

THE NEED FOR THE REFORM OF NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been a cornerstone of Australian education for 17 years, yet evidence from numerous national agencies suggests that its current format is not serving students, teachers, or schools effectively.

Despite its intended benefits the current purpose of this assessment is unknown. Yet NAPLAN has contributed to increased student stress, a narrowing of the curriculum, and an undue emphasis on high-stakes testing, while failing to improve academic standards. Research highlights the negative

consequences of such assessments, raising serious concerns about their impact on student wellbeing and educational quality¹. NAPLAN, in its current format, should not continue and must be replaced with a more effective, equitable, and supportive assessment system.

CHALLENGES OF NAPLAN

- 1 Narrowing of the curriculum**
Schools often shift focus toward NAPLAN preparation, prioritising literacy and numeracy at the expense of other vital subjects such as science, the arts, and physical education². This limits students' exposure to a well-rounded education.
- 2 Increased student stress and anxiety**
The high-stakes nature of NAPLAN creates significant stress for students, leading to negative effects on mental health, self-esteem, and motivation³. Reports show that many students experience anxiety, sleeplessness, and physical symptoms in the lead-up to the tests.
- 3 Teaching to the test**
Schools face immense pressure to produce high scores, leading to a reduction in creative and critical thinking approaches in the classroom⁴. Rather than fostering deep learning, the emphasis shifts to rote memorisation and standardised responses.
- 4 Equity issues**
High-stakes testing disproportionately affects students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as they often lack access to the same resources and support systems or life experiences as their more privileged peers⁵. As well, NAPLAN documents demonstrate a conspicuous absence of reporting about students with disability that further exacerbates existing educational inequalities⁶.
- 5 Negative impact on teacher morale and school reputation**
The publication of NAPLAN results on the MySchool website has led to unhealthy comparisons between schools, often misrepresenting their quality and effectiveness⁷. Teachers report feeling undervalued and constrained by a system that prioritizes test results over holistic student development⁸. ▶

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

Given these challenges, it is imperative that a thorough review of NAPLAN's effectiveness since its inception in 2008 is undertaken to determine its true value and whether alternative assessment models would better serve Australian students (APPA, 2025). APPA advocates a move away from NAPLAN in its current form and the adoption of a more effective and equitable assessment model.

The following reforms are essential.

- 1 Move to sample cohort testing**
Instead of subjecting all students to NAPLAN, a representative sample should be assessed to fulfil national reporting requirements. This would reduce pressure while still providing valuable data for educational policy (APPA, 2019).
- 2 Eliminate public ranking of schools**
Removing NAPLAN data from the MySchool website will prevent misleading comparisons and allow schools to focus on genuine improvements rather than competition (APPA, 2014).
- 3 Develop contextualised assessments**
Future assessments must respect cultural, language, and First Nations perspectives, ensuring that testing is fair and inclusive (APPA, 2019).
- 4 Implement formative, school-based assessments**
Schools should have the autonomy and resources to develop pedagogically sound assessments that focus on student learning rather than external ranking systems.

“ APPA calls for the implementation of a fairer, more effective alternative that prioritises learning over ranking. ”

SUMMARY

NAPLAN, in its current form, is failing to support the educational growth and well-being of Australian students. While the intent is unclear, the current format creates a means of comparing all students on a single measure, NAPLAN's high-stakes nature contributes to unnecessary stress, narrows the curriculum, and negatively impacts teachers and schools. **Rather than continuing this flawed system, APPA calls for the implementation of a fairer, more effective alternative that prioritises learning over ranking.** By embracing sample cohort testing, removing school comparisons, and fostering school-based assessments, we can create an education system that truly supports student success.

