

36 New South Wales Teachers Federation, *Submission 169*, p. 4; New South Wales Teachers Federation Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College, *Submission 255*, p. 2; Mark Drummond, *Submission 257*; Don Rowe, *Submission 8*; David Pederson, *Submission 26*; Spensley Street Primary School, *Submission 232*, p. 1; Australian Education Union (SA Branch), *Submission 79*, pp 4-7.

37 For a detailed analysis of how statistically similar schools are determined, see Barbara Preston, *Submission 235*; Mark Drummond, *Submission 257*.

located in the same community are considered to be at the same level of advantage or disadvantage, irrespective of the socio-economic backgrounds or other factors specific to their students. Given that private and selective schools attract and can pick students who may not always live near the school, whereas public schools tend to enrol students from their surrounding communities, the ICSEA-based method of measuring socio-economic status has understandably attracted substantial criticism.

3.25 The AEU argued that the way in which the ICSEA measure is calculated is the crux of the problem, saying that the measure does not take into account the fact that '...some higher income families live in lower SES regions and vice versa'.<sup>38</sup> If higher income families live in areas surrounding public schools, their presence would impact on census data collected in the area, which in turn '...causes an over estimate of the SES of government schools and an underestimate of non-government schools...[and impact on] their placement in the so called statistically similar schools'.<sup>39</sup>

3.26 The AEU submitted a number of examples of anomalies in 'like school' comparisons, including:

- The Kings' School, a wealthy private school in Parramatta, and Gundaroo Public School, in a small town a short distance from Canberra;
- Blacktown Boys High, Western Sydney, and Alice Springs School of the Air;
- Terrigal High School, with a student population of 1300, and Cameron Downs Public School, with only six students in the Queensland outback; and
- Haileybury College, a private school in Melbourne, and Cleveland Street Intensive English High School, a NSW public school which focuses on teaching students who are from a non-English speaking background.<sup>40</sup>

3.27 The Department of Education Tasmania explained the importance of applying appropriate safeguards around the presentation of test results and argued that:

The perceived weakness of the current ICSEA measure is that it is more an index of community socio-economic status, than an accurate measure of the socio-economic status of the students who attend a particular school.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 17.

39 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 17.

40 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, pp 15-16.

41 Department of Education Tasmania, *Submission 162*, p. 4.

3.28 Other submissions raised similar concerns about ICSEA being '...systematically and substantially biased,' and argued that such area-based indexes, although useful in other contexts, can be '...vulnerable to the ecological fallacy'.<sup>42</sup> The ecological fallacy occurs when individual-level relationships are inferred from aggregate-level ones.<sup>43</sup>

3.29 Dr Mark Drummond, a researcher with a focus on mathematics and statistics, submitted that only around three per cent of the data used to calculate ICSEA scores is

...meaningful and valid data based on the actual families of the actual students at the actual schools. The other 97 per cent or so of data is meaningless "noise", based on families and households with no substantive connection at all to the schools whose ICSEA scores are being determined.<sup>44</sup>

3.30 Alternatives to area-based measures of advantage were outlined in submissions. These included using individual-level measures<sup>45</sup> and conducting data matching between government agencies such as the Taxation Office and Centrelink, as already occurs for parents who receive benefits.<sup>46</sup> Such measures would go some of the way towards remedying statistical problems currently affecting 'like school' comparisons.<sup>47</sup>

3.31 Over the course of a series of meetings in the year to June 2010, education ministers asked ACARA to investigate making use of student-level socio-economic status (SES). This information is currently available from some states and territories but not all. ACARA is considering either obtaining family-level information in all jurisdictions or using the data for those jurisdictions where it is available.<sup>48</sup> Education ministers have also asked ACARA to look into:

- obtaining updated and comprehensive home address data for all students to improve the accuracy of ICSEA in cases where CCD data is used;
- including within the ICSEA formula a variable to take account of the effect of language background other than English;

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42 Barbara Preston, *Submission 235*, p. 1.

43 Barbara Preston, *Submission 235*, p. 2.

44 Mark Drummond, *Submission 257*, p. 1.

45 Barbara Preston, *Submission 235*, p. 3.

46 Data matching is already used to assess tax returns, Centrelink payments etc. For detail see Mark Drummond, *Submission 257*, p. 4.

47 Barbara Preston, *Submission 235*, p. 3; Mark Drummond, *Submission 257*.

48 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 25.

- improving the process for quality assuring ICSEA values for individual schools and, for those for which CCD data is used, identifying instances where the initial estimates is inappropriate.<sup>49</sup>

3.32 The committee majority notes that education ministers have how endorsed the proposals outlined above and the new model outlined below:<sup>50</sup>

An analysis undertaken by ACARA compared the current ICSEA formula with a new formula based on student level-measures of parent education and occupation status, as well as considerations for LBOTE and the proportion of Indigenous students. The result of this modelling indicates that the new formula will improve ICSEA's ability to predict school NAPLAN performance, in addition to having greater face validity. Analyses indicate that there is a 7% increase in the explanatory power of ICSEA when direct student-level indicators of parent education and occupation are used.

Under the methodology endorsed by Ministers, data on parent occupation and education collected directly by schools from parents will be used (where available) in preference to census data. This will ensure that the ICSEA value assigned to a school closely reflects the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students (SES) actually enrolled in that school. ACARA is currently collecting updated direct parent data from jurisdictions and sectors. At the same time, ACARA is collecting updated student address data to enhance the quality and completeness of the indirect parent data (census data).

The new model utilises 'direct parent data'; however, to obtain an accurate indication of the backgrounds of students in each school, it is necessary that a certain percentage of data in each school be available. Where the available direct parent data do not meet this threshold, or where updated student address data are unavailable, the school's ICSEA calculation will revert to the current calculation based on 2007 CCD information.

Once updated student information is collected for 2010, the ICSEA will be recalculated using the recommended approaches. All data included in the revised ICSEA will be tested prior to broader distribution and will involve extensive consultation with the ICSEA Expert Panel.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

3.33 The committee majority notes the importance of accurately measuring the relative level of school advantage to ensure that 'like school' comparisons are much more reliable. The committee majority is alarmed by the evidence it has received outlining severe shortcomings of present methods of calculating ICSEA and is

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49 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 25.

50 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 3.

51 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 5.

disappointed that ACARA launched *My School* without first anticipating and addressing at least some of these shortcomings.

3.34 The committee majority notes the approved enhancements outlined above, but retains some serious concerns about the enhancements' capacity to adequately address the issues raised. Of particular concern is the fact that student-level data will only be used 'where available'. The committee majority would prefer to see a more tangible commitment to replacing the current ICSEA calculation method for all schools.

3.35 In addition, the committee majority is concerned that—given the fact that some schools will in future have their ICSEA values calculated on the basis of student-level data and others on the basis of community-level data as is currently the case—there is potential for further inconsistency and distortion if NAPLAN test results for schools from the two groups are ever compared.

### **Recommendation 8**

**3.36 The committee majority recommends that ACARA prioritises the improvement of the method used to develop like school comparisons and commits to the introduction of a method based on student-level SES data for all schools prior to the reporting of 2011 NAPLAN test results.**

#### *League tables*

3.37 In the absence of proper contextual information and transparent, professional interpretation of data, there is a concerning potential for schools to be crudely and unreliably ranked on the basis of raw NAPLAN data. This was one of the most frequent concerns raised in submissions—that is, that the publication of raw school performance data on the *My School* website could result in league tables of questionable accuracy being published.<sup>52</sup>

3.38 League tables are assembled in order to rank schools according to student performance in NAPLAN tests, and were created by a number of media publications across the country '...within days of the student data going online.'<sup>53</sup>

3.39 Private companies also sought to profit from disseminating NAPLAN results.

In February [2010] a private company *Australia School Ranking* established a website from which it was selling for \$97 a 854 page report containing the rankings and league tables of all kinds of all Australian schools. To its credit, the threat of legal action by ACARA forced the company to withdraw its report from sale.<sup>54</sup>

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52 See for example: Rosey Nelson on behalf of teachers at Kandos Public School, *Submission 223*, p. 1; ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 24; Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 228*, p. 2.

53 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 20.

54 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 20.

3.40 More recently another website, *Better Education Australia*, was established. The website is funded through advertising and operated to

...[provide] informative and comparative NAPLAN results and information including private school scholarships and selective schools to parents wanting to make choices about schooling for their children. We also provide free service to the community in Australia and abroad by answering questions via emails. The website is just a hobby, and not for commercial purposes.<sup>55</sup>

3.41 The AEU believes that there is no substantive difference between *Better Education Australia*, which offers league tables free of charge, and websites which charge for their reports.<sup>56</sup>

3.42 In its submission the AEU also drew attention to what it claimed was inaccurate information published by media outlets such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which produced its own state performance rankings by averaging school mean scores for literacy and numeracy.<sup>57</sup>

3.43 The AEU further highlighted the unreliability of using league tables to rank schools by highlighting the dramatic effects of shifting student cohorts on particular school results, such as that of Mount Blowhard Primary School, where top rankings for some Year 3 students '...were over 100 points higher in 2009 than 2008 due to the changing cohort of students'.<sup>58</sup>

3.44 A submission from the South Australian branch of the AEU pointed to repeated assurances from former education minister the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, who categorically defended *My School* and maintained that it was not possible to compile league tables using information from the website. According to the South Australian AEU branch, given the ease with which league tables were compiled almost immediately following the publication of results on *My School*, this '...is either stunning technical incompetence, political naivety or deliberate misinformation – or perhaps a mixture of all three'.<sup>59</sup>

3.45 The Australian Primary Principals Association pointed to league tables being a consequence of publicly reporting test results without adequately taking into consideration factors beyond a school's control.<sup>60</sup> The NSW Primary Principals' Association argued that results available on the *My School* website 'should not exist in

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55 Better Education Australia, *Submission 148*, p. 1.

56 'Privately run school rankings site riles union', *ABC News online*, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/08/2921863.htm> (accessed 8 November 2010).

57 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 22.

58 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, pp 22-23.

59 Australian Education Union (SA Branch), *Submission 79*, p. 22.

60 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 228*, p. 2.

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a form that allows comparisons between schools' because league tables are 'educationally indefensible'.<sup>61</sup>

3.46 The Department of Education in Tasmania advised that:

...the 'use by third parties of NAPLAN results to create simplistic league tables often maligns the excellent work of schools in enriching the lives of their students and working towards improved outcomes, and raises the stakes of the tests from their original purpose to one of 'high stakes'.<sup>62</sup>

3.47 It is evident that these concerns are present in the community from the following examples provided to the committee:

League tables are only harmful to schools and students by labelling them.<sup>63</sup>

The regrettable outcome [of NAPLAN] is the excessive importance given to it by the media and selective interest groups including the teachers' unions.<sup>64</sup>

3.48 Submissions also highlighted the argument over whether student performance data belongs only to teachers, parents and students and as such should not be released publicly in light of the potential for unintended harm. The AEU emphasised the distinction between parents' rights to information relating to their own children and that of the broader community, arguing that parents do not have any inherent right to information relating to the progress of other people's children.<sup>65</sup>

3.49 A range of submissions offered suggestions for minimising the potential for harm, including by removing raw school averages from the *My School* page. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association would like to see raw averages replaced with student results in bands, thereby making it more difficult for the media or anyone else to devise simplistic league tables.<sup>66</sup> The AEU among others argued for the introduction of legislation which would prohibit the publishing of league tables.<sup>67</sup> The NSW Primary Principals Association proposed a number of ways in which adverse effects could be minimised, including the incorporation of an 'Acceptable Use' page which would require users to agree to conditions of use before accessing *My School* data.<sup>68</sup>

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61 NSW Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 229*, p. 2.

62 Department of Education Tasmania, *Submission, 162*, p. 3.

63 Karilyn Varley, *Submission 62*, p. 1.

64 Peter Posetti, *Submission 70*, p. 1.

65 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 43.

66 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, *Submission 226*, p. 28.

67 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 30.

68 NSW Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 229*, p. 2.

3.50 ACARA reiterated its firm position against league tables at a hearing held in Canberra:

One thing that I think every educator would agree with is that we do not want league tables. A league table, to my mind, is where you rank schools without regard to the nature of the students within the school. My School explicitly does not do that, and all of us in Australia are very much against having league tables.<sup>69</sup>

3.51 The committee majority notes that ACARA has taken action to minimise misuse of data on the *My School* website and will implement changes prior to the release of the new version of the website in December 2010. Enhancements will include:

- a 'click-wrap' requiring users to indicate their agreement up-front to terms and conditions of use of *My School* data;
- a tool to deter automatic scraping of data from the website.<sup>70</sup>

3.52 However, there are limits to the action ACARA can take in response to the misuse of data, particularly where newspapers, which are covered by their own legislation and not ACARA's copyright clause, are concerned. Federal legislation would have to be enacted, and enforced, in order to prosecute newspapers which printed school league tables using data from the *My School* website.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

3.53 The committee majority makes a clear distinction between the *My School* website, which provides contextual information (to be enhanced as a priority, as per Recommendation 12 later in this chapter), and the publication of crudely designed school rankings by the media and other third parties.

3.54 The committee majority supports submissions calling for more rigorous protocols on reporting, accessing and using student data in order to prevent the media and other third parties from publishing crude league tables.

### ***Effect of publishing comparative data and league tables on school, teacher and student morale***

3.55 A range of views were expressed indicating that judging and comparing teachers on the basis of NAPLAN results was damaging school morale, sometimes even having a divisive influence among teaching staff.<sup>72</sup> A November 2009 letter

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69 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 75.

70 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 3.

71 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 74.

