

NAPLAN Reporting Review 2019

March 2019

Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission to inform a 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.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 306 Catholic schools that educate more than 149,000 students in Queensland.

Background

This review was commissioned by the Education Council of the of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in October 2018. A national sample of schools was visited in November and December 2018. School leaders, teachers, students and parents met in focus groups and discussed their schools' use of NAPLAN and other student achievement data.

The Terms of Reference for the Review of the presentation of NAPLAN data (the Review), were released on 2 February 2019. The review is being undertaken by Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM. The Review report will be provided to the Education Council of COAG in June 2019. An Issues Paper has been prepared to guide public submissions. The issues considered in this review are underpinned by a set of principles and protocols for reporting on schools as agreed by Education Ministers in 2009. Comments are being sought across four key areas:

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN and My School data, including the potential for misinterpretation or misuse of data;
2. How My School and NAPLAN reporting contribute to understanding of student progress and achievement;
3. How schools use achievement data, including NAPLAN, to inform teaching; and
4. How My School and NAPLAN data are reported to students and parents.

QCEC invited submissions from its Catholic School Authorities to inform a QCEC response representing the collective views from the Queensland Catholic education sector.

It is understood this Review is the third phase in a four-phase process consisting of:

1. Environmental scan
2. Sample school community consultation with teachers, school leaders, parents and students
3. Public submissions
4. Key stakeholder consultation.

Introductory comments

QCEC and Queensland Catholic School Authorities support a national approach to measure student performance using valid, reliable and standardised data on literacy and numeracy achievement and progress.

QCEC has long maintained that NAPLAN data provides only a 'snapshot' of student achievement at a given point in time. Although NAPLAN data provides useful feedback about student, school and system performance, on its own NAPLAN data does not provide a complete picture of a school community nor a child's learning. It does not reflect the broader challenges, achievements and progress that combine to provide a holistic education.

The QCEC response below is provided with reference to the four key areas and corresponding questions posed in the Issues Paper.

1. Perceptions of NAPLAN reporting and My School data

- i) *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 of data?*

With NAPLAN data publicly available on the My School website (My School), it remains a challenge to maintain the right balance between providing high quality information to all within the community and the possible misinterpretation or misuse of the data.

The potential misinterpretation of NAPLAN data is a concern for Queensland Catholic school communities as what the data is actually 'saying' or indicating is not always clearly understood by members of the general public or the media. NAPLAN data can easily be misinterpreted when comparisons are made such as between cohorts of students, between schools, between test domains; without an accurate and complete understanding about how the varied and diverse characteristics of students can affect the data.

It is reported anecdotally that parents seek information on My School to inform their choice of school for their child. When looking at individual school's NAPLAN results, parents may not be aware of, or understand, the impact of the school's context on the data. Some parents and members of the broader community may be disproportionately influenced by NAPLAN results rather than looking at the complete education provided by a school; such as the enacted curriculum, the teaching and learning programs, and pedagogical and assessment practices implemented to cater for the learning needs of individual students. For this reason, some data on My School can give rise to inaccurate assumptions about the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

However, it is primarily the use or misuse of NAPLAN data published on *My School* by the media that causes most concern for schools and potential angst for students and families. It is common for newspapers to average the mean scale scores of Reading, Writing and Numeracy to rank schools. This practice reflects a poor understanding of the National Assessment Program.

Queensland Catholic schooling stakeholders have previously identified both high level advantages and disadvantages in relation to the publication of school level NAPLAN data on My School which may include but are not limited to:

Advantages

- source of information for stakeholders on school NAPLAN results over time
- visibility to the public on school progress and achievements in literacy and numeracy
- accountability in terms of the reporting of results on a nationally consistent basis
- may assist parents, as part of a suite of inputs, in informing decisions around choice of schools
- capacity for like-school comparisons

Disadvantages

- information provided may be misinterpreted
- media may use the information to create school league tables which lack validity as a ranking of the totality of educational outcomes delivered by each school
- stakeholders may be challenged to understand related processes such as equating to ensure the reliability and validity of NAPLAN results
- parents may refer to NAPLAN school results as the sole source for informing decisions on school choices
- like-school comparisons may not include all factors relating to the school context
- some schools may engage in excessive practice testing to achieve high results thus reducing the time allocated to the full Australian Curriculum teaching and learning curriculum activities
- media articles and/or system performance indicators may promote a high-stakes testing environment causing high levels of anxiety for some students, staff and/or parents.

QCEC notes the Education Council decision on 22 February regarding the publication of 2018 paper and online results on My School in 2019 will include information on NAPLAN results as in previous years, with school mean and student gain data presented for schools that undertook NAPLAN Online. QCEC also notes that those schools which undertook NAPLAN online will be identified with the intention to better inform comparisons made between schools.

Further refinements and communications regarding the context, collection and purpose of NAPLAN data on the My School website would serve to improve the balance between the right to high quality information and the potential misinterpretation or misuse of data.