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- 2 McGaw, B., Loudon, W., and Wyatt-Smith, C. (August 2020). 'NAPLAN Review Final Report.' https://naplanreview.com.au/pdfs/2020_NAPLAN_review_final_report.pdf
- 3 Roberts, P. and Barblett, L. (September 2024). 'Young student's views of NAPLAN: impact on wellbeing through drawn responses.' *Frontiers in education*. DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1443563. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1443563/full>
- 4 'NAPLAN's covert influence on teaching and learning – research.' ACU News (30 November 2023). Accessed 28/04/2025. <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/news/2023/november/naplans-covert-influence-on-teaching-and-learning-research>.
- 5 Hunter, J. & Parkinson, N. 'The new NAPLAN results make for grim reading.' *GRATTAN Institute*. Published in *The Australian Financial Review* (14 August 2024). <https://grattan.edu.au/news/the-new-naplan-results-make-for-grim-reading/>
- 6 Richardson, K. and Rollo, G. (June 2024). 'The invisible cohort: Reporting of students with disability in NAPLAN.' *Australian Journal of Education*. DOI: 10.1177/00049441241242520. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00049441241242520>.
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- 8 'An Educator's Perspective: The impacts of high stakes testing on school students and their families.' Whitlam Institute (November 2012). Accessed 28/04/2025. <https://www.whitlam.org/publications/2017/10/17/an-educators-perspective-the-impacts-of-high-stakes-testing-on-school-students-and-their-families>.

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OUT-OF-SCHOOL HOURS CARE (OSHC) SERVICES

Out-of-School Hours Care (OSHC) services in Australia play a pivotal role in providing care and development opportunities for children aged 5-12 years. These services operate before and after school, during school holidays, and on non-school days, catering specifically to school-aged children rather than preschoolers or younger children.

CURRENT REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Given their unique purpose, OSHC services face distinct operational challenges and developmental considerations that differ significantly from early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Despite these differences, however, OSHC services are currently governed under the National Quality Framework (NQF), which is implemented by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). While ACECQA plays a crucial role in ensuring quality standards in education and care settings, its primary focus remains on ECEC, covering children from birth to five years old. This broad regulatory approach does not sufficiently consider the specific needs of school-age children, whose developmental, social, and educational requirements differ significantly from those of younger children. As a result, the existing regulatory framework fails to adequately address the operational realities and unique service model of OSHC programs.

REGULATORY SHIFT

APPA argues that the current regulatory approach does not sufficiently address the specific needs of school-age children and the operational realities of OSHC services. The establishment of a separate regulatory framework for OSHC services would ensure their success and sustainability, and the well-being of the children they serve. A regulatory shift from ACECQA to education standards boards would allow OSHC services to be governed under a framework that better aligns with the developmental and educational needs of school-aged children. By integrating OSHC within school-based regulations, services could benefit from greater consistency with school policies, improved workforce alignment, and reduced administrative burdens.

However, such a transition also presents challenges, including potential shifts in staff qualification requirements and differences in quality standards. Exploring alternative regulatory models, such as a **hybrid** approach or **state-based** decision-making, could help bridge the gap between childcare-focused and education-focused oversight, ensuring that OSHC services are both high-quality and sustainable.

Here is how that could work.

Shift in oversight from early childhood to school-based regulation

- » OSHC services are designed for school-aged children, not preschoolers or younger children.
- » ACECQA was designed to focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC), which covers children from birth to five years old and who may be in fulltime care.
- » OSHC should be an extension of the school system, rather than early childhood care.

Regulation by education standards boards

- » Education standards boards (such as state-based authorities like NESA in NSW, VIT in Victoria, or QCT in Queensland) oversee the quality and compliance of school education.
- » If OSHC were regulated by these boards, it could be subject to school-based policies and teacher standards rather than the National Quality Standards (NQS) under ACECQA.
- » This could align OSHC more closely with school operations, curriculum, and teacher professional development. ►

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- » **Consistency with school education**
Aligning OSHC regulations with school governance would create smoother transitions for children throughout their day.
- » **Better integration with school policies**
OSHC services would follow the same standards for staff qualifications, child safety, and curriculum and excursion planning. This would ensure that supervision and safety requirements align with school-based policies rather than early childhood care regulations.
- » **Addressing unique operational challenges**
Since many OSHC services operate on school premises, a school-based regulatory framework would improve coordination with school operations, helping to manage scheduling, transitions, and safety protocols between school and OSHC areas.
- » **Recognition of OSHC's recreational and social focus**
Unlike early childhood education, OSHC programs emphasise activities such as physical play, arts and crafts, group sports, and homework assistance. The current NQF does not fully encompass these activities, reinforcing the need for regulations tailored to OSHC services.
- » **Reduced administrative burden**
Schools and OSHC providers would not need to comply with two separate regulatory systems (ACECQA vs. school authorities).
- » **Parent confidence and trust would be enhanced**
A single data base could be used across a site, reducing the need for duplication of information. This streamlining could also reduce opportunity for human error.