72 *Submission 52 (name withheld)*, p. 1.

from peak parent, principal and union organisations to the then Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, stated that:

There is considerable evidence that the inappropriate use of data to compare schools can have serious negative impacts, both on the testing itself and on the very schools and children it was intended to help. Allowing student data to be inappropriately or mischievously used for the creation and publication of league tables could exacerbate the difficulties of the communities concerned, narrow the school curriculum and risk the testing process itself becoming corrupted.<sup>73</sup>

3.56 The Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations cited reports from parents of children being physically sick before tests, and being pressured to do well in order to avoid making '...their teacher look bad.'<sup>74</sup> Moggill State School Queensland Teachers Union argued that teachers now had their reputations at stake and had been given an incentive to teach strong performers and gifted students, who are often clustered in classes, instead of being judged on the performance of lower achievers.<sup>75</sup> The Australian College of Educators added that teachers in the most disadvantaged schools are already '...more likely to be our less experienced teachers [who] need clear standards and support, not more pressure'.<sup>76</sup>

3.57 A significant number of teachers reported feeling frustrated and demoralised. One of these, Marianne Scholem, pointed out that '...not every school can be at the top of the pile...teachers like myself will become disillusioned and add to the burnout statistics.'<sup>77</sup> Some also pointed to overseas experience which suggests '...that league tables lead to a climate of trepidation, incrimination and blame in schools'.<sup>78</sup>

3.58 Others were displeased with what they saw as forced competition at the expense of teacher and school collaboration, calling *My School* '...a veneer of action' and questioning '...how telling people that they work at the worst school will lead to them improving the school'.<sup>79</sup>

3.59 The Australian College of Educators advised that:

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73 A letter to the Hon. Julia Gillard MP from the Australian Council of State School Organisations, Australian Education Union, Australian Government Primary Principals Association, Australian Parents Council, Australian Secondary Principals Association and the Independent Education Union of Australia: <http://aeufederal.org.au/LT/LTlet171109.pdf> (accessed 1 November 2010)

74 Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations, *Submission 161*, p. 2.

75 Moggill State School Queensland Education Union, *Submission 200*, p. 2.

76 Australian College of Educators. *Submission 57*, p. 5.

77 Marianne Scholem, *Submission 49*, p. 1.

78 Murray Williams, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

79 Kenneth Allan James Case, *Submission 50*, p. 1.

...[educational] excellence occurs and improvement agendas are most effective when respectful, relational cultures are built through schools in partnerships with parents, caregivers and their communities.<sup>80</sup>

The College also expressed its view that 'school against school data presentation', in its current form on the *My School* website, does not promote the '...development of networks, communities of practice, and communities of interest,' and suggested that MCEECDYA and ACARA might explore renaming the website from *My School* to *OurSchools*.<sup>81</sup>

3.60 Other submissions drew the committee's attention to the importance of morale at more disadvantaged schools which do not perform well when ranked. One teacher recalled her own schooling in Fairfield, Sydney—by no means an affluent suburb—where dedicated teachers imbued her with educational aspirations despite the circumstances.<sup>82</sup>

3.61 A parent of a child attending a school with below average NAPLAN scores commented on what she saw as 'labelling' students as low achievers, expressing a fear that her daughter and others like her would simply accept the label and stop trying to do better.<sup>83</sup> Another submission lamented the harm done to parent, student and teacher self-esteem in low socio-economic communities which work hard and do their best to improve outcomes.<sup>84</sup>

3.62 Other submissions echoed this, such as that from Christine Turner on behalf of Chatswood Hills State School, who noted that some schools only appear to be underperforming when compared to others because they cater to particular groups of students or operate under particular circumstances of disadvantage. They are nonetheless proud of their record and afraid that their '...hard earned reputation is at risk'.<sup>85</sup>

3.63 The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations referred the committee to a comment from a parent who had looked up her child's school on the *My School* website:

'All it did was leave me with a bad taste in my mouth,' because given where she lives within the school boundaries her child could not go to another school and her child's school was being compared against private schools that she could not afford. So she felt that the school was being

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80 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*, p. 8.

81 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*, p. 8.

82 Joy Arblaster, *Submission 242*, p. 1.

83 Sylvia Harwood, *Submission 153*, p. 1.

84 Daniel Vuik, *Submission 91*, p. 1.

85 Christine Turner, *Submission 243*, p. 1.

stigmatised with this bad reputation and she could not do anything about that. When she went to the website it left her with this bad taste.<sup>86</sup>

The Council cited the above as an example of how the current approach to publishing NAPLAN results:

...punishes, humiliates and demoralizes students, teachers and schools who have been singled out by the crude and at times inaccurate comparisons made between apparently "similar" schools as well as from the creation of simplistic league tables by the media and other organisations.<sup>87</sup>

### *Committee majority view*

3.64 The committee majority notes the potential for harm to be caused by simplistic and crude league tables constructed using information from the *My School* website and takes very seriously any reports of adverse effects, however small in number. Until more is done to protect *My School* information from misuse the website and league tables will be inexorably linked by association, as will responsibility for any resulting harm or distress.

3.65 The committee majority endorses recent initiatives from ACARA and MCEECDYA regarding the responsible use of *My School* data but remains concerned about the harmful impact of irresponsible and unchecked conduct by third parties, such as the media, which are still able to misuse NAPLAN data available on the government's *My School* website.

### **Recommendation 9**

**3.66 The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA examine and publicly report on ways to mitigate the harm caused by simplistic and often distorted information published in newspaper league tables.**

### *Turning NAPLAN into a 'high stakes' test*

3.67 Professor Robin Alexander from the United Kingdom, who has written extensively on education policy and was the director of the Cambridge Primary Review of English Primary Education, recently gave a number of lectures in Australia in which he captured the advent of high stakes testing thus:

Of all the so-called 'levers' of systemic reform, tests seem to be the instrument of choice in policy-makers' efforts to do the two things which they believe they must always be seen to do: raise educational standards and call teachers and schools to account. This means that tests are high

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86 Ms Megan Bagworth, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 33.

87 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 6.

stakes not just for children and teachers but also for politicians, and that they may be as much about political capital as educational progress.<sup>88</sup>

3.68 Other submissions also conveyed the sense that the reputational consequences of publicly reporting and comparing school NAPLAN results have increased the stakes for schools to do well to unacceptable levels.<sup>89</sup> For example, the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) argued:

The use of NAPLAN test results for the purposes of comparative measurement of school performance and distribution of some federal grants to the states and territories and to identified 'disadvantaged' schools has served to morph NAPLAN diagnostic tests into 'high stakes' tests, where money and/or reputation rides on their outcome. Media reporting and exploitation of the data through the creation of 'league tables' have exacerbated this misuse of NAPLAN.<sup>90</sup>

3.69 The Australian Primary Principals Association echoed this concern about turning NAPLAN into a high stakes test, citing two potential factors which contribute to this outcome: the *My School* website and '...the \$350 million of reward money that has been offered for an improvement in NAPLAN scores':<sup>91</sup>

We think it is fantastic that there is money for schools in need. That is a big tick. But when reward money is used to threaten principals or set targets—you must improve by five per cent or 10 per cent before you can get the reward money—I think that has a perverse effect of what the reward money is intended to do. When I moved around the country talking to principals, I think what alarmed me most was a discussion saying yes we have been given targets that we have to reach; we now are going to choose the group of children in our school that we will put most our energy into because they are just below the national benchmark; we are not going to focus on those children that probably, with all the resources in the world, will struggle to get to the benchmark and improve our scores. This was a real ethical dilemma for principals that I sat with in three states. Some were saying you can't do that, and others were saying they had been told they had to improve; this is a business proposition and that is how we have to look at it.

They are the sorts of things that we should be aware were happening. They only happened this year. That is what we have to keep in perspective—it was not happening before that [the advent of *My School*]. We do not have a

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88 Robin Alexander, Miegunyah Distinguished Visiting Fellowship Program public lecture, *The perils of policy: success, amnesia and collateral damage in systemic educational reform*, 10 March 2010, <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/MiegunyahLecture.pdf> (accessed 2 November 2010).

89 Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 228*; Australian Education Union (South Australia branch), *Submission 79*, p. 37; Australian Council for Educational Leaders, *Submission 238*, p. 5; NSW Teachers Federation – Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College, *Submission 255*, p. 1.

90 Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), *Submission 207*

91 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 4.

problem with students doing the NAPLAN test; we have always supported the NAPLAN test. The test itself is not the problem.<sup>92</sup>

3.70 The creation of this 'high stakes' environment has a number of potential negative consequences including 'teaching to the test' and narrowing the curriculum, as outlined below.

### ***Teaching to the test and narrowing the curriculum***

3.71 Teaching to the test involves repeated practice of test format as opposed to merely instruction on test content, often at the expense of other, possibly more educationally valuable, curriculum content.<sup>93</sup> Many teachers and schools made submissions to the inquiry which expressed a sense that they were being forced to teach to the test, that is, to rearrange their teaching plans to focus on NAPLAN tests.<sup>94</sup>

3.72 This extended to sacrificing 'desirable pedagogies' such as inquiry-based learning due to time constraints and instead applying a teacher-directed style more suited to extracting better NAPLAN results.<sup>95</sup>

3.73 The Junee Teachers Association stated that intensive preparation for a single point-in-time 'snapshot' of student achievement levels could actually compromise the diagnostic value of NAPLAN.<sup>96</sup>

3.74 The AEU argued that the high reputational stakes attached to NAPLAN have forced excessive emphasis to be placed on the tests, which '...has had a profound effect on schools, curriculum, teaching and students,'<sup>97</sup> and means that the '...primacy of the educational needs of students is subjugated to the requirements of schools to achieve in testing regimes.'<sup>98</sup> The AEU attributes some of the pressure on teachers to teach to the test to competition-induced pressure between jurisdictions to perform in NAPLAN tests, citing as an example Victoria, where the state education department set out a ten week 'delivery strategy' ahead of NAPLAN 2010:

Principals were directed to appoint a NAPLAN coordinator, to "facilitate a sample testing benchmarking process which may require further resourcing", to "provide additional assistance to students identified as

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92 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 5.

93 Sharon Melink on behalf of teachers at Pomona State School, *Submission 219*, p. 1.

94 Spensley Street Primary School, *Submission 232*, p. 2; Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 237*, p. 1; Christine Turner, *Submission 243*, p. 1; Moggill State School Queensland Teachers Union, *Submission 200*, p. 1; Lois McBow, *Submission 137*, p. 1; Thomas Sleigh, *Submission 225*, p. 1; Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 23.

95 Sharon Melink on behalf of teachers at Pomona State School, *Submission 219*, p. 1.

96 Junee Teachers Association, *Submission 147*, p. 1.

97 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 3.

98 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 33.

capable of making a significant improvement" and to "privilege the testing as an event of significance". Teachers were directed to, "explicitly teach for NAPLAN by including the genre of NAPLAN, commonly used terms and a daily NAPLAN item in the program of instruction".<sup>99</sup>

3.75 Submissions highlighted that the curriculum can be narrowed or distorted if teachers feel they must focus on a particular aspect of teaching, such as teaching for a specific test. Helen Stearman, a teacher, argued that NAPLAN is having precisely this effect on teaching practices around the country, threatening to become '...the de facto curriculum.'<sup>100</sup> This concern that schools are increasingly sacrificing the broader curriculum in pursuit of better NAPLAN results was echoed by Lutheran Education Australia, among others.<sup>101</sup>

3.76 The inquiry received submissions suggesting ways to prevent the curriculum being narrowed by NAPLAN. David Andrich, Chapple Professor of Education at the University of Western Australia, offered that:

...not every student in a particular year needs to sit a test in which every student responds to exactly the same items. The technology exists in test construction, administration, analysis and interpretation that the results of students and of schools can be placed on the same metric even if all students in the same year do not respond to exactly the same items. This is the same technology that currently permits the results of students from different grades, who do not respond to exactly the same items, to be placed on the same scale.<sup>102</sup>

3.77 Teachers also reminded the committee that it is important for NAPLAN tests and the wider curriculum to work together rather than compete for attention.<sup>103</sup>

3.78 This is echoed by international academics such as Professor Robin Alexander, from Cambridge University, who said in a recent keynote address at the University of Melbourne:

Over-concentration on the practice of basic skills in literacy and numeracy unrelated to a context in which they are needed means that those skills are insufficiently extended and applied.<sup>104</sup>

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99 Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, p. 26.

100 Helen Stearman, *Submission 134*, p. 5.

101 Lutheran Education Australia, *Submission 239*, p. 5. See also New South Wales Secondary Principals Council, *Submission 167*, p. 5; Lois McBow, *Submission 137*, p. 1; Peter Young, *Submission 135*, p. 1.

102 David Andrich, *Submission 149*, p. 2.

103 Sharon Melink on behalf of teachers at Pomona State School, *Submission 219*, p. 2.

104 Robin Alexander, keynote speech at the University of Melbourne National Curriculum Symposium, 'Reform, Retrench or Recycle? A curriculum cautionary tale', 25 February 2010, [http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/news/National\\_Curriculum\\_Symposium/2010\\_National\\_Curriculum\\_Symposium.html](http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/news/National_Curriculum_Symposium/2010_National_Curriculum_Symposium.html) (accessed 2 November 2010)

3.79 Others question whether teaching to the test is an entirely negative proposition. Dr Ben Jensen stated that teaching to the test ultimately results in an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, which is not necessarily negative.<sup>105</sup>

3.80 Addressing a similar point, Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, federal president of the AEU, explained:

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying as an argument against mastering, and proficiency in, literacy and numeracy. They are the foundation blocks, the building blocks, of learning. There is a significant difference between teaching to ensure children can attain the best literacy and numeracy skills and teaching to the test. Schools are being directed by bureaucrats to teach to the test, to teach NAPLAN, to teach 'the genre of NAPLAN'. With all due respect, NAPLAN is not a genre; it is a test.<sup>106</sup>

### *Committee majority view*

3.81 The committee majority believes that these examples of teacher dissatisfaction and concern show the importance of increasing teacher engagement in education policy development and rollout. The committee majority also believes that more must be done to encourage a complementary relationship between the tests and the wider curriculum.

