



Our Ref: 2019/

Emeritus Professor Bill Louden
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Dear Professor Louden

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Education Council of the Council of Australian Government's review of the current approach to the presentation of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data including information published on the *My School* website.

Please find the feedback from the School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Russell Dyer, Assistant Executive Director, Examinations, Certifications and Testing (Russell.Dyer@scsa.wa.edu.au) should you wish to discuss any aspect of the feedback.

Yours sincerely

PATRICK GARNETT
CHAIR
SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND STANDARDS AUTHORITY

14 March 2019

Att.

A brief commentary on the importance and usefulness of NAPLAN

Literacy and numeracy are fundamental skills that all children need to acquire; a child who remains illiterate or innumerate is likely to be severely limited in many aspects of adult life.

Within this context, NAPLAN has many benefits:

- it informs individual students and their parents of individual student achievement in the key areas of literacy and numeracy
- it informs schools and teachers of individual student achievement and facilitates the implementation of targeted intervention strategies to assist those students whose performance is less than optimal
- it informs policy makers about standards of literacy and numeracy in schools, school systems/sector, regions and on an all-of-population basis
- it informs policy makers about trends in literacy and numeracy achievement in schools over time
- it facilitates the development of targeted intervention strategies to assist schools and regions which have significant underachievement in literacy and numeracy
- it assists in the identification of underachievement of particular groups e.g. Indigenous students, low ICSEA school students, regional students.

Comments related to specific issues highlighted in the Issues paper:

2. How NAPLAN contributes to understanding of student progress and achievement

NAPLAN is the only nationally comparative data that is available in the crucial areas of literacy and numeracy. This information is critically important at both an 'individual student' and 'whole-of-population' level.

Individual information is essential to inform parents of the performance of their children and to assist teachers in identifying areas of underperformance at an individual student level. This would not be possible were NAPLAN to revert to a NAP-sample approach rather than a 'whole-of-population' approach.

All Western Australian schools have access to a data analytics package provided to them by their school system/sector – Student Achievement Information System (SAIS) for public schools, Appraise for Catholic schools and Valuate for independent schools. These packages provide detailed NAPLAN information at the school, class and individual student level, as well as the individual test domain and item level. They serve as the prime source of NAPLAN data used by schools to evaluate performance in a particular year, over time and, in the case of SAIS, in comparison to like schools in Western Australia.

Many schools make extensive use of NAPLAN data in developing strategies to enhance the literacy and numeracy achievement of their students. While the NAPLAN data

should complement the data already collected at the school level, it is a source of rich data to enable schools to modify their teaching and learning programs for students in need of remedial work, as well as to identify students who would benefit from an accelerated or enriched program. Testament to the effective use of this data in Western Australia can be seen in the ways in which schools have responded to the need for early identification of students who were at or below the NAPLAN minimum standards and put in place strategies to enable these students to reach an acceptable minimum standard of literacy and numeracy by the time they have completed Year 12.

3. How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching

NAPLAN reporting provides feedback on literacy and numeracy achievement at an individual student level. The reporting of individual student achievement and provision of feedback is critical in helping teachers to identify areas of underperformance with a view to implementing appropriate intervention strategies.

In Western Australia, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority has made available to all schools the Brightpath software which can be used to record the results of assessments and reports a range of formative and summative information to teachers and principals. The software allows teachers to compare their students' work to calibrated exemplars to arrive at a scaled score on a similar scale to NAPLAN. The process of comparing students' work to the calibrated exemplars promotes reliable teacher judgements and provides an informed basis for developing teaching programs targeting the needs of individual students. These judgements are comparable across teachers, schools and over time.

4. How NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents

Most schools communicate students' individual performance on NAPLAN by means of the Individual Student Report. In many cases the schools provide opportunities, through parent-teacher meetings, for parents to discuss this report in the context of their child's semester report and with the background perspective that the school is able to provide related to the days of testing and with reference to the wealth of data schools have available to them through their data analytics packages.

25 February 2019



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Submission to the NAPLAN Review

Introduction

NAPLAN as a tool to measure literacy and numeracy skills is a valuable one. It is a given that schools should teach every child to read, write and add up. Without these foundational skills, young people will never be able to access learning on a deeper level and create new knowledge. The test provides schools, students and parents with valuable information.

At St Paul's School, we use the NAPLAN data to inform our improvement strategies. The richness of the data enables us to review and evaluate our current practices and programs and to target specific teaching areas and skills that our students might need improving.

The individual student data report gives parents helpful information about their child's progress, assuring them that their child is meeting standards, or that the school has appropriate intervention plans in place.

The central tenet of this submission to the NAPLAN Review is to question the need to compare schools with each other and publish those comparisons on the My School website.

Background

At St Paul's School, we believe that an education worth having is far more than giving the gift of reading, writing and numeracy. An education worth having is about the development of a young person's character. Central to their character development is their resilience, realisation and appreciation of their place in the world. In what is a rapidly changing environment and a future filled with uncertainty, where the traditional pathways are being disrupted by new technologies, an education worth having is one that provides each student the ability to think creatively. Ultimately, an education worth having is one that teaches students that they have purpose, that their lives matter and that fulfilment in life is found when they seek to make a positive difference to others.

At St Paul's School, we capture the essence of an education worth having in the statement, "to prepare resilient global citizens, who are innovative thinkers with a heart for servant leadership." Many of these ideals for an education worth having are captured in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians.

NAPLAN is only a very small slice of the ideal of a broad and rich education and, sadly, the only slice that is currently measured and reported.

create your own story!

St Paul's School consistently sees students perform above, to well above, the national average on all measures in the NAPLAN suite of tests. The students also make meaningful gains between Years 3 and 5, Years 5 and 7, and Years 7 and 9 (keeping in mind that Year 7 is an intake year with approximately half the cohort coming from surrounding schools). However, when compared statistically with similar schools, in a number of areas St Paul's School students perform below the average. We are proud that the students are making consistent gains in their learning (at least a year's growth per year of teaching) and surpassing the national average, but we are disheartened when we look at comparative data. We see no value in this data.

Submission

The current form of reporting and presentation of the data on the My School website creates (intentionally or otherwise) an unnecessary climate of competition which serves no purpose other than to pit school against school for a place on a league table. I question the purpose and value of the comparative data.

