

# REPORT OF 2021 NAPLAN TEST INCIDENTS

## INTRODUCTION

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests are held during May each year. In 2021, the tests were held between 11 and 21 May. In total, approximately 5.86 million tests were sat by over 1.2 million students.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for the central management of NAPLAN. The test administration authority (TAA) in each state and territory is responsible for the administration of the tests in schools.

ACARA works with state, territory and non-government representatives to ensure the NAPLAN tests are delivered in accordance with nationally agreed protocols so that the results validly, reliably and fairly capture student achievements. The *National Protocols for Test Administration - NAPLAN 2021* and the *National Protocols for Test Administration - NAPLAN 2021 Online* (collectively known as the 'National Protocols for Test Administration' or the 'Protocols') provide detailed information on all aspects of the administration of the tests and specify security requirements, uniform processes and procedures. This is to ensure students complete the tests under standardised conditions so that all students' results are comparable across Australia. Where individual students require special arrangements to complete the tests, these are provided at the school in consultation with the student, their parents/carers and the relevant TAA.

In the context of the more than 1.2 million students at approximately 9,600 school campuses across the country participating in NAPLAN in 2021, there were very few allegations of breaches of the Protocols. Where an allegation is made that the Protocols have been breached, the relevant responsible entity<sup>1</sup> investigates and takes appropriate action. Reports are provided to ACARA summarising the test incident, including investigations and outcomes. This information is then compiled by ACARA and used to produce this test incidents report.

ACARA, in cooperation with states and territories, reviews the Protocols annually to ensure they effectively support educators to administer the NAPLAN tests as required. This review is informed by analysis of the test incident information reported to ACARA to improve processes and education about the program.

As NAPLAN was a dual mode assessment in 2021, the report breaks down incidents into those that occurred during paper testing and those that occurred during online testing, as well as indicating the total number of incidents. While online and paper incidents are

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of investigating breaches of the National Protocols for Test Administration, the relevant 'responsible entity' will depend on the school governance arrangements and any existing agreements that allocate the responsibility for this activity. Responsible entities can include individuals, such as principals, or organisations, such as school boards or system authorities (including public education authorities), which have authority to receive and assess initial reports of test incidents. More information on investigating test incidents is provided in the *Guidelines for managing test incidents in schools* on the NAP website.

reported separately, the report does not provide commentary on the relative frequencies of online versus paper incidents as the numbers are too small for meaningful analysis.

Technical issues associated with NAPLAN online are **not** considered test incidents for the purposes of this report, unless they result in a breach of the national protocols.

NAPLAN test incidents are defined as follows:

- Cheating (C)** A breach of the National Protocols for Test Administration amounting to cheating occurs when there is intent to gain an unfair advantage or improperly influence test results. This category does not include instances of student cheating, which, in itself, is not considered a breach of the Protocols. Such incidents are dealt with through schools' existing procedures.
- Security (S)** A breach of the National Protocols for Test Administration affecting test security occurs when early knowledge of test content is obtained, which has a potential to compromise the integrity of the test results. Breaches of test security committed with intent to gain an unfair advantage are considered as cheating.
- General (G)** General breaches of the National Protocols for Test Administration include all other maladministrative practices that are not in accordance with the agreed protocols, but that do not amount to cheating or affect test security.

This report does not identify individuals or schools but provides information on breaches of the Protocols in two tables as follows:

- **Table 1** provides information about the total number as well as the aggregated number of allegations of cheating, security breaches or general breaches of the test protocols.
- **Table 2** provides further information about the aggregated substantiated cases, including a description of the incident, and information on what action has been taken as a consequence.

Test incidents are aggregated within jurisdictions where incidents are of a similar nature and where the outcomes were the same.

## ANALYSIS OF 2021 NAPLAN TEST INCIDENTS

The report of 2021 NAPLAN test incidents reinforces the fact that teachers and schools work hard to ensure the integrity of the tests. This is evidenced both through the small number of incidents across the entire country, and through the increasing number of schools reporting their own inadvertent breaches.

This report also plays an important educative role in reminding schools of the correct procedures. The transparency and concern shown by schools in reporting incidents demonstrates the schools' commitment to ensuring that the information they and their students receive from the tests is as useful as possible.

