Follow your child’s progress

From the time a child starts Kindergarten assessments are taking place to help parents and teachers understand what students know and can do and what they need to be taught next.

NSW public schools have an extensive range of assessments and the results are reported back to parents and caregivers in a variety of ways.

There are student reports from the school, reports on how students fare in state and national tests, information available at parent-teacher meetings and on school websites.

The assessments also help teachers fine-tune how they teach and what they teach.

These are vital sources of information that allow schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training and parents to focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, track and celebrate student progress and identify areas for improvement.

It’s important that children continue to progress and improve in class, which is why our school-based assessments and the national tests called NAPLAN provide early signals if students need more support.

These assessments also highlight areas where students may benefit from more challenging extension work.

We want to provide as much meaningful information as possible to parents and caregivers, acknowledging our partnership in quality education.

---

Dianne Giblin
PRESIDENT
NSW FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS’ ASSOCIATIONS

Michael Coutts-Trotter
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Parents and teachers sharing assessment information and working together to promote better learning

Assessment is an ongoing process. Teachers gather information on how children are learning, what they know and understand, so they can plan how the students will progress in their education.

As a parent or caregiver you will be kept informed of your child’s progress and how their learning needs are being met.

Every day in every lesson teachers are assessing your child’s progress. Sometimes they will use in-class tests, quizzes, assignments and projects, or they will look at children’s work in class, watch how they work in groups and listen to how they answer questions.

In NSW public schools there are a number of assessments that all students are encouraged to do. They are designed to give vital information about student achievement to the student, their parents, their teachers and their school.

Understanding the assessments
At least twice a year teachers generate student reports, based on tests and assignments, as well as their classroom observations. There are also reports to parents from national and state assessments.

In the final years of school, there are the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate reports.

The education department uses the information gleaned from test results to constantly improve the teaching and learning support provided to students.

As parents you also have the opportunity to discuss your child’s progress at regular parent-teacher interviews.

For more information go to the public schools website: www.schools.nsw.edu.au
Best Start to school

Every child starting Kindergarten in a NSW public school takes part in a Best Start Assessment.

All children are individuals. They start school at slightly different ages. They have unique experiences and abilities. The Best Start Assessment is a consistent way to find out what your child knows, understands and can do.

This assessment focuses on literacy and numeracy because these are the fundamentals for learning and life.

Your child’s teacher will observe activities, such as counting a small number of objects or talking about a story book that has been read to them by their teacher. These activities are relaxed and informal. The observations are recorded and the teacher uses the information to plan your child’s learning programs.

Best Start also detects whether a child may need additional assistance. For instance, some children may need the support of a speech therapist or may need to see an optometrist. Others may need a program to boost their literacy levels, or get support in learning English. It also helps teachers know when a child is ready for extension activities and further challenges.


State or national assessments

Kindergarten
Best Start

Year 3
NAPLAN
(National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy)

Year 5
NAPLAN

Year 7
NAPLAN

Year 9
NAPLAN

Year 10
School Certificate

Year 12
Higher School Certificate
Reporting student progress

You will receive a written report on your child’s progress at school at least twice each year.

The report will include information about your child’s academic achievement, their commitment to learning, attendance, social development and participation in extracurricular activities. The school may include other information in the report too such as the effort put into each subject.

The report should be easy to understand, provide a grade or similar description of achievement and have detailed comments for each subject.

The academic section of your child’s report is based on formal assessments (such as tests, assignments and projects) and informal assessments (such as teachers’ observations of students’ participation in discussion, question and answer sessions and helping others).

What do the grades mean?

Grades in Years 1 to 10 range from A to E. Some schools prefer to use a word that is similar to the grade, so outstanding means an A, high (B), sound (C), basic (D) and limited (E).

Grades are given according to the level of knowledge, skills and understanding of a subject that a student is expected to achieve. The expected syllabus standard of achievement is a C.

