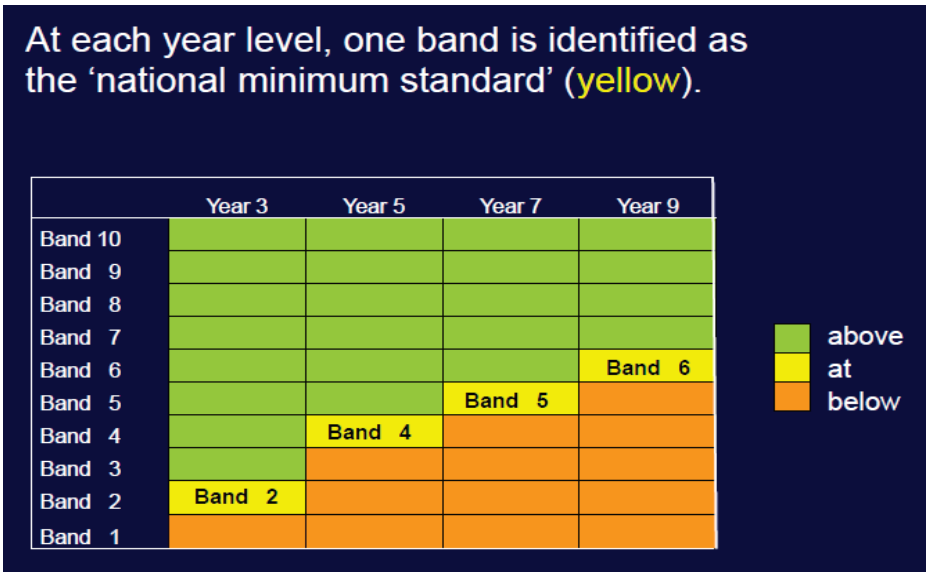
Q1: What is Holy Spirit's approach to NAPLAN?
Holy Spirit views NAPLAN as an important piece of data that can be used with a range of other school based data to help provide an indication of how a child is progressing with the curriculum. NAPLAN, along with other school based data, can be used to inform and direct curriculum planning within the school. Holy Spirit views NAPLAN as a useful point in time test. A better informed understanding of how a child is achieving at school can be obtained through communicating with the class teacher.

Q 2: Do high schools accept enrolments based solely on NAPLAN scores?
High schools understand children learn through a variety of contexts and this requires a variety of assessment methods to demonstrate their learning. Quality high schools therefore use a range of data to gain an in depth knowledge of a child going through their enrolment process and not just base their decision solely on a one off test. A child's NAPLAN score may be one piece of data used along with school reports, interviews, specialist data etc. It is best to contact individual high schools for clarification on the enrolment process and procedures they use.

Q3: What are the relationships between Scale Scores, Achievement Bands, and National Minimum Standards on the NAPLAN test?

NAPLAN tests usually have been 25 and 40 questions. Raw scores are statistically manipulated along a 0 – 1000 scale so that all year 3, 5, 7, and 9 students can be compared on the same scale.

Scaled scores are organised into 10 achievement bands.



Students who are in the national minimum standard band for their year level have typically demonstrated the basic elements of literacy and numeracy needed to participate at their year level.

Students below the national minimum standard are considered to be at risk of being unable to fully participate in schooling without focused intervention or additional support.

For Year 3 the minimum standard is Band 2; students in Band 1 are 'below minimum standard'.

For Year 5 the minimum standard is Band 4; students in Band 3 and below are 'below minimum standard'.

For Year 7 the minimum standard is Band 5; students in Band 4 and below are 'below minimum standard'.

For Year 9 the minimum standard is Band 6; students in Band 5 and below are 'below minimum standard'.

As part of Australian government compliance, schools are required to report the percentage of students at or above the national minimum standard. Exempt students are recorded as not having met the national minimum standard.

