
NAPLAN ONE REFERENCE FOR AUSTRALIA'S LEARNING JOURNEY

The National Catholic Education Commission says the release of the 2015 NAPLAN testing national report will provide a reference for reflection on education policy directions and what needs attention in the next phase of the learning journey of Australian schools.

NCEC executive director Ross Fox said while NAPLAN is a snapshot in time and therefore has limitations, the national report helps educators understand the progress of Australian students and issues in Australian education.

"NAPLAN testing does not provide a complete picture of students' performance and progress, but it can be a valuable reference, especially as student test results can now be tracked from the start of the NAPLAN testing cycle to its conclusion," Mr Fox said.

Students in year 9 this year are the second cohort to have participated in all four years of the NAPLAN tests in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

"While results for a certain class in a certain school are sometimes used in isolation to compare performance, it is by analysing the changes in students' performance over the entire NAPLAN period that more valuable insights can be gained," Mr Fox said.

Those insights should then be used to strengthen ties between the key educational partners: school leaders and teachers, students, and parents.

"NAPLAN should not be the dominant focus of education," Mr Fox said. "Academic achievement is undoubtedly important, particularly literacy and numeracy skills, however Catholic schools strive to be more than just test results. Priority must be given to the partnership between teachers, students and parents, which is the foundation for teaching and learning."

Mr Fox said the release of NAPLAN is inevitably followed by analysis of which state or territory performed best or which school sector achieved what on the test.

"NAPLAN has been used as a wedge between schools and school sectors; that is NAPLAN at its worst," Mr Fox said.

"NAPLAN, at its best, provides information on where student progress is being made so that schools and teachers can engage deeply on the challenge of providing great teaching and learning for every student."

Mr Fox said with schools and school systems preparing for the move to NAPLAN online testing, beginning in 2017, teachers and students will be able to more quickly understand the strengths and challenges that exist in schools and in classrooms and then work to address them.

"The move to online testing offers new opportunities for the efficacy and relevance of NAPLAN to benefit teachers and students. However, some questions remain to be answered," Mr Fox said.

Schools must be assisted during the transition to NAPLAN online, Mr Fox explained, adding that it is imperative that schools aren't negatively impacted by the cost of moving the test online.

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