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SUGGESTED REGULATIONS

APPA strongly advocates for the development of a distinct regulatory framework for OSHC services — one that recognises and responds to the unique needs of school-age children and the environments in which they learn and play. Specifically, these regulations would:

- » be **separate** from those designed for childcare settings,
- » acknowledge the **developmental differences** between school-age children and younger children,
- » reflect the **safety and supervision requirements** of school-based environments, rather than those of childcare,
- » support the seamless **integration of OSHC services** with school operations, aligning regulatory requirements accordingly,
- » ensure programs provide a **balanced blend** of recreational and educational activities tailored to the needs of school-age children,
- » set clear, nationally consistent **staffing qualification requirements**, with provisions for ongoing professional learning, and
- » include **medical management** protocols that align with those already in place in schools, rather than duplicating childcare-based models.

We also wish to highlight the emerging and current OSHC workforce challenges. With the number of student teachers gaining special provision registration, the OSHC workforce has been reduced and, in some sites, decimated. Systemic support is needed to ensure OSHC services have the workforce to be viable in their communities.

SUMMARY

It is time to implement a regulatory framework that recognises the unique role OSHC plays in the lives of children and supports its continued contribution to their growth beyond the classroom. **APPA calls on policymakers and industry stakeholders to collaborate with us in creating a regulatory framework that reflects the distinct nature of OSHC.** By introducing these targeted regulations, OSHC services will be better positioned to deliver safe, engaging, and developmentally appropriate care, while also maintaining long-term sustainability. Together, we can ensure high standards of care and development for school-age children across Australia, separate from the childcare sector, but equally essential.

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NDIS AND THE INTERFACE WITH SCHOOLS

NDIS, Australia's first national scheme for people with disability, provides funding directly to individuals thereby enhancing support for children and young people. Its implementation, however, has introduced challenges for school leaders, who face pressure to host external providers, and to manage the administration and risk management measures that accompany having providers on site.

While families and carers can request that NDIS funded supports be provided in schools and preschools during teaching and learning time, there is no automatic right for those supports to be delivered and principals consider those requests on a case-by-case basis. However, accepting one provider can create pressure to accept others and it becomes a contested space. Accepting all providers places additional workload burdens on schools.

ROLE DEFINITION COMPLEXITY

A clearer distinction has emerged between educational responsibilities (schools) and disability-related supports (NDIS). Schools are no longer responsible for funding or providing personal care, therapies, or assistive technologies that are classified as disability-related rather than educational. In practice, however, there is ongoing confusion about the boundaries, leading to role ambiguity and disagreement over funding responsibilities.

Special education teachers and support staff often take on additional responsibilities in managing student support plans and liaising with providers. There is no standardised training for educators on working within the NDIS framework, leading to inconsistent implementation across schools.

MANAGING STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

The NDIS language and processes are complex, and many families struggle to navigate the system, turning to schools for assistance. Parents often expect schools to advocate for their child's NDIS funding and believe that schools should help implement NDIS-funded supports, creating tension when schools push back on responsibilities that are not theirs. When hosting NDIS providers, teachers and leaders are expected to be the interface with families regarding NDIS plans and service delivery.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN AND WORKLOAD

Many principals and learning support teams report that managing NDIS-related administrative tasks has diverted time and resources away from teaching and school leadership, impacting school operations and student outcomes. Schools must liaise with multiple external NDIS providers, including therapists, support workers, and plan managers, and leaders must consider:

- » the safety and wellbeing of ALL students,
- » the benefit to the student receiving NDIS support at school,
- » resources (human and physical) are prioritised for teaching and learning
- » the impact on other students and their learning,
- » workplace health and safety, and
- » the good management and running of the school.