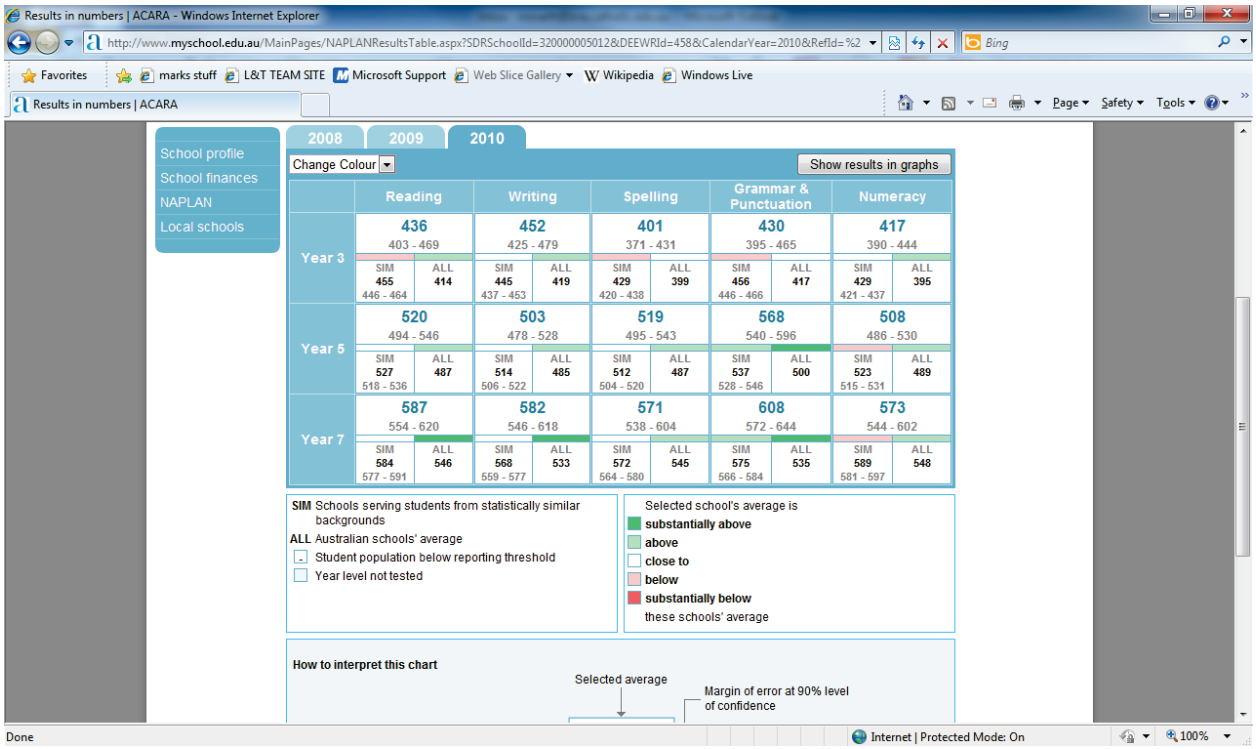
It is noted that absent students neither contribute a score to a school's average, nor are they counted as part of the total school population.

Q4: What is the My School Website?

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) that oversights NAPLAN has established the *My School* website and publishes NAPLAN and other school data, including financial data.

My School uses an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) to identify 'statistically similar' schools in order to compare school means and thus identify 'good' schools and schools needing assistance.

A colour code is used to identify if a school's average is greater or less than the average of the 60 'statistically similar' schools that it has been grouped with (see example below).



There is widespread criticism that schools are being compared with schools that are clearly NOT 'similar'. For example, Holy Spirit is listed as being 'like':

- Guildford Grammar School (WA)
- Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School (Vic).

Holy Spirit	Guildford Grammar	Lowther Hall Anglican
K – 7	K - 12	K – 12
No girls 115 No boys 92	No girls 87 No boys 1011	No girls 794 No boys
FTE teachers 12 FTE non-teach 4.4	FTE teachers 99.6 FTE non-teach 68.9	FTE teachers 68.5 FTE non-teach 38.5
Net recurrent $1,976,930	Net recurrent $16,403,889	Net recurrent $14,183,807

The *My School* website with its simplistic comparisons of school averages cannot reasonably represent the complexities of different learning communities and the various ways in which schools may be value-adding for their students.

Schools have much more, and much richer learning data than NAPLAN. Schools also know and understand the contexts in which they plan and enact their learning programs.

A current challenge for schools is to make visible and reportable their value-addedness through analyses of the intersections of all of their student learning data (including NAPLAN), school demographics and profile data, school processes data, and perception data – over time.

Q5: How can NAPLAN data be used to identify improvement in student learning?

