

AUSTRALIAN GREENS ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Full list of Australian Greens recommendations

Recommendation 1:

1.9 The Australian Greens recommend that, if publication of individual school results on the *Myschool* site continues, the Government remove the functionality that enables ranking and comparisons of individual school results.

Recommendation 2:

1.10 The Australian Greens recommend that in the event that functionality for the ranking and comparisons of individual school results is removed from the *Myschool* website but improper and detrimental use of NAPLAN data continues (such as the creation of league tables) the Government remove the school-level data, in accordance with their prior policy position.

Recommendation 3:

1.18 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government clarify the purpose of NAPLAN testing, particularly with regard to its use as a diagnostic assessment, and adapt the structure and any publication of the data to align with the stated purpose.

Recommendation 4:

1.30 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government provide further support and training for teachers and schools to analyse the NAPLAN data and devise individual educational programs to assist students to ensure the resources used to run the tests and create the data are not wasted.

Recommendation 5:

1.46 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government consult with schools to determine the best time of year to hold the annual tests in light of discussions around the purpose of the testing.

Recommendation 6:

1.53 The Australian Greens recommend that NAPLAN Online uses the advantages of the medium to test a broader scope of knowledge within literacy and numeracy, more accurately reflect classroom learning styles and incorporate questions which encourage lateral and creative thinking from students.

Recommendation 7:

1.60 The Australian Greens recommend that ACARA actively consults with teachers and academics experienced in teaching students from language backgrounds other than English to scrutinise the tests for cultural assumptions and inappropriate content and styles of questioning.

Introduction

1.1 The Australian Greens are pleased to endorse the majority report. However, we believe that in light of the evidence cited and strong opinions expressed in the ‘committee view’ sections, the recommendations of the majority report are inadequate in responding to the full extent of the evidence presented to the committee.

1.2 While there were a number of suggested improvements for NAPLAN test itself, a large number of submitters attributed problems with the NAPLAN scheme to the publication of data on the *Myschool* site and the competitive, high-stakes culture this has created.

1.3 As noted in the committee report, there is widespread confusion about the purpose of NAPLAN testing. However, it is clear that NAPLAN was not designed for use as a ranking tool for schools.

1.4 Many of the groups made submissions in support of ceasing the publication of school-level data on the site.¹

1.5 The Australian Greens also note this was the position of the Liberal Party in opposition and has been reiterated by Education Minister Christopher Pyne since the election.²

1.6 The Australian Greens are willing to negotiate with the Federal Government on the best way for this to proceed.

1.7 We affirm our support for the need for measures to track student achievement and collect data about schools and students, but it is clear on the evidence presented to the committee that steps must be taken to restrict the competitive and unfair ranking environment created by *Myschool* site.

1.8 If the Coalition Government has altered its position, it is the view of the Australian Greens that the committee must formalise the view in Section 3.51 into a recommendation. It is a recommendation that we are prepared to make:

Recommendation 1

1.9 The Australian Greens recommend that, if publication of individual school results on the *Myschool* site continues, the Government remove the functionality that enables ranking and comparisons of individual school results.

Recommendation 2

1.10 The Australian Greens recommend that in the event that functionality for the ranking and comparisons of individual school results is removed from the *Myschool* website but improper and detrimental use of NAPLAN data continues

1 For example, see ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 70*, p 3; The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, *Submission 74*, p 16; NSW Parents' Council Inc, *Submission 78*, p 3.

2 Alexandra Smith & Amy McNeilage, ‘Schools site receives a mixed report card’, Sydney Morning Herald, 8 March 2014, p 35.

(such as the creation of league tables) the Government remove the school-level data, in accordance with their prior policy position.

1.11 A full discussion of issues arising from the terms of reference and further recommendations follow. However all subsequent discussion and recommendations are made in the context of recommendations 1 and 2.