Schools often advocate for families to secure appropriate supports, as many parents are unfamiliar with how to navigate the NDIS system, and paperwork and communication with families regarding NDIS plans, eligibility, and service provision have added to the workload of school leaders. Some families directly hire support workers who may accompany their child at school, creating additional oversight responsibilities for school leaders. ►

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ACCESS INEQUITY

The NDIS has the potential to enhance student support, as families can access tailored disability supports beyond what schools provide. However, access to NDIS services is inconsistent, especially in rural and remote areas, due to provider shortages, long wait times and travel barriers. Limited availability of allied health services and inconsistent funding create further disadvantages, leaving many students without essential interventions, widening the gap between urban and regional schools, and placing additional pressure on educators to fill service gaps.

As well, schools in low socioeconomic areas report that many students who need support are not receiving it because their families struggle to navigate the system or meet eligibility criteria.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

With more private therapists (e.g., speech pathologists, occupational therapists, behaviour support practitioners) now working within primary school settings, schools must establish clear protocols for managing NDIS providers on site, which may vary across jurisdictions. The absence of clear protocols for provider access and supervision complicates coordination, placing additional strain on school leaders and impacting equitable support for students with disabilities. It is not a requirement that NDIS providers can provide their service on a school site.

Many primary schools also lack appropriate, accessible dedicated spaces for NDIS providers, creating logistical challenges that impact student support, equity, and effective service delivery. Insufficient infrastructure, scheduling conflicts, and inadequate accessibility hinder effective service delivery.

APPA also wishes to highlight a growing community tension between private practitioners who choose to work with students at their own premises and NDIS providers who operate their businesses within school facilities, raising concerns about equitable access, duty of care, and the appropriate use of education spaces.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

- 1 Role of schools**
APPA recommends a national statement clarifying the **role of schools** in enabling NDIS therapy on a school site to reduce the current confusion and ambiguity.
- 2 Stakeholder expectations**
APPA recommends the provision of **consistent guidelines for parents/carers** that outline the responsibilities of all parties – schools, providers and families – in the delivery of NDIS support for students within the school environment.
- 3 Administrative workload resourcing**
APPA recommends **administrative resourcing** to schools to meet increased coordination requirements for students in receipt of NDIS funding.
- 4 Equitable access**
Where NDIS provided support services are lacking, APPA recommends **targeted funding** to offer specialist support services, particularly in rural, remote, and lower socio-economic communities.
- 5 Logistics**
APPA recommends clear, consistent national **guidelines on school-NDIS engagement**, defining provider access, school responsibilities, and support service delivery across all sectors.

SUMMARY

School leaders are committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities by delivering high quality education, supported by reasonable educational adjustments. NDIS support contributes to a student's ability to participate in their education. To address the growing pressures on school leaders, teachers and support staff as they liaise with NDIS providers, **APPA calls for the implementation of consistent practices, the establishment of clear guidelines, the provision of comprehensive training for staff engaging with NDIS providers in schools, and appropriate resourcing.** Teachers and school leaders need ongoing professional development to understand the NDIS and how it intersects with their roles.

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DEVICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) recognises the importance of digital literacy and the role of technology in education. The use of devices in education should enhance learning, build essential skills, and foster responsible digital citizenship.

ICT CAPABILITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Developing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability from Foundation to Year 6 equips students with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly digital world. Through technology, students:

- » build confidence in research, communication, and problem-solving,
- » develop critical thinking skills to assess digital content for credibility and relevance, and
- » learn ethical and responsible ICT practices to foster safe online behaviours.

The integration of ICT across the curriculum can support learning to be more interactive and engaging and can enhance differentiated instruction. Primary students gain hands-on experience with digital tools, helping them become independent learners who can adapt to new technologies. This foundational knowledge is essential for lifelong digital literacy and responsible technology use.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND FUTURE SKILLS

Digital literacy, as defined by UNESCO (2025):

- » includes the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately, and
- » aims to empower people, in particular youth, to adopt a critical mindset when engaging with information to build their resilience in the face of disinformation.¹

The Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Computer Society (ACS) report, *Tech Skills for the Next Generation*, highlights key challenges in digital education.