3.82 The committee majority notes that ACARA has expressed a desire to look at ways in which to align NAPLAN tests with the wider curriculum in the future.<sup>107</sup> However, given community scepticism of the national curriculum currently being developed by ACARA, the committee majority cannot support this intention until concerns about the curriculum have been adequately addressed.<sup>108</sup>

### **Recommendation 10**

**3.83 The committee majority recommends that ACARA identify, analyse and report publicly on possible means of strengthening the relationship between NAPLAN tests and the wider curriculum. The committee majority reserves its support for any alignment between the tests and the new national curriculum until the quality of, and community support for, the curriculum become clearer.**

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105 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 19.

106 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 57.

107 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, p. 78.

108 For more information see for example 'Garrett flags national curriculum changes,' *The Age* online, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/garrett-flags-national-curriculum-changes-20101006-167tu.html>; 'Criticism prompts cut to national curriculum,' *ABC News* online, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/10/15/3039098.htm> (accessed 5 November 2010).

***Do parents really have a choice about where to send their children to school?***

3.84 One of the key arguments underpinning the publication of NAPLAN results on *My School* is that the website provides parents with information and choice when assessing which school their children will attend. A number of submissions questioned this assertion.

3.85 The Tasmanian Education Department considers the choice argument to be misleading for the following reasons:

- It implies that schools are entirely responsible for a student's results, without taking into account the personal, political and social context in which they operate;
- Most parents do not have choice. In many parts of Australia there is no other school and in other areas many parents do not have the resources to move their child to another school;
- Where there is choice, parents choose schools for a variety of reasons, not only test results. They choose because of the needs of their children, the school culture, the social or extra-curricular programs the school has, because their child has friends who attend that school, because it is close to where they live or merely because they went there themselves;
- If the argument is accepted that parents will choose schools based on the public reporting of NAPLAN result, the parents who take this option could be changing schools each year as results change due to the different cohorts being tests.<sup>109</sup>

3.86 The Australian College of Educators, too, emphasised that parents with children in disadvantaged schools rely on the government to provide a sound standard of education for their children and cannot 'vote with their feet'.<sup>110</sup> Their submission argued that for schools serving economically and socially marginalised parents and children '...the logic of parent power and school choice, as a response to NAPLAN comparative information, does not apply'.<sup>111</sup>

3.87 Other submissions, such as that from June Teachers Association, informed the committee that parents were in fact withdrawing their children from particular schools in order to send them to better performing schools nearby, resulting in

...dramatic effects on the staffing, resourcing, and programming of schools...[including]...a significant narrowing of curriculum offerings, particularly in the senior school.<sup>112</sup>

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109 Department of Education Tasmania *Submission 162*, p. 3.

110 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*, p. 4.

111 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*, p. 6.

112 June Teachers Association, *Submission 147*, p. 1.

3.88 This was echoed in by other submissions which also reported that talented students were leaving because their school had been 'branded a failure'.<sup>113</sup>

3.89 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Acting General Manager, Strategic Policy and Performance, Department of Education, Tasmania, informed the committee the department had done a statistical analysis of student movement across schools in response to principals' concerns. The findings indicated that no significant movement has occurred; in fact, the '...movement variation is what we saw from year to year before we did public reporting, so it has not impacted'.<sup>114</sup>

3.90 The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) confirmed that some parents have decided to change the school their children attend as a result of NAPLAN reports, but that this only appeared to be happening in 'tiny numbers'.<sup>115</sup>

### ***Inadequate contextual information***

3.91 Submissions questioned the value of the comparisons between schools available on the *My School* website for reasons beyond those to do with ICSEA values and often in connection with a perceived lack of adequate contextual information about schools. For example, the NSW Teachers Federation argued that '[t]he prominence given to quantitative data presented in colourful graphics projects an air of scientific authenticity that is essentially populist'.<sup>116</sup> The submission quotes a NSW principal who says that the coloured comparison graphs used by *My School* will always get more attention than any other information on the website.<sup>117</sup>

3.92 A substantial number of submissions lamented the lack, or at least lack of prominence, of contextual information on the *My School* website.<sup>118</sup> Information on parents' views presented to the committee by organisations such as the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations indicates that parents want more contextual information about the schools available to their children.<sup>119</sup>

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113 NSW Teachers Federation – Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College, *Submission 255*, p. 1.

114 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 39. It should be noted that this information pertains only to the state school system.

115 Mr Norm Hart and Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 11.

116 New South Wales Teachers Federation, *Submission 169*, p. 3.

117 New South Wales Teachers Federation, *Submission 169*, p. 3.

118 See for example Spensley Street Primary School, *Submission 232*, p. 1; Dianne Stace on behalf of staff at Bouldercombe State School, *Submission 146*, p. 1; Canley Vale Public School, *Submission 202*, p. 2; *Submission 224 (name withheld)*, p. 1.

119 ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 226*, p. 15.

3.93 The committee majority notes that, as stated by the Australian Council for Educational Research, *My School* '...is best viewed as the first version of the website,' which will be '...refined and further developed into the future'.<sup>120</sup>

3.94 ACARA has notified the committee of its plans to increase reporting of school contextual information by publishing the percentages of enrolled students who come from a language background other than English, as well as by expanding the text field available for principals to describe school profiles. The latter are in the process of being collected from schools.<sup>121</sup>

3.95 The AEU expressed the following hopes for the new version of the *My School* website:

Our view would be that in the next iteration of the My School website, which will emerge, there needs to be a very serious and honest communication strategy in order to put front and centre what the data is about and what the limitation is of the data and contextualise it so that people understand that this is not the be-all and end-all of schools. We cannot lead with information about schools with the use of NAPLAN data. There is a lot more to a school and the need to establish context of a school before you even start discussing what is data—which ostensibly is a snapshot of student skills in the area of literacy and numeracy, only one at a particular time and only one narrow slither, important as it is—of the educational wellbeing of a child.<sup>122</sup>

The improvement that is required with the federal system of the My School website is that at the very least any information presented on that website should lead with contextual information about that school so that it can present a picture of itself which deals with, on a daily basis, its successes, its challenges and the like. Any subsequent information should be just that, subsequent information, and it should not be privileged, given the fact that it is not the be all and end all; in fact it is a very small part of a school's life.<sup>123</sup>

### ***Committee majority view***

3.96 Providing parents with information to make empowered decisions about which school their child attends is a strong argument in favour of reporting NAPLAN results on the *My School* website. The committee majority acknowledges, however, the evidence received that not all parents have options about where to send their children to school.

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120 Australian Council for Educational Research, *Submission 192*, p. 4.

121 ACARA, *Supplementary Submission*, p. 3.

122 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 59.

123 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 60.

3.97 The committee majority also notes the evidence received suggesting that too much can be mistakenly inferred about a school on the basis of student performance data. Therefore, the committee majority does not support publishing raw test results devoid of context or acknowledgement of the fact that schools are not solely responsible for student performance.

3.98 The committee majority notes and supports ACARA's plans to include information on the percentages of students from a language background other than English, but believes this only goes some of the way toward providing adequate contextual information about schools.

### **Recommendation 11**

**3.99 The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA move to include more contextual information about schools on the *My School* website, reflecting the complex range of factors that affect schools, and acknowledge to users of the website their awareness of the limitations of comparisons based on raw performance data due to extrinsic factors. The committee majority further recommends that ACARA commit to ensuring this contextual information is available ahead of the reporting of 2011 NAPLAN results.**

### **Can we learn from the international experience?**

3.100 Whilst standardised testing is used by a number of countries, student performance in international tests suggests that the existence of such testing does not lead directly to improved performance. Neither does the international experience with standardised testing necessarily translate directly into the Australian context. As stated by Dr Peter Hill of ACARA:

...[T]hat history of high-stakes testing leading to high-stakes consequences for the staff within schools has, of course, scared other people in other jurisdictions, and there has been a thought around that Australia is simply going down this path. What I would say is that we are not. Educators come and visit us from the UK and tell us all the bad news about what happened there. We know what happened there, we have learnt from that and we are not going down that path.<sup>124</sup>

3.101 Certain countries which outperform most others on international assessments of literacy and numeracy without relying on national standardised testing are frequently cited as arguments against standardised testing. On this, the committee received considerable information on Finland in particular.<sup>125</sup>

3.102 Finland achieves indisputably impressive results, consistently coming at or near the top of international rankings, with very narrow achievement gaps between the

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124 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 75.

125 Professor Brian Caldwell, *Submission 74*.

highest and lowest performers within individual schools and between schools, as well as between students from different socio-economic backgrounds and regions of the country.<sup>126</sup>

3.103 However, the fact that Finland does not base policy decisions on national testing in the same way as Australia does not of itself explain Finland's success. There are a number of important additional factors at play which this report can only touch on. In Finland every teacher:

...[has] a masters degree and is an expert in how to assess, test and act on the results of student assessment, about a seventh of all professional teachers in the school are people who are trained to ensure that no student will fall behind by more than 48 hours. That is the kind of strategy that is going to lift the performance of students and close the gap between our high and low-performing students.<sup>127</sup>

3.104 The Finnish education system enjoys what Professor Brian Caldwell of Educational Transformations calls a 'cultural advantage' which means that the system is not directly comparable to Australia's:

It is not necessarily salaries, because when you adjust for purchasing power of currency our teaching salaries are probably a little above those of Finland. There is a cultural advantage that Finland enjoys, and that is that for many decades teaching has been a very highly valued profession. The initiatives of the Finnish government, in saying that the level of professional knowledge and skill that you now require if you are really going to make a difference for each and every child requires five years of university preparation—and then making a master's degree a requirement for beginning teachers—lifted the status of the profession quite significantly and, as Geoff Masters points out, and as the McKinsey report also points out, education is one of the top three preferences for those entering university.<sup>128</sup>

3.105 The English and American school systems do administer standardised tests and use the data to compare schools. Neither country performs well in international literacy and numeracy assessments.<sup>129</sup> Both countries' approaches to the publication of comparative reporting of test results, which focus on punitive measures for schools

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126 For more detail see Dianne Butland, *Testing times: Global trends in marketisation of public education through accountability testing*, NSW Teachers Federation, June 2008, pp 20-22.

127 Professor Brian Caldwell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2010, p. 6.

128 Professor Brian Caldwell, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2010, p. 7.

129 See PISA 2006 results, <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/13/39725224.pdf> (accessed 1 November 2010).

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which do not meet targets, are controversial and the consequences of their respective policies disputed.<sup>130</sup>

3.106 Dr Peter Hill of ACARA elaborated on these international examples:

I do understand the feelings of many people who have seen what has happened in the USA and the UK, which was not, in my mind, very intelligent in terms of accountability. To be honest, it happened a long time ago in the UK and more recently in the USA.

In the UK they certainly published lists of schools in terms of raw percentages meeting a standard, and they ranked the schools. The schools at the top, of course, were the schools that had all the smartest kids. They were independent schools, and typically girls' independent schools. The schools at the bottom tended to be the schools in boroughs like the inner London borough of Hackney, where I have done quite a bit of work recently. Of course, the demographic composition there means that the schools are really struggling to do the right thing with their students. So schools were unfairly compared.

The other thing that happened was in the USA following the passing in January 2000 of the No Child Left Behind legislation, which incidentally was supported by both the Republicans and the Democrats; there was complete agreement on it. It meant that each state within the USA enacted its testing program but that there would be serious consequences for schools that did not meet annual targets. These serious consequences meant that you were pretty well placed on notice after one year. After two years there was some small action, but after three years the action got very serious, even down to taking money from the school so that it could be given out to parents to get private tutors. In other words, the school was deemed not to be able to deliver this, so the money was taken from them. Indeed, the school could be closed down or staff removed and so on. In other words, there were very high-stakes consequences, often unfairly, because the schools that were the subject of this found it very hard to improve the students for reasons which were partly outside their control.

So that history of high-stakes testing leading to high-stakes consequences for the staff within schools has, of course, scared other people in other jurisdictions, and there has been a thought around that Australia is simply going down this path. What I would say is that we are not. Educators come and visit us from the UK and tell us all the bad news about what happened there. We know what happened there, we have learnt from that and we are not going down that path.<sup>131</sup>

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130 See for example Jaekyung Lee, *Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-depth Look into National and State Reading and Math Outcome Trends*, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University. See also *Student assessment regimes: Getting the balance right for Australia*, Draft discussion paper, Queensland Studies Authority, June 2009.

131 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 74-75.

3.107 The committee majority notes that, despite similarities to the Australian system, the context and outcomes are quite different. The US and English education systems both pursue a policy of withdrawing resources from underperforming schools. Conversely, in Australia, the focus of the NAPLAN testing regime is improvement, and poor performance is identified in order to better direct additional resources.

