

About the *My School* website

Q: What is the *My School* website?

A: All Australian education ministers last year committed to the publication of school information under the National Education Agreement and the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*.

This information is being delivered through the *My School* website www.myschool.edu.au.

The *My School* website provides profiles and school performance data on almost 10,000 Australian schools that can be searched by name, location and/or sector. Statistical and contextual information about schools is provided, and school results in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (see www.naplan.edu.au) can be compared with results in statistically similar schools across Australia. Each school has a dedicated profile page displaying a range of information. The information will be published on 28 January 2010.

Q: Who is responsible for the *My School* website?

A: The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for the website. ACARA is an independent authority with functions including publishing nationally comparable data on all Australian schools. This responsibility is outlined in the ACARA Act (www.comlaw.gov.au) and through the decisions of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) (www.mceecdya.edu.au). To help achieve the reporting responsibilities, ACARA liaises with Commonwealth, state, territory and non-government school authorities to publish relevant, nationally comparable information on all schools.

Q: Why was the *My School* website developed?

A: In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that greater transparency and accountability for the performance of schools

was essential to ensure that every Australian child received the highest-quality education and the opportunity to achieve through participation in employment and society. COAG agreed that ACARA would undertake this work and provide the public with information on each school in Australia.

All education ministers agreed that the information published would include data on each school's performance and factors relating to performance. This includes national testing results and school attainment rates, student background characteristics and the school's capacity, including information about each school's teaching staff and income. Ministers also agreed that the publication of this information should enable comparisons with statistically similar schools (that is, schools with similar student populations) across the nation.

The *My School* website has been developed so that parents and the community have access to this information about their child's school.

Q: What information about schools will be published on the *My School* website?

A: The *My School* website provides profile information on each school's:

- student population – the socio-economic status (SES) of the school student body, the proportion of students with an Indigenous background, and student attendance rates
- capacity or capability – the type of school, the year range, student and staff numbers, and the school's location
- educational achievements – the results of national literacy and numeracy testing, senior secondary outcomes and, for states with relevant data, post-school destinations.

Not all of the information planned for publication is currently available. Additional information will be provided as it becomes available.

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The website also contains a short description of each school and in most cases, a link to the school's website so people can obtain more information about the school community.

For each school, the *My School* website provides NAPLAN results for other schools across Australia that are statistically similar in terms of their student intakes.

Q: Why do school profiles include student background information?

A: Certain factors relating to student background are correlated with student achievement. Providing information about student background reduces the risk that inappropriate conclusions are drawn about the performance of individual schools. Publishing achievement results and student background data enables members of the school community to make informed decisions about school performance.

Q: What other information on schools will become available on the website?

A: Education ministers have agreed that school financial information will be published in the next website update as part of the information about a school's capacity. Work is underway to develop a nationally comparable indicator for school finances so that this information can be available in 2010. Indicators relating to senior secondary outcomes, including information relating to Year 12 attainment and tertiary entrance scores, will be refined to ensure national consistency.

ACARA will investigate the feasibility of a national satisfaction survey of parents, teachers and students to enable nationally comparable satisfaction information to be published on the website in future. ACARA is also helping to develop indicators to make it easier to report on the percentages of students with disabilities and students with a language background other than English. This will expand on the contextual information provided about a school.

Q: Will information about senior secondary outcomes be available on *My School*?

A: Information on senior secondary outcomes has been provided by each State and Territory from their own records. This information is comparable on a state or territory level, not on a national basis, as different jurisdictions capture and record different information.

Q: Why is the website being launched at the end of January 2010?

A: The publication of school information on the *My School* website is a key element of the government's education reform agenda. The collection of school profile data across states and territories and the building of the *My School* website have been a significant undertaking since ACARA was established in May 2009. The end of January 2010 was the earliest that ACARA could complete this work given data availability and the time required to build the website. In future years the *My School* website will be updated annually before the end of each year.

Q: Will all schools be on the website?

A: All schools that were in operation in 2009, that will continue in 2010, and that receive funding from governments through either the National Education Agreement or the Schools Assistance Act 2008 will have their information published on the *My School* website. ACARA is required to publish the agreed, available information for each school in Australia.

Q: Could individuals be identified from published results?

A: ACARA has carefully considered the privacy risks involved when publishing information about students. Rules have been adopted to suppress the publication of information in situations where it could result in the identification of individual students.

