

Submission to the Education Council NAPLAN Reporting Review



March 2019

About Queensland Independent Schools

Independent Schools Queensland is the peak body for Queensland's independent schooling sector. The sector comprises 213 schools enrolling over 122,000 students.

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with over 120,000 students enrolled in 213 independent schools across Queensland in 2018. These schools educate approximately 15 percent of the state's total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

The strength of Queensland's independent schooling sector lies in the rich mix of education choices and opportunities local schools provide families. Independent schools are as diverse as the students and parents who make up their close-knit communities. Of Queensland's 213 independent schools: 183 educate children with disability; 109 cater for students for whom English is a second language or dialect; 184 enrol Indigenous students; 72 offer international education programs; 33 provide boarding services; and 17 cater specifically for students who have disengaged from mainstream education.

Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and wellbeing of students.

Over the past ten years enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by 21 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child's schooling.

Executive Summary

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) recognises the importance of transparency and accountability to ensure the public has relevant and appropriate information about school education provision and outcomes in Australia. However, it is widely acknowledged that there should be a balance between transparency and responsible use of data.

ISQ supports NAPLAN as an important mechanism which contributes to:

- measuring student progress;
- reporting to parents;
- informing school improvement; and
- providing data on Australian student achievement and progress over time.

Independent schools in Queensland use a range of data instruments, including NAPLAN, to examine student progress and inform school improvement strategies. The measures for successful student and school outcomes will vary from school to school based on the culture, values of the school community and the students they serve.

The capacity to analyse NAPLAN data can vary from school to school. There should be a focus on increasing the capacity of schools to analyse NAPLAN outcomes in the context of driving school improvement.

It is essential there is improved reporting of online results and more training and data analytic tools available to schools to ensure leaders and teachers continue to accurately interpret results to inform teaching and school improvement agendas. If there are systems or platforms made available to assist schools to analyse NAPLAN data, they must be available to all schools.

As schools move to online branch testing, they should be provided with accessible and thorough information to help their community understand the changes and the limited comparisons that can be made between paper and online results. This information should also be presented on the My School Website.

ISQ acknowledges the advantages of more timely reporting of students results of NAPLAN online to inform teaching. This should continue to be a critical goal of the transition to online testing.

The use of ICSEA scores to inform comparisons with schools with similar student cohorts is not widely understood. Currently ICSEA relies on capturing student background information and where this is not available, on an imputation model, to determine a school's ICSEA score. Given this methodology, there are questions around the validity of using this score for comparisons.

ISQ does not support the use of NAPLAN to compare schools or develop league tables.

According to ISQ's 2018 *What Parents Want* survey the most influential information sources parents referred to in selecting a school were:

- Family, friends and colleagues – identified by 67% of parents
- Other parents with children at the school (54%)
- School open days (47%)
- School website and social media (40%)
- Family members already attending the school (24%).

While the survey indicated an increased trend in more parents relying on My School as one of their top three most influential sources of school information – 18% in 2018 compared with 8% in 2010 – it did not identify specifically whether parents looked at the NAPLAN results' pages as a source of information. The school profile page is generally considered the most visited page by parents as this provides a broad overview of the school, its teachers and students as well as specific links to the school website.

Schools are working hard to balance communication about positive NAPLAN results with perceptions of NAPLAN as a competitive, high-stakes testing regime that may result in increased student anxiety and teacher dissatisfaction.

Optional formative assessment tools aligned to learning progressions in the Australian Curriculum may provide a better opportunity for students to engage in conversations with teachers and parents about their own educational progress.

Submission Questions

Perceptions of NAPLAN reporting and my school data

- 1. 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 misrepresentation or misuse?**

ISQ recognises the importance of transparency and accountability to ensure the public has relevant and appropriate information about school education provision and outcomes in Australia. However, it is widely acknowledged that there should be a balance between transparency and responsible use of data.

Existing measures, such as the National Assessment Program, to monitor school outcomes at the national and system level are adequate and the temptation for additional prescriptive national measures should be avoided. ISQ encourages debate about the value of whole-population testing and consideration of sample literacy and numeracy assessment to reduce the perception of NAPLAN as a high-stakes competitive, testing regime.