When comparing the data between schools, there will always be "winners and losers". By the very nature of statistics and averages, some schools will fall "below the line", while others will perform better than others. What value does this add other than to label those below the average as under-performers, presumably done as a strategy to pressure those schools to enact measures to improve what is happening in their classrooms?

In the context of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, the Education Ministers agreed to a "further four principles reflecting the specific interests of schools, parents and families, the community, and school systems and government" (NAPLAN Reporting Review, Issues Paper p.2). These principles have at their core the notion of accountability, that the public should have access to reliable, rich data about the performance of students at individual schools.

There is no argument that schools should be accountable for the provision of a quality education and that the public should have access to information to help inform their choice of schools. However, the system and process of collecting and reporting data for publication not only has the effect of narrowing the scope of an education, but creates a climate of competition that unfairly portrays schools as poor places of learning, ignoring the value of a true education worth having and the particular circumstances and needs of individual communities.

Goldstein and Spiegelhalter (1996) argue in their paper "League tables and their limitations: Statistical issues in comparisons of institutional performance" that it is generally unrealisable, even when adjusting data for individual contexts, to consistently compare the performance of schools across a country. They conclude that "it seems fairly clear that we should exert caution when applying statistical models to make comparisons between institutions, treating results as suggestive rather than definitive... this implies that current official support for output league tables, even adjusted, is misplaced" (p.405). While the paper is some 23 years old, one can argue that their conclusions are not affected by political bias as it was published pre-league table obsession by the independent Royal Statistical Society and examined the impact of "league tables" in health as well as education.

Goldstein's and Spiegelhalter's findings have been supported in later studies, including Eason's and Bolden's 2005 paper, "Location, location, location: What do league tables really tell us about primary schools?" Eason and Bolden conclude that league tables present a simplistic, even potentially misleading, picture of primary schools.

Anecdotally, as a school leader, I consistently hear of schools that use various tactics to lift the performance of their students, from spending copious hours teaching to the test (to the detriment of other valuable learning), to data manipulation, and/or asking particular students to stay home when the test is sat. Many educators feel the pressure to lift the performance of their students in the measured and reported areas to the detriment of other important factors including the development of resilience, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and interpersonal skills.

These anecdotal observations are supported by Wilson, Croxson and Atkinson (2004) in their paper "What gets measured gets done: Headteachers' responses to the English secondary school performance management system". Their interview-based study concluded that headteachers do care about where their schools fall on the league table and the unintended consequences of this is the temptation to "implement strategies to game the indicator, often by re-allocating resources to those students targeted at the C/D [grade] borderline" at the expense of the educational development of other students in their care.

According to Burgess et al. (2005), the students most likely to be negatively impacted by public transparency policy in the form of "league tables" (that is, school to school comparison) are the very low ability students. Their paper "Who wins and who loses from school accountability?" concludes that accountability policies reduce the educational gains and exam performance in high stakes exams of very low ability students, supporting the conclusions made by Wilson et al. (2004).

I would argue that the current approach to accountability in the form of comparison data on the My School website does little more than cast judgement without providing context. Those schools performing poorly are judged as "underperforming" and labelled accordingly. However, the My School website doesn't provide the reader with the full picture. As Eason and Bolden suggest (2005) in their paper, the available data doesn't paint the whole picture, that the school might have worked incredibly hard, for example, just to get individual students to school each day because their home circumstances are so challenging. Education is about people, not inanimate products.

It is fair to conclude from all the available data (including PISA) that the Australian education system is in decline, but the interesting thing to note that, even with increases in funding, the introduction of the My School website, and other initiatives to lift the performance of students, the country's overall performance is still in decline. Rather than focusing on schools as the cause of this decline, should we not be looking beyond the school gate for reasons for the decline? The education of young people requires the effort of not only teachers and schools, but also families and communities. While teachers are working harder, and have more data available, the finger is still pointed at those working within the school gates. Accountability is vital, but accountability under the guise of transparency is clearly not working.

Alternative

If the Ministers continue to be committed to accountability and transparency for the public good, I propose, for the benefit of education broadly, that the My School website abolish the school to school system of comparison and instead report a school's performance against agreed national benchmarks and year-on gains in learning in literacy and numeracy. Instead of comparing the performance of a school's students with those of another school, in some cases, over 1000km away, the focus should be on each school's contribution to the performance and development of the students it serves. This system would see the removal of averaging and, therefore, the notion of winners and losers, creating a climate of trust and support.

If Ministers are committed to transparent reporting, additional tools should be developed and implemented to place emphasis on other equally valuable skills such as resilience and creativity, skills necessary for not only the future success of individuals but also our nation.

Accountability should continue to be a key principle, but be resourced in other ways. For those schools that have significant numbers of underperformers, further investigation should take place to identify the causes and assist the school to develop a plan to support them to improve their outcomes. This could include targeted professional development, additional professional support or additional funding.

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21st March 2019

**Steiner education Australia: submission to the education council of the council of
Australian governments(coag) Naplan reporting review**

Emeritus Professor Bill Louden AM,

Steiner Education Australia (SEA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the
NAPLAN Reporting Review 2019.

SEA is the peak national body comprising 47 Member schools and 16 Associate Members
across Australia. We represent nearly 9000 students and their families, in all States and
Territories of Australia.

Steiner education is an internationally recognized educational movement and SEA is a
member of the International Forum for Steiner/Waldorf Education. Steiner Education Australia
is also affiliated with the European Council of Steiner/Waldorf Education, the Association of
Waldorf Schools of North America and the Federation of Rudolf Steiner Schools in New
Zealand. There are over 1300 Steiner/Waldorf Schools and 2000 Early Childhood centres
worldwide.

Steiner education is an integrated and holistic education designed to provide for the balanced
development of human intellectual and cognitive faculties, artistic and imaginative capacities
and practical life skills. Parents consciously choose to enrol their children in Steiner schools
for the Steiner pedagogy underpinning the ACARA recognized Australian Steiner
Curriculum(ASCF). Whilst the ASCF is recognized as commensurate with the content
descriptors and achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum at key reference points
along the K-10 curriculum continuum, our pedagogy and staging of the curriculum
differentiates our schools from other types of schooling.

In 2018 SEA undertook an independent national survey of over 3000 members of our
community:

- Over 80% of parents said they selected our schools because they are Steiner Schools and as such reflect their values.
- 86% of parents said they strongly agree or agree that with the statement that they are satisfied with their choice. [SEP]
- More than 92% said they valued an arts-based approach to learning. [SEP]
- 85% of parents said Steiner schools are valued because they offer [SEP] a well-rounded education, teach to the individual and because of their culture and values. [SEP]
- Alumni results give insight into the enduring effects of a Steiner education and reinforcement of some of our core educational objectives: an overwhelming 89% agree that 'what I learnt is highly appropriate to later life'. 95% agree that 'attending a Steiner school has been an asset in my life'. 94% of alumni would recommend a Steiner school education.

[SEP] With all of our schools surveyed, there was an overwhelming level of support and endorsement of our educational approach. [SEP]

Within this background, the submission will focus on the four key areas for feedback as outlined on page 1 of the *Issues Paper*.

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN Reporting and My School data

SEA believe that the NAPLAN data currently available on the My School website does **not** provide an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misinterpretation or misuse. Key factors in support of this view point to the need to look at broader, systemic issues surrounding NAPLAN and its use (and misuse):

- A key rationale for NAPLAN and for My School website was for public accountability, demonstration of transparency and to maintain public confidence in the standards of schooling. There is, however, not enough (if any) national conversation on 'what is the nature of public reporting and accountability' What forms can it take? Who is accountable to whom? What is the nature of 'high quality' information in the public sphere? We urgently need a national conversation to clarify the purpose and role of national testing which is aligned with commonly understood, shared purposes of education. We need a collective conversation on what form it needs to take and who

benefits from a national testing regime. It is vital that the teaching profession is actively and authentically involved in the creation of a reimagined national assessment and reporting system which has minimal unintended consequences, and clearly supports the work of teachers and teaching.

- It is becoming increasingly evident that the government's current accountability policy through NAPLAN cannot deliver on accountability without negatively impacting high quality and high-equity teaching and learning (Klenowski,2016; Lingard et al.,2016; Comber,2012). We need to more openly acknowledge that, in its standardisation, 'NAPLAN effectively ignores student difference (e.g. physical or cognitive disability, social class, socioeconomic status of the family, ethnicity, home language) and local and geographic variants' (Johnston,2017, p. 25).
- NAPLAN testing program is currently confused in its purpose. NAPLAN is seen not only as an assessment of students but of the schools they attend(Gorur,2016) and the effectiveness of a teacher and his/her teaching. The perception is that NAPLAN as a measure, and the process of measuring, will automatically result in improvements in both the teaching quality and the student learning outcomes(Johnston,2016). No set of tests could achieve all these outcomes. Also, being equated with the achievement of, for example, greater equity and fairness effectively sets NAPLAN up for failure.
- The unintended consequences of this confused agenda have been:
 - de-professionalisation of the teaching profession;
 - over emphasis on teachers as being to blame for poor education outcomes;
 - a strong impact on what we think is important in education, with the result that it ends up serving as proxy measures for teacher, school or school system effectiveness.
 - high anxiety of students;
 - a 'problem framing' to the question of NAPLAN and educational achievement in Australia by media and by governments themselves (Mockler, 2016; Baroutsis,2014; Thompson & Cook,2014) where schools or school system -level issues are simplistically seen as responsible for poor educational achievement; and
 - teachers moving away from holistic approaches which include arts, drama, music integration This is clearly at odds with the broader aspirational goals of the Melbourne Declaration.

Further, the tests are not a diagnostic tool (Wu,2016). They cannot 'account for why students achieved the level they did' (Brady, 2013, p. 53), and they do disadvantage certain groups of students (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). This point is taken up further in section 3.

ISCEA Index a major contributor to high stakes nature of testing

The use of 'like schools' on the My School website as a measure is flawed, as widely acknowledged in the literature (Johnston,2017; Wu,2016; Bonner, 2010).

When My School was introduced in 2010, access to the information it provided was seen as a parents' entitlement. As Gorur states: 'by providing clear, meaningful and comparable information, NAPLAN and MySchool aimed to create a new form of intimacy between schools and the community'(Gorur,2016,). Further, Gillard proposed a 'standardisation of schools' through the Index of Community Social-Educational Advantage(ICSEA). This was created to establish 'likeness' between school populations. This way differences in socio-economic advantage could be controlled and differences in the student results could be directly attributed to teachers and schools' effectiveness.

This has not occurred. Instead, as a serious unintended consequence, the ISCEA measure and comparison with 'like schools' has resulted in NAPLAN morphing from a means to assess students against set standards to a high stakes test. It does not matter that schools know the limitations of standardised testing, it does not matter that the broad aspirations of school communities for their students, NAPLAN scores and comparative performance of schools have become the main vehicle through which a school is assessed.

Such is the high stakes nature of the testing, parents may be anxious about allowing their children to sit the test, or feel the necessity for tutoring. A whole industry has sprung up, preying on the fears of parents and schools that students won't measure up (Hogan, Lingard &Sellar,2015).

Removing the public reporting of NAPLAN data, including 'like school' comparisons, will go some way towards schools being able to approach use of the data, as one of the many strategies to improve student learning, with professional discretion - not anxiety and fear.

2. How My School and NAPLAN Contribute to Understanding of student progress and achievement

There needs to be more recognition of the questions around accuracy and validity of NAPLAN as a measure of student learning and of a school's effectiveness which have been

increasingly questioned in the research literature (Ladwig,2010,2016; Preston,2010; Wu,2010; Mockler,2019; Klenowski,2016), but not so much in the public arena. This does not enable an accurate representation for parents who are making far reaching judgements about schools and their own child's performance.

