

NAPLAN is the faster, better and smarter future for our kids

By Robert Randall, ACARA CEO

For the first time next week, just under 200,000 students will be taking NAPLAN in the new online format. It is a logical step that represents a milestone in the evolution of the annual assessment.

NAPLAN has been around for a decade. It was introduced by Australia's education ministers as a replacement to the range of state/territory assessments, which were already occurring across the country. In that sense, it was nothing new, it just consolidated what was already in place but gave a valuable national picture of educational achievements. This national view helps us to see which policies or initiatives are working and which are not.

NAPLAN has not stood still over the last 10 years. It has evolved and changed, with questions now directly linked to the Australian Curriculum and a reduction in the time taken to return results, with reports now routinely returned in August. This turnaround time will shorten to about six weeks once NAPLAN is fully online in 2020, and the aim is to reduce this turnaround time even further in coming years.

The biggest change to NAPLAN, in both the design and delivery of the assessments and the way in which results are reported, begins next week, with the move online. NAPLAN Online features computer-adaptive, or tailored, testing that adapts to each student's performance in the test, assessing students more closely on what they know.

This type of assessment is more engaging for students and provides more precise and detailed information to teachers, including how a student responded to each question in the assessment, and how each question is linked to the Australian Curriculum. Faster turnaround of this detailed information will better support targeted teaching interventions and inform decisions about learning.

Moving NAPLAN online meets calls from stakeholders over recent years to make the assessment tailored to each student and more precise in assessing what students know. These changes provide increased benefit to teachers, students and parents. To ensure the transition is closely managed and schools and students are supported, there will be a phased approach to introducing NAPLAN Online. This year, around 20 per cent of students will take the test online with the aim for all students in all states and territories to be taking NAPLAN in an online format by 2020. Schools and students have been supported in preparing for this move online by readiness activities over several years. NAPLAN will continue to evolve in both the design and delivery of assessments and in the way results are reported. There is a lot more that can be done in an online environment, compared to that with paper and pencil. Interactive questions, graphics and videos can all make students' experience much more engaging, at the same time increasing the detail of information provided to teachers.

NAPLAN is the only national assessment all Australian children undertake (four times across seven years of schooling in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9) and the data gained from NAPLAN have proven value. It is the only national set of education data available in Australia, which informs decisions about improving learning for all young students.

Numerous studies have been conducted using NAPLAN data, providing valuable insight into education and community issues. NAPLAN data have also been used by the Australian Education Union to identify gaps in achievement according to socio-economic circumstance and geographic location ([December 2017](#)) and by others to identify gaps in achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other Australian children.

More recently, NAPLAN data have been used to inform discussion about opportunities to achieve educational excellence in the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, led by David Gonski. NAPLAN provides an evidence base for these important conversations.

For parents, NAPLAN is an important tool for seeing how their child, compared with the rest of Australia's children, progresses in gaining the important skills of literacy and numeracy. It supports conversations between parents, teachers and schools on working together to help children achieve their full potential.

Last month, national parent representatives – the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the Australian Parents Council and the Isolated Children's Parents Association – supported the role NAPLAN plays in the education of children, noting that every child in Australia must have an opportunity to succeed as a literate and numerate individual in his or her school community.

Importantly, the parent organisations encouraged families to keep the NAPLAN assessment in perspective, as a point-in-time assessment that, in conjunction with school-based tests and other information, contributes to the partnership between home and school.