



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
Mr Michael Petterson MLA (Chair), Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Deputy Chair),
Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Standardised Testing in ACT Schools

Submission Number: 12

Date Authorised for Publication: 20 November 2018



Yvette Berry MLA

Deputy Chief Minister

Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development

Minister for Housing and Suburban Development

Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and
Family Violence

Minister for Sport and Recreation

Minister for Women

Member for Ginninderra

Mr Michael Pettersson MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Pettersson

Michael

During the hearings into Standardised Testing in ACT schools on 25 September 2018 you agreed, following a number of both requests and offers for further information, to the provision of additional information on the subject of standardised testing in the ACT.

There are two attachments to this letter. Attachment A provides further information to support evidence on school improvement processes given during the hearing on 25 September 2018 while Attachment B provides further information on performance analysis to support evidence given during the same hearing, and some additional information relevant to the broader Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. I would be pleased to provide any further information on request.

Yours sincerely

Yvette Berry MLA
Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development

6 NOV 2018

ACT Legislative assembly

London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

Phone +61 2 6205 0233 Email berry@act.gov.au



@YvetteSBerry



YvetteSBerry



yvettesberry



ATTACHMENT A

INFORMATION REQUESTED DURING THE HEARING INTO STANDARDISED TESTS IN ACT SCHOOLS

Attachment A comprises information sought from the Education Directorate by the Standing Committee during the hearing on 25 September 2018.

The School improvement journey

Informed by the Future of Education consultative process and by the 2018-2021 Education Directorate strategic plan, improving performance in ACT schools is the result of actions on a number of fronts, including the process by which individual schools are reviewed, the development of strategic action plans at the school level, as well as building the capability of school leaders to use data to inform their decision making.

Strengthening the school review process

The Education Directorate supports a school review process designed by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER). This is the third year of implementation of this review process, with approximately 18 schools per year being reviewed. The process is based on a national best practice framework for assessing school improvement across nine domains:

- Domain 1 - An explicit improvement agenda
- Domain 2 - Analysis and discussion of data
- Domain 3 - A culture that promotes learning
- Domain 4 - Targeted use of school resources
- Domain 5 - An expert teaching team
- Domain 6 - Systematic curriculum delivery
- Domain 7 - Differentiated teaching and learning
- Domain 8 - Effective pedagogical practices
- Domain 8 - School and community partnerships

The use of standardised testing information contributes to domain 2 of the review. Whilst standardised testing results and how the information is used forms a component of the review, a number of other key areas of consideration are assessed as part of the process to provide a more holistic assessment of a schools improvement journey. These reports are provided to the Principal and community through the school board.

Strengthening School Strategic Planning and Annual Action Plans

A key outcome of the school review process is specific recommendations for a school to take forward into their next five-year improvement plan. The Directorate supports schools

in strengthening their priorities and associated targets as part of the support process for the development of school strategic plans and annual action plans.

The release of the new ACT Education Strategic Plan in 2018 and the publishing of strategic indicators in equity, growth and student engagement also provides an opportunity for schools to align their planning and targets with reference to these system priorities. This provides greater consistency between schools as well as providing line of sight between the system priorities and schools. All schools are currently being supported to align their Schools Strategic Plans with the new education strategic performance indicators for 2019.

Building capability in the use of data and evidence in schools

The Directorate is working with all school leaders on a common approach to looking at individual student achievement, cohort achievement, whole school achievement and system achievement. The approach we have taken in the Directorate is research supported and is a multiple sources of data approach, described in more detail below.

This focused data analysis process will enhance continuous improvement processes and provide comprehensive information about how a school/college/system is going in relationship to its guiding principles (vision, beliefs, curriculum standards and improvement priorities). In this model, rather than looking at one big data set such as NAPLAN mean scores, a number of relevant data sets are grouped into four 'sources' of evidence that provide multiple lens on what is happening in a school.

Principals, deputies and executive staff in schools have been involved in a program of professional development throughout term 3 this year, focussed on using multiple sources of evidence to drive school improvement.

