



CATHOLIC

Dianne Mack and children Nathan, 14, and Erin, 14. Her eldest, Sarah, 17, is not pictured. Sacred Heart middle and senior schools, Marymount College.

A cursory look at her children's school's home page on My School showed Dianne Mack all she wanted to know. Without a particular purpose in mind, Mrs Mack said the website had no real benefits for parents. "I wouldn't just look at it as an exercise to play around," she said. "If there's particular information you want to know that you can't get elsewhere, then maybe it's helpful." The decision about her children's education was made with several factors in mind. The junior, middle and senior school build of Sacred Heart and Marymount appealed to the Mack family, while the religious affiliation and transition between single sex and co-educational cohorts also played a part. "For me, I wouldn't pick a school because it had the highest average scores. It's more about how people treat you when you're there and what they offer in terms of curriculum."



CHOICE: Kylie Krueger with her children Ainsley and Hayden, who attend Woodville Primary School.

Picture: MICHAEL MARSCHALL

Jury still out on new My School version



INDEPENDENT

Anne Oldford and children Liam, 15, Dylan, 13, and Regan, 11. Scotch College

When My School was first launched in January last year, Anne Oldford didn't take much notice. But as media interest in the website picked up, Ms Oldford decided to log on and get her own understanding. She initially looked at the information for her children's school, Scotch College, before perusing the data on other independent schools in Adelaide. "I was interested more for what it didn't say about schools than what it did," she said. "What it actually told me about the schools was fairly limited. I felt as a consumer of educational services I didn't find it very useful." To Ms Oldford, some parts of the site, including the school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, were lacking context and were therefore virtually useless. "It's just made up parameters the government organisation has set, it doesn't mean anything." In choosing a school for her children with partner Steve Holmes, the couple considered the structure of the school, the school environment and the feeling and energy level of staff and students.

THE FEDERAL Government's My School website has once again become a political hot potato with the launch of version 2.0 this month.

Passed from School Education Minister Peter Garrett to teachers' unions to principals and back, the controversial school performance and comparison website has generated a great deal of debate, as well as reigniting the age-old private/public funding stoush since it first launch in January last year.

However, the group it was allegedly created for - parents of children in the Australian education system - has had very little public say about the website and whether it's worth the time, funding and hot air it has taken to keep it afloat.

The Australian Parents Council, representing parents of students in non-government schools, says the website has a place but is yet to prove itself as a useful tool for the education sector.

"Importantly, while the revamped My School website gives parents more information about schools, it does nothing to encourage and support parents to engage in meaningful ways with their children's education, particularly the parents of students in disadvantaged communities," council executive director Ian Dalton said.

"My School 2.0 certainly provides a lot of potentially rich information. However, down the track parents will judge the worth of the website on how accurate the information it contains proves to be and whether that information has been converted into policies and practices that have a positive impact on their children's schooling."

In discussion with *The Advertiser*, parents

EDUCATION REPORTER

CANDICE KELLER



have given various responses to the website. Some regularly log on to assess their own school's performance and compare that with others nearby, across all three sectors.

Others have barely given it a second glance, satisfied by information gained from the school's own website and through conversation with the school community.

Mr Garrett said the reworked site received 186,000 hits in the first day, showing there was a need for this breadth of information.

"This clearly is a resource people want, and it is already helping inform parents, teachers, principals and the general public right across the nation about how our schools are performing and how they're funded," he said.

South Australian Association of State School Organisations, the group representing parents on governing councils, says the updated version of the site can raise more questions than provide answers.

"At the most basic level, parents are entitled to know how much money their local school has to spend on their child's education and how much is spent supporting education bureaucracy," association director David Knuckey said.

Yet Mr Knuckey said there had been a positive response to My School 2.0 and, essentially, the more information available to parents, the better.

PUBLIC

Kylie Krueger and children Ainsley, 11, and Hayden, 9. Woodville Primary School.

As the Krueger family prepares for the transition from primary to high school, the My School website has become an invaluable resource. Comparing national literacy and numeracy test results between schools and Year 12 completion rates will provide Mrs Krueger with some guidance in the decision of where Ainsley and Hayden will attend secondary school. While it's not the only factor informing their decision, Mrs Krueger said she did find it a helpful piece of the puzzle.

"These NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) results give a reasonable indication," she said. "It shows at least if they're achieving what they should be. It's useful as a second resource. Personally I think visiting the school, talking to other parents and word of mouth are the best indicators." She said the colour coding, which shows if a school is performing below, at or above national and similar school averages, was easy to understand and a quick way to gauge a school's performance.