Intended purposes of NAPLAN testing

1.12 Since its inception, politicians and bureaucrats have assigned a number of different purposes to NAPLAN testing. It has been separately described as diagnostic and not diagnostic; a snapshot of learning on one day and a measure to identify systemic gaps; a tool for governments to allocate resources and a tool for parents to scrutinise teacher performance.³

1.13 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's submission says NAPLAN tests contain 'insufficient items at each difficulty level to provide the detailed information that a diagnostic test is designed to do'.⁴

1.14 However, ACARA Chair Barry McGaw has also made the following comment in 2011:

NAPLAN is not a test students can prepare for because it is not a test of content. The federal government's intention in introducing and reporting NAPLAN results was to provide a diagnostic tool for teachers and parents, identifying gaps in students' skills.⁵

1.15 The Department of Education similarly listed the central aim of national assessment as

finding out what students can or cannot do and lifting the performance of every student in every school... the tests should focus on the diagnosis of each student's strengths and weaknesses as a means for planning educational interventions'.⁶

1.16 Fintona Girls School also pointed out the inherent contradiction in using NAPLAN simultaneously as a means to measure individual student performance and 'using these results to suggest that some schools are better than others'.⁷

1.17 As noted in the committee report, there remains significant confusion about the purpose of NAPLAN testing among educators.

Recommendation 3

1.18 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government clarify the purpose of NAPLAN testing, particularly with regard to its use as a diagnostic

3 See Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, pp 7-8 for a more detailed summary

4 ACARA, *Submission 58*, p. 8.

5 ACARA media release quoted in Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, p 8.

6 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 69*, p. 9.

7 Fintona Girls School, *Submission 31*, p 2.

assessment, and adapt the structure and any publication of the data to align with the stated purpose.

The impact on teaching and student learning practices of publishing NAPLAN test results on the *Myschool* website

Use of data

1.19 The reliability of data generated by NAPLAN testing has been called into question, particularly in regard to publication on the *Myschool* site.

1.20 As noted by Epping Heights Public School and many others cited in the committee report, small school cohorts and other mitigating factors can influence the perception of overall school performance.

1.21 In the competitive market *Myschool* creates, some schools are understandably eager to control these factors. Numerous submitters provided evidence of student withdrawal as a way to avoid students with difficulties from sitting the NAPLAN and ‘bringing down’ school results.⁸

1.22 Accounting for factors such as diverse language backgrounds and disability, good NAPLAN results do not always correlate to good schools, but *Myschool* has generated a need for schools to emphasise improvement in NAPLAN scores over efforts to provide a rounded education.⁹

1.23 Other submitters, including the NSW Primary Principals' Association, noted the inherent problems with interpretation of complex data by those unfamiliar with the education system.¹⁰

1.24 The Australian College of Educators rejects the notion the *Myschool* website provides incentives for low-performing schools to improve:

school improvement takes time and what is likely to happen is that those parents who are able to do so will remove their students, only exacerbating the situation for the school involved and those students who remain. This ‘free market’ model also fails to acknowledge that many students, because of location or socioeconomic factors, have no effective choice.¹¹

1.25 The Australian Greens support the collection of data for education authorities and the provision of information to parents and schools, but we agree with submitters who said publication of the results on the *Myschool* site had led to incorrect or mischievous use of the data.¹²

8 See Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 21*, p. 2; Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc, *Submission 22*, p 3.

9 See, for example, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 70*, p. 1.

10 NSW Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 23*, p 4.

11 Australian College of Educators, *Submission 30*, p 4.

12 Mr Norm Hart, President, Australian Primary Principals Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 21 June 2013, p. 19.

1.26 For this reason, it is the view of the Australian Greens that the Government must act to limit this misrepresentation of schools as described in Recommendation 1.

1.27 However, the committee also heard extensive evidence that teachers and schools are not equipped to interpret the data produced by NAPLAN testing.

1.28 A survey conducted by the Independent Education Union of Australia showed only one third of members found the results useful.¹³

1.29 The Australian Education Union recommended schools be given more resources to allow for professional development for teachers on the use of data, the interpretation of data and the application of information in informing teaching and learning.¹⁴

Recommendation 4

1.30 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government provide further support and training for teachers and schools to analyse the NAPLAN data and devise individual educational programs to assist students to ensure the resources used to run the tests and create the data are not wasted.

Effect on student learning and wellbeing

1.31 The publication of NAPLAN results on the *Myschool* site has created a high-stakes test for schools, resulting in significant media coverage of the tests. Along with the natural inclination of parents to want the best for their child, it is our belief that creating a high stakes environment for schools has had a flow-on effect for individuals.

1.32 A commercial market has sprung up for NAPLAN preparation, including textbooks, soft toys, fish-oil supplements, targeted tutoring and more.¹⁵

1.33 As noted in the majority report, a large number of submitters noted negative impacts of NAPLAN testing on student wellbeing. Among other evidence cited, we note concerns articulated by Epping Heights Public School and others about the long-term educational impacts on students feeling they are failures.¹⁶

1.34 The Australian Education Union also noted reports of increasing numbers of parents seeking psychological counselling for their children because of anxiety and stress associated with NAPLAN.¹⁷

13 Independent Education Union of Australia, *Submission 41*, p. 9.

14 Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, Australian Education Union, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 21 June 2013, p. 14.