Schools have also supported with a range of targeted programs, based on system level evidence and data, for supporting schools to improve the pedagogy and practice in literacy and numeracy. These include:

- **Principals As Numeracy Leaders** – Program targeted at strengthening whole school capability in pedagogy and practice in numeracy.
- **Principals As Literacy Leaders** : Program targeted at strengthening whole school capability in pedagogy and practice in literacy.
- **Early Years Literacy – The ten essential literacy practices:** Schools receiving intensive in school support for leaders and teachers.
- **High school literacy inquiry** – High School program focussed on improving interdisciplinary writing across the school.
- **Writing Inquiry P-6** – Whole school approach to improving writing.

Multiple sources of data for learning

There are a number of data sets that can be considered in conjunction with the results of standardised testing. Relevant data sets in addition to the results of standardised testing, are grouped into four 'sources' of evidence that provide multiple lens on what is happening in a school. These sources of evidence are described below.

Additional student learning data

At the class and school level, the benefits of standardised testing is reduced where the time lapse between the tests and the results is prolonged and the teaching moment for next steps for an individual student has passed. Less formal individual student data captured at the class level through formative assessment strategies every day can be used to personalise learning through targeted teaching.

More formal school agreed assessments to personalise learning through targeted teaching. These may be assessing a child's reading behaviours at regular intervals using common assessment tools in the early years or perhaps a unit assessments or feedback on assignments using an agreed matrix in a high school class

It is the local, classroom, data that teachers become experts in using throughout every lesson, every day to provide the feedback individual students need and to plan for their next learning. This formative assessment is looking at the edge of each student's learning, ensuring every day there is new layers of learning and practice.

School processes data

This is data related to instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches used by the teachers- for instance if a school is using the 10 essential early literacy strategies or if a high school English faculty of teachers is using a scaffolding literacy approach. In addition, the data in this area can also be collecting information on the effectiveness of the coaching support or the response to student need model used in the school.

Demographic data

Teachers and school leaders can look at the student learning data or/and the school processes data by subgroups. These might be socio economic subgroups, as considered in equity measures, or students with additional languages are achieving and what instructional practices work most effectively for them, or how the boys are achieving in reading in year 1. This data can also include demographic and enrolment trends over time within a school's catchment area.

Perception data

This may be data collected on how students perceive their learning and what is most effective for them, what learning environments they find most successful and what feedback supports them to improve their learning. Perception data also includes the results of staff and student surveys that schools draw upon.

ATTACHMENT B

POINTS IN RELATION TO THE USE OF STANDARDISED TESTS IN ACT SCHOOLS

Attachment B outlines a number of issues drawn from the Terms of Reference for the inquiry into Standardised Testing in the ACT that were not covered during the evidence provided by the Minister for Education or by Education Directorate officials on 25 September.

Range of standardised tests used in the ACT

A number of standardised tests are taken by learners in ACT schools. These include the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), as well as the associated NAP sample assessments, which test students' skills and understanding in science literacy, civics and citizenship and information and communication technology literacy, and the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) tests.

International standardised tests undertaken in the ACT include the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Standardised testing in the ACT can test either the full cohort of students, or test a sample of students. The international tests outlined above, and the NAP Sample tests are all based on a representative sample. For all these tests, the representative sample is determined at the national level, and must be constructed in a way that ensures a representative sample of students is selected.

Samples drawn from the ACT, for both NAP Sample tests and for international tests, are proportionately larger than those from the larger jurisdictions. This technique is known as 'over sampling' and is designed to ensure that a 'valid' number participants from the ACT, or other small jurisdictions, have been selected to ensure that any report produced for ACT has enough participants to be reliable as an indicator of what is happening in the ACT.

NAPLAN – ACT PERFORMANCE OVER TIME

Over time, most of the variation in ACT NAPLAN performance has tended to mirror changes in national results, both positive and negative as visible in Attachment A. Nevertheless, there are a number of insights that can be drawn from the performance of the ACT in comparative assessments over time, and in comparison to the performance of other jurisdictions.

In general the ACT has consistently over time, and comparatively, as measured both by NAPLAN and by PISA testing, performed well against the key measures of reading, writing and numeracy.

