

ASSESSMENT

Assessment in education plays a crucial role in supporting teaching and learning. Assessments provide data that informs both student individual growth and broader educational outcomes and are designed to align with the Australian Curriculum. Classroom assessment provides information about student progress and achievement, helping teachers plan and refine instruction to meet diverse learning needs.

What and how we measure, however, can be an enabler or a constraint. APPA is concerned that the current assessment paradigm contributes to creating fragile learners. Professor Clare Wood notes that a child's belief in themselves as a learner is highest when they first start school; the more they are evaluated or assessed, the more conscious they become of what they **cannot** do.

THE PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT

There are three aspects of classroom assessment.

- » Assessment **for** learning (sometimes referred to as '**formative** assessment') whereby teachers use evidence about a student's knowledge, skills and abilities to tailor their instruction.
- » Assessment **as** learning whereby students monitor their own learning to determine what they know and can do.
- » Assessment **of** learning (sometimes referred to as '**summative** assessment') whereby teachers use evidence to assess achievement against outcomes and standards.

The information gathered during assessment has two major purposes.

- » An **educational** purpose: educators learn about the student's strengths and weaknesses so that the teacher can adjust, fine-tune, and improve teaching strategies in the classroom and enable students and classes to achieve educational outcomes.
- » An **administrative** purpose: assessment is used to report the progress of a student to other stakeholders, especially parents; to determine the student's next step in their educational path; and, to monitor the quality of an education system or institution.

Unfortunately, the administrative purpose is often over emphasised resulting in over assessment. Teachers are under pressure to produce a continuous 'report card' and the greater the number of 'measurements' the teacher has taken, the more accurate that assessment presumably is. In the primary years, summative assessments, useful for grading and accountability should not exceed 20% of assessment practices.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Teachers are key agents in the assessment process. They have the professional knowledge and expertise to design assessments that reflect their students' needs. Teachers understand the specific context of their students, communities, and schools, thus allowing a more personalised approach to learning. Daily, teachers triangulate data from the variety of assessments and observations to inform their teaching, to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning activities, and to provide effective feedback to students for next steps.

Continuous professional development is crucial for strengthening assessment practices, equipping teachers with the skills to interpret data effectively, and using those insights to enhance student learning.

CHANGING THE METRICS

Over the last few years, social and emotional skills, which are important for success and social functioning, have been rising on the education policy agenda. The OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) is one of the first international efforts to collect data from students, parents, and teachers on the social and emotional skills of students at ages 10 and 15. It sheds light on ways to help education leaders monitor and foster these skills.¹

In Australian primary education, new metrics assessments are emerging as innovative tools to measure student growth and success beyond traditional academic subjects. The new metrics emphasise a broader view of student development, aiming to measure skills that better reflect a student's preparation for future challenges. This comprehensive approach informs educators and parents about a child's strengths and areas for development, enabling teachers to create personalised learning experiences that support each child's overall development.

- » **Wellbeing and social-emotional skills:** crucial for mental health and social adaptability, supporting lifelong success beyond academic settings.
- » **Critical thinking and problem-solving:** essential for navigating complex modern challenges; often assessed through project-based learning and performance tasks. ►

- » **Student agency and engagement:** measures a student's capacity to take ownership of their own learning; improves intrinsic motivation and helps students learn more effectively.
- » **Global and digital competencies:** includes digital literacy, cross-cultural competencies, and the ethical use of technology.
- » **Active citizenship:** involves engagement in community and civic activities and includes an understanding of rights and responsibilities as a member of society.
- » **Acting ethically:** comprises understanding and practising ethical behaviour in various contexts and making decisions that reflect moral and ethical considerations.

These assessments often utilise digital platforms, real-world applications and continuous feedback, supporting personalised learning and reflecting 21st century capabilities aligned with the Australian Curriculum. A more holistic view of student progress is achieved with this broader approach to assessment.

STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS

The Alice Springs (**Mparntwe**) Education Declaration (2019) has two goals.

1. The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity, which aligns well with NAPLAN.
2. All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community, which does NOT align well with NAPLAN.²

As stated in the 2020 federal review, the purposes of NAPLAN include 'monitoring progress towards national goals, school system accountability and performance, school improvement, individual student learning achievement and growth, and information for parents/carers on school and student performance.'³ While they provide useful benchmarks, standardised tests are just one component of a broader evaluative framework.

- » NAPLAN results tend to reflect broader inequalities showing how family income and access to resources can shape educational outcomes.
- » Teachers and schools need the results in a more timely manner to allow more immediate impact for students.
- » The My School website has allowed for inter-school comparisons and could be seen as a factor in exacerbating competition between schools and sectors.

In their 2019 submission to the Education Council of Australian Governments, the Gonski Institute for Education argued that it is impossible for a single student assessment such as NAPLAN to be accurate. It asserted that NAPLAN was trying to do too many things and that its sole purpose should be to monitor education systems against the purpose of education.⁴

ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES

APPA advocates for:

- » strengthening **the role of the teacher** in the assessment process including targeted professional development
- » continuing to **reimagine the metrics of assessment** by moving beyond traditional academics and recognising social and emotional development
- » focussing on ongoing, flexible, low stakes, **formative assessment** that fosters growth and guides learning
- » **a review of the role and purpose of NAPLAN**, including testing a representative sample of students, rather than the entire cohort, and removing the publication of NAPLAN performance from the My School website.

SUMMARY

Assessment in the Australian primary context must be designed to be a dynamic and integral part of the educational experience, supporting both teaching and learning in meaningful ways. **APPA calls for assessment practices that**

- » value the whole child and goes beyond traditional academic measures to recognise and support all aspects of a child's development.
- » **balance formative and summative approaches, promote fairness, encourage student engagement, and account for cultural and linguistic diversity.** Effective assessment is differentiated, providing students with more than one way of showing their understanding, provides feedback which gives students the opportunity to improve their performance, and includes student self-assessment.

- 1 'Beyond academic learning.' OECD, Accessed 10/02/2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/beyond-academic-learning_92a11084-en.html
- 2 'COVID-19 offers opportunities to consider "NAPLAN 2.0".' LENS, Accessed 11/02/2025, <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2020/04/29/1380135/covid-19-offers-opportunities-to-consider-naplan-20>
- 3 'NAPLAN Review Final Report.' Accessed 10/02/2025, https://naplanreview.com.au/pdfs/2020_NAPLAN_review_final_report.pdf
- 4 'Gonski Institute for Education: Submission to the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) NAPLAN Reporting Review 2019.' Accessed 10/02/2025, https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/NAPLAN_submission_21_March.pdf

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