An examination of ACARA's own technical report which is issued each year reveals significant measurement error. An example of this is provided by Mockler(2019):

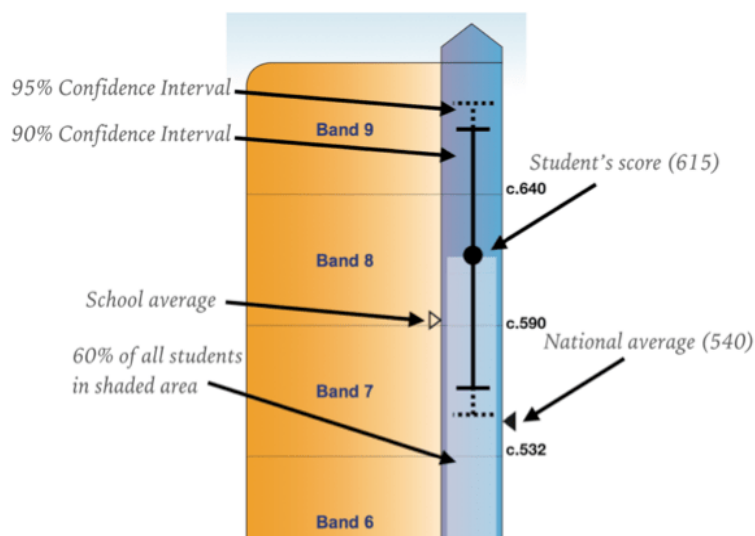


Figure 1 An example of effects of measurement error (Mockler,2019, p. 2)

The main point of this graphic is to highlight the significance of the measurement error. A student may be placed in Band 8 with a score of 615 which places them in the top 20% of students nationally. However, with the error bars added (90% confidence interval), we can say we are 90% confident that ability in grammar and punctuation lies between 558 and 672. This is two Bands worth. If we had 95% confidence level, the distance in scores is even wider. The student may therefore be at the bottom of Band 7 or at the top of Band 9. This is significant in light of the high stakes nature of the testing with schools being publically held to account for results and improvement in student outcomes.

In addition, sampling error must be more widely acknowledged and communicated to the wider public, as well as to schools. NAPLAN is not good at representing student ability at class or school level due to this statistical issue. The smaller the cohort size, the larger the sampling error Wu(2016). With small schools with cohorts of 50 students or less (a situation common in Steiner schools, for instance) the margin of error on school statistical means can be one year of expected annual growth(Mockler,2019). Variation in performance can be just on basis of sampling error. Again, this is especially significant in relation to the ISCEA based 'like schools' comparisons.

3. How Schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN to inform teaching

There are many claims about what NAPLAN will achieve, but It is very questionable whether NAPLAN achievement data can inform teaching, with strong challenges to the usefulness of NAPLAN results for teachers, students and schools in the literature (Reid 2010; Thompson & Harbaugh 2013; Willet & Gardiner 2009; Mockler,2019). NAPLAN is supposed to '*define performance, direct management attention and induce behavioural changes*'. However, there is no clearly articulated pathway from student testing, testing results, to changes in teaching practice to improved student learning outcomes(Johnston,2016).

Recent research(Mockler,2019) into teachers' perceptions of what is good 'evidence-based practice' for classrooms, reveals that teachers think using NAPLAN is somewhat useful and part of the assessment puzzle, but it can be harmful to use that evidence beyond what it can really tell us. NAPLAN results come at the bottom of the list when it comes to useful evidence for teachers' practice(Mockler,2019). These initial research results have relevance in Steiner schools where Steiner teachers' understanding of learning within a particular view of how a child develops, has a significant impact on how they assess that learning. For example, the focus on learning in the context of the arts with an emphasis on rich oral language and quality literature in the younger years is prioritised by the teacher, with assessment practices cohering with the pedagogy itself. The necessarily decontextualized nature of the NAPLAN test, with its narrow focus, is therefore a disadvantage to Steiner students.

4. How My School and NAPLAN Data are reported to students and Parents

In terms of perceptions of NAPLAN Reporting and My School data, as a matter of urgency, we need to be more honest to parents about what NAPLAN can and cannot do. ACARA states: *NAPLAN results . . . in conjunction with other information, can be used by teachers and schools to determine how well their students are performing and to identify any areas of need for which students require assistance* (ACARA, 2010a, Fact Sheet, p. 1).

Educating parents on the complexities of test interpretation, however, is a fraught task. Attempts to place the test results in context do not seem to improve the natural tendency for parents to gravitate to the coloured bars which show whether as school is above or below the majority of schools.

A lack of real understanding of the complexities of the NAPLAN results within broader considerations of equity and other factors, reinforces the *status quo*: that schools, teachers

and Principals are responsible for the totality of factors that affect students' capacity to do well in the tests. Teachers, however, know that the factors that contribute to in-school student achievement are complex and include the child, the home, the school, the curricula, the teacher and approaches to teaching. 'These factors can apply to every school, teacher, classroom and student in Australia and are not discrete or isolated but rather are compounded'(Johnston,2017).

As Johnston states, this is indeed a 'wicked problem' and not resolvable within the current national assessment and reporting regime in Australia.

Conclusion

In summary:

- There has to be more truthful reporting of the fact that there is little evidence to show improvement in student outcomes over the 10 years of NAPLAN implementation despite the huge amount of resourcing devoted to NAPLAN testing and reporting.
- We strongly advocate for a total change to the way national assessments are conducted in the interests on refocussing the agenda on learning, student growth over time and broader understandings of what constitutes 'success'. We recommend a sampling of students to provide a national snapshot of student ability. This is what NAPLAN is good for. A census approach is not needed for this purpose. Removal of the 'census' approach to data collection, will result in a considerable reduction in the high stakes nature of the current assessment and reporting system and the huge administrative burden on schools that it entails.
- Removal of census based national testing will also enable the a much-awaited acknowledgement of the prime role of teachers in student assessment and reporting and regaining of trust in the teaching profession as a whole. A national system based on sampling can play a role in providing useful information at the local level and which can be linked to school-based assessment strategies. The teaching profession need to be involved in the establishment and ongoing evaluation of a flexible and responsive sampling based national assessment and reporting system.
- To enable this, we need to divert funding from NAPLAN as a national assessment and reporting system to professional learning and development of teachers. Teachers are thus supported in driving school improvement, the definition of which is expanded to privilege school-based equity goals – ensuring students' home backgrounds do not determine school performance(Sahlberg,2017) and focus is placed on student well being within well understood and articulated goals of education to support students to live well in a world worth living in(Kemmis,2017).

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March 2019

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Overview of The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity founded in 1922 to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and young people in Australia. Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education. This mission is founded on the belief that every child and young person deserves a chance.

Our mission guides every element of our work, including program development and delivery, research, advocacy and fundraising. The Smith Family delivers programs in each state and territory in Australia, in over 90 communities, including many regional and rural communities.

