
NAPLAN TESTING USEFUL, BUT NOT FULL PICTURE OF SCHOOLING

The National Catholic Education Commission has welcomed today's release of the 2014 NAPLAN national report, but cautioned that such testing is not a complete picture of students' performance and progress.

"NAPLAN is a valuable reference at a point in time, but needs to be put into context," said NCEC executive director Ross Fox.

This year marks the first time students have completed the NAPLAN life cycle – having first taken NAPLAN as year 3 students in 2008 and having sat their final NAPLAN test this year as year 9 students.

"Those data are part of a series of 'firsts' that will improve the relevance of NAPLAN testing as part of a broad understanding of a student's learning," Mr Fox said.

"But even with that cohort group data, showing us how 2008's year 3 students have progressed to 2014's year 9 students, there are a number of variables that hinder the reliability of direct comparisons and contrasts with those results," Mr Fox said.

Testing like NAPLAN is a valuable way to prepare students for real-world challenges they will face after school, but Mr Fox said the most effective way of tracking and improving student performance is through teachers and students understanding how their learning has progressed.

"Classrooms are the front line of education and learning. Teachers, parents and the students themselves need to be constantly engaged to understand how each student is performing from week to week and from year to year," he said.

Mr Fox said it is encouraging to hear that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is already working on the next stage of improvements to NAPLAN.

Moving the test online, starting from 2017, is an important development that will allow teachers to access the results much sooner to inform their teaching and learning approaches.

"Schools must be assisted during the transition to online testing, and it's also imperative that schools aren't negatively impacted by the cost of moving the test online," Mr Fox explained.

The full NAPLAN report can be accessed at the ACARA website: www.acara.edu.au.