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

Queensland Catholic School Authorities report they are able to understand the NAPLAN data reported on My School. It is generally considered to be user-friendly and clearly formatted with graphics that are informative and well designed.

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

QCEC is of the view that the explanatory material on My School could be improved. For example, there could be clearer explanation regarding the factors which constitute the ICSEA calculation as it relates to ‘educational advantage’ and the factors impacting on the selection of ‘similar schools’, particularly with regard to inclusion of Students With Disability (SWD) and students for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) enrolments.

QCEC is of the view that the while comparisons made with other statistically similar schools on My School are generally fair, this is not always the case. My School provides a platform to facilitate comparisons to similar schools, students with the same starting point and ‘all Australian students’ for both a specific year and over time. These comparisons are particularly useful when school leaders have a deep knowledge of their own context (i.e. SWD, school size, numbers of EAL/D students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students). However, some concerns remain regarding the reliability of data used to decide on “statistically similar schools”. For example, it is difficult to see the value when the data from a small rural school (enrolment of 26 students) is compared with a school in large regional centre with an enrolment of over 1,800 students.

QCEC suggests that the explanatory material around statistically similar schools be improved so as to enable more informed and fairer comparisons of schools.

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

QCEC remains concerned about the validity of comparing NAPLAN results between paper and online assessments and is of the view that these concerns are likely to remain until all schools have transitioned to online delivery. As such, QCEC is pleased that Education Council will identify the delivery mode (paper or online) in publishing the 2018 data however it would also be helpful if My School published information about tailored testing, comparability of data, and some of the key differences in the two delivery modes so that users had a better understanding of the implications on results as a consequence of the different delivery modes.

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

i) 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?

Queensland Catholic School Authorities extensively use a range of data sources, including NAPLAN data, to inform school improvement strategies. These include:

- identifying school cohort progress
- monitoring individual student progress
- analysing trends
- identifying strengths and weaknesses to inform school improvement and system directions

- tracking the effectiveness of school learning and teaching practices
- comparing results with similar schools
- comparing results with state and national means
- informing professional development directions.

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

As NAPLAN data is drawn from all Australian students across four cohorts (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9) it is a valuable data set. Whole-population assessment data is an important component in the development of strategic priorities and directions at a system and government level (i.e. both national and state).

Queensland Catholic School Authorities use whole-population assessment data and school trend data to assist in identifying areas for improvement and the development of strategies to address these priority areas. The information is also used to inform targeted professional learning and capability.

However, while data on individual students is valuable for assisting teachers to most appropriately target interventions, it could be argued that sample, rather than full cohort, testing in some of the year levels, may be suitable for some aspects of government and system need for sound information. International tests such as PISA use sampling rather than full cohort approaches in statistically valid ways. QCEC supports further consideration of the appropriate balance of full cohort versus sample testing.

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

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

As mentioned previously, Queensland Catholic School Authorities use NAPLAN data in conjunction with a range of other data sources and tools to inform and support reflection on teaching and learning, review student progress and identify areas for improvement.

Teachers report that they do not generally use the My School website but rather access NAPLAN data through system data monitoring tools to examine a range of achievement data to inform their teaching. Schools triangulate NAPLAN data with other valid data sets to identify key focus areas for teaching and for individual student instruction. For example, in conjunction with NAPLAN, teachers may use Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-R), Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics PAT-M, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Student Reporting System (SRS) data, to inform differentiated teaching strategies to support student learning growth. Item and trend analysis data further assists school leaders and teachers in identifying whether interventions and strategies have been effective in addressing student learning needs.

It is acknowledged that NAPLAN data provides useful information about student and cohort strengths and weaknesses which further informs the tailoring of teaching and learning programs to address identified areas of need. Teachers may check for “outliers” and any unexpected results or focus their

analysis on a specific learning area. This may be a strategic priority for the school or a professional learning area for the individual teacher or group of teachers.

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

Queensland Catholic School Authorities use a range of business intelligence (BI) tools to enable school leaders and teachers to access a range of standardised and/or diagnostic student assessment (e.g. NAPLAN, PAT-R, PAT-M, DRA). These tools are constantly evolving, such as including the capacity to track and monitor cohort and individual progress. SunLanda is a tool developed by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and is used widely by schools to review results of individuals or groups of students. This assists teachers in identifying students who require targeted support interventions as well as those who need to be extended and challenged in their learning.

QCEC acknowledges that NAPLAN Online enables schools to drill down into School and Student Summary Reports (SSSR) to examine individual students and identify areas of teaching that can be improved or those which are progressing well. In practice, SSSR is extracted and imported into school management systems to enable comparative analysis with other school data and previous NAPLAN results. Data analysis that compares various standardised testing approaches, assessment progress and NAPLAN results serve to provide a more wholistic and informed picture about student performance.

QCEC supports a proposal made by one Catholic School Authority for the development of a national data analytics tool that can be easily accessed by systems, leaders and teachers. Given that NAPLAN is a national assessment, a national data analytics tool would provide additional functionality to complement what is already available at the state level (e.g. Sunlanda in Queensland, Scout in NSW/ACT) to support the use of data analytics for school improvement purposes.