In 2017-18, The Smith Family supported more than 170,000 disadvantaged children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals through its education-focussed programs. This included over 140,000 children and young people. We are supporting 45,000 financially disadvantaged children and young people on our largest program, the *Learning for Life* educational scholarships.

We have a unique longitudinal dataset of young people participating on *Learning for Life*. It includes demographic, administrative and outcomes data. We are tracking the school attendance, achievement in English and Maths, school completion and post-school engagement in work and/or study, of all young people on the program. We are also analysing this data in a systematic way in order to contribute to building the Australian educational evidence base.

1. Introduction

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Reporting Review. The Review is both important and timely, given the increased focus on education policy in recent years in Australia. In particular, the Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools set out a national roadmap for schools reform, triggering in turn deeper examination of the future of education at the Commonwealth, state and territory level.

All Australian jurisdictions and educational systems and sectors have a focus on improving the educational outcomes achieved by Australian students. Access to consistent, reliable, accessible and transparent information and data is a foundation of any such improvement. Since its introduction in 2010, NAPLAN and the My School website have been an important part of that foundation and to improving understanding of the performance of Australian schools and students. The collection of NAPLAN data is part of creating a rigorous, credible and longitudinal Australian educational evidence base. NAPLAN has significant utility for governments, educational systems and sectors, educators, students, their parents and carers, academics, think tanks and community organisations like The Smith Family to name a few, even though its utility has yet to be fully realised.

NAPLAN has helped, for example, to show that certain groups of students are disproportionately represented among Australian students who are not making the desired progress in their educational journey. This includes students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and from regional and remote areas. This is an important first step when governments, educational systems and schools are considering relevant educational policies and programs.

The Review is an ideal opportunity to consider options to ensure NAPLAN is fit for purpose and can contribute to the educational data infrastructure required to ensure better progress is made by Australia's students. The Smith Family believes that Australia needs a suite of education data that is collected, analysed and used to:

- support individual student progress;
- identify areas of good practice and areas requiring more attention;
- help build an Australian educational evidence base; and
- assess national, state and territory progress against an agreed set of goals and outcomes.

NAPLAN gives a firm foundation upon which to build, and certainly more can be done to enhance its contribution to the above goals. This includes the following items:

- introducing a national unique student identifier to track every student;
- aligning NAPLAN data collection and reporting with learning progression and student growth;
- improving the transparency to schools of how NAPLAN tests are designed, and how results are communicated to key groups such as parents and carers;
- rethinking the approach to minimum standards to more accurately identify those students requiring additional support to progress in their learning;

- improving NAPLAN test participation rates, in part via better information to parents and carers regarding the benefits to sitting the tests;
- ensuring that during the transition to national online testing the results are communicated to stakeholders with caution; and
- developing NAPLAN reporting materials that are more accessible and easier to understand for different stakeholders; and
- better accommodating the needs of students with a disability in performance testing.

These points are further outlined below.

2. Importance of a national unique student identifier

The value of being able to track individual students through NAPLAN (and their whole school journey) if they remain in the same jurisdiction is clear. However, it is currently difficult to track the NAPLAN results of students moving across state and territory borders in the intervening years between NAPLAN tests. The issue of mobility particularly impacts disadvantaged students, as they are generally more adversely impacted by mobility than their more advantaged peers. The introduction of a national Unique Student Identifier (USI) would help track each student regardless of their mobility and leverage the value of longitudinal data collection. It would contribute to better understanding of individual students' educational outcomes over time, especially disadvantaged students.

The introduction of a national USI could also combine NAPLAN data with other educational data collected by different jurisdictions, to formulate a more comprehensive picture of individual student performance. An example is the Best Start assessment undertaken as children start school in NSW. This would in turn have a direct benefit for educational research undertaken within and outside of government. The Productivity Commission has previously noted the benefits of a USI, including the positive impact on education research.¹

Australian governments endorsed the establishment of a USI in 2009 and committed in 2018 to a rollout of the USI nationally over five years.² The Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, *Through Growth to Achievement*, recommended accelerating the establishment of a USI.³ The current NAPLAN review provides another opportunity to urge for more substantive action to move Australia towards the reality of a USI.

3. Measuring learning progression and student growth

The Smith Family recommends that in the short term, NAPLAN be aligned with measuring learning progressions, individual achievement and student growth over time, and that more holistic reform of student testing be considered in depth for the long-term. There are several key

¹ Productivity Commission, *National Education Evidence Base*, Inquiry Report No. 80, 9 December 2016, p 11.

² Council of Australian Governments, *National Schools Reform Agreement*, p 9, 22.

³ Australian Government, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, March 2018, Recommendation 22, p xiv.

recommendations, made by the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools that set out the top priorities in this area:⁴

- Recommendation 4: Introduce new reporting arrangements with a focus on both learning attainment and learning gain, to provide meaningful information to students and their parents and carers about individual achievement and learning growth;
- Recommendation 5: Revise the structure of the Australian Curriculum progressively over the next five years to present the learning areas and general capabilities as learning progressions; and
- Recommendation 6: Prioritise the implementation of learning progressions for literacy and numeracy in curriculum delivery during the early years of schooling to ensure the core foundations for learning are developed by all children by the age of eight.

In the near term, an enhanced NAPLAN reporting system aligned with learning progressions, individual achievement and student growth would allow a more sophisticated understanding of each student's long-term educational journey to be developed. This would strengthen the value of NAPLAN for schools and professional educators as, NAPLAN data tends to be most valuable when it is triangulated with other performance data.⁵ This can include items such as teacher assessment of student performance, attendance patterns, participation data or other certified testing regimes such as the Progressive Achievement Tests provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research.

In recent years, the Grattan Institute has demonstrated the significant value of analysing NAPLAN data to more clearly measure students' years of progress. Its 2016 research showed the significant gap in educational performance for disadvantaged students compared to their more advantaged peers. For instance, even when capabilities are similar in Year 3, disadvantaged students fall between 12 months and 21 months behind more advantaged students by Year 9.⁶

By collecting and analysing additional layers of data aligned with the above recommendations, NAPLAN would become a more useful tool in the daily teaching of the curriculum, especially understanding the progression or challenges being faced by disadvantaged students. It would also help encourage both earlier identification of children at risk of poorer outcomes, and the deployment of appropriate intervention and support strategies to help them improve their performance.