ISQ does not support school or system comparisons, league tables or misuse of targeted educational data to draw broad conclusions about school success.

ISQ supports NAPLAN as an important approach to:

- measure student progress;
- report to parents;
- inform school improvement; and
- provide snapshots of Australian student achievement and progress over time.

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

Transparency in reporting NAPLAN data is important for schools, parents/carers and the wider community. The current publication of school-level NAPLAN data on My School, presumes parents and the wider community understand the NAPLAN test design, its reporting scale and how the ICSEA score for a school is calculated.

Although information is hyperlinked and fact sheets are available on My School, the language is not accessible and presumes prior knowledge e.g. the concept of statistical comparison.

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

Currently ICSEA relies on capturing student and parent background information and where this is not available, on an imputation model, to determine a school’s ICSEA score. Given this methodology, there are still questions around the validity of using this score for comparisons and other external purposes.

The terminology “statistically similar schools” is interpreted in varying ways by schools and the wider community, but ISQ recognises the availability of explanatory material on the My School website is adequate for those seeking further clarification.

The value of comparing “statistically similar schools” is often questioned by schools particularly when the nature of the schools being compared can be entirely different. This includes, for example, single-sex schools compared to co-educational schools, primary schools compared to Prep to Year 12 schools.

The value for parents of comparing statistically similar schools in other States/Territories is also questioned.

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

ACARA states that moving to NAPLAN online “will provide better assessment, more precise results and faster turnaround of information.”

ISQ acknowledges the advantages of more timely reporting of students results of NAPLAN online. This should continue to be a critical goal of the transition.

My School should identify when a school began online testing and provide accessible and thorough explanations for schools and the wider community about the impact of this change on reporting and results. This information should highlight the limitations of any attempts to compare schools or compare paper and online results for schools.

How My School and NAPLAN contribute to understanding student progress and achievement

5. 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?

Independent schools in Queensland use a range of data instruments to examine student progress and inform school improvement strategies. The measures for success vary from school to school based on the culture, values of the school community and the students they serve.

Whilst recognising the importance of measures (such as NAPLAN) to monitor the progress of educational attainment in Australia, the focus should remain at utilising the data to enhance educational delivery at the individual school level.

Schools may consider data about statistically similar schools from the My School website and they may also review data of schools with similar catchment areas or philosophical approaches to benchmark their performance.

There is significant variation between schools with regards to their capacity to analyse NAPLAN data. Many schools continue to require substantial support to draw accurate conclusions from NAPLAN data. This issue is becoming more acute because of the changes to reporting that have occurred since the introduction of online branch testing.

It is essential there is improved reporting of online results and more training and data analytic tools to ensure schools and teachers continue to accurately interpret results to inform teaching and school improvement agendas. If there are systems or platforms made available to assist schools to analyse NAPLAN data, they must be available to all schools.

Branched testing means schools can no longer analyse trends based on the percentages of their students that answered domains and subdomains of question types correctly because of students having different test pathways. Paper-based testing has enabled school results to be compared with percentages of students nationally that correctly answered the same questions. Consideration should be given to support for meaningful comparisons between previous paper-based results and online testing.

Individual student pathways in NAPLAN online should be examined to ensure they are designed with both reporting and the optimum student experience in mind. Queensland independent schools have provided examples of student test pathways that have resulted in Year 3 students facing Band 9 questions in the first testlet or, because of high attainment in the reading task, faced only a high level of questions in the Grammar and Punctuation test. Reporting this had limited usefulness and a negative impact on a Year 3 student who answered only 2 out of 25 questions ranging in difficulty from Band 6 to Band 9.

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

How one school defines success will be quite different to another school based on the culture and values of the communities and students they serve.

Educational success for every student is central to school quality, however how this is achieved does not need to be standardised. Any measure of school quality should not influence the ability of schools to autonomously determine the most suitable approach to meeting the needs of all learners in their community.

Whole-population assessment can support schools to benchmark student and cohort progress and inform school improvement agendas, however ISQ encourages debate about the value of moving to sample, rather than whole cohort testing in literacy and numeracy, to reduce the perception of NAPLAN as a high-stakes competitive, testing regime.