The below summary reports on the number of total incidents in 2021:

- Of the approximately 5.86 million NAPLAN tests sat by students nationally, 252 test incidents were substantiated, affecting 252 schools across the nation.
- Of the 252 total substantiated test incidents<sup>2</sup>, there was only one substantiated cheating breach on the part of a school at the time of reporting.
- There was a total of 65 aggregated substantiated incidents, this is less than the number of aggregated substantiated incidents in 2019 (88), likely due to the number of incidents still under investigation at the time of reporting.
- Where incidents are substantiated (refer to Table 2), TAAs consider whether affected students' results are valid. This year's incidents demonstrate that in most of the situations where students might have had access to an unauthorised device or assistance, there was no evidence that led to their results being compromised.
- The majority of total substantiated incidents (182) were general breaches that relate to maladministration. This includes instances of test procedures not being followed correctly. Schools and TAAs are increasingly identifying and reporting these types of breaches.
- Of the total substantiated incidents, there were 69 substantiated security breaches that included instances of opening test materials earlier than allowed or test materials not being kept secure during the test security period.
- As in previous years, the majority of substantiated incidents were directly reported to the TAA by the schools, representing a broad level of understanding of the Protocols and significant efforts by schools to ensure transparency in their processes. This is testimony to the professionalism of teachers and school administrators.
- As of 25 October 2021, there were 20 test incidents under investigation. ACARA continues to follow up with relevant authorities until all cases are resolved.

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<sup>2</sup> Test incident reports prior to 2019 did not report the total of disaggregated incidents, so caution should be taken when making comparisons with previous test incident figures.

**Table 1: Summary of reported incidents - all allegations of cheating breaches, security breaches and general breaches of test protocols, 2021**

Incident category	Substantiated		Unsubstantiated		Under investigation		Total
	P	O	P	O	P	O	
Cheating breach (C)	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Security breach (S)	13	56	0	1	0	0	70
General breach (G)	33	149	1	2	2	18	205
Total incidents	252		5		20		277
Total aggregated incidents*	65		5		20		90
Total schools affected	252		5		20		277

\* Test incidents (within jurisdictions) were aggregated where incidents are of a similar nature and where the outcomes were the same. See Table 2 for details of substantiated incidents and aggregations.

The format of this table was revised in 2019 through consultation with the National Testing Working Group (NTWG), so caution should be taken when making comparisons with previous reports' test incident figures.

- Table 1 reports *Total incidents* (disaggregated) as well as *Total aggregated incidents* and *Total schools affected*.
- Table 2 continues to report incidents investigated and substantiated in more detail.

**TABLE 2: Incidents investigated and substantiated**

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
1	NSW	S	O	8.6.1	Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to two year levels across two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
2	NSW	S	P	4.3.7	Test materials opened and sorted earlier than allowed.  Relevant to one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
3	NSW	S	O	4.3.2	Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.  Contingency test material not used.  Relevant to multiple schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
4	NSW	S	O	4.3.2	Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.  Contingency material used to administer the Year 3 writing test.  Relevant to four year levels across four schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
5	NSW	S	O	2.6.2 4.3.2	Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.  Contingency materials used to administer tests other than Year 3 writing test.  Relevant to multiple students at seven schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
6	NSW	S	O	2.6.2 4.3.2 8.10.1	<p>Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.</p> <p>Contingency materials used to administer tests other than Year 3 writing test.</p> <p>Relevant to multiple students at five schools.</p>	<p>School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.</p> <p>Data compromised and withheld.</p>
7	NSW	S	O	2.6.2 4.3.2 5.8.1 8.10.1	<p>Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.</p> <p>Contingency test materials sent by one school to another school without TAA permission.</p> <p>Contingency materials used to administer tests other than Year 3 writing test.</p> <p>Relevant to one student at one school.</p>	<p>School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.</p> <p>Data compromised and withheld.</p>
8	NSW	S	O	2.4.4 5.8.1	<p>Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.</p> <p>Contingency test materials sent by one school to another school without TAA permission.</p> <p>Contingency materials used to administer tests other than Year 3 writing test.</p> <p>Relevant to one student at one school.</p>	<p>School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.</p> <p>Data not compromised.</p>
9	NSW	G	O	8.6.1	<p>Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.</p> <p>Relevant to four year levels across three schools.</p>	<p>School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.</p> <p>Data not compromised.</p>

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
10	NSW	G	O	8.7.2	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for catch-up sessions.  Relevant to three students at three schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
11	NSW	G	O	8.6.1	Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to multiple year levels at multiple schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised
12	NSW	G	O	8.10.1	Incorrect test administration instructions given to students.  Relevant to two schools	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised
13	NSW	G	O	8.9.9	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to two year levels at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
14	NSW	G	O	8.11.7	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for disruptive behaviour of student.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
15	NSW	S	O	8.9.1	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for accessing online platform.  Relevant to one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
16	NSW	G	O	8.9.3	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for absent student.  Relevant to one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
17	NSW	S	O	4.3.10	Photo taken of test environment and made public during test security period.  Relevant to multiple schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
18	NSW	S	P	4.3.11	Photo taken of test environment and made public during test security period.  Relevant to three schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
19	NSW	G	O	6.8.9	Scribe rules not followed.  Relevant to multiple schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
20	NSW	G	O	6.8.8 6.8.9	Permission not sought for use of scribe and scribe rules not followed.  Relevant to two students at two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
21	NSW	G	O	6.8.8	Permission not sought for use of scribe.  Relevant to two students at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
22	NSW	G	P	6.5.6	Scribe rules not followed.  Relevant to multiple schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
23	NSW	G	P	6.5.6 6.5.4	Permission not sought for use of scribe and scribe rules not followed.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.



