



# **FACTS SHEETS**

**NAPLAN –**

**MY SCHOOL WEBSITE -**

**LEAGUE TABLES**

**February 2010**



# NAPLAN - MY SCHOOL WEBSITE – LEAGUE TABLES

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## What are the NAPLAN national tests?

National tests in literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) were introduced in 2008 for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They are not based on a national curriculum as one does not yet exist.

The NAPLAN tests are short (around 40 questions), multiple-choice, machine-marked tests which provide a one point in time snapshot of student performance.

The NAPLAN tests were designed as a diagnostic tool. The results are used to help assess the progress of each individual student and ensure teaching programs meet their learning needs. They also provide parents with information on their child's skill development in literacy and numeracy.

**The NAPLAN tests were never designed to be used to publicly rank or compare schools against each other.**

Organisations representing [parents, teachers and principals](#) have warned Education Minister Julia Gillard that:

- NAPLAN was not designed for the purpose of measuring school performance and certainly is not able to reliably measure overall year-to-year student improvement.
- There are large margins of statistical error evident in tests such as NAPLAN.
- Combining individual student results into a school average does not provide a sound basis for comparing schools.
- The complexities found within a school population – social, economic, etc – do not allow reasonable comparative data to be gained through the administration of one or two brief tests covering a very limited part of the curriculum

**Teachers do not oppose NAPLAN national testing but we are strongly opposed to the misuse of the results to inappropriately rank or compare schools.**



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## **What are the concerns of parent groups and teachers about the My School Website?**

While it is important to give as much information as possible to parents about school performance, care must be taken to ensure that the publication of this material is done in a way that does not do **more harm than good.**

Parents, teachers and principals repeatedly warned the Government before the site went live that there needed to be measures put in place to stop the NAPLAN data it contained being used by the media to create damaging and misleading league tables.

But within 24 hours that is exactly what happened.

League tables, which ranked schools on scores alone and showed nothing of the broader achievements of schools and students, were published by newspapers in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and the Northern Territory.

**Education Minister Julia Gillard says she opposes league tables because they are misleading and make the job of principals and teachers harder, yet so far she has done nothing to protect students and school communities from them.**

## **Using NAPLAN Data**

Parents should exercise extreme caution when looking at the different NAPLAN results of schools on the My School website.

These tests were designed to measure individual *student performance*. They were never designed to be used as a measure of *school performance*. Not only is it an invalid use of these tests, but they are not accurate enough for the purpose.

The NAPLAN test data on the site does not show the progress of students or the difference a school makes to students. It only compares how different groups of students performed in 2008 and 2009.

Changes in the student group between years can be so significant, especially in small schools, that they render any difference in score meaningless. *The My School website includes average scores from grades with as few as five students.*

The margin of error on results for a grade this small can be as high as 34 points.



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Even the report relied on by the Federal Government as the basis for the My Schools site methodology warns: “*Fluctuations in student cohort from one year to the next are large enough to swamp the effect of any improved teaching that may be occurring.*” (**Reporting and Comparing School Performances, Australian Centre for Educational Research**)

As one of Australia’s leading experts in education statistics, [Professor Margaret Wu from Melbourne University](#) ,said recently: “*It would be irresponsible for the government and education researchers to tell the public that school performance can be judged from information provided on the My Schools website.*”

### **Not Comparing Like with Like**

The My Schools website includes comparisons of schools that are nonsensical.

Large public high schools are compared with tiny schools in remote areas and elite city private schools are compared with small country public schools.

For example:

- One of the richest private schools in Australia The Kings’ School at Parramatta is compared with Concord West Public School in Sydney’s west and Gundaroo Public School in a small town outside Canberra.
- Blacktown Boys High in Sydney’s west is compared with Alice Springs School of the Air.
- Melbourne Girls Grammar is compared with a school with one student in the mountains of Victoria, Dargo Public School.
- The small Norton Summit Primary School in South Australia with 84 students is compared with the elite Ascham School in Sydney which has 976 students.

The problem is that the index used to group schools fails to take into account important factors like school size, funding and resources, gender and even whether children are from a non-English speaking background. It doesn’t even consider **whether a school has a selective enrolment policy**.

It is impossible to compare rich private schools and public schools without taking into account their enrolment policies and resources.

Grouping large schools with small schools also compounds the problems with the accuracy of the NAPLAN scores. As discussed above, the margin of error around the scores in a small school and the year to year variation is going to be much greater than it is in a large school.



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## What about the public's right to know?

The suggestion that parents have been denied access to school performance data until the creation of the My School website is demonstrably not true. Parents, and anybody else with an interest, have been able to access the NAPLAN results of any school as well as information on academic achievement, staffing, resources and programs by directly contacting schools.

The only sections of our community that want to publicly rank and compare schools in league tables are media owners who want to profit from them.



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## Why do parents, teachers and principals oppose school league tables?

League tables, which rank or compare schools based on test results, present an invalid and misleading picture of school performance.

Parents, teachers and principals repeatedly warned the Government before the My School site went live that there needed to be protections put in place to stop the NAPLAN data it contained being used by the media to create damaging and misleading league tables.

But within 24 hours newspapers in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and the Northern Territory produced crude, simplistic league tables ranking schools on the aggregated test results alone.

All the evidence shows league tables have a detrimental effect on students and school communities.

Branding schools as failures or poor-performing based on test results which do not show the progress of students or the work that schools have done with them is damaging.

## League Tables Are:

**Misleading:** Publicly ranking schools based on students' results in national tests presents an invalid and misleading picture of school performance.

**Inaccurate:** The NAPLAN national tests were never designed to be used to compare schools. Experts say the results are not accurate enough to be used this way.

**Damaging:** Schools where students do not do well in literacy and numeracy tests are likely to be unfairly branded as 'failing' schools.

**Demoralising:** It takes schools many years to throw off the tag of a 'failing school' and it is demoralising for students, teachers and parents. It makes it much harder for those schools to improve the performance of their students.

**Unnecessary:** Politicians don't need schools to be publicly ranked to know which ones need help and more resources. Parents can already access relevant information on school performance by directly contacting schools.

## What do we want the Federal Government to do?

Parents groups, principals and teachers have all asked the Federal Government to take action to protect students and school communities from misleading and damaging league tables.



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This can be done through new laws or by copyright protection of the data published by ACARA.

Laws preventing the creation of league tables in NSW have been in place since 1997. Those laws were put in place after the Daily Telegraph placed a photo of an entire Year 12 class on the front page of the paper under the headline: The Class We Failed. The paper described students as “virtually useless for further education”.

**The AEU remains willing to discuss all possible options with the Federal Government to protect students and school communities from the damaging impact of school league tables.**