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

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

Schools use a range of data instruments to inform decision making including NAPLAN. NAPLAN data assists school leaders to understand cohort trends and evaluate a school's progress towards targeted improvement priorities. The My School website may provide a school with useful comparisons of mean student gain compared to the national and state mean student gain.

NAPLAN data is available on the My School website approximately ten⁸ months after testing. Time lags between the completion of NAPLAN tests and the availability of NAPLAN data reduces its usefulness to inform teaching. Detailed student data with relevant benchmarks, such as state and national means for both test items and test areas overall, are available to schools approximately three months after the completion of the test.

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

Along with schools and systems globally, Queensland independent schools are focused on continuous school improvement, measured by improved student achievement, wellbeing and engagement.

Schools are implementing evidenced-based approaches to quality leadership and teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. To support this, ISQ facilitates voluntary school reviews aligned to the National School Improvement Tool; supports a five-year program called Self-Improving Schools; and provides an extensive suite of online and blended professional learning to support leadership and teaching in diverse schooling contexts. A review of a range of educational data, including NAPLAN results, are included in these services.

Independent schools are increasingly using a wide range of approaches to collect, manage, analyse and report on demographic, educational and wellbeing data to inform teaching. This includes the ISQ developed DataPAK, a tool available to Queensland independent schools to analyse NAPLAN data.

Independent schools make choices about the data analytics tools they employ to support the use of data to inform teaching. NAPLAN data provided to schools should continue to enable and support meaningful comparisons to national, state and statistically similar schools, regardless of the data analytics software.

Queensland independent schools that participated in the NAPLAN online trial in 2018 noted they were limited in their ability to track student and cohort progress over time by the omission of individual student scale scores in the Student and School Summary Reports (SSSR). Some schools perceived they were disadvantaged by the quality data reporting from online testing compared to reports from paper-based testing. This has a negative impact on the data being used to inform teaching.

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

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) states the delivery of assessments online will significantly reduce the time it takes to provide results and feedback to schools, students and parents.

ISQ is very supportive of improved timelines for the delivery of results including the My School website report results. NAPLAN data is available to parents, teachers and reported on the My School website approximately ten months after testing. Time lags between the completion of NAPLAN tests and the availability of NAPLAN data reduces its usefulness to inform teaching.

Moving to online *may* address the following issues associated with the timeliness of NAPLAN reporting:

- a. Improving the low levels of engagement in NAPLAN data by teachers (resulting from a slow turnaround from test to results)
- b. Improving the low levels of engagement in NAPLAN by students (also partly a result of a slow turnaround in results).

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

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

Parents/carers of students who participated in NAPLAN receive individual student reports issued to schools by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. These reports provide a comparison of individual student attainment compared to national mean attainment in each test area.

Individual reports are considered useful. However, they are less effective if a student's academic performance is at the top of the highest bands. There is little or no information about how far a student's work is above the highest means.

Some independent schools choose to provide further details to parents showing individual student and school growth and results, noting that NAPLAN is just one tool that may be used with parents to evaluate student attainment and progress.

Schools who move to online testing should be provided with accessible and thorough information to help their parents/carers understand the changes and explain the limited comparisons that can be made between past paper-based and recent online results.

ISQ agrees the transition to NAPLAN online provides an opportunity to reflect on the current processes for sharing outcomes with schools, parents and the community.

Schools are working hard to balance positive communication about NAPLAN results with perceptions of NAPLAN as a competitive, high-stakes testing regime that results in increased student anxiety and teacher dissatisfaction.

11. 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?

According to ISQ's 2018 *What Parents Want* survey the most influential information sources parents referred to in selecting a school were:

- Family, friends and colleagues – identified by 67% of parents
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12. What NAPLAN reporting information do students need in order to contribute to their own education?

Reports that clearly demonstrate a student's gain against consistent achievement standards or educational benchmarks may provide individual students with a greater understanding of the link between the testing process and their own educational progress.

Optional formative assessment tools aligned to learning progressions in the Australian Curriculum may provide a better opportunity for students to engage in conversations about their educational progress.