



**Independent
Schools Victoria**

Media Release

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Independent Schools Victoria Comments on the My School Website

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Dear Parents

Many of you may have viewed the Australian Government's My School website launched this week, which has generated widespread discussion, massive media commentary and a wide range of opinions reflecting the views of both special interest groups and individuals.

As the member organisation that supports independent schools in Victoria, we have been analysing the My School website data and I would like to offer you the following observations.

All parents are entitled to extensive information relating to the education of their children. Our schools make effective, continuing consultation with parents a primary objective.

The My School website was developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) using information based on the government's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) national testing. While it does provide additional data, the published material, based on literacy and numeracy skills, is only a snapshot and ignores the range of experiences, values and qualities that make up an independent school education.

Good quality information on schooling is important. Meaningful school performance information enables parents and the community to see how schools are performing but it does depend on quality data. Simple aggregates of results in basic skills tests say a little about what a school is achieving, but they do not reflect the full experience that each school offers.

As ACARA itself says:

'NAPLAN tests sample only a part of what students learn during the year. No test is able to perfectly measure a student's level of achievement and all tests are subject to a certain amount of measurement error. This means that there will always be a margin of error surrounding a school's average score. It is important for parents to find out more about the whole curriculum of the school and the school's performance across a range of areas by visiting the school's website and talking with school leaders and teachers.'

The website compares average test results from government and non-government schools with 60 'statistically similar' schools nationwide and 20 nearby schools. School comparisons are based on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) that was developed specifically for the My School website as a means of identifying socio-educationally similar schools across Australia. Some of the comparisons are problematic and there are concerns over the accuracy of the socio-economic measures used to compare schools. ACARA is reported in the media as being aware of data anomalies and has encouraged schools to report mistakes.

Launching the My School website, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Julia Gillard MP, said it would assist the government to enable the sharing of best practice from schools doing well and to see which schools need assistance. We support that objective.

Ms Gillard also said parents should talk to their school principals if they are concerned about their school's performance. Again we agree.

Principals of independent schools ensure full and detailed reporting to parents who are committed stakeholders in the school through their investment in their children's education. Teachers at independent schools are always in close contact with parents about the progress of students, with a continuing dialogue of both formal and informal discussions.

Principals and teachers will carefully consider the My School results and will finetune existing, or introduce, new measures to manage any issues identified.

Learning outcomes statistics are important, but independent schools offer much more than can be measured by NAPLAN and other educational data, such as particular educational philosophies and cultural, social and religious values that meet the requirements of parents and children.

We have reservations about the extent of the information on the website and the accuracy of school comparisons. School results published on the website will not be the only factor in judging where parents should send their children and there is a lot more to a good education than scores in subject tests. Nonetheless, the website is providing parents with more information than they previously had.

The website has also sparked a national debate about greater transparency in education and has promoted the discussion about educational standards. Transparency assists in informing parents. If the My School website can help provide greater transparency, accountability and competition the quality of education in Australia will benefit.

Please make sure that you discuss any concerns you have about the My School website with your school Principal. We look forward to receiving your views, which can be sent to enquiries@independentschoolparents.com.au

Yours sincerely

Michelle Green
Chief Executive

**For more information, or to interview Michelle Green
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