In the longer-term, consideration should be given to the merits and feasibility of moving to a sophisticated testing regime centred on learning progression that comprehensively maps students' educational journey over time. Whilst such a regime could build on NAPLAN's strong foundations, it is anticipated it would ultimately replace the current form of testing. This would be a logical

⁴ Australian Government, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, March 2018, p xiii.

⁵ Rooty Hill High School, *Public Submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, p 3.

⁶ Grattan Institute, *Widening gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress*, p 2.

endpoint for the key recommendations from the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools identified above.

4. Improving stakeholders understanding of NAPLAN tests and results

The way NAPLAN tests are designed, and the way results are communicated, should be improved. This is so professional educators, have a clearer understanding of the context within which the tests are developed and administered each year, and so parents and carers have a better understanding of the significance of the annual results.

There is a need for greater transparency on the design of NAPLAN tests, and improved communication of this design process to professional educators. This includes ensuring that proposed tests are carefully assessed against curricula norms across the country, to ensure that individual tests assess an appropriate level of knowledge for each student cohort across Australia. It also involves more clearly articulating the process for rescaling of NAPLAN results each year, which currently remain unclear to schools. Improved transparency along these lines will help schools to better compare test performance over time and as a consequence, improve their teaching to the curricula.

Additionally, it is difficult for key stakeholders, in particular parents and carers, to easily use NAPLAN reporting data to understand their child and school performance. The Smith Family believes that the quality of the information regarding NAPLAN results, and the support provided to analyse them, should be improved so that parents and carers have better knowledge, and can interpret and use NAPLAN results with greater confidence and ability. Given the significant discussion of NAPLAN within the media and wider community, there is also a need for a wider group of stakeholders to be better informed on NAPLAN.

The Smith Family believes that there should be better quality translation for parents and carers of what the results mean for student and school performance. Parents and carers want to understand their child's performance and overall development, including in the context of their peers, but this information needs to be provided in a more accessible format, as part of a suite of useful information that helps them understand their child's progress. This will help reinforce the overall importance and benefits of NAPLAN testing itself.

5. Minimum standards and progression

The Smith Family believes that the current focus on the National Minimum Standard (NMS) should be revisited in any recalibration of NAPLAN reporting. A sole reliance on the NMS can lead to Australia being lulled into a false sense of security regarding the extent of educational challenges we face across primary and secondary schooling.

The NMS does not give a complete picture as to which students require additional support in their learning. It captures a particular cohort who are performing very poorly, largely those with significant learning difficulties, who will require intensive, specialist support to adequately progress in their learning. Relying on the NMS as *the* key benchmark does not, however, help to identify students who are not making adequate progress in their learning and who need additional support from the classroom teacher, as opposed to specialist support.

The general utility of the NMS in helping to identify students performing poorly should be reviewed, and viable options for improving its value considered.

There are different mechanisms to address this issue. One potential way to address this would be to introduce a National Minimum Proficiency Standard in addition to the NMS. Such a proficiency standard would more clearly identify whether individual students are making acceptable gains in their learning, and developing sufficient, requisite skillsets and knowledge to progress in their education. Whilst there are assessment scales for each of the five domains in NAPLAN reporting, they do not offer this type of insight.⁷ There is precedence for a proficiency standard in NAPLAN, as a proficiency standard exists in each of the NAP sample assessments, where the standard shows what is expected of students at a year level and where students need to show more than the minimal skills.⁸

Alternatively the NMS could be based on the grade average for each year sitting the test, demonstrating the required standard to be met by a student to adequately progress in their learning.

The Review offers a good opportunity to re-examine the value of the NMS and determine a better way to identify all students requiring additional support to continue to achieve at school to an acceptable level.

6. Increasing participation rates in NAPLAN testing

One structural challenge to strengthening the rigour and value of NAPLAN is that participation rates vary noticeably across different state and territory jurisdictions, as well as across different school years within single jurisdictions.⁹

This dilutes the potential power of what can be learnt from NAPLAN and can result in comparisons between jurisdictions which may be unhelpful and inaccurate. The Smith Family recommends that an information campaign be implemented targeting parents, carers and professional educators, to increase NAPLAN participation rates across Australia. This would include clearer communication about the benefits of NAPLAN testing, as well as clearer communication of results. Strengthening participation rates will help ensure the potential of NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool and as part of an Australia's educational data infrastructure, can be maximised.

7. Transitioning to national online testing

Undoubtedly there are significant advantages of conducting NAPLAN tests online, in particular the speed at which results and analysis can be returned to parents and educators.¹⁰ Reports being

⁷ National Assessment Program, '[Scales](#)'.

⁸ National Assessment Program, '[NAP Sample Assessments](#)'.

⁹ See [ACARA reports](#) for further information, in particular comparison of different participation rates from 2008 onwards.

¹⁰ Calwell, Brian, *The Alignment Premium: Benchmarking Australia's student achievement, professional autonomy and system adaptivity*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2018, p 224.

returned to students and schools within a week of tests being conducted, rather than the current situation of 3-9 months for results, will be hugely beneficial.¹¹ It will encourage more timely support for specific students where required, maximising the likelihood that such support can achieve its desired aim of improving performance. It will also enable more streamlined data analysis that over time will become less resource intensive. The ability to have a more personalised assessment through an online version is also a particular benefit.

However, there are some challenges, including but not limited to, ensuring that digital proficiency (or lack of) does not adversely affect student performance. This is a particular concern for certain groups of students, such as those from low SES groups. Students from low SES background tend to have less experience using digital technology than those from high SES backgrounds, and students with significantly less digital experience tend to perform more poorly on NAPLAN ICT Literacy tests.¹²

During the transition period from paper to online testing, a major challenge is getting clarity regarding what results are, and are not, comparable between the online and non-online versions. There have been mixed messages regarding this which can serve to undermine confidence in NAPLAN overall. A clearer, nationally consistent message, about the comparability or otherwise of NAPLAN results during this transition would be beneficial for educators, parents and carers alike, as well as broader community stakeholders, and help to avoid the spreading of misinformation about results. Similarly information regarding the benefits of NAPLAN on-line should be made available to parents, carers and educators, in highly accessible formats.

