

# CURRICULUM REPORT

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I am pleased to once again report on curriculum related matters and highlight areas of interest for families educating children living in rural and remote locations. In recent years ICPA (Aust) has welcomed a number of changes to the National Curriculum which have and will benefit rural students, many of which were highlighted in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

## CURRICULUM

**Phonics:** The use of phonics is well supported by many of our families who teach via distance education, so the news that the new curriculum would also mandate the use of phonics to teach children to sound out words and syllables, instead of making them learn by rote or guess words through the contentious “whole language” was most welcome. This year, Minister Birmingham announced the introduction of the assessment of phonological awareness in Year 1 to enable early identification of potential learning difficulties. Support for teachers to do this is most welcomed by rural and remote families who often struggle to get suspected difficulties recognised, especially in the distance education setting and small schools.

**Agriculture in Education:** In 2016, ICPA (Aust) welcomed the Australian Government’s commitment to investing \$2 million into developing Agriculture in Education. The materials were to showcase the diversity and economic importance of food and fibre production in Australia. The online teaching and learning resources are aligned to the Australian Curriculum learning areas including science and geography. However, despite these resources now being available, some parents working in the industry feel that what is being taught is not truly reflective (particularly in the early years) of the industry and are calling for more industry input on matters such as, where does our food come from.

**Further expansion of learning areas for high school students:** At the 2017 Federal Conference members supported the idea of including topics essential to safe driving practice in the high school curriculum. Stating that, *“The spotlight has been put on the increase of deaths on our rural roads. We believe that with correct training and making our new, young drivers aware of the perils found on rural roads. Rural students often have difficulty organising this education on their own because of boarding commitments or no services being available in rural towns.”* This issue was raised in the IRRRRE submission and discussed at a number of meetings. To date no progress has been made, however, the matter will continue to be raised when the opportunity arises.

## NAPLAN

**NAPLAN Assessment:** After a decade, Australia’s first national test of literacy and numeracy continues to be a powerful tool in measuring students’ achievement in core literacy and numeracy skills. The report produced in 2016 by the Grattan Institute (VIC), ‘Widening gaps: what NAPLAN tells us about student progress’, outlines a number of concerns for rural and remote students and how changes might be implemented.

**Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools:** This year the Turnbull Government established the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, to be chaired by Mr David Gonski AC, to provide advice on how how additional Commonwealth funding should be used by Australian schools and school systems to improve school performance and student achievement.

The review will examine evidence and make recommendations on the most effective teaching and learning strategies and initiatives to be deployed. In particular the Review will focus on the effective

and efficient use of funding to: Improve student outcomes and Australia's national performance, as measured by national and international assessments of student achievement; improve the preparedness of school leavers to succeed in employment, further training or higher education; improve outcomes across all cohorts of students, including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically-advanced students ('gifted' students). At the end of March, the final report was sent to the Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education and Training.

ICPA (Aust) lodged a submission into this review and took part in a panel via teleconference. The submission can be found on our website:

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1112/federal-submissions/federal-submissions-2017/review-to-achieve-educational-excellence-in-australian-schools.pdf>

**NAPLAN Online:** ICPA has welcomed consultations with ACARA throughout the development, trialling and implementation associated with NAPLAN going online. While problems around connectivity are a major concern for many of our members, we believe these concerns have been taken seriously and every effort is being made to overcome them. The fact that students will receive results to their tailored test in a matter of weeks, compared to the current process which can take months, should benefit students enormously. The test window for NAPLAN Online has been extended from three days to nine, to provide flexibility in scheduling and to accommodate schools that may have fewer devices.

In transitioning to NAPLAN Online, education systems have considered the appropriateness of utilising certain technologies, including automated essay scoring. Automated essay scoring allows for writing scripts to be assessed using sophisticated computer programming. In December 2017, the Education Council determined that automated essay scoring will not be used for the marking of NAPLAN writing scripts. Any change to this position in the future will be informed by further research into automated essay scoring, and be made as a decision of the Education Council."

**Autoscoring explained here:**

[http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/20151130\\_automated\\_essay\\_scoring\\_infographic.pdf](http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/20151130_automated_essay_scoring_infographic.pdf)

State/territory education authorities make decisions about the logistics and timing to move NAPLAN online for their state/territory. These groups also lead implementation of NAPLAN Online in their state/territory. Federal Council would like to encourage members to ask their school when and how they plan to rollover to NAPLAN online.

At the June Education Council meeting, Ministers received an update on the recent NAPLAN Online program held in May. This year, a number of students in schools in the ACT, NSW, Qld, SA, Vic and WA completed NAPLAN assessments online for the first time. In participating schools, Years 5, 7 and 9 students completed online assessments in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy, while Year 3 students completed assessments in reading, language conventions and numeracy. Year 3 writing was undertaken as a paper-based assessment.

NAPLAN online testing was a success with students participating in 668,529 NAPLAN Online assessments during the nine-day testing program, with 99.9 per cent of students able to complete the assessment online. Local internet connectivity and device issues saw a very small number of tests diverted to complete on paper. Schools in all states and territories will continue to transition from paper-based to online assessments over the coming years.

**Review of NAPLAN data:** The Education Council has agreed to a review of NAPLAN data presentation. A number of state and territory ministers advocated support for a broader review of NAPLAN and noted the review of NAPLAN currently underway in Queensland.

Federal Council looks forward to contributing to discussions that now sees the government focused on improving testing, reporting and streamlining the curriculum. Our advocacy continues to draw attention to the issues of “access and delivery” for geographically isolated students, making certain they are not forgotten during this new era in education reform.