3.108 The Australian College of Educators supported making school performance information available to the public and pointed to '...international literature on transparency and accountability for governments, [which] provides strong evidence that public access to this sort of information is a potentially powerful force that can contribute to keeping governments focussed on their policy promises.'<sup>132</sup> The College of Educators also pointed out the problem with applying this to the Australian context, where '...the way in which the information has been organised for public consumption is not focussed around "keeping the government honest"'.<sup>133</sup>

### **What are the alternatives?**

3.109 The committee majority notes that some submissions to the inquiry support replacing current school performance data on the *My School* website with information on the value a school adds to student performance.<sup>134</sup>

3.110 Value added to student performance by schools can be calculated by comparing the progress made by individual students between one test and the next, controlling for extrinsic factors such as student background information. Once the background factors are controlled for, what is left is a measure of the contribution a school has made to individual student progress,<sup>135</sup> which is calculated by:

...using a statistical model that compares the progress made by each student with the same initial level of attainment, controlling for background factors.<sup>136</sup>

3.111 Dr Ben Jensen informed the committee that value-added measures of school performance are preferable because they are more accurate than using raw NAPLAN test scores or similar 'contextualised attainment models' which attempt to control for background factors in less precise ways:

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132 Australian College of Educations, *Submission 57*, p. 4.

133 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 57*, p. 4.

134 Peter Ridd, *Submission 140*, p. 4; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, *Measuring Improvements in Learning Outcomes: Best practices to assess the value-added of schools*, OECD, 2008; Dr Ben Jensen, 'Measuring What Matters: Student Progress,' *Additional Information 4*; Dr Ben Jensen, 'Value added measures of school performance: Improving the *My School* website', *Independence*, vol. 35, no.1, May 2010, pp 32-36.

135 Dr Ben Jensen, 'Measuring What Matters: Student Progress', *Additional Information 4*.

136 Dr Ben Jensen, 'Value added measures of school performance: Improving the *My School* website', *Independence*, vol. 35, no.1, May 2010, p. 34.

Australian and international research consistently shows that value added measures provide more accurate measures of school performance than the use of raw test scores or what have previously been termed contextualised attainment models. These models attempt to control for the socioeconomic background of students, usually through some form of multivariate modelling. These models are similar to the methods used to measure school performance on the My School website that use raw NAPLAN scores and then attempt to control for the socioeconomic background of the school... research consistently shows that this method produces less accurate measures of school performance than value added modelling.<sup>137</sup>

Even with data far more comprehensive than anything available in Australia, and modelling far more complex than that utilised for the My School website, the predictive power, the accuracy, of these types of models were roughly half that of a simple value added model. These findings are echoed around the world. Value added measures of school performance are not 100 per cent accurate—no estimate of school performance ever will be—but they are a substantial improvement on current measures and widely considered to be the most accurate measures available, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged communities. That is why they have been supported by stakeholders such as unions and school associations in numerous countries.<sup>138</sup>

3.112 Dr Jensen elaborated on what appears to be a widespread misunderstanding of what value-added measures of school performance are, explaining that they are not '...simple measures of student progress' but are instead relative, because:

All students will progress. Even a student who in year 3 performs at an average level but in year 5 performs at a below average level will have progressed in absolute terms, but we should be interested in the contributions schools make to that progression relative to the progress made by students at each initial level of attainment.<sup>139</sup>

3.113 An additional benefit of using value-added measures of school performance is that their introduction would remove the need to use the ICSEA index and to group schools into 'like schools', because both would be contained in the estimation used to calculate the value added.<sup>140</sup> This would address one of the most contentious aspects of the *My School* website.

3.114 The committee majority notes that Dr Jensen advocates including both raw test result data and value-added measures on the *My School* website.<sup>141</sup>

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137 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 13.

138 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 14.

139 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 14.

140 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 16.

141 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 18.

### *Committee majority view*

3.115 Given the large number of concerns expressed in submissions about the *My School* website, the committee majority believes it is necessary to increase the accuracy of student performance measurements on the website in order to provide better quality information on how schools and students are progressing.

3.116 The committee majority has considerable reservations about the *My School* website in its current form, and believes that shutting down the website to prevent further harm may be necessary unless steps are taken to improve the quality of the information presented. However, the committee majority does not believe that taking the *My School* website down is the best way forward and instead sees substantial potential for improvement in methods of publishing school performance data on the website by incorporating value-added measures as outlined above.

3.117 The committee majority emphasises the importance of following up low NAPLAN test results, or low school value-added scores in future, with immediate intervention aimed at assisting individual schools and students. The committee majority does not support putting punitive measures in place for schools with low value-added scores, as is the case in England.<sup>142</sup>

### **Recommendation 12**

**3.118 The committee majority recommends that ACARA and MCEECDYA comprehensively revise the type of information available on the *My School* website to shift the focus from raw school performance data to value-added measurement of school performance.**

### **Conclusion**

3.119 On the weight of evidence received outlining numerous community concerns about the *My School* website, the committee majority cannot support the website in its current form.

3.120 The problems outlined in this chapter are wide-ranging and a cause for serious concern. They point to a substantial and justified lack of confidence in the website among the parent, teacher and wider community. The potential for this lack of confidence in *My School* to engulf the entire national literacy and numeracy assessment system, thereby compromising the benefits of NAPLAN tests themselves, is considerable.

3.121 For this reason and in the interests of progressing the central aim of national literacy and numeracy testing—that is, improving educational outcomes for

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142 For details on national assessment and school accountability in England see Australian Education Union, *Submission 231*, pp 6-10.

students—the committee majority concludes that the best way forward is to instigate, as a matter of priority, a comprehensive revision of the *My School* website.

3.122 The committee majority is firmly of the view that a more measured and evidence-based approach must be taken. Instead of holding schools and teachers accountable on the basis of opaque and often distorted comparisons between raw student test results, the government must instead turn its attention to developing an optimally accurate, reliable and verifiable measure of school performance. Teachers and schools must then be allowed the autonomy and given the necessary support to design and implement frameworks aimed at improving student performance across the board, but in particular where students are performing below national benchmarks.

3.123 The committee majority concludes that the focus of the *My School* website must shift to include information on the value added by schools to student performance, taking into consideration background and extrinsic factors in a much more reliable fashion than is currently being achieved by the use of ICSEA values as a basis for comparison. The committee majority cannot support any future version of the website which fails to do this.

**Senator Chris Back**

**Chair**



## Government senators' additional and dissenting comments

Government senators are pleased to see that the committee majority recognises and supports the importance of national testing for literacy and numeracy and will provide some additional commentary on this below. Result analysis and reporting are the subject of ongoing improvements which should address the committee majority's recommendations regarding reporting refinements. However, government senators do not agree with the proposal to expand NAPLAN testing and this is addressed below. Government senators also do not agree with all the revisions proposed in the committee majority report for the *My School* website, particularly the focus on value-added measures and provide reasons as well as additional commentary later in this report.

Government senators acknowledge the central importance of literacy and numeracy as the foundations for further learning. As indicated by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER):

Educational research studies have underscored the fundamental importance of literacy and numeracy, not only to educational success, but also to successful transitions into employment and adult life. Levels of literacy are correlated with a wide range of outcomes, including lifetime earnings, employment prospects, levels of health and involvement in crime.<sup>1</sup>

### Benefits of NAPLAN testing

The government's education revolution is driving a renewed focus on the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy to lift student achievement across the country. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing is intended to:

...identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) emphasised to the committee that NAPLAN is intended to provide a snapshot of student performance to better inform stakeholders for the purpose of improvement.<sup>3</sup>

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1 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 2.

2 Information available from: <http://www.naplan.edu.au/faqs/napfaq.html> accessed 14 October 2010.

3 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 76.

### *Uses of the data*

Government senators support NAPLAN testing and reporting as an important tool to provide valuable information for many uses which include:

- enabling a sophisticated analysis of growth in attainment over time;
- showing student results by sex, location, parental background and Indigenous status, enabling the community to clearly see those student groups which need more support to improve their educational outcomes;
- tracking progress towards Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets;<sup>4</sup>
- giving the community, teachers and parents better information about how schools are performing;
- helping schools to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching programs;
- allowing governments to target additional resources to schools which may be struggling;
- complementing class and school based assessment to provide a comprehensive picture of student achievement that helps determine areas of priority to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes;
- allowing teachers to better identify students who require additional support; and
- enabling parents to use individual results to discuss student achievement and progress with teachers.

ACER confirmed that the tests provide a new level of information for teachers and schools, education systems and governments as well as parents. It explained how the data can be used:

At the school level, the tests can be used to identify areas of relative strength and weakness and to assist in planning teaching interventions and special support. A number of Australian states provide software to support schools to explore and make best use of the diagnostic information available through NAPLAN. At a national and education system level, NAPLAN provides diagnostic information to inform educational policies and planning.<sup>5</sup>

Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Acting General Manager, Strategic Policy and Performance, Department of Education, Tasmania, explained how important the NAPLAN data is for school education systems:

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4 For example see the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which uses NAPLAN as the data source for literacy and numeracy available at: [http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/docs/IGA\\_FFR\\_ScheduleF\\_National\\_Indigenous\\_Reform\\_Agreement.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement.pdf) accessed 27 October 2010.

5 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 2.

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It provides us with performance information, for the first time when we had the national test, that enabled each of the states and territories to actually look at our results relative to other states and territories across Australia. That is very important because prior to 2008 we had state-wide testing but each of the states had different tests, so it made it very difficult to see how our students were performing across the nation in relative terms.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs Lidster indicated how schools are supported to make best use of the data:

The NAPLAN tests are used extensively to support schools. Our jurisdiction, and others, provides the information back to schools. A lot of analysis is done that supports the schools. Workshops are run to help the schools to interpret the results and use them effectively to support their teachers. We also conduct workshops to assist senior people within schools to interpret the information and, where appropriate, we provide additional support for schools in relation to teacher development. Also, funding is provided to support the additional programs to improve the outcomes for students, where they are identified as performing below where we would expect them to be.<sup>7</sup>

Mrs Lidster emphasised the usefulness of the data for schools and teachers:

There is a large amount of evidence that shows us that the quality of our teachers makes a big difference to the outcomes of our students. The use of NAPLAN, or state-wide and national testing, especially when it is provided back to schools, is valuable to help teachers look at how effective their delivery of the curriculum has been. It also helps school leaders to sit down and have critical conversations with their teachers to say, for example: ‘These results are particularly fantastic. What is it that you are doing in your classroom? Let’s share that practice across our school.’ It also helps our district support staff to look at the school’s results and to work with the school either to bring in additional professional learning where it is needed or to share some particularly gifted teachers’ talents with other schools. So I think it is critical, and it will lead to improvement in Australia if we are using those results for that purpose.<sup>8</sup>

The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations supported the continuation of national testing and pointed out the importance of the data for parents:

...The council believes that parents should receive as much detailed information as possible, as this encourages them to speak to their child’s teacher and get involved in their education. Research consistently shows that the best outcomes are achieved when teachers and parents work closely to give students the best education possible.<sup>9</sup>

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6 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 37.

7 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 37.

8 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 46.

9 Mrs Elizabeth Singer, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 26.

While impressing on the committee that NAPLAN is only one source of information about student achievement, the President of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), Ms Leonie Trimper, told the committee that her organisation 'supports the use of NAPLAN to provide schools and systems with quality information about the performance of Australian primary school students in literacy and numeracy'.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators support the increased transparency and rich information source now available for governments, educational authorities, schools, principals, teachers and parents as a result of the publication of NAPLAN test results.

### ***International research and best practice***

The former Minister for Education noted that the NAPLAN measurement scales are unique and represent world best practice in the measurement of student progress.<sup>11</sup> Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer, ACER emphasised that NAPLAN is firmly grounded in 20 years experience through state literacy and numeracy testing programs, adding:

NAPLAN is also pretty firmly grounded in international best practice in tests of this kind...Part of the reason that the Australian Council for Educational Research are managing the PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] tests for the OECD out of Melbourne is that we do have international expertise in the analysis and reporting of data, and we are applying that to the NAPLAN tests.<sup>12</sup>

He explained that the test development process used is accepted as international best practice, as well as the statistical methods and processes used to analyse the data and report the results.<sup>13</sup>

Dr Ben Jensen, Director, School Education Program, Grattan Institute, stated that NAPLAN testing and to a lesser extent the *My School* website are important advances in the development of the school education system, noting that:

...the international research clearly shows that high performing education systems are more likely to have national assessments and utilise them in some form to foster school improvement, school accountability and school choice.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 2.

11 The Hon Julia Gillard MP, *Media release*, NAPLAN National Report Released', 19 December 2010.

12 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 47.

13 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 51.

14 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 13.

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### *Using NAPLAN data to address disadvantage*

NAPLAN results have showed that there are still some students who have not attained the literacy and numeracy skills expected of students in their year level. The federal government has entered into National Partnerships with the states and territories to address disadvantage, support teacher quality, and improve literacy and numeracy.

As noted in the 2010-11 Budget, funding of \$2.6 billion over five years from 2008-09 has been provided for the three Smarter Schools National Partnerships. There is \$540.0 million for the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership which seeks to accelerate improvement in student literacy and numeracy outcomes for those students most in need of support; the \$1.5 billion low Socio Economic Status School Communities National Partnership to support the learning needs and wellbeing of Indigenous students to improve engagement and attendance; and the \$550.0 million Teacher Quality National Partnership which will support teachers, including those in schools with predominantly Indigenous students.<sup>15</sup>

Through the NAPLAN assessment and *My School* website, the government has identified an additional 110 struggling schools that would have missed out on a share of the \$2.6 million Smarter Schools National Partnerships and will now share in \$11 million in extra funding to ensure students improve literacy and numeracy.<sup>16</sup>

The increased transparency and attention on support for low performing students was supported by Mr Gary Banks, Chairman of the Productivity Commission, who stated:

While there are low performing students across the socio-economic spectrum, justifying some attention to raising performance per se, there is evidence that low SES kids underperform relative to their potential across the board, justifying the targeting of this group as a whole. Hence COAG's attention to schools in lower SES areas would seem warranted, especially for those performing poorly relative to other schools with similar student populations. (This can now be revealed through NAPLAN data — with 'My School' transparency upping the ante for action — again illustrating the perversity of opposition to reporting by those professing to hold the interests of students paramount.)<sup>17</sup>

Dr Ben Jensen also supported the greater emphasis on low-performing students:

If we look at the very low-performing students, these are the students who are most in need of help and assistance and who unfortunately are a greater

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15 Information available from: [http://www.budget.gov.au/2010-11/content/ministerial\\_statements/indigenous/html/ms\\_indigenous-03.htm](http://www.budget.gov.au/2010-11/content/ministerial_statements/indigenous/html/ms_indigenous-03.htm) accessed 21 October 2010.

