



Contact Angelo Gavrielatos at angelo@aeufederal.org.au

Not good enough

The My School website delivers an incomplete and misleading report.

As predicted, within 24 hours of the My School website going live the worst fears of the teaching profession were realised: across Australia, the data was used to create and publish crude, simplistic and damaging league tables. The Federal Government now finds itself in the peculiar position of both opposing and facilitating league tables.

While our primary concern remains the creation and publication of league tables, our concerns with the My School website are not insignificant.

In its current form this website is incomplete and inaccurate.

It is incomplete because it contains no information whatsoever on the total resources available to schools. Throughout 2009 Education Minister Julia Gillard repeatedly said that this was vital information if anyone was to judge school effectiveness. Yet the website went live, prematurely, without this information.

It is inaccurate because of the flaws inherent in the Index of Community and School Educational Advantage (ICSEA). Parents are being told to compare schools grouped with so-called 'similar schools' such as:

- Cocos Island District School, thousands of kilometres off the coast of Western Australia, and Holroyd High School in Western Sydney which has a

significant non-English speaking background student enrolment including new arrival and refugee students;

- Melbourne Girls Grammar and Dargo Public School, a one-student school near the Victorian snowfields;
- Alice Springs School of the Air and schools such as Blacktown Boys High School in Western Sydney;
- Cameron Downs State School, located on a property in Queensland's central western district with six students grouped with schools

The damaging effects of league tables on education, students and school communities are well documented.

including Terrigal High School on the central coast of NSW with 1300 students;

- The Kings School in Parramatta and Gundaroo Public School in a village near Canberra;
- Geelong Grammar and Arthurs Creek Primary School in Victoria, with 71 students, or Thirroul Public School near Wollongong.

These comparisons are clearly nonsensical.

Fundamentally, however, this website is invalid because of its reliance on national literacy and numeracy test data.

NAPLAN data provides a one-point-in-time snapshot of student performance. It was never designed nor intended to be used to describe a school's performance.

The invalidity of using NAPLAN

tests as a basis of a school performance is further highlighted by the margin of error contained within such tests. In small schools for example, the margin of error can be as large as plus or minus 35 points.

According to Professor Margaret Wu, a leading psychometrician from the University of Melbourne, "it would be irresponsible for the Government... to tell the public that school performance can be judged from information on the My School website".

The My School website also encourages comparison of high school performance on the basis of the aggregated scores of individual year 7 students. In most cases, year 7 students have only been at high school for three months when they are tested.

Describing a high school's performance or effectiveness on the basis of these results is clearly wrong.

The damaging effects of league tables on education, students and school communities are well documented.

Apart from media proprietors and online profiteers, it appears the only people not listening are the politicians who are putting political timetables and agendas before the educational wellbeing of our students and school communities. ●

Angelo Gavrielatos

AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT