

Frequently asked questions about the *My School* website

For your convenience, FAQs have been grouped into the following subject areas:

- A) Understanding *My School* – general questions
- B) Searching and navigating *My School*
- C) Appropriate use of information / privacy
- D) Index of Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)
- E) Financial information
- F) NAPLAN and NAPLAN reliability
- G) Selective enrolments, cohort and unique populations

A) Understanding *My School* – general questions

What is the *My School* website?

The *My School* website is an information service. It has been developed so that parents and the community have access to information about their child's school and other schools in Australia. It provides information on over 10 000 Australian schools that can be searched by a school name, location and education sector.

Results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) are also provided and compared across schools with students from statistically similar backgrounds. (For more information, visit the National Assessment Program website www.nap.edu.au).

Why was *My School* developed?

The *My School* website was developed to allow people to see what is happening in schools. In 2008 all Australian education ministers agreed that greater transparency and accountability for the performance of schools were essential to help ensure that every Australian child receives the highest-quality education. To achieve this, a range of information is being delivered through the *My School* website, making it accessible to educators, parents, school communities and the Australian public.

Who is responsible for *My School*?

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for administration of the website. ACARA is an independent Australian Government authority with functions that include publishing nationally comparable data on all Australian schools.

This responsibility is outlined in the ACARA Act 2008 (see www.comlaw.gov.au) and through the decisions of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) – formerly the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (see www.scseec.edu.au).

To help achieve its reporting responsibilities, ACARA works with Australian Government, state, territory and non-government school authorities to publish relevant, nationally comparable information on all schools.

What sort of information is on the *My School* website?

In summary, the *My School* website provides profile information on each school's:

- educational outcomes – including the results of NAPLAN testing and an indication of students' improvement as they progress through school, participation in vocational education and training courses and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, senior secondary outcomes and, for jurisdictions with available data, post-school destinations
- student population – including the level of socio-educational advantage (SEA) of the school student body, the proportion of students with an Indigenous background, and students with a language background other than English, as well as student attendance rates
- capacity or capability – including the type of school, the year range, student and staff numbers, school financial information, and location.

Each school's profile page also contains a short description, provided by the school, to describe the school's context and character. In most cases, a link to the school's website is provided.

For each school, *My School* provides comparative NAPLAN outcomes for other schools across Australia that are statistically similar in terms of their student intake.

Financial data are also displayed for each school. These data include recurrent income and capital expenditure, disaggregated by funding source, for all government and non-government schools.

What do most people use the *My School* website for?

Teachers, schools and parents regularly use information presented on *My School* at the individual school level. Having information on all Australian schools in one location also provides nationally comparable data on students' performance in literacy and numeracy, as well as contextual information. It is an additional resource for schools and their communities.

For parents and other members of school communities, some constructive ways in which information from *My School* can be used include:

- understanding how their local school is performing relative to other schools with statistically similar students
- gaining a broader understanding of the learning environments and performance of schools in their local community, as well as within their state or territory and across the nation
- initiating communication with a school, based on comprehensive and detailed information
- seeking a greater level of engagement with a school in support of their child's learning
- becoming involved in advocating for and supporting improvement initiatives within the school.

Are all schools listed on the *My School* website?

All schools from government and non-government school sectors that receive funding from governments, through either the National Education Agreement or the Schools Assistance Act 2008, have their information published on the *My School* website.

What is new on the *My School* website in 2014?

The key recent additions and enhancements include:

- the latest (2013) profile and population data on each school
- outcomes from the 2013 round of NAPLAN testing
- six years of performance data for comparison
- a new map / school location function
- an enhanced process for the calculation of ICSEA
- ICSEA values that are more representative of the school
- the latest financial figures on each school, including capital expenditure and sources of funding.

Will more information become available in the future?

Education ministers have agreed that a number of areas being investigated by ACARA should be published on the *My School* website in the future to enhance the information available for each school. Work is ongoing to obtain more nationally consistent data, especially indicators of senior secondary outcomes and information relating to Year 12 attainment, tertiary entrance scores and post-school destinations.

Under the Quality Teaching National Partnership, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers have been developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Following this, discussions are ongoing as to the feasibility of reporting levels of teacher expertise, as defined under this standards framework, on a school's *My School* pages.

B) Searching and navigating the site

How do I find out about schools in my local area?

When viewing the Local schools page for a selected school, the *My School* website lists up to 20 government and non-government schools situated closest to it.

In a city these schools may be quite close together; in remote and rural areas, schools may be separated by large distances and so the list may contain fewer than 20 schools.

The profiles for each of the schools situated closest to the selected school can be accessed by selecting the school name links on the list displayed.

How are 'senior secondary outcomes' reported?

Senior secondary school outcomes are reported for the following key areas:

- senior secondary certificate awarded
- senior secondary school completed
- post-school destinations.

Data on senior secondary outcomes are provided by the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA). Caveats are provided on the website to indicate where measures are not directly comparable between states and territories.

Post-school destination data are published only for schools in Victoria and Western Australia, and government schools in the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland.

What reporting is done on VET and school-based apprenticeships?

A summary of student enrolment numbers in VET and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships is provided on a school's profile page where relevant. Primary schools will not display VET in school information.

A new depiction of detailed VET in schools information was added to the *My School* website in 2013. This page displays the number of course enrolments and qualifications completed for students, sorted by qualification level and industry area.

VET information is provided by education authorities in all states and territories. Caveat information is also provided to account for any differences in reporting the VET measures.

C) Appropriate use of information / privacy

Could individuals be identified from published results?

No. ACARA has carefully considered the privacy issues involved when publishing information about school performance on the *My School* website. Rules have been adopted to suppress the publication of information in situations where it could result in the identification of individual students.

Does the website publish 'league tables' ranking schools by performance?

No. Simple 'league tables' that rank and compare schools with very different student populations can be misleading and are not published on the *My School* website.

What measures are in place to ensure that school data are reported responsibly?

Education ministers have agreed to rules that support meaningful and comparable reporting of school data and responsible use of this information. These rules include:

- protection of individual student privacy
- not publishing comparative data without contextual information
- publication of confidence intervals, caveats and explanatory notes to ensure accurate interpretation.

How are data on the *My School* website secured against misuse by third parties?

Users of the *My School* website are required to agree to a set of terms and conditions about how they will use the information from the site before they are permitted to access the information on the school pages of the website. A website login tool is used that requires users to enter an alpha-numeric code before they are able to access further pages displaying school information. This security measure reduces the likelihood of computerised data gathering, such as by web robots.

ACARA's security protocols around data collection, storage, access and use comply with best practices.

D) The Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage

What is the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA)?

ICSEA was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), specifically to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia.

Further information about ICSEA can be found in the About ICSEA fact sheet and the Guide to understanding 2013 ICSEA values available on the 'More information' page of the website.

Why has the group of schools in my 'Similar schools group' changed since last year?

As student cohorts change each year so do the data used in the ICSEA calculation. For some schools, this results in a change in their ICSEA values from one year to the next and therefore some schools may find that their grouping of similar schools has changed since last year.

What is the purpose of the 'Distribution of students' table?

The purpose of this table is to show a representation of a school's student population grouped in four quarters by a measure of socio-educational advantage, determined by students' family backgrounds.

For each school the makeup of its student population is displayed in percentages spread across the quarters, showing the range of relative advantage within the selected school's student group and giving contextual information about the composition of the student population.

Why compare schools if they are in different parts of the country?

The benefit is in knowing that there are schools that have similar student intakes but which can perform at quite different levels.

The high-performing schools within a grouping show what is possible and can raise expectations for other schools. In many instances, high-performing schools will not be in the local area or in the same state or territory, but there may still be a lot to learn from them. The main benefit of a national approach to comparing schools is that it focuses attention on ways to improve the performance of all schools across the nation.

E) Financial information

Why report school financial data on the *My School* website?

State, territory and federal education ministers through their Ministerial Council asked ACARA to report information about each school's recurrent income and capital expenditure on the *My School* website.

This information provides further details about a school's capacity to support educational outcomes for students. By reporting such information, the *My School* website allows fair comparisons to be made about schools.

School financial data provide valuable information about the context of a school, and the resources it has available to deliver educational outcomes to students.

This is the fourth year that national school-based financial data have been provided.

Where do schools get their income?

Schools have a range of funding sources that vary according to a sector (government or non-government) and, to a lesser extent, the state or territory in which they are located.

Government schools receive state or territory and federal government funding and may generate income through private sources such as fundraising, donations and parental contributions through fees. The majority of government school funding comes from the state and territory governments.

Non-government schools' income is sourced from student fees and income from other private sources, including fundraising, donations, interest on savings, and state and territory as well as Australian Government funding.

What things do schools spend money on?

Schools spend money on a range of items, with the largest cost typically being teacher salaries. Other areas of expenditure include:

- infrastructure
- capital works and maintenance
- information and communication technologies
- teaching support
- equity
- school corporate / running costs.

How are financial data collected?

To obtain nationally comparable data, ACARA requires jurisdictions to employ a common methodology for the collection of financial data.

For government schools, respective education departments are responsible for collecting financial data and providing these data directly to ACARA.

For independent schools and Catholic schools, data are sourced in the following ways:

- The federal Department of Education (DoE) (formerly DEEWR) requires non-government schools to complete and submit the DoE Financial Questionnaire (FQ). This information is provided to ACARA by the DoE. This FQ has been revised to incorporate data fields specifically to support *My School* reporting within a broader set of questions used for other purposes.
- DoE provides details of Block Grant Authority administration costs for member schools of state and territory associations of independent schools to ACARA. The administration cost is added to schools' financial information (both recurrent income and capital expenditure) on the *My School* website.

Are school assets reported?

Capital works expenditure incurred in the reporting year is shown for each school on its 'Finance' page. However, total physical assets of schools are not reported on the *My School* website, as it was considered that the time, complexity and cost associated with valuing assets for over 10 000 schools outweighed the benefit in reporting assets as a part of school financial data. Trust funds that are not directly controlled by the school or its legal entity are not reported on the *My School* website. Where interest earned on these funds passes through the school accounts, such interest is reflected as a source of income.

Aggregated capital expenditure for each school is also reported on *My School*.

How are financial data checked for accuracy?

ACARA appointed accounting firm Deloitte to provide accounting expertise and advice regarding the method proposed for collection and reporting of school financial data.

The purpose of this advice is to assist ACARA in the evaluation of the appropriateness of the methodology used in the context of Ministerial Council objectives.

Throughout the annual data collection, and prior to the publication of finance data on *My School* each year, state and territory government departments review their data and update it where appropriate.

DoE confirms data collected through the school financial statements reconciles with the non-government schools' audited financial statements. Further, ACARA applies quality assurance data validation checks on receipt of finance data.

Letters of assurance confirming compliance of the data with the methodology are provided to ACARA by Deloitte and is published on the 'More information' page of *My School*.

How can schools' finances be compared across the country?

The Ministerial Council directed ACARA to engage independent accounting experts to advise on the comparability of the methodology. Deloitte was engaged to assess the extent to which data reported under the methodology would be comparable.

The Letter of Accounting Advice to ACARA confirms that – with the exception of a small number of specific limitations – the methodology provides a reasonable basis for the collection of materially comparable financial data by school. Details of the limitations are provided in the Letter of Accounting Advice to be published on the 'More Information' page of the *My School* website.

How are data reported for non-government multi-campus schools?

Since 2010, all non-government multi-campus schools are required to report their financial data at a combined school level against the head campus of the school.

This reflects the fact that these schools are registered with the Department of Education as one school with a single school identifier and report financial data to the department at the school level.

It is important to note that for the 2009 calendar year a small number of non-government multi-campus schools reported their financial data at the campus level.

For these schools, the financial data reported on *My School* for 2009 remain identified at the campus level; the financial data for 2010 and onwards are reported at the school level. As such, it is not possible to draw direct comparisons between the 2009 and subsequent years' finance data. Any observed substantial increases in the reporting lines of multi-campus schools are likely to be attributable to this change in reporting methodology.

The revision of reporting requirements from 2010 reflects the need to refine and standardise financial reporting at the school level, and to take into account the arrangements that apply for these schools in their registration and reporting of their financial data with the DoE.

There are other schools that appear to be multi-campus schools as a result of a shared name and/or association with a common organisation, but that operate as separate financial entities and are registered as separate schools with the DoE.

The definition of multi-campus schools for the purposes of *My School* does not include those schools, and they continue to report financial data as separate schools for the 2012 calendar year.

F) NAPLAN and NAPLAN reliability

More information on NAPLAN can be found at www.nap.edu.au

What is the purpose of conducting NAPLAN testing?

The main purpose of the NAPLAN tests is to identify whether students have literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community.

The introduction of the tests in 2008 has provided consistency, comparability and transferability of information on students' literacy and numeracy performance across all jurisdictions.

NAPLAN test results provide an objective view of students' performance and a basis for evidence-based decision making about literacy and numeracy policies, practices and resourcing. They provide a national perspective on student achievement and the performance of schools.

How does My School include information on student progress over time?

ACARA has worked with education authorities to develop measures to track student progress over time and represent this in a graphical form on the *My School* website.

As the years of NAPLAN assessment data increase, progressively more meaningful information on students' progress is reported.

Student progress information provides a measure of the influence of the school on student outcomes – the value schools have added to their students' learning over the two years.

Student gain measures show how well students have progressed no matter what school they attend. These measures present a level-playing field for all schools from selective schools with students with high levels of aptitude, who are already highly proficient, to schools with students with lower levels of aptitude, who may be able to demonstrate their students have made large gains while not necessarily achieving at the highest proficiency levels. Student gain measures allow us to see and acknowledge progress at all levels.

Can NAPLAN test results be compared from one year to the next?

Yes. An expert advisory group is responsible for monitoring the reliability of NAPLAN tests between years. A rigorous process of 'equating' the tests was undertaken in 2009 to ensure that the 2008 and 2009 results could be compared. This process has been repeated in subsequent years. Consequently, changes in performance of schools and school systems over time can be tracked.

How accurate are school results?

The NAPLAN average score for a school is a very good indication of school performance based on the students who were tested in the school. The greater the proportion of students tested, the greater the accuracy.

The *My School* website displays statistical confidence intervals around school average scores to indicate the degree of confidence we can have in them.

How are reliability and validity of NAPLAN ensured?

- A range of factors provide confidence about the reliability and validity of NAPLAN assessments and results. These include:
- Procedures for NAPLAN testing are set out in the National protocols for test administration and the Test administration manuals to ensure the integrity and consistency of the testing process.
- The tests are constructed using assessment guides and test specifications that show the relationship of the items in the tests to the nationally agreed statements of learning.
- Draft tests are reviewed by subject specialists, as well as language background other than English (LBOTE), Indigenous and disability representatives within each jurisdiction with respect to curriculum content and potential cultural or other biases.
- The tests are trialled in each state and territory to ensure the items are age-appropriate and measure the curriculum in the intended manner.

Does My School show numbers of students who do not participate in NAPLAN?

Yes. As well as NAPLAN outcomes, participation data including exempt, absent and withdrawn students are reported for all schools on various pages on the *My School* website along with the national average.

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

Students unable to do the test due to an illness or some other acceptable reason are counted as absent. They are not awarded a NAPLAN score.

Students whose parents remove them from participating in NAPLAN for their own personal reasons are counted as withdrawn. Written consent is required.

Can individual students' results be provided through the My School website?

No, the *My School* website does not provide information on individual students. Parents receive a report on their child's NAPLAN results in September each year. Inquiries about a student's NAPLAN results should be directed to the appropriate state or territory test administration authority. Contact details for these authorities are listed on the National Assessment Program website (see www.nap.edu.au).

G) Selective enrolments, cohort variations and unique populations

What information is provided about schools catering for students with learning disabilities or for students in juvenile detention?

These schools are categorised as 'special purpose' schools on the *My School* website; NAPLAN results and the ICSEA value for the school are not reported.

These schools are also not included in the groups of statistically similar schools. A short description of these schools is provided, along with a link to the current school website, where the school can describe any specific school programs it has.

How are schools that are selective / have selective streams / have groups of students with special needs reported?

These schools are reported in the same way as all other schools. Schools are able to draw attention to their particular circumstances, such as being a selective school, through their school statement on the school profile page.

Schools may wish to outline their enrolment policies, promote any special programs that they operate or detail their student profile. A link to the school's own website is provided so that users of the *My School* website can better understand the unique characteristics of each school.