	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
24	NSW	G	P	6.5.4	Permission not sought for the use of a scribe.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
25	NSW	G	O	6.15.2	Scribe provided for a temporary injury.  Relevant to two students at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
26	NSW	G	P	6.10.2	Scribe provided for a temporary injury.  Relevant to three students at three schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
27	NSW	G	P	6.4.1	Adjustment provided without TAA approval.  Relevant to two students at two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
28	NSW	G	O	6.12.1	Adjustment provided without TAA approval.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
29	NSW	G	P	6.7.1	Adjustment provided without TAA approval.  Relevant to two students at two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
30	Vic.	S	P	4.3.11	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to five classes at five schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
31	Vic.	S	O	4.3.11	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to three classes at three schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
32	Vic.	G	P	8.6.6	Test administration procedures not followed correctly.  Relevant to four students at two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
33	Vic.	G	P	8.6.8	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to three students at three schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
34	Vic.	S	P	8.6.8	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to one student at one school	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
35	Vic.	G	P	6.6.4	Test administration procedures not followed correctly relating to the use of a support person.  Relevant to two students at two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data compromised and withheld.
36	Vic.	G	P	2.4.2	Test administration procedures not followed correctly.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
37	Vic.	S	P	8.9.1	Post-test administration procedures not followed correctly.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
38	SA	G	O	8.9.8	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to four students at four schools.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
39	SA	G	O	8.9.7	Students not properly supervised during the test for a period of time.  Relevant to three students at two schools and one class at one school.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
40	SA	G	O	6.9	Adjustment/s provided without appropriate approval.  Relevant to two students at two schools.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
41	SA	G	O	2.6.2	Test administration procedures not followed relating to contingency test materials.  Contingency materials used to administer tests other than Year 3 writing test.  Relevant to multiple schools.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
42	SA	G	O	8.5.1	Tests provided/distributed to students in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to multiple schools.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
43	SA	G	O	5.5.4	Test administration procedures not followed correctly relating to sanctioned abandonment.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
44	SA	G	O	6.12.1	Test administration procedures not followed correctly relating to rest break.  Relevant to three students in one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
45	WA	S	P	2.4.2 3.3.2 4.3.2 8.8.2	Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to one year level in one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
46	WA	S	O	2.6.2 8.8.1	School reverted from online tests to paper tests without direction by their TAA.  Relevant to two students at one school and one class at one school.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
47	WA	S	P	4.3.10	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised
48	WA	C	P	2.3.3 8.9.1 8.9.3	Inappropriate assistance provided to students.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
49	WA	G	O	2.6.2 8.8.1	School reverted from online tests to paper tests without direction by their TAA.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
50	WA	G	O	4.3.10	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
51	WA	G	P	6.5.4 6.10.2	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for use of a scribe.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
52	WA	G	P	8.7.2	Test administration procedures not followed correctly for catch-up sessions.  Relevant to four students at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
53	WA	G	O	8.9.8 8.9.9	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to one class at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
54	WA	G	O	6.4.1	School did not provide a TAA approved disability adjustment.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
55	Tas.	G	O	8.5.1	Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
56	NT	G	O	8.6.1	Tests provided/distributed to student in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to one student at one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
57	NT	S	O	4.3.10	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to one class in one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
58	NT	G	O	2.5.4	Test administration procedures not followed.  Relevant to one student in one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
59	NT	G	O	2.6.2	Process to revert from online tests to paper test not followed.  Relevant to multiple students in two schools.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  No evidence data was compromised.
60	NT	G	O	2.1.3 5.3.1	Process for student exemptions/withdrawals not followed.  Relevant to multiple students in one school.	School counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  No evidence data was compromised.
61	NT	G	O	8.6.1	Tests provided/distributed to students in incorrect sequence.  Relevant to three schools.	All parties undertook to improve procedures for future years.  No evidence data was compromised.

	State/ territory	Incident category (C, S, G)	Paper or online (O, P)	2021 National protocol clause(s) breached	Description of incident	Action taken and outcome
62	ACT	S	O	4.3.10	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to one class at one school.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
63	ACT	G	O	8.9.9	Unauthorised access to device.  Relevant to three students at one school.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
64	ACT	G	O	8.9.3	Inappropriate assistance provided to students during the test.  Relevant to one student at one school.	Schools counselled and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.
65	ACT	S	O	10.4.1	Test material made public during test security period.  Relevant to one student at one school.	Internal processes reviewed and undertook to improve procedures for future years.  Data not compromised.

In addition to those detailed in Table 2, at the time of reporting there were 20 incidents still under investigation in QLD.