Over time, there has been a gradual increase in NAPLAN performance nationally with regard to year 3 and year 5 reading that has gradually eroded the ACT's advantage. Reading outcomes for year 7 and year 9 have been largely consistent over the full period of NAPLAN testing, with the ACT largely maintaining its advantage over other jurisdictions.

Writing outcomes, as measured by NAPLAN have, with some volatility over time for year 3, tended to gradually decline over the 10 years of NAPLAN testing. The ACT's performance has tended to be consistently just below NSW and Victoria over time for all year levels, with the exception of year 9, where the ACT has frequently been the highest performing jurisdiction with regard to writing. The decline in writing results across all year levels and in all states and territories that has been evident for a number of years. For 2018, it appears that online writing results have not declined as much as those for paper and the overall decrease is not significantly below 2017 results for most year levels and jurisdictions.

Unlike writing, numeracy performance has trended very slightly higher in all jurisdictions over time, with the ACT a consistently strong performer.

Other insights at the broad level are that the gap between the jurisdictions has tended to decrease slightly over the NAPLAN period in the key domains of reading, writing and numeracy, noting that the Northern Territory remains an outlier over the whole period and for all domains. The main reason for this narrowing between jurisdictions has been improvements in the performance of other jurisdictions, particularly Queensland and Western Australia.

Analysis commissioned by the Education Directorate

In 2016, the Education Directorate commissioned work from Victoria University into the comparative performance of ACT public schools. The value of this work by Professor Lamb was that it was possible for the author to compare more detailed ACT data, not available on the My School website, with equivalent data in other jurisdictions. This work, for example, specifically excluded non-metropolitan schools and academically selective schools in other jurisdictions.

The Lamb report was commissioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors operating in ACT public schools and the extent to which results, as measured by NAPLAN, are consistent with the outcomes in other jurisdictions. Among other things, this report did identify an issue with the educational outcomes in the ACT of students from low socio-economic families when compared with those of similar background in other jurisdictions.

It is important to note that it is possible that the national ICSEA measure has the potential to create anomalies in jurisdictions with populations that varied significantly from the national population. In the ACT, parents and carers are significantly over represented by families with degree qualifications, or higher.

The 2017 Report by the ACT Audit Office into the use of Performance Information in ACT Public Schools drew on the Lamb Report. Following this report, the Education Directorate commenced and is continuing to work with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to develop a more 'fine grained' understanding of the application of the Socio-educational Advantage (SEA) measure that lies at the heart of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) measure.

MEASUREMENT OF LEARNING GAIN IN SCHOOLS

The 2017 ACT Auditor General's Report – Performance information in ACT public schools contained a number of recommendations that are relevant to this Inquiry. These include Recommendation 2, *The Education directorate should develop new Strategic Indicators which are based on measuring student progress in NAPLAN over time.*

Since the delivery of the Audit Report, the Directorate has developed two indicators that meet the intent of this recommendation. These are measures of student learning gain in schools over time and measures of progress towards greater equity in educational outcomes in the education system in the ACT.

To measure the growth in student outcomes over time in the education system, the Directorate compares the NAPLAN mean reading and numeracy scores of children in year 3 and in year 7 with the NAPLAN mean reading scores of the same children when they have reached year 5 and year 9 respectively. The difference (gain) in the results indicates how the children's learning outcomes are changing over time and demonstrates whether the Directorate is achieving a growth in student outcomes (ideally, the gain will be maintained with a gradual increase over time).

To help assess its progress towards greater equity in the system, the Directorate is currently developing and testing indicators using NAPLAN scores that represent the performance gap over time between the most disadvantaged group of students—based on parental education (those whose parents have not completed year 12)—and the most advantaged group of students – those with parents with a university qualification

COSTS OF STANDARDISED TESTING

In 2018 the approximate full cost for delivery of NAPLAN related services will be \$1,400,000. This equates to approximately \$65 per student. This cost has declined slightly from 2011, where the cost per student was calculated at \$68 per student.