15 See Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, pp 9–10; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 73*, pp 3–4.

16 Epping Heights Public School, *Submission 21*, p. 2

17 See Australian Education Union, *Submission 57*, p 10.

1.35 Even in schools which actively limit discussion of NAPLAN testing, schools have reported a strong parental push for prior preparation. Heads of Independent Schools of Australia director and principal Mr Phillip Heath told the committee:

My school does not talk about NAPLAN at all. We do not publish the results. We keep it very much to what it is designed for—that is, to give feedback to us and to an individual student. But, for about half of those present, their parents are giving them tests at home to prepare for the experience. That really surprised me. That is in a context where we say nothing, as a school, and I would suggest that is a pretty common picture around the country. Parents at home who are used to a testing regime—that is how they grew up—consider this a very high-stakes experience, much higher than, in fact, it was intended ever to be.¹⁸

Effect on teachers and teaching practice

1.36 A large portion of submitters provided evidence the publication of NAPLAN data on the *Myschool* site is increasing pressure on teachers and school leaders, diverting attention from other areas of the curriculum and ‘teaching to the test’.

1.37 Along with the evidence cited in the committee report, we also note the evidence of Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc, which directly ties this stress to the comparative and competitive nature of the *Myschool* site:

School principals are also feeling immense pressure exerted by the system as both schools and states jockey for league position. They, in turn, explicitly or inadvertently, place additional pressure on their teachers.¹⁹

1.38 Submitters also gave evidence the pressure is so high, teachers are requesting not to teach year levels with NAPLAN testing.²⁰

1.39 Evidence provided to the committee regarding narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test is well covered in the majority report.²¹ We also note the evidence of MTeach student Andrew Irwin who witnessed planned lessons for Year 2 students being replaced with coaching on pre-written NAPLAN number problems – almost a year out from when student would sit the test.²²

1.40 Publication of NAPLAN data on the *Myschool* site also has negative consequences for teacher morale. The NSW Primary Principals' Association said

18 Mr Phillip Heath, Director and Incoming Chair, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia Ltd, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 21 June 2013, p. 2.

19 Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc, *Submission 22*, p 4.

20 Spensley Street Primary School, *Submission 76*, p 2; Mr Chris Watt, Federal Secretary, Independent Education Union of Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 21 June 2013, p 26.

21 See also for example: Ms Jane Hunter, *Submission 7*, p 2. See also, Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia, *Submission 56*, p 2; The Whitlam Institute, *Submission 26*, p 6; Dr Alyson Simpson, *Submission 64*.

22 Dr Alyson Simpson, *Submission 64*, Attachment 2, p 1.

Elevating the status of NAPLAN results via the *Myschool* website diminishes the public's trust in the teaching profession and portrays NAPLAN incorrectly as a definitive and absolute measure.²³

1.41 The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English submitted teachers are 'required to respond to parent expectations' by providing NAPLAN preparation and regularly feel 'quite disempowered as their professional knowledge is undermined by being forced to be so narrowly focussed'.²⁴

1.42 In light of the evidence presented in the majority report and above, it is our view the committee recommendations do not go far enough to tackle the serious and adverse, consequences of the publication of data on the *Myschool* site.

Potential improvements to the program, to improve student learning and assessment

Timing

1.43 The committee heard significant evidence that the delay in returning NAPLAN results to teachers significantly restricted the effectiveness of NAPLAN testing as a diagnostic tool.

1.44 We endorse the recommendation of the committee to improve the turn-around time of data from NAPLAN testing to teachers.

1.45 However, some submitters including the Independent Education Union of Australia, suggested that the timing of the tests should be dependent on the clarification of the intention of NAPLAN testing:

It would seem sensible to conduct a 'diagnostic test' as early as possible in the school year... If on the other hand the tests are intended to be a summative assessment of the literacy and numeracy levels against a benchmark it makes little sense to assess students in May of the school on the basis of intended capacity for that year's benchmark expectations. Such a test would be better administered at the end of the school year.²⁵

Recommendation 5

1.46 The Australian Greens recommend that the Government consult with schools to determine the best time of year to hold the annual tests in light of discussions around the purpose of the testing.

