Frequently asked questions

About the My School website

What is the My School website?
The My School website has been developed so that parents and the community have access to information about their child’s school and other schools in Australia.

My School provides information for about 9,500 Australian schools that can be searched by school name, location and education sector. Each school has a dedicated profile page displaying a range of information about that school and including a link to the school’s own website.

Statistical and contextual information about schools is provided, along with enrolments and results achieved by students participating in vocational education and training programs and apprenticeships, as well as information about students who have completed school and who may be engaged in tertiary education.

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 (see www.nap.edu.au).

Who is responsible for the My School website?
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 information about schools is published on the My School website?

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

- educational outcomes—including the results of national literacy and numeracy 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; and

• capacity or capability—including the type of school, the year range, student and staff numbers, school financial information, and location.

Not all of the information planned for publication on My School is currently available. As additional information becomes available it will be published on the website.

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 so that more information about the school community can be obtained.

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, broken down by funding source, for all government and non-government schools for 2009, 2010 and 2011.

What’s new on the My School website in 2013?

The key additions are:

• an additional year of information for each school, with five years of performance data now available;

• enhanced information about Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools, with a display of qualification by industry area; and

• the addition of Total Capital Expenditure from 2009 to 2011 on the School finances page.

What other information on schools will become available on the My School website 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 underway 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.

ACARA is investigating options to survey parents, teachers and students to enable nationally comparable opinions of schools to be published on My School in the future.

Once a definition of disability has been agreed and implemented nationally, information about students with disabilities will be published on My School as additional contextual information.

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.

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; and
- 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 is published only for schools in Victoria and Western Australia, and government schools in the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland.

How are students participating in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships reported?

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 has been added to the My School website this year. 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.

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.

Could individuals be identified from published results?

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.

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 great 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 can the My School website be used?**

Teachers, schools and parents already use information at the individual school level. From January 2010, for the first time, information on all Australian schools became available in one location on the My School website, providing 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; and
- becoming involved in advocating for and supporting improvement initiatives within the school.
Appropriate use of information

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:

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

How is 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 on 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.

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www.myschool.edu.au
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 2012 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 shown in the student background section of the School profile page?

The purpose of this table is to show a representation of a student population grouped in four general 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.

What is the benefit of comparing schools if they are in another part 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. They may also hold the key to working out what needs to happen for all schools to perform at a high level. 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 chief 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.
Financial information

Why report school financial data on the My School website?

Australian, state and territory education ministers requested ACARA, through their Ministerial Council, to report information about each school’s calendar year recurrent income and capital expenditure on the My School website.

The inclusion of this information helps provide further detail about a school’s capacity to support educational outcomes for students. School financial data provides valuable information about the context of a school, and the resources it has available to deliver educational outcomes to students.

This is the third year that national school-based financial data has been reported on My School. This will continue to be improved over time to enhance its comparability.

How is financial data collected?

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

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

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

- the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) requires non-government schools to complete and submit the DEEWR Financial Questionnaire (FQ). This information is provided to ACARA by DEEWR. This FQ has been revised to incorporate data fields specifically to support My School website reporting within a broader set of questions used for other purposes; and
- DEEWR provides details of Block Grant Authority (BGA) 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 My School.

Where do schools get their income?

Schools have different funding sources depending on 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 Australian Government funding and may generate income through private sources such as fund-raising, donations and parental contributions through fees. The majority of government school funding comes from the state and territory governments.

Non-government schools’ income comprises a mixture of private and government funding. Non-government schools receive a greater proportion of their income from private sources compared to government schools.
Private income is sourced from student fees and income from other private sources, including fund-raising, donations, and interest on savings. Government funding is primarily received from the Australian Government and to a lesser extent from the state or territory government in which the school is located.

What things do schools spend money on?
Schools expend 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;
- school corporate/running costs; and
- equity programs to assist students with specific needs, including those with disability and/or low socio-economic backgrounds.

Are school assets reported?
Capital works expenditure incurred in the reporting year is shown for each school on its School finances page.

Total assets, including physical assets of schools are not reported on the My School website. Only ‘in year’ school income and capital expenditure are recorded on My School. Therefore assets, including trust funds are not reported on My School. However, where interest earned on these funds passes through the school accounts, such interest is reflected as a source of income. Also capital expenditure met from trust funds included in a school’s asset base is recorded in capital expenditure within the year that the funds are expended.

The School finances page on My School in 2013 also includes total capital expenditure 2009 to 2011 for each school that has data for all three years.

For new schools, or schools that do not have all three years of capital expenditure information, total capital expenditure fields will not be displayed on the School finances page on My School in 2013.

Each school’s capital expenditure will generally reflect its building program expenditure over the reported three years. This incorporates factors such as the school’s age, upgrade works and targeted capital works programs and enrolment growth profile. A significant influence on capital expenditure over 2009 to 2011 is the Australian Government’s Building the Education Revolution program (BER).

This program was part of the Australian Government’s economic stimulus package and the timing of the planning and construction of specific projects under this program can affect comparisons between schools.

How was 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 the My School website each year, all jurisdictions are provided with opportunities to review their data and update where appropriate. Principals are also given the opportunity to review their school’s data before it is reported on My School.

DEEWR requires the Approved Authority for the school to declare, upon submitting the school’s FQ response to DEEWR, that the information provided is true and correct and has been drawn from independently audited accounts or based on information submitted to an independent auditor. 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 are available on the More Information page of the website.

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.
NAPLAN

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 the 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 will the My School website 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, even more meaningful information on students’ progress will be 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. They 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 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 confidence intervals around school average scores to indicate the degree of confidence we can have in them.
Reliability of NAPLAN

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 disabilities representatives within each jurisdiction with respect to curriculum content and potential cultural or other biases; and
- the tests are trialled in each state and territory to ensure the items measure the curriculum in the intended manner.

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 because of 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).

Does the My School website show numbers of students who don’t 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.
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 and NAPLAN results and the ICSEA value for the school will not be reported.

These schools will also not be 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 identify any specific school programs it has.

How are schools that are selective or have selective streams, or 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.