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Q: How do I find out about schools in my local area?

A: The school profile webpage will include a link to a list of up to 20 government and non-government schools situated closest to the selected school. In a city these schools may be quite close together. In remote and rural areas, schools may be separated by great distances and so the list may contain fewer than 20 schools.

The profile for each of these schools can be accessed from this list.

ICSEA and statistically similar schools

Q: How can I use the *My School* website to help me to compare the performance of schools?

A: The *My School* website provides charts that enable you to compare the NAPLAN test results of a given school with results for all schools in Australia and for up to 60 schools that have similar student intakes. On the 'Home' page, use one of the search functions to select a school. This will take you to the 'School profile' page. Scroll down to the NAPLAN results where NAPLAN test performance information is set out in a chart. The numbers in the chart are average scores on each of the NAPLAN tests.

Colour coding has been used to indicate whether the average score of the selected school is above or below that of statistically similar schools and of all schools across Australia. Green means the selected school is above the average of statistically similar or all schools, while red means the selected school is below the average of statistically similar or all schools.

You can also choose the statistically similar schools on the left-hand menu on the 'School profile' page. This will take you to the list of up to 60 statistically similar schools to the school you have selected. You

can compare average student results on NAPLAN tests with those of students attending other schools in a similar group.

Q: What is the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)?

A: The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a measure that enables meaningful and fair comparisons to be made across schools. It has been developed specifically for the *My School* website for the purpose of identifying schools serving similar student populations.

ICSEA uses Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and school data to create an index that best predicts performance on NAPLAN tests. The variables that make up ICSEA include socio-economic characteristics of the small areas where students live (in this case an ABS census collection district), as well as whether a school is in a regional or remote area and the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at the school.

For each school, ICSEA is used to create a list of up to 60 statistically similar schools to enable fair comparisons to be made between schools with students from similar backgrounds.

Q: What is the benefit of comparing schools if they are in another part of the country?

A: The benefit comes from knowing that there are schools that have similar intakes but are performing above expectation. These schools show what is possible and raise expectations. They may also hold the key to working out what needs to happen in order for all schools to perform at a high level. In many instances, high performing schools will not be in the local area or in the same State or Territory, but there may still be a lot to learn from them. The chief benefit of a national approach to comparing schools is that it focuses attention on ways of improving the performance of all schools across the nation.

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Use of information

Q: Will the website publish 'league tables' ranking schools by performance?

A: No. Simple league tables that rank and compare schools with very different student populations can be misleading and will not be published on the *My School* website.

Q: What measures are in place to ensure that school data are reported responsibly?

A: Education ministers have agreed to rules that support meaningful and comparable reporting of school data and responsible use of this information. These rules include:

- the protection of individual student privacy
- not publishing comparative data without contextual information
- the publication of error margins, caveats and explanatory notes to ensure accurate interpretation.

Ministers have also agreed that ACARA will manage the information it publishes to prevent individual students from being identified and to promote the meaningful use of data by third parties. ACARA will work with the media to explain the information published on the *My School* website, advise on how to properly interpret it and take steps to counter any inaccurate reporting.

The *Principles and Protocols for Reporting on Schooling in Australia* is available on the MCEECDYA website at www.mceecdya.edu.au.

NAPLAN

Q: What is the purpose of conducting NAPLAN testing?

A: The main purpose of the NAPLAN tests is to identify whether all students have the literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide

the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community. The introduction of the tests in 2008 has provided consistency, comparability and transferability of information on students' literacy and numeracy performance across all jurisdictions.

NAPLAN test results provide an objective view of students' performance and a basis for evidence-based decision-making about literacy and numeracy policies, practices and resourcing. They provide a national perspective on student achievement and the performance of schools.

Q: How are NAPLAN tests developed?