Testing of creative or higher-order thinking

1.47 NAPLAN testing examines a very narrow selection of skills within very narrow subject matter. It also does so in a way that is incongruent with current teaching and learning styles.

23 NSW Primary Principals' Association, *Submission 23*, p 6.

24 The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, *Submission 74*, p 16.

25 Independent Education Union of Australia, *Submission 41*, pp 12-13.

1.48 Ms Lorraine Wilson submitted that the NAPLAN Reading, Writing and Language Convention Tests are ‘a terrible mismatch with today’s best classroom practice’:

The type of literacy able to be measured by multiple choice, machine marked tests is low level literacy. It is the type of literacy we taught in the 1950s, 1960s in Australia. Since that time there has been much excellent research which has illuminated the types of reading and writing necessary for a changing, global, highly technological society, as well as research about how children learn language (both oral and written).²⁶

1.49 The committee also heard evidence that multiple choice testing is unable to test creative and higher-order thinking, inconsistent with the increasing global demand for entrepreneurial skills and creativity.²⁷

1.50 Steiner Education Australia, among other submitters, noted NAPLAN is inconsistent with daily teaching and learning experiences for students and examined the design of questions to ‘trick’ students.²⁸

1.51 For example, Ms Lorraine Wilson singled out questions which ask students to identify spelling errors:

Misspellings may introduce incorrect letters which the child might never have included in his production of the spelling, but seeing it in the test question, causes confusion. ‘NAPLAN makes a pedagogical assumption that proofreading can act as a proxy for a student’s spelling ability’ (Bartlett & Buchanan 2012).²⁹

1.52 Several submitters also noted the international movement away from standardised testing,³⁰ while the Australian Literacy Educators' Association argued the limited nature of NAPLAN testing was inconsistent with the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* to ‘promote creativity, innovation, cultural appreciation and personal values to ensure they become confident and creative learners equipped for a rapidly changing world’.³¹

26 Ms Lorraine Wilson, *submission 11*, p 2.

27 Queensland Association of State School Principals Inc, *Submission 22*, p 7.

28 Steiner Education Australia, *Submission 43*, p 15; see also Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 19*, p 6.

29 Ms Lorraine Wilson, *Submission 11*, pp 7-8.

30 For examples see Ms Jane Hunter, *Submission 7*, p 4; Dr Kerry Hempenstall, *Submission 27*, p 7; School of Education, Deakin University, *Submission 45*, p 5; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 56*, p 2.

31 Australian Literacy Educators' Association, *Submission 66*, p 2.

Recommendation 6

1.53 The Australian Greens recommend that NAPLAN Online uses the advantages of the medium to test a broader scope of knowledge within literacy and numeracy, more accurately reflect classroom learning styles and incorporate questions which encourage lateral and creative thinking from students.

Inclusivity

1.54 NAPLAN testing to date has contained cultural assumptions that have disadvantaged students from language backgrounds other than English, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

1.55 Ms Jane Wenlock, a teacher experienced in teaching secondary students from LBOTE backgrounds, told the committee ‘Skippy the bush Kangaroo’-style questions were inaccessible to her students:

that NAPLAN, in fact, discriminates against our students, as they are unable to access much of the written material to show their true capabilities.³²

1.56 The Australian College of Educators also raised concerns the ‘trick questions’ common in NAPLAN tests disadvantage LBOTE students.

1.57 Yirrkala School principal Mr Leonard Freeman also told the committee many of the indigenous students at his school do not have sufficient grasp of Standard Australian English or the cultural and social knowledge that the tests assume:

Year 3 and 5 remote indigenous students who work hard at school, whose family supports their learning and ensures good school attendance, are still regarded as having failed based on NAPLAN results.³³

1.58 It is the opinion of the Australian Council of TESOL Associations that NAPLAN tests provide ‘distorted, inaccurate and unreliable’ data for these students and no basis for developing appropriate pedagogy or programs for these learners.³⁴

1.59 They also raised concerns publication of NAPLAN results on the *Myschool* site has resulted in parents removing their children from schools with high numbers of students learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.

32 Ms Jane Wenlock, *Submission 13*, p 1.

33 Mr Leonard Freeman, *Submission 71*, p 2.

34 Australian Council of TESOL Associations, *Submission 79*, p 3.

Recommendation 7

1.60 The Australian Greens recommend that ACARA actively consults with teachers and academics experienced in teaching students from language backgrounds other than English to scrutinise the tests for cultural assumptions and inappropriate content and styles of questioning.

Senator Penny Wright