

# NATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY ASSESSMENTS MAY 2008

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 1. **Test Purpose and Design**

- **How were the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests developed?**

NAPLAN tests have been developed in a collaborative process between states and territories, the Australian Government and non-government schools sectors. NAPLAN operates under the auspices of education ministers and is overseen by a steering group comprising chief executives and deputy chief executives from states, territories and the Australian Government as well as representatives from the Catholic and independent schools sectors. The steering group was advised by an Expert Advisory Group comprising four eminent assessment and educational measurement experts. NAPLAN test development was managed on behalf of Ministers of Education by Curriculum Corporation.

- **At what time of the year do students sit NAPLAN tests?**

Students participate in NAPLAN tests in mid May of each year. This will be in early second term for all states except Tasmania, where it will be in late first term.

- **Who sits the tests?**

Every year, all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across the country in government and non-government schools will sit literacy and numeracy tests for their year group.

- **Are any students exempted from sitting NAPLAN tests?**

Students with severe disabilities or students from a non-English speaking background who have been learning English for less than one year are eligible for exemption. However, this is not automatic and parents may choose for their child to participate.

- **What was tested?**

Students in the same year level across Australia were tested on the same items in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy.

- **How will students benefit from these tests?**

For the first time all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 have sat common national literacy and numeracy tests, which will provide information about how Australian children are performing on a national basis.

The national literacy and numeracy tests will provide useful information for teachers and schools on individual student performance on a national basis. From this information, teachers and schools will know how well their students are performing, and will be able to identify areas of strength and where further assistance may be required.

National testing also means greater consistency, comparability and transferability of results across jurisdictions in a way that was not possible under the previous system.

- **Instead of testing every child in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, why aren't tests conducted on sample student populations in these years?**

Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are important junctures in education and it is important to see how all students in these grades are performing. The national literacy and numeracy tests will provide important information for schools and teachers on individual student performance and will assist them in tackling areas of need for all students. Parents anywhere in Australia will be able to know how their child is achieving against national minimum standards.

- **Isn't the curriculum different in each state and territory, and doesn't that mean students learn different things?**

State and territory curricula have more commonalities than differences. The tests have been developed using the nationally agreed Statements of Learning that describe essential skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

- **What are the advantages of the new NAPLAN tests?**

NAPLAN tests provide rich information on student performance across the full range of student achievement, not just at the minimum level of literacy and numeracy skills. An important aspect of the NAPLAN test design is the introduction of a single national scale of achievement across 10 bands from Years 3 to 9.

The introduction of the 10 achievement bands from Year 3 to Year 9 means that as a student advances through the years it will be possible to see how much progress in literacy and numeracy he or she has made.

## 2. **Test Results**

- **When will the results be released to the general public and what will be published?**

The results will be released to the public in two stages. The first stage will be a national summary report that will show results at each year level and domain by state and territory, as well as nationally. This will be released during September 2008.

A second more detailed report that will also include results by sex, Indigenous status, Language Background Other Than English status and geolocation (metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote) will be released later in 2008.

Analysis of the data will enable the development of new reporting measures to better inform parents, teachers, schools, governments and the Australian public of students' literacy and numeracy performance.

- **Why are national results being released in two stages?**

A first stage summary report, which will provide key national information in numerical and graphical forms, will be released just before the distribution of reports to parents. A detailed full national report, which takes longer to produce, will be provided later in the year.

## 3. **Student Reports**

- **When will the results be released to schools?**

Schools will be provided with data packages which contain detailed student results either before or at the same time that student reports are provided to parents.

Student reports will be distributed from 15 September 2008 depending on the timing of school holidays in each jurisdiction.

- **What will be included in the student report to parents?**

Every child will receive a report showing his or her results against key national information. For each domain and year level, student results will be reported against six achievement bands, the national average, the middle 60 per cent of Australian students and the national minimum standards.

- **Why do the reports have different starting bands for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9?**

This is to make clear how results for each year level relate to the full 10 band scale covering Years 3 to 9. The advantage of this is that parents will be able to compare their child's results to those in previous years as he or she advances through school.

The 10 band scale has been constructed to span Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 so that the growth in student achievement throughout these years of schooling can be monitored and reported. The new national scales will enable the achievement of all students to be monitored. For example, for the first time at the national level it will be possible to gauge the achievement of the most able students and at the same time to pay attention to students who have yet to reach the national minimum standard.

Typical individual progress would have students moving up the scale the equivalent of one band between tests. This is not constant across the national scale as student achievement increases much more rapidly between Years 3 and 5 and slows between Years 7 and 9.

- **By the time student reports are distributed, how will the information still be useful to help students?**

NAPLAN results in 2008 will be available during the third term to inform parents, schools and teachers about student performance. This information can be used to provide support to students within the same year the tests are conducted.

- **What help will be available to interpret the NAPLAN tests results?**

Parents with questions about their child's results should speak to their teachers to learn more about their child's performance at school. See also the information sheet 'Understanding Your Child's Report' on this website.

- **Can I compare these results with my child's results from previous state and territory tests?**

NAPLAN tests replace individual state- and territory-based tests within a new assessment framework. The new national scale is not directly comparable with previous state- and territory-based tests.

#### **4. Integrity of Test Administration**

- **How has the integrity of test administration been assured?**

National Protocols for Test Administration have been agreed to so that all students around Australia take the tests under the same conditions.

Test Administration Manuals are provided to all schools and to teachers supervising the tests so that students sit the tests under the same conditions.

- **Are there special provisions/accommodations being made for students with disabilities/special needs when they sit the NAPLAN tests?**

All students are encouraged to participate in the national tests and special provisions are made to meet the needs of individual students with special needs. The same level of support provided in schools for students with special needs will be provided during the tests.

- **Will NAPLAN tests encourage teaching to the test?**

The national literacy and numeracy tests are based on curricula that all teachers throughout Australia are required to cover and reflect important aspects of the essential elements that should be taught at the appropriate year levels. Teachers have no access to test items and will have no way of knowing what particular items will be included in each test.

National Protocols for Test Administration have been agreed by all participating authorities who will be responsible for ensuring the integrity of the testing process.

## 5. **Reporting the Range of Student Achievement**

- **How is the full range of student achievement being reported?**

In previous years national reporting was only against the minimum benchmarks. From 2008, students' results for each domain will be reported against the 10 achievement bands from Year 3 to Year 9, with six bands at each year level. Over time, parents will be able to monitor their child's progress in literacy and numeracy.

- **What does "national minimum standard" actually mean?**

The new student report shows the national minimum standard as a full band on the national scale for each area tested. If your child's result is in this band, then he or she has typically demonstrated the basic elements of literacy and numeracy for the year level.

- **What does it mean if a student is in the lowest band (below the national minimum standard)?**

Students whose results are in the lowest band for the year level have not achieved what they should for that year, and need focussed intervention and additional support to help them achieve the skills they require to fully participate in schooling. Parents should discuss this with their child's teacher.

- **How are national minimum standards determined?**

For each year level a national minimum standard is located on the scale. For Year 3 Band 2 is the national minimum standard, for Year 5 Band 4 is the national minimum standard, for Year 7 Band 5 is the national minimum standard and for Year 9 Band 6 is the national minimum standard. The skills that students are typically required to demonstrate for the minimum standard at each year level are described on the back page of the student report.

These standards represent increasingly challenging skills and require higher scores on the national scale.