8. Disseminating NAPLAN analysis to stakeholders

The major research product published annually from NAPLAN at a national level is comprehensive, rich with analytical insight, and has been immensely valuable for education researchers within and outside of government. However, this product tends also to be voluminous and difficult to decipher, largely comprised of a series of data tables analysing results by different variables such as domain, jurisdiction, student characteristics, parental level of education and the like.

While the major report has value, there is much more that could be leveraged from this data and provided in a suite of useful publications and tools that would help inform a range of stakeholders. For example some of the materials provided by the NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) can be considered leading practice - they are valuable and more digestible for different stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and carers. Similar materials produced nationally for NAPLAN could help to better inform what happens at school and jurisdictional levels, and the impact of specific variables on students' and schools' performance, and be an important contribution to helping to build the Australian educational evidence base.

¹¹ Calwell, Brian, *The Autonomy Premium: Professional autonomy and student achievement in the 21st century*, Australian Council for Educational Research, p 67.

¹² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *NAP Sample Assessment, ICT Literacy, Years 6 and 10*, November 2018, p 47-48.

The other major product is inclusion of information on NAPLAN performance for all schools on the My Schools website. Given the work of The Smith Family in multiple schools across Australia, we have found the material provided on the My Schools website to be of value, particularly where the longitudinal data has been used to track average and median student gains in NAPLAN results over two years.

9. Accommodating students with a disability

The Smith Family believes that any recalibration of NAPLAN needs to consider how to better accommodate the needs of students with a disability. This is especially the case for students with a severe or complex disability, who can be formally exempted from sitting the tests.¹³ It is important that students with a disability are fairly and meaningfully assessed to identify their critical skills and areas where they need further assistance, as part of their unique educational journey. The Review offers a suitable opportunity to address this overdue issue.

10. Conclusion

When it comes to the availability of consistent, quality, national reporting on the performance of students and schools, NAPLAN provides Australia with an important foundation. In a relatively short time, much has been learnt from NAPLAN, including those areas where its data collection and analysis can be strengthened, in order to contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of each school and each student's educational journey. It is timely to align NAPLAN with the priorities set out in the Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, and to ensure that as we reform the way we teach school students, we continue to improve the way we collect, analyse and report data on their long-term performance.

¹³ National Assessment Program, 'Participation'.

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Review of the Reporting of NAPLAN being undertaken by Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM.

We look forward to reading the outcomes of the review once it has concluded.

Yours sincerely

Peter Stower

For and on behalf

Townsville Catholic Education Diocese.

Section 1: Perceptions of NAPLAN reporting and My School data

Does the NAPLAN data currently available on the My School website provide an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misinterpretation or misuse?

The current version of the My School website provides an appropriate balance between the right to high quality information and the possibility of misinterpretation or misuse. All statistical information is, by its very nature, open to both misinterpretation and misuse. Graphical representations and tables are especially susceptible to misinterpretation, as readers are encouraged to make comparisons without necessarily reading the accompanying information to ensure that they fully understand the information therein. The current version of the My School website foregrounds individual school data but makes comparisons available to interested parties; these comparisons are better contextualised than in previous versions of the website.

Unfortunately, there is no clear way of preventing misuse of information in an environment in which the 'right to know' exists. Those who wish to construct league tables, for example, are able to do so as long as the information is available to them. The current version of My School makes this a somewhat difficult task, requiring those who wish to misuse and reinterpret the data to suit agendas other than the 'right to know' to put considerable work into constructing those tables.

The reporting of NAPLAN data at the QCAA level is far more susceptible to misuse than the reporting on the My School website. State reports published on the QCAA website are downloadable as .csv files, allowing manipulation and organisation of the data into league tables with relative ease.

Is there anything you find difficult to understand or is there any different NAPLAN information you would like to see included on My School?

Where to find information on exemptions from schools?

Is the explanatory material on My School around “statistically similar schools” sufficiently explained, easy to understand and does this support fair comparisons for schools?

One area of concern is the lack of transparency when identifying ‘statistically similar schools’. ‘Statistical similarity’ appears to vary from one year to the next, and the means of determining an ICSEA, from which such similarity is discerned, is not explained clearly enough for members of the public to understand in a way that allows informed comparisons. In 2016, for example, the following schools were considered to be ‘statistically similar’:

- Ryan Catholic College, a P-12 co-educational Catholic day school in Townsville, in regional Queensland, and
- Aquinas College, a K-12 boys’ Catholic boarding school in inner-city Perth

At the heart of this issue is the combination of several distinct factors (geographic location, parents’ occupation, indigenous enrolment, etc.) to form a single numerical point of comparison. While the ICSEA is an accepted measure of social and educational advantage, the explanation of what an ICSEA actually *is*, is obscured from My School users, who have to navigate away from the school data to find this information. Site users are not provided with sufficient information to understand how such ostensibly dissimilar schools are, in fact, statistically similar. This is problematic, as it does not facilitate fully informed, fair and reasoned comparisons of school performance.

We believe having a simpler or user friendlier way of showing growth on the My School site would be more beneficial than similar schools comparisons.

What consideration should be given to comparisons over time and between schools while schools progressively transition to NAPLAN online?

The hesitation surrounding the publication of NAPLAN data in 2018 highlights the low confidence in the comparability of online and pen-and-paper NAPLAN data. While it has been determined that the data *is* comparable, the reasoning behind this determination is unclear.

The contexts in which the tests were taken, and the conditions under which they were administered, differed greatly. The digital literacy required for completion of the online tests is not the same as the traditional literacy required for the completion of the pen-and-paper tests. This was not taken into account, and there has been no clear indication of which schools completed the tests online and which completed the tests in the traditional pen-and-paper form. The tests themselves were different, but the data generated from the two distinct tests was deemed to be comparable.

Much more information is required to alleviate concerns about comparability of data.

Section 2: How My School and NAPLAN contribute to understanding of student progress and achievement

To what extent do schools and school systems use NAPLAN student progress and achievement data, including comparisons with statistically similar schools, to inform their school improvement strategies?