A: NAPLAN consists of four tests in the domains of Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy. The test development process takes about 12 months to complete and involves the following steps:

1. Specialist writers are employed to develop test questions (items) that meet nationally endorsed test requirements, including requirements relating to the types of test items that can be used, length of tests, and spread of item difficulties. NAPLAN is developed so that it has curriculum coverage appropriate for the relevant year levels. Currently this is done by referencing the National Statements of Learning in English and Mathematics, and State and Territory curriculum and assessment frameworks. NAPLAN will be referenced against the national curriculum once it is implemented.
2. Proposed test questions are provided to all State and Territory test authorities for review by experts in curriculum and measurement, practising teachers and specialist officers in areas such as Indigenous education, English as a Second Language, and inclusive education. Only those questions that meet stringent criteria are used.
3. Samples of students from all jurisdictions participate in trialling a number of NAPLAN test forms. The performance of each question,

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such as how well it is able to discriminate high-performing and low-performing students, or whether there is a gender bias, is determined by psychometric analysis conducted after the trial. The psychometric data are used, together with professional judgments from educational measurement, test construction and curriculum experts from all jurisdictions, to select the items most suitable for inclusion in the final NAPLAN tests.

4. An Expert Advisory Group (EAG), consisting of five pre-eminent educational measurement experts, reviews the tests and provides advice before the tests are finalised. The EAG may recommend changes prior to endorsement. The EAG provides a final report to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), who signs off the tests and endorses them as satisfying the specifications.

Q: How reliable are the NAPLAN tests?

A: Reliability coefficients (using Cronbach's alpha) for the NAPLAN tests are generally high and typically lie between 0.88 and 0.92. The Grammar and Punctuation tests have somewhat lower coefficients of between 0.77 and 0.80.

Q: The NAPLAN results are only a snapshot in time. Will the website include information on student progress over time?

A: ACARA will work with education authorities to develop measures to track growth over time. The website will include these measures once they have been agreed, and once data from several years of NAPLAN assessments are available.

Q: Can NAPLAN test results be compared from one year to the next?

A: Yes. An expert advisory group is responsible for monitoring the reliability of NAPLAN tests between years. A rigorous equating process was undertaken in 2009 to ensure that the 2008 and 2009 results could

be compared. As a result, changes in performance of schools and school systems over time can be identified.

Q: How accurate are school results?

A: The NAPLAN average score for a school is a good indication of school performance based on the students who were tested in the school. The greater the proportion of students tested, the greater the accuracy. The *My School* website gives indicative standard errors for schools with different numbers of students. Standard errors reflect the accuracy of the estimates and the degree of confidence one can have in them.

Q: Are any students exempt from NAPLAN tests?

A: Yes. Students are exempted from NAPLAN tests if they have a severe intellectual or functional disability or if they are from a non-English-speaking background and have been learning English in Australia for less than one year. Exempted students are not included in the calculation of the school average. All Australian governments have committed to promoting increased participation of such students in the national assessment process. National protocols for the administration of the NAPLAN tests outline the agreed policies and practices for providing students with special support, adjustments and accommodations.

Q: I can't locate my child's NAPLAN results. Can students' results be provided through the *My School* website?

A: No, the *My School* website does not provide personal information on individual students. Enquiries about a student's NAPLAN results should be directed to your test administration authority. Please visit the NAPLAN website (www.naplan.edu.au) for the contact details in your State or Territory.

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Selective enrolments, cohort variations and unique populations

Q: Are some schools, for example schools serving special needs students, small schools, schools for at risk adolescents and selective schools, reported differently?

A: No, all schools are reported in the same way. However, the school profile page of the *My School* website includes a statement that provides a general overview of the school and the environment in which it operates. The information included in the statement is provided by each school and is a means of drawing attention to any special features of the school or special circumstances under which it operates. For example, schools may wish to outline their enrolment policies, promote any special programs they operate or detail their student profile. A link to the school's own website is provided to better understand unique characteristics of the school.

Q: What information will be provided on schools catering for students with learning disabilities or for students in juvenile detention?

A: These schools are categorised as 'special' on the *My School* website and NAPLAN results and the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value for the school will not be reported. These schools will not be included in the groups of statistically similar schools.

A short description of these schools will be provided, along with a link to the current school website, where the school can identify specific school programs.

State and Territory websites

Q: How does the information on *My School* relate to school performance data published by States and Territories?

A: Some States and Territories publish their own school performance data. Reporting frameworks may differ, as may data and interpretation methods. *My School* provides a complete picture of the performance of Australian schools by publishing information relating to every school in Australia. This means that for the first time there is genuinely comparable information on all Australian schools, irrespective of their location, jurisdiction or sector.

States and Territories will continue to publish their own data in parallel with the publication of information on the *My School* website. ACARA will work with all education authorities and governments towards consistency and reporting of useful, meaningful data.