



CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

NAPLAN REPORTING REVIEW SUBMISSION

14 MARCH 2019

About Catholic School Parents Australia

Catholic School Parents Australia is recognised as the national body representing and advocating for the parents/carers of over 764,000 children and young people who attend the 1740 Catholic schools across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with the National Catholic Education Commission and is recognised by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education.

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Preamble to response

Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) understands that there is much discussion and debate currently in relation to large scale assessment. It seems that NAPLAN as a national point-in-time test has evolved from key aspects of its original purpose and has now being utilised more as a high stakes test for school comparisons than a diagnostic test to inform individual student learning.

Various members of CSPA have a range of experience with schools and this anecdotally informs the shared comments in relation to the dot points below.

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN and My School data, including the potential for misinterpretation or misuse

- 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?

CSPA believes that data presented on the *My School* website is understood by some broad groups of parents but not others. While ACARA has strived to make information clear, some parents would still have limited understanding of information which is presented. A key use of the *My School* data is a check on a child's school for overall performance and a comparison with other schools.

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

The % of students who did not undertake the various NAPLAN tests, for whatever reason, could be included in a highly visible place on the *My School* website as sometimes withdrawals/absences can skew results unfavourably for those schools who place high expectation on attendance versus schools who for whatever reason have significant numbers not taking the tests. This can facilitate unfair comparisons especially at local levels and flies in the face of intended comparisons. More specifically, it could be useful to know what proportion of withdrawn students were instigated by a school and what proportion was instigated by parents.

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

It is stated that *My School provides information to help make informed decisions about their child's education*. This would seem to be only achieved in the broad sense as the premise of how schools are categorised based on ICSEA has limitations. That is, ICSEA is determined by: parents' occupation; parents' education; a school's geographical location and proportion of Indigenous students, and some of these aspects can be misleading. For example, parents' occupation is a very broad category with wide variation and the continued labelling of students as indigenous or non-indigenous has obvious short comings. There are many instances where people see known schools with key differences falling within the 'like schools' categorisation and this diminishes the credibility of this aspect of *My School* data. Also, anecdotally, there is no general understanding of what is a 'like school' for parents.

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

While work has been undertaken around achieving scaled comparisons between *paper & pencil* and *on-line* tests during the transition, it would seem that once all schools are *on-line* a new baseline could be established. During the transition, *My School* could be very clear in distinguishing which data were the result of *paper-pencil* tests and which were *on-line*.

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?

It would seem that schools and systems broadly use NAPLAN achievement to note trends around improvement with the tests and more broadly with their teaching and learning agenda. These include year by year comparisons and more importantly individual student growth between NAPLAN testing. However, there would seem to be some concern in student attitude especially towards the Yr 9 tests and many schools have less than half a year with their Yr 7 cohort of students prior to their NAPLAN testing. There would seem to be little comparison with statistically similar schools to inform a school's improvement agenda; this is more likely informed through the year on year comparisons and student growth between NAPLAN tests.

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

CSPA understands that whole-population assessment data is necessary for various purposes including accountability however a focus here is on the undertaking of testing for individual learner diagnostic purposes. NAPLAN can achieve both of these purposes however there needs to be the teacher and parent PD around fully interpreting the data for individual students. Without such analyses NAPLAN becomes a waste of time for its most key purpose of informing student learning. Also there is some question around aspects of validity of some components of NAPLAN, e.g. Writing – are there other standardised tests that could be used for this.

It is suggested that an alternative to NAPLAN could be a broad suite of standardised tests that are available to schools through ACARA. These could be locally selected by schools or systems from a broad bank of available tests and government/system agencies could access a sample of schools' testing for accountability purposes. Such a framework could utilise various standardised tests on an as needs basis and at a time that is suitable to schools/cohorts of students. Also, there could be testing at various year levels for aspects of the curriculum, not just 3, 5, 7 and 9. The costs of purchase and scoring of these tests could be subsidised for schools by government.

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?

Observations by various members of CSPA indicate that there seems to be varying use of NAPLAN data to inform teaching and learning. In schools where there is a school-wide coordinated use of data, including NAPLAN, there is more likelihood of NAPLAN data being used as a diagnostic tool for individual student learning. Clearly the more these data are known by teachers, students and their parents the more likely that the data will be used to differentiate for learning. If NAPLAN is not used for this purpose it is easy to understand why teachers, students and their parents question why NAPLAN tests are undertaken.

Many schools/systems seem to use NAPLAN data as a measure of overall school improvement. However, this would seem more likely when a school is part of a system and there is a system-wide expectation.

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

Most schools undertake a suite of tests and follow up data analytics to inform teaching and learning. ACER testing including PAT-M and PAT-R tests are commonly used and schools/systems are likely to have benchmarks as part of goal setting in place re these tests. Various other tests regarding reading, writing, numeracy and spelling seem to be commonly undertaken in many schools and make up a data plan to inform teaching and learning. It would seem that it is highly varied re the degree to which individual teachers utilise these data, however it is increasingly an expectation of schools and systems that all teachers will utilise such evidence to inform their decision making/planning. For example, in some jurisdictions where programs have been developed to assist the interpretation of data together with related remediation strategies for educators (e.g. SunLANDA (QCAA) in Qld.) there might be greater instances of differentiation resulting from system-wide expectations for its use.

Many schools have taken up elements of visible learning and the higher the flexibility of learning spaces the higher the likelihood that differentiated teaching/learning is implemented.

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

If NAPLAN or any testing is to be useful there needs to be a minimum period of time between testing and reporting. NAPLAN on-line, once taken up by all schools, will greatly shorten the current lengthy lag time between administration and availability of results of NAPLAN tests - at the moment the impact of their use as a diagnostic tool are greatly diminished. Currently, as of March 2019, the most recent NAPLAN data available through the *My School* website is for 2017. It is acknowledged that individual schools and parents/students do have 2018 data.

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?

It is understood that in the best case scenarios that NAPLAN data (individual and whole school) are made available to parents soon after it is received by schools, however this seems to vary from school to school. The current lag in the availability of data from ACARA diminishes the use of these data as a diagnostic tool. The sooner this lag time can be reduced to weeks rather than months the better – this would also give more credibility to NAPLAN data.

- 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?

The degree to which NAPLAN data are understood and utilised is most likely in some proportion to the education levels of families and the degree to which a school promotes these data within their school community. Importantly, though a measure of the use of any diagnostic/school wide testing is the degree to which the educating authority takes steps to educate all parents and teachers around the data and what strategies can be undertaken to improve individual student learning.

It is vital that parents are able to easily access 'user friendly' NAPLAN data so that they will be better able to work in partnership with the school with regards their children's education and well-being. Through such parent engagement, fuller use might be made of the diagnostic benefits of such testing – one of the key original purposes for setting up NAPLAN.

When NAPLAN testing consistently shows some specific areas where learning is lacking, perhaps some implications could be drawn for more targeted focus in teacher training in these areas of literacy and numeracy. Also, more teacher training in strategies to better engage parents in their children's learning and well-being would help to improve overall learning outcomes for all students.

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

It would seem reasonable to inform students of the data that they generate through their testing. The more students understand the data perhaps the higher it might be used diagnostically and the greater the credibility in the data and the testing.

As far as possible, national testing such as NAPLAN should be culturally appropriate tests such that there are acceptable levels of content validity in relation to the tests used.

The widespread negative reporting about NAPLAN no doubt must impact some student attitudes to these tests. For example, where there is an unusual dip in NAPLAN performance in some schools (e.g. at year 9) this might be attributed to student attitude rather than teaching and learning. Perhaps some brief attitudinal data could be collected prior to the start of each NAPLAN test to develop some trend data around this.