Our school currently uses NAPLAN student progress and achievement data to inform school improvement strategies in three key ways:

1. We use NAPLAN data to identify areas of weakness in our own literacy and numeracy programs. By accessing fine-grain data through SunLANDA, Tableau and other analytical applications, we are able to identify *specific* areas of weakness and target them in our school-based programs.
2. We use NAPLAN data to measure the success of our intervention strategies. By tracking the progress of students who have accessed interventions, we can measure the extent to which those interventions have achieved their purposes.
3. We identify statistically similar schools with improvement that exceeds our own, and identify processes in place in those schools that may be appropriate to our own context. By investigating schools that have achieved growth or 'turned around' their performance on NAPLAN, we are able to determine whether or not similar strategies are suitable for our own improvement goals.

To a significant extent in Townsville – particularly identifying areas of weakness. All of the schools across the diocese engage in analysis of their school's NAPLAN data. Work has also been conducted with schools to investigate the school's data with similar schools to gauge where each school may be positioned.

To what extent is whole-population assessment data necessary to meet school systems' and governments' need for sound information to support school improvement?

Whole-population assessment data is important to meet our need for sound information to support school improvement. This data should be complemented by more specific data (other than ICSEA-based subgroups) to allow a broader range of comparisons and to allow schools to measure their performance against a wider range of context-specific standards.

Consider:

- Despite sharing a common curriculum, states have implemented the Australian Curriculum differently. The Australian Curriculum in New South Wales and Victoria, two of the top-performing jurisdictions, looks very different from the Australian Curriculum in Queensland, with state-based syllabus documents contextualising and shaping the curriculum to suit their own local needs. Arguably, then, direct comparison of a school bound by the Queensland manifestation of the Australian Curriculum with a school bound by the NSW manifestation of that curriculum is problematic.
- Regional variation *within* states is recognised by external studies (e.g. https://research.acer.edu.au/cqi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1228&context=research_conference; <https://www.teachforaustralia.org/2016/12/07/australias-pisa-results-show-educational-disadvantage-gap-remains/>), but is not reflected in published NAPLAN

data on My School and elsewhere. As the majority of Australian students live in metropolitan areas, state and national averages are skewed to reflect their comparative advantage, and regional schools are unable to access clear data to reflect how well they are doing in their geographically disadvantaged contexts.

It is important to have some transparency and measurement benchmark.

Section 3: How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching

To what extent are NAPLAN data and the My School website used to inform teaching?

The length of time that elapses between testing and reporting of NAPLAN data means that this data is useful only for long-term planning. By analysing data, schools are able to identify broad strengths and weaknesses in their teaching and learning programs and intervene accordingly. For example, prolonged underperformance in persuasive writing has enabled schools to develop programs that strengthen these skills; similarly, ongoing underperformance in inferential reading has led to implementation of strategies to enhance this skill. The fine-grain data provided through SunLANDA and similar analytical systems has been useful in allowing these interventions. It has also allowed schools to measure the success of their interventions in the long term.

Shifts between narrative and persuasive writing from one year to the next, however, makes improvement difficult to measure (e.g. in 2016, students completed a narrative writing task; in 2018, the same students completed a persuasive writing task). While some elements of writing are transferred across both genres, different marking guides are used and, as a result, comparability is questionable. Consequently, measurement of growth and evaluations of our programs are limited.

Immediate interventions and differentiation according to individual and collective student need are rendered impossible (or at least very difficult) by the delay between data collection and data reporting. As a result, NAPLAN is of minimal use in guiding teacher practice at the unit and individual lesson levels.

The My School website is also of minimal use, largely as a result of the even greater delays between collection of data (testing), reporting of data (reports) and publication of data (website). As of 05/03/2019, 2018 data is still unavailable on the website. The broad data provided on the website does not provide the detail already offered to schools. While the publication of this data provides some incentive for schools to perform strongly, this does not necessarily inform teaching and learning in a meaningful or constructive way.

Which assessment tools, approaches and data analytics services do schools and school systems use to inform teaching?

Schools in the diocese use NAPLAN on a broad scale to inform teaching, but more effective and holistic use is made of data gathered through other sources, including PAT-R and PAT-M. The immediacy of reporting allows for purposeful grouping and immediate intervention,

and teachers tend to place greater weight on data that captures what students *can* do rather than what students *could* do some months earlier.

This does not mean that we disregard NAPLAN data - it is used at times to corroborate what we already know about our students. Anomalies are also identifiable - for example, students may perform poorly on PAT-R but perform well on NAPLAN. Similarly, we have developed strategies for forming correlations (using software packages such as Tableau) between NAPLAN performance and Year 12 achievement. Once again, this is useful for long-term planning, but not for immediate intervention to support students.

What opportunities are there to improve the timeliness of NAPLAN reporting?

With the rollout of NAPLAN online, it has been suggested that NAPLAN reporting may become more timely. As the results of the online tests are of questionable comparability with the results of the pen-and-paper tests, there should be no need to delay the reporting of student performance until both modes have been finalised.

In secondary schools, the current timeframe for reporting is problematic, as it coincides with QCAA verification processes. This means that those who oversee curriculum, teaching and learning are unable to dedicate as much time to data analysis and intervention as at other times of the year. This, coupled with perceived issues with the timeliness and ongoing validity of the data, results in under-utilisation of NAPLAN data.

Section 4: How My School and NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents

To what extent do schools communicate individual, whole school and comparative NAPLAN data to students, parents and families?

Schools in the diocese distributes NAPLAN reports to parents in accordance with requirements. In cases in which intervention is required, a number of schools would also discuss the implications of the data with parents and students.

Like OP preparation, NAPLAN preparation is contrary to the holistic purpose of education.

To what extent do parents and families use NAPLAN data on My School to make informed judgements, make choices and engage with their children's education?

There is limited evidence that this occurs.

Parents refer to when choosing /deciding on a school.

The general public has a distrust for NAPLAN.

What NAPLAN reporting information do students need in order to contribute to their own education?

Students need timely information about their NAPLAN performance if they are to use that data to make choices about their own learning. Students need clear information about their

strengths and weaknesses *at the time of testing* in order to apply that information in their own educational practices.

Evidence of Growth – pre test to post test

Target teaching and boot camps

Reporting on numeracy and literacy is only part of the picture of the purpose of education

A focus on literacy has changed the nature of English – not enough discussion of whole school approach.

Information is too late for effective student feedback

NAPLAN is only one part of their education puzzle that is made during 'a point in time' test.