16 The Hon Julia Gillard MP, *Media release*, 'My School stops schools being left behind', 7 February 2010.

17 Gary Banks AO, *Advancing Australia's 'Human Capital Agenda'*, Public Administration Today, July-September 2010, p.15.

cost to society later on and who miss out on opportunities later in life. I actually see the value in NAPLAN and My School identifying those students who are below minimum levels of literacy and numeracy, because they will struggle the most later in life.<sup>18</sup>

Dr Jensen provided the following statistics to support the attention on students falling behind:

We have a real problem in our country of letting students slip further and further behind. If you look at the NAPLAN data, in year 3 roughly eight per cent of students perform at or below minimum levels of writing literacy. By year 9, it is over 30 per cent—nearly a third of students are performing at or below minimum levels of writing literacy. That is an incredible percentage of students. Not only do we fail to address and help the students who are performing poorly at a young age, we actually let others fall to that level as well. So I think there is a good case to be made that, as soon as a student falls to those levels—particularly the younger they are, because if we get them young we can help them much more efficiently, much more effectively—we should institute specific programs to help them. This could be special assistance or simply identifying to the school principal, ‘You have these students who really need your help.’ I think that can work effectively; it has in other countries—very high-performing countries which do not have the same problems of very low performance that we have.<sup>19</sup>

Examples of the strategies used in other countries to assist students starting to fall behind were provided by Professor Geoff Masters who expressed the view that:

...there is a general lesson there about the importance of identifying and catching children who are beginning to slip behind in their learning and getting them back onto a trajectory.<sup>20</sup>

NAPLAN was supported as a major step in the education system by Professor Peter Ridd at James Cook University in Queensland, who reported that he has noticed a decline in the standards of students on entry into university in the areas of maths and science. Professor Ridd cited a review undertaken by ACER in Queensland which found:

In summary, there appears to have been a decline in the relative performance of Queensland students in maths and science over a period of decades. In the period 1964 to 1995, the absolute decline in lower secondary maths achievement appears to have been greater than in any other State, and to have been the equivalent of about two years of schooling.<sup>21</sup>

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18 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 19.

19 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 20.

20 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 53.

21 Professor Peter Ridd, *Submission 140*, p. 2.

Professor Ridd emphasised that regular and consistent monitoring and assessment is essential to address the decline in standards over the years and welcomed the development of NAPLAN which, when used as intended, is a 'successful and useful tool'.<sup>22</sup>

In practical terms Mrs Sharyn Lidster from the Tasmanian Department of Education reported on how providing extra assistance to struggling schools occurs:

All of the measures are used as part of schools providing an annual school improvement report where they identify where they need to improve. That is done in conjunction with the regional general managers. Then the support is provided where schools determine that they may need to put in extra professional development. For example, if their reading results for a particular group of students were not as expected, additional support and additional programs will be provided to the school so that they can improve those outcomes for the students. So they do not submit; it is part of the system, part of the conversations and part of the budget process.<sup>23</sup>

### ***NAPLAN is just one of a range of measures***

NAPLAN is one indicator of student performance. It is not an indicator of school performance on its own. As noted by Ms Trimper, APPA, 'NAPLAN is only one piece of the educational jigsaw; it is only one piece of the story about a school'.<sup>24</sup>

This view was supported by Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Department of Education Tasmania, who emphasised that NAPLAN is just one of a suite of measures used to look at performance.<sup>25</sup>

Professor Masters emphasised the need to protect NAPLAN as a good measure of student performance and to make clear the original purpose of providing information to schools, parents and systems. He added that it will be important to develop better measures of teacher, school and system performance.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Margins of error are recognised***

Professor Geoff Masters acknowledged the current limitations of NAPLAN tests:

Of course, they are point-in-time tests, so they are limited in that sense. They only assess part of what is important in schools. There is inevitably a degree of imprecision, measurement error, around the estimates that they provide.<sup>27</sup>

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22 Professor Peter Ridd, *Submission 140*, pp 2-3.

23 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 38-39.

24 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 6.

25 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 39.

26 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 48-49.

27 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 47.

ACARA has acknowledged the measurement errors inherent in any tests and explained how this is being addressed:

...NAPLAN are short tests, so the error band for an individual is wider. We can improve that in two ways: increasing the testing time, which is not very popular; or we can have a test where the items are more focused around the abilities of the individual student and then your testing becomes more efficient and the error becomes much smaller. That is one of the things that ACARA wants to look at for the future along with of course aligning the test with the curriculum...We are also keen on the notion of seeing if we can improve the efficiency of the testing to reduce margins of error. That is something that we want to look at.<sup>28</sup>

ACARA also noted that the first version of the *My School* website recognised the margins of error inherent with any testing, and the next version will display this even more clearly.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Timing***

In response to concerns about the timing of the NAPLAN test, Dr Peter Hill, CEO of ACARA provided the following explanation:

NAPLAN will never work as a diagnostic test. A diagnostic test should be administered by the teacher so that they can take action the next day. No national survey can return all of that the next day very easily. There are ways in which we can provide resources—for example, in computer adaptive tests that can provide feedback instantly. Perhaps in the future those sorts of resources can be made available. There is a lot of interest in doing that, but that is not a part of NAPLAN at this stage.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators were concerned to see signs during the inquiry that that the original purpose of NAPLAN has either not been well communicated<sup>31</sup> or its importance exaggerated by some. It is essential to keep the test in perspective. Its purpose is to provide a snapshot of student performance in order to focus on improvement. It is not a diagnostic assessment which looks at the reasons why students are not performing and which requires immediate feedback.<sup>32</sup> The limitations of NAPLAN as with other testing are acknowledged. It is a point in time test with margins of error and it should be seen as just one information source within broader contextual information about a school.

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28 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 78.

29 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 76.

30 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 78. See also p. 69.

31 See p.20 for further discussion on improving communication.

32 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 76, 78.

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Government senators welcome the new National Partnership Agreements with governments and schools which will allow resources to be better targeted to disadvantaged schools and students which need the most support. Government senators note that distribution of the \$2.6 billion committed through these partnerships to improve the quality of teaching, improve literacy and numeracy and provide additional assistance to disadvantaged schools<sup>33</sup> relies on NAPLAN tests revealing where needs are the greatest.

In response to the committee majority recommendation to use below-average NAPLAN test results to trigger the provision of assistance to schools and students, government senators note this is already occurring. The focus of NAPLAN testing is to provide assistance to schools and students which are identified as requiring it. As reported to the committee by Mrs Sharyn Lidster from the Tasmanian Department of Education, mechanisms are already in place to facilitate this. The committee also heard that teachers use the results to evaluate their teaching programs and identify students requiring additional support. As for more immediate feedback, this is not the purpose of NAPLAN and government senators note that consideration of resources to provide this more immediate feedback to teachers is underway (see below).

### *Learning from overseas experiences*

Ms Trimper, APPA, advised that research from the US and Britain shows that when assessment programs become high stakes there are unintended negative effects on the quality of teaching and learning. She emphasised that APPA wants to ensure that NAPLAN does not go down the same path.<sup>34</sup>

Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, ACARA responded to comparisons made by some with the UK and US experiences:

...Those two countries got into accountability in terms of having really-high-stakes assessment well ahead of others, often with quite severe consequences for poor performance. I was in the USA when President Bush introduced No Child Left Behind and if you failed to meet satisfactory progress targets then there was a consequence: you were on watch the next year; in the second year there was one set of consequences and in the third year another set of consequences. This, of course, led to a lot of contention and debate. Now we are seeing some of the research into whether it really did make a difference and so on...

...Australia has not made the mistake of the UK and the USA of having those extreme high-stakes consequences. We are in a position where we can have a good look at the data and say, 'Let's look at other schools that are doing a good job. What can I learn here?' within an environment where you

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33 Information available from: [http://www.pm.gov.au/Policy\\_Priorities/Future/Priorities](http://www.pm.gov.au/Policy_Priorities/Future/Priorities) accessed 18 October 2010.

34 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 2.

are not expecting to be closed down next year for poor performance, and to really look at how you can improve.

The answer I would have to those critics is that we are in a different context to the research that you are reading. We are in a situation where I think we are having a more intelligent approach to accountability and a more intelligent approach to the use of that data, particularly in not comparing schools against others where it is an illegitimate comparison but having comparisons with schools that have similar students.<sup>35</sup>

Dr Hill stressed to the committee that Australia has learnt from the UK and US experiences and is not going down the same path.<sup>36</sup> Responding to the concerns about NAPLAN being a high stakes test, Dr Hill added:

I think the education community is coming to grips with a new world in which transparency is at a level that we have never seen before and accountability is of a kind that we have never seen before. We are all coming to grips with what it means to have intelligent accountability in all of this. I do understand the feelings of many people who have seen what has happened in the USA and the UK, which was not, in my mind, very intelligent in terms of accountability...<sup>37</sup>

ACER also noted the experiences overseas which are often cited to argue against standardised testing. It argued that this occurs without acknowledgement of the differences in the testing regimes or in the educational circumstances in other countries. For example Finland is often referred to:

...without acknowledging the very different features of the Finnish education system, including the fact that Finnish teachers are significantly more highly qualified than Australian teachers and Finnish schools are much more alike in composition and outcomes than Australian schools.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators stress that NAPLAN is not the same high stakes test that occurs overseas where penalties are applied for poor performance. Government senators highlight the evidence from Dr Peter Hill, CEO ACARA, who emphasised that Australia has not made the same mistake as the UK and USA which have negative consequences for their testing. Government senators emphasise the intention here is to identify where support is required for students and schools and ensure they receive it.

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35 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Senate Estimates Hansard*, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 21 October 2010, p. 88.

36 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 75.

37 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 74.

38 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 3.

### ***Improvements to NAPLAN testing***

Government senators note that as NAPLAN is now in its third year it is possible to report on the growth of student achievement which adds an important element to the usefulness of the tests. Government senators recognise that NAPLAN tests and the ways in which results are analysed and reported are the subject of ongoing improvements, and ACER listed a number of areas under consideration.<sup>39</sup>

Dr Hill also told the committee that resources to provide more immediate feedback for teachers are under consideration:

There are ways in which we can provide resources—for example, in computer adaptive tests that can provide feedback instantly. Perhaps in the future those sorts of resources can be made available. There is a lot of interest in doing that, but that is not a part of NAPLAN at this stage.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators note the committee majority recommendation to expand NAPLAN testing. Government senators disagree with this proposal as increased large-scale cohort testing is not the next step that needs to be taken. The next step is providing teachers with better diagnostic tools to address the needs of individual students. Government senators note that the government has committed to developing a national online assessment and learning bank for students, parents and teachers to provide a sophisticated diagnostic assessment of each student's strengths and learning needs.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Allegations of cheating have been dealt with seriously***

Allegations of cheating on the NAPLAN tests<sup>42</sup> have been thoroughly investigated<sup>43</sup> and actions taken to stop any recurrence of security breaches.

In October 2010 at Senate estimates hearings, Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, ACARA, provided an update on action underway:

...We have two that are under investigation in terms of security breaches. We have 10 under investigation that involve cheating and four that involve

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39 ACER, *Submission 192*, pp 2-3.

40 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 78.

41 Information available from: <http://alp.org.au/agenda/school-reform/online-diagnostic-tools/> accessed 8 November 2010.

42 Tanya Chilcott, 'Rort fear from test 'leak'', *Courier Mail*, 13 May 2010, p. 9; ABC News, 'More teachers accused of NAPLAN cheating', 18 May 2010, Michael Owen and Verity Edwards, 'Teacher faces axe for NAPLAN cheating' *The Australian*, 14 May 2010, p. 1; Linda Cann, 'Cheats on notice', *Sunday Times*, 16 May 2010, p. 10.

43 Tanya Chilcott, 'Student cheating results withheld', *Courier Mail*, 9 August 2010, p. 7; Jared Owens and Naomi Lim, 'Principal stood down over tests', *Weekend Australian*, 2 October 2010, p. 5.

breaches of the protocols of administration. They are of varying degrees of seriousness. Obviously, the ones that involve cheating are the ones that are of concern to us, and there are 10 of those under investigation, but there have only been two that have been confirmed at this stage, so we are talking altogether about 12 allegations that have either been confirmed or are still under investigation.

...These are matters which are being done by the test administration authorities in each state or territory. Because they can have very serious consequences for the individuals concerned, they do tend to take rather a long time to finalise, so we cannot put an end date on them.<sup>44</sup>

He added that where a child's score may be affected, the jurisdictions notify parents and may need to withdraw the results. He assured the committee that the effect of this on the averages for statistically similar schools or for all schools would be negligible.<sup>45</sup>

ACARA outlined plans to enhance the security of test administration which include strengthening protocols and embarking on a 'multi-level' communication strategy for 2011 which will develop greater understanding of the required protocols to manage test materials.<sup>46</sup> As this action is already underway, government senators do not see the need for the committee majority's recommendation for additional work in this area.

