

NAPLAN – an Overview

By Frankie Rodney

All parents have probably heard of NAPLAN, it's near impossible to avoid if you have children at school. But how much do you really know about it?

NAPLAN stands for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy. The tests are administered nationally to students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9, in the second full week of May every year. This year will be the seventh round since NAPLAN first started in 2008.

NAPLAN tests students in the four following areas of their learning:

- Reading
- Writing
- Language conventions (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- Numeracy.

The purpose of NAPLAN – like any test - is to give a snapshot of where students are at across the country. It is intended to be used by everyone from the federal government to the teachers in the classroom and parents, to track and assess their children's learning.

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Traditionally, testing has always taken place using pen and paper. As of two years from now, however, that is set to change. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has announced that from 2016, all students undertaking NAPLAN will complete the tests using a computer or other electronic device, such as a tablet.

Moving to online assessments is expected to open up the possibility of tailored

testing. Where students have previously all answered the same sets of questions from test start to test finish, with online assessments, students will answer an initial set of questions and then be directed to subsequent sets of questions based on their initial answers. This approach is expected to provide more detailed information on student aptitude and performance.

Another significant improvement provided by online assessments is the reduction in the time it will take to provide feedback to schools, parents and students. Given that the current turnaround time is approximately 3 months, such an improvement would be welcome.

Unfortunately, there has been a lot of controversy surrounding NAPLAN in recent years, particularly around the way in which teachers and principals approach the tests, and the stress suffered by students taking them.

According to recent media, principals and teachers have been banned from coaching students for NAPLAN and classroom security is going to be tightened in a

crackdown against cheating. That such measures are necessary, suggests that the problem is rife in our schools.

The existence of such problems led to a Senate inquiry earlier this year. Recently, the Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy inquiry released its final report.

Included in the report was some discussion of the impacts of NAPLAN and its

unintended consequences. A submission from the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) quoted an independent survey of primary school principals, which found that teachers do alter the regular curriculum in preparation for NAPLAN testing – whether intentionally or not.

The Tasmanian Department of Education acknowledged that there have been changes to teaching methods as a result of NAPLAN, but argued that the changes are appropriate for improving students learning outcomes. The committee agreed that changes in teaching are inevitable and considers it an issue which needs careful consideration.

In regard to student stress levels, research conducted by the Whitlam Institute found that educators and parents are concerned about the effects of NAPLAN testing on students. However, the submission from the Whitlam Institute also said that stress is a perfectly normal response to any test, and to mount a case that somehow NAPLAN is damaging a generation of children says more about parenting than it does about the test itself.

It seems that many of the problems surrounding NAPLAN are a result of perception, rather than a problem with the testing regime. The committee considers the issue to be the way NAPLAN data is used, rather than the tests themselves or the impact on students.

Many of the submissions made to the Inquiry consider NAPLAN to be a high-stakes test, because of the impact it can potentially have on the school community. That impact is not a result of individual test results, but of the school results as a whole, due to the publication of those scores on the MySchool website.

Despite discouragement from both ACARA and the government, it is widely recognised that development of league tables from MySchool data occurs and is



used to rank schools. This creates a perception that there is pressure on schools to perform well in NAPLAN testing in order to compete with other schools in the area. The fact that funding is sometimes allocated as a result of NAPLAN scores does little to help the situation.

The inquiry recommended that some of the core ranking and comparative functionality of the MySchool website should be removed, but stopped short of saying that NAPLAN results should not be published on the site at all.

Their recommendations also included:

- quicker turnaround of results;
- taking into account the needs of students with disabilities and those from non-English speaking backgrounds when designing online testing; and
- close monitoring to ensure that published results are being used in an appropriate manner.

If you are interested in reading the full report of the Senate committee, it can be found on the SAASSO website. ■

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NAPLAN - How Would You Do?

The national literacy and numeracy test is coming up for all year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students. The results always generate media and public interest - but what about the questions themselves ... how well would you do?

Below are some sample year 9 questions from the NAPLAN website. See how hard or easy you find the test our children will be taking. The answers (if you need them) are on the SAASSO website.

Literacy

1

In each of the sentences below correct the highlighted spelling mistakes.

The nineteenth-century **bilding** was heritage listed.

The **bravary** of our lifesavers at the beach is legendary.

Doing daily sit-ups is an excellent way to strengthen the **stummick** muscles.

It was the **begining** of the school year.

Tiny **particals** of dust were floating in the sunlight.

2

In each of the following sentences, there is a spelling mistake - can you spot it?

The coach made the team watch a vidio of the previous game.

The chemical structure of many plastics makes them flexible.

The detective was sertain of the identity of the suspect.

The volcanic eruption spread lava across the region.

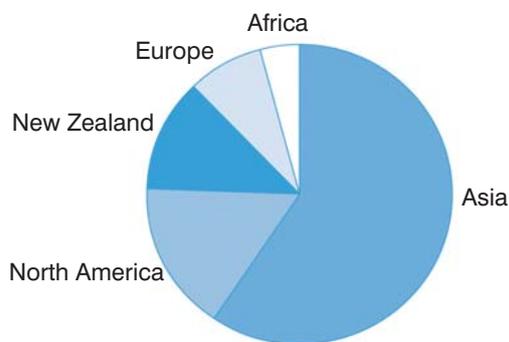
The perimeter of the circle is in its circumfrance.

For our health project, we had to record our kilojul intake for an entire week.

Numeracy

1

The diagram shows the proportion of flights to different international regions for an airline.



One region makes up about 60% of the airlines flights

Which region is it?

Asia

Europe

North America

New Zealand

2

Steven cuts his birthday cake into 8 equal slices. He eats 25% of the cake in whole slices.

How many slices of the cake are left? _____

3

Helen has 24 red apples and 12 green apples. What fraction of the apples are green?

1/2

1/3

1/4

1/12

4

A ticket costs \$75.

A fee of 10% is added to the price.

Which calculation will give you the new price?

75 + 10

75 + 0.1

75 x 0.1

75 x 1.1

visit www.saasso.asn.au to check your answers.