

MAKING SENSE OF NAPLAN

What is NAPLAN?

NAPLAN is a standardised snapshot of your child's literacy and numeracy skills. It can be useful information for parents, teachers, and schools, but we know it will not (and it's not expected to!) capture the full picture of your child as a learner or human. What it does do, is assess:

- Reading (understanding different texts)
- Writing (a prompted persuasive or narrative task)
- Language conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation, and mostly multiple choice)
- Numeracy (number, measurement, problem solving and reasoning).

People hold a range of views about NAPLAN, and these views are often shaped by media coverage. But what matters most is this: NAPLAN is not a measure of your child's intelligence, a predictor of their future success, or a judgement of your child (or your parenting!).

It's a way teachers and schools get feedback on what they're doing and what their learners need next.

How schools use the data

As well as producing a report for parents (which you'll receive in a couple of months' time), NAPLAN provides feedback to educators, teaching teams and schools about their programs and teaching strategies. When kids sit NAPLAN and try their best, it helps schools understand what students know and can do, so teachers can improve programs and target support. At a school level, schools use the data to:

- reflect on the impact of literacy and numeracy programs across the school,
- combine the data with other sources to learn what's working (or not!) which directs their future focus areas, and
- consider the results over time to ensure the school progress is headed in the right direction.

At a class and individual level, educators can use the information to look for:

- specific areas of growth and achievement for individuals, classes, and cohorts,
- areas that require focused attention to support students,
- similarities and differences between internal and external assessments to build a better understanding of their learners,
- individual students who would benefit from more support or extension.

All of these uses of the data can significantly benefit your child.

How to prepare your child for NAPLAN

NAPLAN is not designed to cause stress, but it is understandable that young people have mixed feelings about it. The best preparation is calm, practical, and routine-based, *where you speak positively* about the assessments as an opportunity for your child to demonstrate what they can do. You might like to say things like:

- "This is just one way schools collect information. Just try your best."
- "If you get stuck, take a breath, count to 5, and try again".
- "Lots of kids feel nervous. It will be okay. Just take it one question at a time."

After the tests, focus on what matters most. Ask them how they think it went, praise their effort, but don't do a post-mortem by rehashing questions.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU RECEIVE THE REPORT

How to read the report

Your child will receive one of four 'proficiency levels' for each test they sit:

- Exceeding: above the expected level for their year.
- Strong: meeting the expected level for their year (which is where about half the students usually sit).
- Developing: progressing, but not yet at the expected level.
- Needs Additional Support: would benefit from targeted help in this area.

The report shows your child's result alongside the national average and the middle 60% band, helping you see roughly where they sit compared with all students nationwide. These are broad categories, and not precise measurements, but your child's school will have more specific information about their scale score result.

Is my child doing okay?

This is what parents are ultimately trying to understand.

If the results match what you expected, that's a good sign, and just another data point confirming your child is tracking as anticipated (and you now have this benchmarked nationally).

If the results are lower than expected, get curious about why: what might have affected the day, and how does it compare with the classroom evidence you've received? If it doesn't make sense, talk with their teacher to get assistance with interpretation and to plan next steps.

If the results are higher than expected (yes, this happens quite a bit!), celebrate their effort and progress. If the results don't match the evidence you're seeing from your child's school, consider how big the gap is and compare with other evidence you might have... then check in with their teacher if you're still unsure.

Achievement and progress

If your child is in Year 5, 7, or 9, you will be able to compare their achievement this year with the report you received two years ago; to not only consider their 2026 achievement, but also their progress over time.

If your child has moved up in the cohort or in a proficiency level - they've probably made more progress than the average Australian student, which is great!

If they've moved down in the cohort or a proficiency level - they've probably made less progress than the average Australian student. This is useful to know and if this is surprising to you, it's worth chatting with their classroom teacher to see what they think.

Dr Selena Fisk is a data storyteller and former teacher with almost two decades of experience helping educators use data meaningfully. She advocates for data-informed approaches that keep student wellbeing, growth, and learning at the centre.

 www.selenafisk.com