### ***My School website***

NAPLAN testing is complemented by the *My School* website, which provides detailed information about almost 10,000 schools. People can locate statistical and contextual information about schools in their community and compare them with statistically similar schools across the country.

### ***Background***

The website has been developed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Agency (ACARA), an independent authority that is responsible, among other things, for publishing nationally comparable data and contextual information on schools. Education ministers have agreed the *Principles for Reporting on Schooling* in Australia which include:

- the protection of individual student privacy;
- not publishing comparative data without contextual information; and

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44 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Senate Estimates Hansard*, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 21 October 2010, p. 92.

45 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Senate Estimates Hansard*, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 21 October 2010, p. 92.

46 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, pp 8-9.

- the publication of error margins, caveats and explanatory notes to ensure accurate information.<sup>47</sup>

The design of the website was endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in September 2009 and was launched on 28 January 2010. It provides profiles of almost 10,000 schools, contextual information and NAPLAN results that can be compared with results from statistically similar schools.<sup>48</sup> ACARA reported that as at 25 June 2010 the website had received 2,445,308 visitors and 3,368,847 visits.<sup>49</sup>

### *The importance of context*

Cognisant of the concerns raised about the website, Dr Peter Hill, ACARA, cautioned that the information on the website about each school needs to be understood within a broader context of all the other information available about the school, including factors such as student characteristics, percentage of Indigenous students and location.<sup>50</sup> In response to concerns that the first version of the website may have been made available too early, he stated that he believed the publication of the data improved the quality of the data:

I believe that until we published we were not going to get the data. Since we published there has been a scramble to get extra data. So things have moved along very rapidly. My view is that if we had waited for that to be in place we would still be waiting in five years time.<sup>51</sup>

Professor Geoff Masters, CEO of ACER, also emphasised the important distinction between measures of student performance and measures of school, teacher or system performance:

What we have done in Australia to date is that we have worked hard on getting very good measures of student performance. They can be, as I said, point-in-time measures. We can look at trends over time because of the way we calibrate the tests statistically. We can look at trends in a system or even in a school over time. We can look at the growth that is occurring—for example, between year 3 and year 5 or between year 5 and year 7. But all of these, whether they are point-in-time measures of status, growth measures or measures of trends, are measures of student performance.<sup>52</sup>

Professor Masters added:

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47 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 13.

48 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 13.

49 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 24.

50 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 71.

51 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 73.

52 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 48.

I think we have been pretty careful with the My School website to say that what we are reporting on My School is measures of student performance. We are not trying to report a measure of a school's performance. It is true that an attempt is made to make the information perhaps more useful by comparing schools that have similar student intakes, but our focus with My School is still very much on the reporting of student achievement, not trying to construct measures of a school's performance to get a number for a school.

Professor Masters also emphasised the need to understand the information in context:

I think the thing we have to guard against is giving it all the value, giving it a priority above everything else. I would be arguing for reporting NAPLAN results, as we are, but also providing rich information about other aspects of the school's circumstances as well as the students' performance.<sup>53</sup>

ACARA also responded to concerns about *My School* using the NAPLAN data, which assesses student performance, to provide information on schools:

It is quite acceptable to get an overall measurement of the performance of students in the school by averaging the performance of the students within it. That is done in every international survey of educational achievement. We compare the performance of countries—for example, in PISA—by doing the same thing. We aggregate up from the student level to a national level and indeed to an international level. So aggregating the responses of individuals within a unit is quite acceptable in measurement terms and that is what is done in, for example, educational research. All educational research is based on aggregating performance of individuals within the unit.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Facilitating conversations***

The My School website provides valuable information to facilitate conversations at many levels. Dr Ben Jensen told the committee that he supports NAPLAN and the My School website as:

...this website has highlighted both the positive and negative issues within schools, and it is great that it has encouraged these conversations to take place – not just engaging parents and families with the school but facilitating discussions internally within schools.<sup>55</sup>

Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Department of Education, Tasmania also reported the website information is leading to increased conversations between parents and teachers:

It certainly has increased the level of discussion. Of course, our media have also jumped in and made some simplistic summaries of that information,

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53 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 98.

54 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 20 October 2010, p. 71 (please note the proof Hansard incorrectly attributes this quote to Mr Adams. The final Hansard will show that it was Dr Peter Hill).

55 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 19.

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but I think that the rich conversations that are happening at a local level between parents and the schools are where a lot of the positive outcomes are coming from in publicly reporting the information.<sup>56</sup>

Mrs Lidster added:

I can only speak anecdotally in relation to parents' engagement with their local schools. Anecdotally, there have been a lot more conversations around that. I can say that, when you provide a whole suite of information, there is probably no school that is hitting the top marks in every area. That is the nature of any endeavour, especially something as complex as a school and providing an education for students. There will be areas of strengths and areas of weaknesses. That is where it is valuable to share it publicly with parents, so that they can have that discussion with the school around how they can improve it. Because it is a partnership, things like attendance, for example, are not in the total control of the school. They can encourage attendance but in actual fact parents have a direct responsibility in relation to attendance. There are great conversations happening in relation to it.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Increased transparency***

While advocating for including a value-added score on the website,<sup>58</sup> Dr Ben Jensen acknowledged the greater transparency provided by the *My School* website:

My School has been a dramatic increase in transparency in school education. That has been undertaken in an industry or a sector that has not had a lot of transparency—particularly when you consider that this year we are going to put financial information on it as well. That is a huge increase from where we have been. I think whenever you have that sort of change you are going to get this sort of emphasis.<sup>59</sup>

Dr Jensen spoke in more detail about increased transparency leading to greater student improvement:

...Overall what you are getting is a gradual decline over the years and an inability within a system to effectively help those students at or below minimum levels. As I said before, clearly the students at year 9 who are at or below minimum levels of writing literacy are still improving in absolute terms but it is the rate of improvement—this is where I greatly support the transparency of My School. We are going to have some of the greatest improvements by shining a light on the fact that we have this issue because this data is not well known. We are only beginning to develop effective programs to address these issues. That is why I would advocate that we need greater systems that immediately flow to the students who are performing at these levels. The sorts of equity programs which I would advocate have been successful in countries only focus on equity and not on

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56 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 38.

57 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 44.

58 See Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 13-15.

59 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 22.

absolute height. These are the programs that very high-performing countries have.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators note that the intention of COAG was for school performance data to be published in the context of broader information about a school's students, teachers and resources.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, along with the NAPLAN results, each school has a self-written profile page where it describes the mission and values of the school, the number of students, number of teacher and non-teaching staff, the attendance rate and any additional programs and support in place for students. Government senators emphasise that the data on the website should be considered along with an understanding of the context of the school and the composition of the student body.

Government senators agree that apart from the uses at the system and school level, the information provided by NAPLAN via the *My School* website is acting as a useful tool for parents to engage directly in conversations with teachers and ask questions about what is happening in their school.

### ***Further development of the My School website***

It was always intended that the *My School* website would be developed in stages and that subsequent versions would be improved by the additional of information as it became available.<sup>62</sup> To this end, ACARA advised that it was asked by education ministers to investigate proposals for enhancing the website including:

- school financial data;
- nationally comparable senior secondary information;
- satisfaction with schooling;
- student population indicators;
- growth data on literacy and numeracy achievement;
- teaching staff and levels of expertise;
- using student-level data to compute the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)
- other enhancements to ICSEA
- reporting of results; and

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60 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 25.

61 See also Geoff N Masters, Glenn Rowley, John Ainley, Siek Toon Khoo, ACER, *Reporting and comparing school performances*, paper prepared for the MCEETYA EWG, December 2008, p. v.

62 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 69.

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- action to minimise misuse of *My School* data.<sup>63</sup>

Making more information available was advocated by ACER, which stated that the website 'has the potential to become a valuable single source of comparable, public information about every Australian school'.<sup>64</sup>

Government senators agree with advice from ACER that '[m]any of the current concerns about *My School* are likely to be addressed by broadening the range of information provided and increasing levels of user choice'.<sup>65</sup>

Government senators note that a working party made up of educational experts including literacy and numeracy specialists, principal organisations and representatives from the Australian Education Union and Independent Education Union of Australia was formed. It is providing advice on the use of student performance data and other indicators of school effectiveness.<sup>66</sup> Recommendations from the working party were considered by MCEECDYA on 15 October 2010. Ms Trimper, APPA, who is part of the working party, confirmed that the recommendations developed by the working party will go a long way to addressing the concerns that have been raised about the website.<sup>67</sup>

Government senators note that the substantial amount of work undertaken by the working party and the ability of *My School* version 2 to address concerns raised about the website has been given limited acknowledgment in the committee majority report. Government senators support the view expressed by Dr Peter Hill, CEO, ACARA, who told the committee that he believed the publication of the data has improved the quality of the data.

### ***Making more information available***

Following the meeting on 15 October 2010 with state and territory education ministers, the Minister for School Education, the Hon Peter Garrett MP, reported that ministers supported most of the enhancements proposed by the working party and that school finances and richer community detail will now be reported. He stated:

This is a really big reform for us and it's important that we get the website right. We've asked for some further work to be done on how the site will look and details about how it will function. But certainly we're very pleased that we're starting to see additional information coming to MySchool. Additional information that will enable parents, teachers, the communities

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63 ACARA, *Submission 261*, pp 25-26.

64 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 4.

65 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 6.

66 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 26. See also Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 69-70.

67 Ms Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 9.

and others to get a good sense of the educational progress that is being made by their students and by their schools right across the country.<sup>68</sup>

The minister added that the second iteration of *My School* will provide a leading information source for parents, teachers and school communities. It will also provide better information for governments to consider policies to best support education.<sup>69</sup>

*My School* version 2 will address many of the issues raised in submissions. Some specific examples are outlined below.

#### *Measures to address the misuse of data*

Government senators note that to address the misuse of data, for example, using it to create 'league tables', on 15 October 2010 MCEEDYA endorsed implementation of the following measures to protect the integrity of data on the site and the collection of direct student data:

- a 'click wrap'<sup>70</sup> requiring users to indicate their agreement up-front to terms and conditions of use of *My School* data;
- a tool to deter automatic scraping of data from the website.<sup>71</sup>

These measures will be implemented prior to the release of version 2 of the website.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Government senators view*

Government senators emphasise that the *My School* website is not a league table and support mechanisms to prevent and deter the practice of using *My School* data to create such tables. *My School* allows people to go to the website and view the NAPLAN results in an appropriate context.

#### *ICSEA changes*

APPA President Ms Leonie Trimper emphasised the concerns that the ICSEA values caused for their members. She suggested that to legitimately compare schools you need accurate details of the children at the school itself rather than details from a census data collection district.<sup>73</sup>

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68 The Hon Peter Garrett MP, *Media Release*, 'Joint Press Conference - MCEEDYA Forum', 18 October 2010.

69 The Hon Peter Garrett MP, *Media Release*, 'Joint Press Conference - MCEEDYA Forum', 18 October 2010.

70 Note: a clickwrap agreement is a type of agreement mostly found on the internet which allows users to read the terms of an agreement before accepting them.

71 ACARA, *Submission 261*, p. 26. See also Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 74.

72 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, p. 3.

73 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 2.

The use of Census Collection District (CCD) data for ICSEA values was considered by MCEECDYA on 15 October 2010. ACARA acknowledged that the use of this census data resulted in anomalous ICSEA values in a small number of cases. At the 21 October 2010 Estimates hearing Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, ACARA, told the committee that ministers have agreed to move from census-based data to a model where information is obtained from parents:

...We have looked at it and now we have a new formula, which will mean that the ICSEA value of at least 70 per cent of schools, the socio-economic status component, will be based on direct student measures.

...It improves the predictor of validity by seven per cent. It means that we will not get the anomalies we have had in the past where the census collection district does not properly characterise the nature of the students who live in them.

...The only instances where we will revert to census collection data is where we do not have the individual level data and that relates particularly to schools in very remote areas of the Northern Territory or in cases where the number of students for whom we have this direct data is too small to get a reliable fix.<sup>74</sup>

Dr Hill added that the new formula will be used when the revised website is released in December 2010.<sup>75</sup> The use of individual student information on parental education and occupation over census data was supported in evidence to the committee.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Enhanced reporting***

The provision of more information, particularly qualitative and contextual information, was supported by witnesses.<sup>77</sup> Government senators note that MCEECDYA has agreed to expand the contextual information about schools by publishing the percentage of students with a language background other than English. Principals will also be able to include more information about their school. In addition, information on student absences, withdrawals and exclusions from NAPLAN testing will be more prominent. The website will show the growth in learning for students who took the test in 2008 and 2010 and were in the same school both years.<sup>78</sup> Schools will also be able to provide a commentary on their results.

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74 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Senate Estimates Hansard*, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 21 October 2010, pp 89-90.

75 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Senate Estimates Hansard*, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, 21 October 2010, p. 90. See also Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 72; ACARA *Supplementary submission*, p. 3, pp 5-6.

76 See Ms Leonie Trimper, APPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 3; Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 16, 17; Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 42.

77 See Mrs Elizabeth Singer, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 26, 27.

78 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, p. 3.

Comments will be collected and reported in the first half of 2011. Further enhancements are also planned for *My School* version 3, such as nationally comparable senior secondary information and teaching levels of expertise.<sup>79</sup>

Government senators point out that after this year's NAPLAN testing we are now in a position to see progress of the same children two years later, for example seeing how the grade 3 students tested in 2008 are now doing in grade 5 in 2010.