Students who demonstrate a deeper level of knowledge and understanding, a more sophisticated level of skill and are able to more effectively apply these to new situations would receive a B or an A. Those whose level of achievement isn’t at the expected standard would receive a D or an E.

It is important to note that most – but not all – students will receive a grade or similar description of achievement for each subject.
The Best Start Assessment for Kindergarten students does not use grades. Some students with learning difficulties and students with limited English have their achievement reported against different scales.

(Note: any student receiving lower grades in a number of subjects may be experiencing learning difficulties.
 Schools have significant support structures for these students.
 For students with an identified learning difficulty a learning adjustment program will be implemented and a report with comments and no grades will be issued).

For more information about report grades: http://arc.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/k-6/common-grade-scale/ 

Ways to find out how my child compares with other students?

In the past, grades compared students with one another. Only a few “top” students could get an A and the “bottom” students got a D or E.

Grades today tell parents about their child’s achievement relative to what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do. This is a fairer system. Students are not ranked and there is no limit to the number of students who can achieve a particular grade.

Some parents would still like information about how their child compares with others. You can ask the school for information about the distribution of grades across the year – that is, how many students were awarded an A, how many a B and so on.

What other information about academic achievement will I receive?

Grades or similar descriptions of achievement are a useful way of knowing where your child is relative to the curriculum level. However, you need more detail than that.

The reports have teacher comments about each subject, which describe what your child understands and can do. They also include information about what they need to learn next.

Getting the whole picture

Information about academic achievement is just one part of your child’s report. But it’s not the only form of learning your child is involved in.

There is also information about social development, attendance and commitment to learning, as well as participation in other areas of school life.

The mix of information in your child’s report will help you best understand their progress and help you support their learning.

You don’t have to wait for the report

If you have a concern about your child’s progress or behaviour or want to know how your child’s learning can be extended or further challenged, or you just need to have a general discussion, you don’t have to wait until you receive a written report.

Schools provide opportunities for you to talk with teachers or the principal. There will be a formal opportunity to speak with your child’s teacher at a parent-teacher interview after their first report is sent home.

And you can always call the school to make a time for a special meeting. It’s best to ring the school in advance to schedule a mutually convenient time.

If you need an interpreter to help you discuss matters with your child’s teacher the school can call the Telephone Interpreter Service on 13 14 50.
NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy)

The NAPLAN tests are taken by all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NSW has the country’s highest level of participation in NAPLAN tests.

The tests are designed to gauge how each student is acquiring skills in the fundamental learning areas of literacy and numeracy. Results are analysed to identify what particular skills are and aren’t being learned by a single child, a group, a class, a school or a group of schools.

Each question is linked to the curriculum and a particular skill band. When test reports are given to teachers and parents they can see how the student has performed within a skill band.

Special versions of the test are created so that children with a disability, such as a vision impairment, can undertake the test.

Why just test literacy and numeracy?

Literacy and numeracy are skills essential for every other subject within the school curriculum. Knowing how to read, write, comprehend and understand mathematical ideas are fundamental life skills.

How is NAPLAN data used?

If your child sits the NAPLAN assessment you will receive a personal results package. It will tell you the questions your child attempted, which questions your child got right, what particular skill the question was trying to test and what proportion of students within the state got that question right.

The NAPLAN student report should confirm what school reports have indicated about your child’s achievement at school.

The NAPLAN student report gives parents and teachers meaningful information about each child, provides a focus for areas of improvement and the nature of any additional support required.
NSW public school teachers and principals use software to analyse the NAPLAN results for each child, and even groups of children. Once teachers analyse the data they use this software to download specialist teaching resources to target areas for improvement.

Long-term NAPLAN trend data is useful for education departments to monitor how well we are teaching. For example, we can use the data to see how well we are teaching numeracy to girls, or how well boys are doing at spelling.

We can analyse data over time to see what action is required. We are able to chart the learning growth and see how much improvement is taking place.