A proposed national tool that provides reliable, timely, easily-accessible data for education authorities to analyse and respond to learning needs in an informed manner could include:

- analytics at the school, year, class and student level
- analysis at item level
- analysis of why students chose particular responses (similar to miscue analysis)
- evidence-based teaching strategies to progress learning in specific areas
- longitudinal tracking in each domain (where valid), for example, a school could track longitudinal achievement of cohorts in aspects of writing such as paragraphing or sentence structure against the national performance
- links to the Australian curriculum
- access to student writing samples
- scatter plots that present comparison to the mean and comparison of learning gain in a single graphic
- state comparisons to increase valid interpretations and comparative data overlaid with previous years data
- matched cohort information that shows:
 - longitudinal line graphs showing the performance of matched students in Years 3-5, 5-7, 7-9, compared to the national cohort.

- Z-score graphics plotting the mean of the matched cohort (Year 3-5, 5-7, 7-9) for each domain, providing a quick graphical representation of a school's relative progression compared to the nation.

QCEC understands that the current program of work regarding the NAPLAN Online Longitudinal Data Store (LDS) may address some of the issues raised in relation to a national data store and analysis tools.

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

The transition to NAPLAN Online will assist in improving the timeliness of NAPLAN reporting as the data is intended to be made available earlier in the school year. This will provide teachers with the opportunity to analyse and review the data in a more timely manner so that it can inform their teaching for the current cohort of students. It will enable programs to be tailored to meet identified areas of need earlier in the learning process rather than later in the year. It has also been suggested by some that NAPLAN tests could be conducted earlier in the school year, (i.e. prior to May). This could potentially provide teachers with information on their current students earlier, arguably so that teachers could improve the likelihood of ensuring all students experience a full year of learning growth.

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

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

Queensland Catholic schools communicate in a variety of ways with students, parents and families depending on the purpose and the audience. The most common way NAPLAN data is communicated to students is in the setting of individualised learning goals, a process usually undertaken in secondary schools. Teachers use the data to discuss with each student their 'growth' or gain and identify areas for improvement. It is important to recognise the role that students have in their own learning journey. By providing relevant data to students they can monitor their own performance and reflect on their progress.

Schools typically communicate with their parent community the school's results in each year level and domain with state/national results (mean scale scores and % students At or Above the National Minimum Standard). The most common methods used to report NAPLAN data to parents/carers and families is in parent/teacher conferences; school newsletters, websites and parent portals; annual reports; School Annual Improvement Plans; and parent information nights.

QCEC is aware that many Queensland Catholic schools do not reference the *My School* website in their communication. This is largely because schools have a deliberate focus on student gain and progress, and there is a view that summative, competitive and achievement data can detract from quality teaching and learning. Additionally, *My School* is only reporting the point in time results on NAPLAN tests. Schools feel that parents are better supported in understanding their child's learning progress by being provided with a range of feedback data derived from a holistic assessment program.

ii) *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?*

Queensland Catholic schools only provide individual student results to the child's parents/carers who can then choose when, if and how they share this information with the student. Some schools provide guidance to families about how to make the sharing of NAPLAN results a positive experience. As the Individual Student Report (ISR) indicates where the child sits in relation to the national cohort across the domains (the 'rocket ship'), it may be a deflating experience if the child receives results in each NAPLAN test cycle that show they are performing well below the national minimum standard. The data can be a prompt to start a conversation between the school and home about areas for improvement, interventions required and activities to support a child's learning, wellbeing and engagement out of the school environment.

QCEC suggests that to better inform parents/carers about their child's learning progress and to increase student's responsibility for their own learning, it would be valuable to add a student progression of NAPLAN results over time (from Year 3 to 9) to the NAPLAN report. This would require a Unique Student Identifier so that every Australian child, regardless of which state or sector they are educated, can track their progress over the literacy and numeracy domains. This progressive mapping of results over years of schooling would support students in taking ownership of their own learning.

Feedback from parents suggests that only a minority of parents use NAPLAN data on *My School* to make informed judgements, make choices and engage with their children's learning. The overwhelming majority of parents utilise the far more comprehensive and holistic assessment feedback provided by schools.

Conclusion

NAPLAN data, along with other educational data sets, provides valuable information which assists in identifying gaps and progress in student learning. This informs school and system directions, professional learning and capability priorities, and personalised student learning strategies.

QCEC recommends further consideration be given to strategies that mitigate the negative impacts of publishing NAPLAN data such as improved communication about how and what data is presented, as well as how it should be interpreted.

QCEC is supportive of the transition of NAPLAN to the online environment recognising the overall aims of better quality assessment, more precise results and faster turnaround of information over time. It is also acknowledged that further innovations in reporting may be available when all schools are online.

In summary, QCEC is supportive of review mechanisms that seek to improve the reporting of NAPLAN data and considers that this review will further inform discussions and positions in relation to the processes and publication of NAPLAN data on *My School*. QCEC appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the NAPLAN Reporting Review 2019.


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