### ***Enhanced search facilities***

APPA called for a more interactive website where more detailed comparisons are possible.<sup>80</sup> Government senators note and support the recommendation from ACER to develop other ways of comparing student results across schools which would allow users to choose their own comparisons.<sup>81</sup>

Government senators note that for version 3 of the website, MCEECDYA has agreed that ACARA will investigate enhancing search facilities and filters which would allow users to refine their searches for like and statistically similar schools.<sup>82</sup>

### ***Need for better communication***

Mrs Sharyn Lidster, Department of Education Tasmania told the committee that a lot of education is needed to support schools in making best use of the data and being able to talk about their performance with their communities.<sup>83</sup> ACARA endorsed this view, and Dr Hill said that improving communication of the information would be a focus for the next version of the website.

There is always a big communication issue with presenting any form of complex information. We are conscious this time around—because we have a little bit more time than we did last year—that we need to put a lot of work into communicating ahead of the release about what the website will look like and the sorts of caveats that were in the first version. What we said in the first version is: if you see one result that might not be to your liking, that in itself may not be significant. Look at the previous year and then, if you have three years, look again. Certainly, if you have an indication that there is a problem three years in a row, you should take it seriously. One poor result does not necessarily mean you have a problem. It could be an aberration. That particularly applies to small schools. We would say that, particularly for small schools, you have to be very careful in interpreting these roles. Indeed, the errors in measurement around those

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79 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, p. 4.

80 Ms Leonie Trimper, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 3.

81 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 6.

82 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, p. 4.

83 Mrs Sharyn Lidster, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 38.

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estimates will be larger for those schools. The report on the current website and on the new one makes that very clear.<sup>84</sup>

Government senators note the inherent difficulty in presenting complex information and the intention by ACARA to put more work into better communicating the limitations of the data on the website.

### *Availability of financial data*

One of the enhancements agreed by state and federal education ministers is requiring schools to list financial information. This will include 2009 recurrent income, disaggregated by source of funding (Commonwealth government; state/territory government; school initiated fees, charges and voluntary contributions; and other sources such as parent or third party initiated). It will also include 2009 capital expenditure broken down by source of funding.<sup>85</sup> The MCEECDYA Communiqué from the 15 October meeting noted that school financial information will be reported from 2008 to 2010 when the new version of the website is available in December 2010.<sup>86</sup>

This issue has received some media reporting, with the WA Primary Principals Association President Stephen Breen expressing concern that published financial data may present a misleading picture of how much money is spent on a student. He argued that public schools would see their costs inflated because they would also have to include the cost of education department head office bureaucrats. He added that he would like to see the data include school assets such as real estate.<sup>87</sup> The WA Director of the Association of Independent Schools, Valerie Gould, was concerned that publishing such financial data would lead to 'simplistic' comparisons such as linking school wealth to test scores. She added that it would be difficult to compare schools across difference sectors as costs and expenses are not treated in the same way:

For example, independent schools had to account for depreciation and insurance that State governments covered for public schools.<sup>88</sup>

These concerns were echoed in Victoria, where it was reported that the disclosure of private income will be misleading as:

They must cover costs that individual government schools don't, such as salaries, cleaning, maintenance, capital works, depreciation and loan interest.<sup>89</sup>

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84 Dr Peter Hill, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, pp 76-77.

85 ACARA, *Supplementary submission*, p. 2.

86 MCEECDYA Communiqué, 15 October 2010.

87 Andrew Tillett, 'Alarm over MySchool finance data', *West Australian*, 15 October 2010, p. 16.

88 Andrew Tillett, 'Alarm over MySchool finance data', *West Australian*, 15 October 2010, p. 16.

89 Editorial, 'Only full picture is fair to all schools', *The Age*, 15 October 2010, p. 18.

The Chief Executive of Independent Schools Victoria argued that schools would not be able to put their income and expenditure in context.<sup>90</sup> The Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools, NSW, Mr Geoff Newcombe, stated that he did not believe private schools should have to report income from all sources:

I don't think there is a lot of relevance in disclosing a school's assets...It would be almost impossible to compare. We are looking at the recurrent costs of education children.<sup>91</sup>

The Australian Education Union argued in favour of disclosing all financial information such as trusts, foundations, bequests, share and property portfolios to provide an accurate account of the financial resources of schools and increase transparency.<sup>92</sup> Dr Ben Jensen also supported the publication of financial data:

I think that when we introduce financial data onto My School we are going to start a lot of conversations about whether our resources are being effectively spent to help students. That is a conversation that is long overdue in school education. I think that parents will ask—and I am not just talking about parents with children in independent schools—‘I am spending X for this; am I really getting value for money?’ But I also think we will get conversations such as ‘My state government is spending this per student; why are they performing at a lower level than students in other jurisdictions where the governments spend less?’—those sorts of conversations.<sup>93</sup>

The office of the School Education Minister Peter Garrett responded to the concerns raised by stating that representatives from independent and catholic schools have been involved in working out how to collect financial data so that it could be compared.<sup>94</sup>

### ***Government senators view***

Government senators note the financial data to be captured on *My School* version 2 is a good start but will not capture accumulated surpluses, assets, trusts or foundations. In the interests of providing more information, government senators believe that there should be full disclosure of financial assets including assets, foundations and investments, otherwise true comparisons will not be possible. There are limited obligations on private schools in return for public funding. Possibilities could include being obliged to open facilities to government schools and offer scholarships for disadvantaged and Indigenous students.

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90 Editorial, 'Only full picture is fair to all schools', *The Age*, 15 October 2010, p. 18.

91 Anna Patty, 'Firth slams rules hiding private school assets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 2010, p. 8.

92 Anna Patty, 'Firth slams rules hiding private school assets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 2010, p. 8.

93 Dr Ben Jensen, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 20.

94 Andrew Tillett, 'Alarm over MySchool finance data', *West Australian*, 15 October 2010, p. 16.

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If non-government schools continue to expect a share in federal funding then full financial disclosure in the interests of the tax payer and the better allocation of resources must be required. If non-government schools do not wish to comply with full financial disclosure, then public funding should not be provided.

### **Recommendation 1**

**Government senators recommend that in the interests of transparency, accountability and facilitating meaningful comparisons, the *My School* website capture full disclosure of financial assets. Those schools who do not agree to this requirement should not receive public funding.**

#### *Problems with value-added measures*

Government senators note the Coalition recommendation to revise the *My School* website by publishing a value-added measurement of school performance rather than the raw performance data results.<sup>95</sup>

The committee received an explanation of value-added measures from Dr Ben Jensen<sup>96</sup> and Professor Geoff Masters.<sup>97</sup> Professor Masters noted that the term value-added can mean many different things. It could mean the growth occurring or an attempt to take into account the background of the students, which he understood to be the aim of Dr Jensen. He described several problems with this approach:

One is the attempt to interpret residuals that I described before, where the residual is not just the influence of the school, necessarily; it could be all sorts of other influences. Another issue I have is that in that process you potentially lose the performance of the students themselves, so what becomes important is how much better or worse the school did than you predicted in your regression analysis, and you may end up saying well this school performed as well as expected, but in an absolute sense the literacy and numeracy levels could be unacceptably low, but it is as well as expected given their socioeconomic background. There is a bit of a risk in this approach of not recognising the absolute levels of achievement in the school and thinking everything is fine—I guess I have a philosophical problem with approaches that end up drawing conclusions like ‘students in this school are doing as well as expected given their backgrounds’. I can understand why people say that, but there is a fine line between explaining and making excuses. Sometimes I worry about that line.<sup>98</sup>

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95 See also 2010 Coalition Election Policy, p. 11 available from: <http://www.liberal.org.au/~media/Files/Policies%20and%20Media/Education/Quality%20Education%20Policy.ashx>; Christopher Pyne MP, Speech to the Christian Schools National Policy, 25 May 2010.

96 Dr Ben Jensen, Proof Committee Hansard, 29 October 2010, pp 13-15.

97 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 50.

98 Professor Geoff Masters, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2010, p. 50.

ACER pointed out that the current comparisons used are superior to the approaches used in other countries and outlined the problems with the school comparisons used in England which are advocated by the relevant Grattan Institute report.<sup>99</sup>

...school comparisons in England are based on 'contextualised value added' (CVA) measures which are constructed by first predicting how students in a school will perform from their backgrounds and then calculating the difference between the predicted and actual performances of students in each school. This method has the apparent advantage of providing a single number for each school enabling it to be compared with every other school in the country. These CVA measures are residuals that are assumed to reflect the contribution of the school, but in fact also reflect any other influences not taken into account in making the 'prediction'.<sup>100</sup>

Importantly, Government senators recognise that this method also has the disadvantage of obscuring students' actual levels of performance. As noted by ACER, when using such a system, 'students in a school can be judged to be performing as well as expected even when their absolute achievement levels are unacceptably low'.<sup>101</sup> Government senators also note the critical point made by ACER that, unlike the system in use in England, *My School* does not compare every school with every other school but encourages comparisons only between schools with similar student intakes.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

Rather than more convoluted analysis, clearly the solution to the issues raised with the website is providing more information, not less. Government senators welcome the calls for more contextual information to be provided by schools on the *My School* website and note that this was always the intention over time. The launch of the *My School* website in January 2010 was an important step forward in reporting the measurement of student performance and progress as well as increasing transparency and accountability. *My School* version 2 will be the next step in addressing these calls for more information to be provided. Government senators note that the next version is to be available in December 2010.

*My School* places the school at the centre of reporting, with its own home page containing a range of rich information and context about the school. In contrast, reporting overseas often places the school as a line in a table. Government senators note and support the intention to continue building on and improving the *My School* website to make more information available and improve and update the information that is there.

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99 Dr Ben Jensen, *Measuring What Matters: Student Progress*, Grattan Institute Report No. 2010-1, January 2010.

100 ACER, *Submission 192*, pp 5-6.

101 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 6.

102 ACER, *Submission 192*, p. 6.

*My School* has shown there are schools with student populations of similar social backgrounds which are doing very different things, with many achieving unexpectedly good results. It has also highlighted schools which need additional assistance, which enables government to allocate additional resources to struggling schools.

Government senators note the success of the working party announced to address stakeholder concerns in relation to the *My School* website.

Government senators emphasise that the debate on NAPLAN assessment and the *My School* website is just one part of the broader education reform agenda being addressed in partnership with the states and territories. These broader issues include the development of the national curriculum, the school funding review underway, providing additional assistance to disadvantaged schools and improving the quality of teaching.<sup>103</sup>

**Senator Gavin Marshall**

**Senator Catryna Bilyk**

**Deputy Chair**

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103 [http://www.pm.gov.au/Policy\\_Priorities/Future/Priorities](http://www.pm.gov.au/Policy_Priorities/Future/Priorities); The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Media release, 'Expert panel for school funding review', 1 May 2010.



## **Additional Comments from Australian Greens**

The Australian Greens referred the administration and reporting of NAPLAN testing to the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee as we were deeply concerned about the potential adverse impacts of the use of the NAPLAN tests, and in particular the use of NAPLAN results on the *My School* website.

The evidence to the Committee demonstrates that NAPLAN serves a useful function and can provide valuable information for parents, teachers, schools and education authorities but also that there remain genuine questions as to the appropriateness of NAPLAN results being used as a comparative measure for *My School*.

The Australian Greens agree substantially with the findings and recommendations of the majority report. We agree that NAPLAN is an important tool for measuring the literacy and numeracy competency of students but unlike the majority we are not convinced that annual testing is necessary. The Australian Greens have never been convinced that the *My School* website provides useful and meaningful information to parents or the broader community and remain sceptical that NAPLAN provides the most useful information for such a purpose.

### **Administration of NAPLAN**

The Australian Greens support the use of NAPLAN as a tool to identify the literacy and numeracy competency of students. We agree to improve measurement is necessary and that NAPLAN provides information able to be used to improve student learning. The evidence strongly supports NAPLAN as useful for teachers, schools and education authorities in identifying issues with literacy and numeracy. Teachers can use the results to identify students who need additional assistance. Parents can use the results in discussions with teachers about their children's education and progress. Education authorities can use the results as one factor to consider in reviewing their education systems and allocation of resources.

This is not to suggest that NAPLAN is perfectly suited to these tasks. It is after all a point in time test of a limited albeit vitally important set of knowledge and skills. We note the submission of Professor Margaret Wu who raised concerns that the margin of error on the NAPLAN tests meant they were not a sufficiently accurate measure of student performance or progress or school performance. These concerns are important for how the results of NAPLAN are used and the information and context given to those who are using the information.

We share the concerns outlined in the majority report about the suitability of NAPLAN for special needs students and students for whom English is not their first language. Furthermore, we are concerned that more is done to ensure the integrity of the testing from schools asking low performing students to not take the tests or allegations of cheating.

We also note that none of the functions of NAPLAN in assisting parents, teachers, schools and educational authorities in identifying educational progress or problems require the results to be presented to the public at large through *My School*. There is a lot that NAPLAN does not tell us about student, teacher or school performance and progress. The limitations of NAPLAN and the need for contextual information are important concerns in how NAPLAN results are reported and then used via *My School*.

### **Reporting of NAPLAN and *My School***

The Australian Greens remain concerned by the potential adverse affects of the *My School* website on students, teachers and schools. We accept the evidence presented to the Committee that *My School* and its reliance on NAPLAN has the potential for NAPLAN testing to take on the characteristics of other high stakes testing regimes from overseas. We accept that high stakes testing has been shown to lead to teaching to the test, a narrowing of the curriculum and allegations of cheating. High stakes testing has been a demonstrated educational failure and we must learn the lessons of the UK and US.