» Teacher challenges

Over two-thirds of teachers report difficulties in delivering the Digital Technologies curriculum due to inadequate support and resources.

» Support deficit

Only 25% of teachers feel they have sufficient resources, leading to reduced student engagement in technology subjects.

» Declining Enrolment

Fewer students are enrolling in technology subjects in Years 11 and 12, impacting future workforce readiness.²

BALANCING SCREEN TIME

APPA acknowledges concerns about screen time and supports clear messaging to promote a balanced approach. Australian guidelines recommend that children and young people aged between 5-17 should have less than two hours of sedentary recreational screen time per day, excluding educational activities.³ Schools should ensure that:

- » device use supports meaningful learning and is not driven by trends, and
- » students have opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and the pursuit of personal interests.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDTECH INTEGRATION

Evidence from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) highlights that effective technology use in education depends on skilled teachers. Even when student-centred and well-integrated, the implementation of educational technology (EdTech) requires:

- » teacher guidance in critical thinking and contextualising feedback, and
- » a focus on high-quality teaching rather than replacing teachers with technology.⁴ ►

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVICE USE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- 1 **Bring your own device (BYOD)** in primary schools
APPA encourages careful consideration of the implications of BYOD policies, including equity, security, and consistency of digital experiences.
- 2 **Selecting the best devices for learning**
Teachers and leaders should critically evaluate the adoption of devices, apps, and digital tools to ensure they support curriculum objectives and student learning, add value to learning, enhance student engagement and align with pedagogical goals.
- 3 **Teacher professional learning**
Professional development should be independent of commercial technology interests to ensure objective, evidence-based practices.
- 4 **NAPLAN**
NAPLAN assessments are now online so ensuring that students are confident in the use of EdTech for assessment and learning is essential.
- 5 **Artificial Intelligence**
AI is here. We must ensure it's used thoughtfully: age-appropriate, ethically, and in ways that support learning, creativity, and critical thinking for both students and teachers.
- 6 **Parenting Support**
APPA acknowledges the challenging role parents have in supporting safe online behaviour and considers it imperative to provide training and support for all families.

- » Expand the availability of accessible, ready-to-use **teaching resources**.
- » Provide additional **human resources** to enable access to skilled coaches and to ensure IT systems and devices work effectively.
- » Improve **equity in education** so learning with digital tools is enhanced.
- » Provide **targeted support** to improve student digital literacy.
- » Ensure that primary students have access to **quality devices** in a manner that doesn't place undue pressure on school finances.
- » Make available a robust **'assessment' framework** for leaders to use when considering the introduction of any EdTech (including Apps).
- » Build **professional networks** for the sharing of innovative primary practice.
- » Promote ways that AI can be used to broaden and build learning, and augment efficient low value tasks for teachers.
- » Review mobile phone bans (which we support) to include restrictions on the use of mobile devices such as smart watches.
- » **Parent education** along with access to quality resources that build their confidence in managing their child's digital environment.

SUMMARY

While technology plays a crucial role in contemporary education, its effectiveness depends on skilled educators, clear policies, and a commitment to digital literacy. **APPA calls for the meaningful and sustainable integration of technology in primary schools and a thoughtful, balanced approach to device use.** Supporting teachers and students in navigating the digital landscape will ensure that primary education remains relevant, engaging, and future focused.

MOVING FORWARD IN DIGITAL EDUCATION

APPA advocates for the following:

- » Embed **digital-readiness training** in Initial Teacher Education (ITE).
- » Strengthen ongoing **teacher professional development (PD)** in digital education so teachers are confident in choosing and using technology wisely, and confident in planning for the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability to be integrated across learning areas.
- » Ensure teachers are confident in **learning design** to best position contemporary technology in the curriculum. Ensure a developmental skills continuum in digital citizenship is accessible.

- 1 "What you need to know about literacy". *UNESCO*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know>. Last updated: 11 February 2025
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