In addition to a NAPLAN team in the Education Directorate, the ACT has delivers NAPLAN through a service level agreement with NSW for NAPLAN delivery. This covers the printing of test papers, marking of writing materials, preparation and printing of student reports, as well as and access for ACT teachers to an online analytical tool. It is anticipated that there

will be some savings to the overall cost of NAPLAN delivery/reporting once the transition to NAPLAN Online is completed and printing of test papers is no longer required.

NEXT STEPS FOR STANDARDISED TESTING

The evidence provided to this Inquiry argues that there is a role for standardised testing, at the level of the classroom and school, at the level of the whole jurisdiction, at the national level, and internationally.

The important thing is to ensure that the right standardised tests are being used for the right purposes, and that the results are effectively contributing to improved outcomes for students and, most importantly, that the results are not being misused, either inadvertently, or for narrow purposes that result in low-stakes testing becoming high-stakes testing.

Advances in technology, including those demonstrated by the recent implementation of NAPLAN Online in the ACT, offer opportunities, including the technical platforms, to administer standardised tests more effectively, more cheaply and with less negative impact on students. The benefits of these advances are likely to include much faster feedback for students, teachers and families on student progress and consequently, much more useful information at the classroom level that a teacher can use to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of their students.

Another significant area for development for quality assessments is what are often called 'soft skills', or general capabilities. These are the sorts of skills and attributes that contribute to the development of the well-rounded, contributing adults that we admire and seek for our community. This is a key focus in the ACT Government's Future of Education Strategy released in August 2018.

Learners need to have skills to look at challenges in innovative ways and assessment techniques need to acknowledge and evaluate these diversified and varied creative skills. It is highly likely that recall plays a critical role in performance in standardised testing compared to learners' skills for critically analysing the gaps and inconsistencies in a task.

Also of importance in the education process is a student's emotional engagement with the teaching, their attitudes to it, their identities as learners, their ability to manage and direct their learning activity and how culturally relevant they see the teaching. Standardised assessments can contribute some information concerning these areas, but enrichment with formative assessment tools and surveys will be critical to strengthening the breadth of what is measured and therefore inherently valued.

Addressing the high-stakes nature of some standardised testing

In an ideal future for standardised testing, the high-stakes emphasis that is placed on key aspects by some families, some schools, some reporting and some stakeholders would be significantly reduced. A major contributor to the 'high-stakes' interpretation of some standardised testing, including NAPLAN, is a consequence of poorly informed reporting, leading to information inconsistencies being created in the parent and in public perceptions

of certain schools and then to a market schools which is not truly reflective of their intrinsic value.

The main purpose of test results is intended to be identifying the learning progress of students, schools and jurisdictions. Additional contextual information is provided to guide the parents and public about the student mix in the schools/jurisdictions. The phenomena described above is created when this widely available public information is used to publish rankings and the results are ascribed solely to the efforts of the schools.

This uninformed reporting creates a value of school in a market which is not established when using a full information set. The full information set determining outcomes include students' innate abilities, access to and participation in quality early childhood education, initial level of education attainment, personal and social circumstances, physical and mental well-being, school factors, communities' engagement, and others. All these factors shape student outcomes.

Standardised tests offer a number of benefits and insights that can support system improvement and enhance learning experiences at schools. Enhanced realisation of benefits could be achieved by better informed reporting including fully acknowledging constraints and limitations.

FUTURE OF NAPLAN REPORTING

At the national level, the reporting of standardised testing, as represented by NAPLAN, is under review. In June 2018, the Education Council of COAG reiterated its commitment to a valid, reliable, standardised and transparent national approach to measuring student performance, and noted that NAPLAN reporting currently plays an important role in this context. Council also agreed that ten years into national reporting it is timely to take stock and ensure that the initial principles are being upheld, including balancing the need for transparency with the need to minimise any misuse or misinterpretation of information. On this basis, Council has requested a review of the current approach to presentation of NAPLAN data, including information published on the *My School* website.

The Education Council noted that the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* recommended the creation of an online, on-demand formative assessment tool based on the Australian Curriculum.

The ACT Government initiated this process and has carriage of the national review.