The Government assures us that NAPLAN combined with the *My School* website is not high stakes testing and we note that the Government currently uses the results to provide additional resources to schools, not take them away. However, the very fact that schools can be ranked and compared does mean schools do have something at stake. Furthermore, there have been allegations of cheating, of low performing students being asked not to sit the tests and curriculum skewed towards the tests. Of great concern is the issue raised by the Australian Primary Principals Association of the potential for schools to focus on students just below the national benchmarks rather than the students further behind who will not improve the school's score. We must be vigilant in monitoring these types of unintended consequences.

The Australian Greens are already on the record as strongly objecting to the potential for the information on *My School* to be used to create league tables. We were disappointed that despite their stated concerns, the Government did not act sooner and much more strongly to ensure league tables could not be created from the data available on *My School*. We are yet to be convinced that the damage league tables do to parents, student, teachers and school communities is outweighed by the stated goals of transparency and accountability.

The *My School* website attempts to compare like schools to give parents an idea of how their school is comparing to schools with similar socio-economic make-ups. However the ICSEA values have been shown to be flawed with wildly varying school communities considered similar. We agree with the comments of the majority report on the need for improving the methods for comparing like schools.

A key message from the government about the value of *My School* has been empowering parents to make choices for the children's education. The Australian Greens have always supported parents having as much information as possible about

their children's education and their schools. Parents can use the information available to them to engage in discussions with the children's teachers, school community and educational authorities on ensuring the best educational outcomes for their children. However we do not believe the mantra of "choice" is realistic when it comes to comparing schools on *My School*. Parents are constrained in their choices of schools by many factors including geographic location and economic resource. Not all parents can choose to send their children to high performing private schools.

## **Conclusion**

The Australian Greens remain sceptical about the value of the *My School* website. We agree with the majority report that much needs to be done to ensure the website provides meaningful information. We have consistently called for more information to be available to parents and welcome the Government's recent announcement concerning additional information and greater security on the site. In particular we welcome school resources being available as important contextual information for parents.

We want NAPLAN testing and the *My School* website to be productive and useful tools for furthering our children's education, not a misguided government initiative that does more damage. The Australian Greens will continue to closely monitor the evolution of the *My School* website and its use by parents, teachers, schools and the broader community.

**Senator Hanson-Young**



# **APPENDIX 1**

## **Submissions Received**

<b>Submission Number</b>	<b>Submitter</b>
1	Mr Tim Lukins
2	Name Withheld
3	Name Withheld
4	Name Withheld
5	Mr Brendan McKinnon
6	Mr Murray Williams
7	Name Withheld
8	Mr Don Rowe
9	Name Withheld
10	Name Withheld
11	Confidential
12	Hon Dr Bob Such MP
13	Mr Stuart Williams
14	Ms Leah Johnson
15	Mrs. Clytie Siddall
16	Mrs Lorraine Doyle
17	Name Withheld
18	Mr Michael Doyle
19	Ms Marcia Nicholl
20	Mr Phil Cullen A.M.

- 21 Name Withheld
- 22 Dr Vanlyn Davy
- 23 Name Withheld
- 24 Name Withheld
- 25 Ms Tracy Considine
- Supplementary Submission
- 26 Dr David Pederson
- 27 Sir Joseph Banks High School
- 28 Mr Brett Bertalli
- 29 Ms Judith Williams
- 30 Mrs Cheryl Russell
- 31 Ms Kristy Do
- 32 Mr Chris Lovelock
- 33 Mrs Robyn Gleeson
- 34 Ms Catherine Millar
- 35 Mr Scott Johnston
- 36 Ms Carmel Dowd
- 37 Mrs Anne Matthews
- 38 Mrs Mary Asimopoulos
- 39 Mrs Vivienne Dearman
- 40 Mr Andrew Charlton
- 41 Mr David Edmonds
- 42 Ms Valda Jarvis
- 43 Mr Adam Fitzgerald
- 44 Ms Robyn Butterfield

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45	Mr Steve Dewar
46	Mrs Kay Laing
47	Mrs Pauline Barratt
	Supplementary Submission
48	Mr Jacob Slavin
49	Miss Marianne Scholem
50	Mr Kenneth Allan Janes Case
51	Ms Kerry Miller
52	Name Withheld
53	Mr Tim Cowgill
54	Mr Anthony Birch
55	Mr Nicolaas Williams
56	Ms Lisa Donoghue
57	Australian College of Educators
58	Ms Mary Robbins
59	Mr Duane Galle
60	Ms Karen Wilson
61	Mrs Patricia Johns
62	Ms Karilyn Varley
63	Mr David Tucker
64	Ms Vicky Tulle
65	Ms Nina Gibbs
66	Miss Beth Reimers
67	Mrs Chris Burns
68	Mr Stephen Dunne

69	Mrs Irene Anne Zimmermann
70	Mr Peter Posetti
71	Ms Leanne Costello
72	Mr Darren Sinclair
73	Ms Norma John
74	Professor Brian J Caldwell, Educational Transformations Pty Ltd
75	Mrs Dzintra Richards
76	Mrs Candice Morris-Grant
77	Mrs Kristy Cockman
78	Mrs Diane Cronin
79	Australian Education Union (SA Branch)
80	Name Withheld
81	Mr Joe Landers
82	Mrs Lyn Gascoigne
83	Mrs Bernadette Dunne
84	Mrs Liana Leigo
85	Mrs Kim Walkom
86	Mr Vincent King
87	Mr Chris Marshall
88	Mrs Karen Chaston
89	Mrs Melinda Lori Pui
90	Mr Peter Waterman
91	Mr Daniel Vuik
92	Mr Dean Beard
93	Mrs Liz Johnstone

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94	Ms Trina Coburn
95	Mrs Meredith Krygger
96	Ms Catherine Day
97	Mrs Sue Nelson
98	Ms Diane Pearton
99	Mr Geoff Cooling
100	Mrs Sharon Walker
101	Ms Margaret Corcoran
102	Mr Kevin Phyland
103	Mr David Bonser
104	Mr Warwick Price
105	Ms Alison Jales
106	Mrs Lynley Eadie
107	Mrs Meryl Child
108	Mrs Martine McLeod
109	Mr Bruce Crothers
110	Ms Ruth Trimboli
111	Mr Wes Vague
112	Mrs Berrill Ley
113	Tamworth Teachers Association
114	Ms Judith Wall
115	Mr Keith Muller
116	Mrs Maree Skehan
117	Finley Teachers Association
118	Name Withheld

119	Mr Paul Rose
120	Ms Brenda Montgomery
121	Mrs Rachel Holdway
122	Mrs Trina Wood
123	Mrs Natalie Lincoln
124	Ms Helen Russell
125	Ms Leone Elford
126	Mr Don Howden
127	Ms Louise Ward
128	Ms Denise Deacon
129	Mr Russell Horton
130	Mrs Heather Marshall
131	Name Withheld
132	Girraween PS
133	Eastern Creek Public School
134	Ms Helen Stearman
135	Mr Peter Young
136	Mr Victor Armstrong
137	Mrs Lois McBow
138	Mr Geoffrey Lacey
139	Ms Christine Collins
140	Professor Peter Ridd
141	Ms Linda MacLaurin
142	Wyrallah Road Primary School
143	Mrs Maree Grace

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144	Ms Belinda Corbett
145	Mrs Julieann Hudson
146	Ms Dianne Stace
147	Junee Teachers Association
148	Better Education Australia
149	Professor David Andrich
150	Mrs Cheryl Glover
151	Mrs Elizabeth Hook
152	Ms Jennifer Goldfinch
153	Ms Sylvia Harwood
154	Mrs Marena McFarlane
155	Mr Tim White
156	Mr Matthew Rosevear
157	Mr Ian Allan
158	Mr David Smith
159	Mr Andrew Bennett
160	Mr Jonah Haines
161	Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens' Associations Inc.
162	Department of Education Tasmania
163	Ms Anne Longworth
164	NSW Teachers Federation-Barrack Heights Public School
165	Name Withheld
166	Ms Jacqueline Roberts
167	NSW Secondary Principals Council
168	Miss Agata Kula

169	New South Wales Teachers Federation
170	Mr Sheridan Brown
171	Ms Robyn Cuskelly
172	Mr Nathan King
173	English Teachers' Association NSW
174	Mr Desmond Barratt
175	Ms Leanne Glasson
176	Mrs Simone Symons
177	Mr Colin Grace
178	Mrs Jennifer Graham
179	Mr Peter W. Rae
180	Mr Phil Steer
181	Mrs Leontine Barnett
182	Mrs Marelle Whitaker
183	Mr Mark Stephens
184	Mrs Elaine Mills
185	Mr Peter Caldow
186	Kingsgrove High School
187	Name Withheld
188	Assessment Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education
189	Name Withheld
190	Mrs Sanaa Ghabbar
191	Mr Phillip Francis
192	Australian Council for Educational Research

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193	Name Withheld
194	Montagu Bay Primary School Association
195	Ms Karen Carpenter
196	Name Withheld
197	Mr Adam Bell
198	Name Withheld
199	Sylvania High School teachers
200	Moggill State School Queensland Teachers Union
201	Mr Paul Lang
202	Canley Vale Public School
203	Ms Wendy Ingram
204	Mr Ian Glass
205	Mr Rodney Lyon
206	Mrs Natalie Loadsman
207	Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)
208	Assoc Prof Margaret Wu
209	Name Withheld
210	Mrs Kylie Glass
211	Mrs Janis Fischer
212	Ms Sallie Groves
213	Mr Simon Clarke
214	Miss Anna Duffield
215	Mrs Linda Brooks
216	Independent Schools Queensland

217	Mrs Yvonne Donohoe
218	State School Teachers' Union of WA (Inc)
219	Ms Sharon Melink
220	Mr Andrew Bennett
221	Mrs Jan Sugden
222	Independent Education Union of Australia
223	Miss Rosey Nelson
224	Name Withheld
225	Mr Thomas Sleigh
226	ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association
227	Mr Andrew Wright
228	Australian Primary Principals Association
229	NSW Primary Principals' Association
230	Queensland Indigenous ESL and FNQ Language Perspectives
231	Australian Education Union (AEU)
232	Spensley Street Primary School
233	Australian Parents Council Inc.
234	Ms Carmel Anne Richardson
235	Ms Barbara Preston
236	Name Withheld
237	Epping Heights Public School
238	Australian Council for Educational Leaders
239	Lutheran Education Australia
240	Ms Anne Devine

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- 241 Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA); Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA); and Australian Linguistic Society (ALS)
- 242 Mrs Joy Arblaster
- 243 Ms Christine Turner
- 244 Mrs Linda Stanford
- 245 Ms Maria Logan
- 246 Ms Cresta Richardson
- 247 Mr Mal Hartwig
- 248 Mrs Heather Wilkinson
- 249 Mr James Ryan
- 250 Mrs Margaret Fahey
- 251 Mr Gennaro Marino
- 252 Mrs Jacqui Frew
- 253 Name Withheld
- 254 Blakehurst High School
- 255 NSW Teachers Federation - Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College
- 256 Ms Anthea Nicholls
- 257 Dr Mark Drummond
- 258 Brighton-Le-Sands Public School
- 259 Emerald State School
- 260 Confidential
- 261 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

Supplementary Submission

262	Save Our Schools
263	Seymour College
264	Ms Gail Davies
265	Multicultural Development Association (MDA)
266	Ms Alison Masters, Hassall Grove Public School
267	Name Withheld
268	Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW
269	The Government of South Australia
270	Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (
271	Name Withheld
272	ACT Department of Education and Training

### **Additional Information Received**

- 1 Paul Williams, Analytic Report: Factors contributing to and ways of improving Australia's educational performance (paper written as part of a MEd in Educational Leadership at the University of Wollongong)
- 2 Dianne Butland, Testing Times: Global trends in marketisation of public education through accountability testing (NSW Teachers Federation: Sydney, 2008)(PDF 380KB)
- 3 Queensland Studies Authority, Student Assessment Regimes: Getting the balance right for Australia (DRAFT discussion paper, Queensland Government, 2009)(PDF 208KB)
- 4 Ben Jensen, Measuring What Matters: Student Progress (Grattan Institute Report No. 2010-1, January 2010)
- 5 George Leckie and Harvey Goldstein, "The Limitations of Using School League Tables to Inform School Choice" (University of Bristol, UK)

- 6 George Leckie and Harvey Goldstein, "School League Tables: What Can They Really Tell Us?" *Significance*, June 2008, pp. 67-69
- 7 Tabled Document from ACT Council P&C Association, at Canberra Public Hearing 29 October 2010
- 8 Tabled document from Professor Brian Caldwell, at Canberra public hearing 1 November 2010.

### **Answers to Questions on Notice**

- 1 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Public Hearings and Witnesses**

**FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER 2010-Canberra, ACT**

Australian Primary Principals Association

*Ms Leonie Trimper, President*

*Mr Norm Hart, President-elect*

Dr Ben Jensen

*Director of School Education,*

*Grattan Institute*

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

*Ms Elizabeth Singer, President*

*Mr Warren Muller, P&C Delegate*

*Ms Megan Bagworth, Policy Officer*

Tasmanian Department of Education, Strategic Policy and Performance

*Ms Sharyn Lidster, A/General Manager, Strategic Policy and Performance*

Australian Council for Educational Research

*Professor Geoff Masters, CEO*

Australian Education Union

*Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Federal President*

*Mr Robert Lipscombe, NSWTF President*

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

*Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer*

*Mr Peter Adams, General Manager, Assessment*

**MONDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2010-Canberra, ACT**

Educational Transformations

*Professor Brian Caldwell, Managing Director*