2010 was the first year that longitudinal analyses of cohorts was possible since the 2008 year 3s were the 2010 year 5s; the 2008 year 5s were the 2010 year 7s; and the 2008 year 7s were the 2010 year 9s. Two comparisons can be made, namely:
comparing 2008 year 3 and 5 with 2010 year 5 and 7 ***averages*** (somewhat useful for a simple global sense of possible trends)
comparing 2008 ***achievement band distributions*** with 2010 achievement band distributions using the appropriate bands that designate the national minimum standard for each year level for comparative alignment (quite useful for making individual school value-addedness visible).
A comparison of Holy Spirit's 2008 Year 3 and 5 data, with the corresponding 2010 Year 5 and 7 data, can be interpreted as showing value-addedness for the following aspects of NAPLAN, namely:

- 2010 Yr 5 Reading
- 2010 Yr 5 Spelling

- 2010 Yr 5 Writing
- 2010 Yr 7 Numeracy
- 2010 Yr 7 Reading
- 2010 Yr 7 Spelling.

Q6: Is it useful to compare one year's NAPLAN averages, with other years?

No.

One year's group of year 3 students, for example, will be different from other years. The smaller the group, the more likely it is that there will be different abilities, experiences, and learning needs from year-to-year.

While each year's results are manipulated statistically to the same scale of 0 – 1000, different years' tests test different parts of the curriculum. It is identifying the particular 'curriculum stories' and 'students' stories' within the data that is useful to students, parents, and teachers – rather than comparing one year's averages with previous years.

There are many BCE schools that lose students after year 3, especially boys, who enrol in other schools. Often these are higher NAPLAN achieving students whose absence in the year 5 and 7 data makes meaningful comparisons with previous years' averages, or between-schools' data not readily possible.

Q7: How useful is it to compare distributions of students through the achievement bands?

Answer: It is the 'shapes' and 'patterns' in the data, particularly the distributions through the achievement bands that gives a better indication of students' learning as revealed by NAPLAN.

School reports indicate the percentage of students exempt; below the National Minimum Standard (NMS); on the NMS; the first band above NMS; the second band above the NMS; the third band above the NMS; and the fourth band above the NMS. When comparing percentages, it is necessary to consider the number base that the percentages are being calculated from. For example, in a cohort of 10 students, one student is 10%, while in another cohort of 100 students, one student is 1%.

Q8: What effects does the timing of NAPLAN have?

NAPLANs are conducted in May of each year. This means that only 14 weeks of the intended curriculum for Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 have been the focus of teaching and learning. Specific test items missed by students may NOT necessarily indicate the need for special intervention – rather they may indicate a part of the curriculum not yet taught.

It is noted that, for example, the results in Year 3 reflect less of the effects of current Year 3 teachers and their curriculum programs and more the accumulative effects of teachers and curriculum programs in the preceding years. Additionally, areas of the curriculum that analysis of school and class reports in Term 4 reveal as needing attention will effectively inform curriculum planning for the preceding and subsequent years – that is, for example, year 3 data should be informing year 2 curriculum planning (*'the curriculum that was'*); year 3 curriculum planning (*'the curriculum that is'*), and year 4 *('the curriculum that needs to be'*).

Before 2008, the state-devised tests of aspects of literacy and numeracy were conducted in August. These tests were directly aligned with the Queensland curriculum while NAPLAN is not. Being conducted in August, and being based on the Queensland curriculum, meant that two-thirds of the intended curriculum had been taught and more diagnostic use could be made of the data. However, results were not received until the last week of school and so it was too late to use the data to inform curriculum planning.

Q9: Do NAPLAN results identify 'better' schools?

While parents are encouraged to visit the ***MySchool 2.0*** website to make 'comparisons', very great care is needed to understand a complex array of contexts. Simplistic 'league tables' that rank one school with others do not take into account such things as availability of resources; parent backgrounds; number of students with special needs; language and cultural backgrounds; and access to other resources such as museums, art galleries, and libraries.

It is the 'good of a school' that makes it 'a good school'. Some schools may have lower NAPLAN averages, but are still 'value-adding' for their learners. Other schools may have higher NAPLAN averages, but are not 'value-adding' as much as they might otherwise do.

It is observed that an increasing number of schools have their NAPLAN data analysed by groups of teachers comprised of, for example, a Year 2 teacher, a Year 3 teacher, and a Year 4 teacher. In this way there is informed ***continuous, coherent, and consistent curriculum planning*** for the year level before, the current year level, and the subsequent year level.

Such continuous, coherent, and consistent curriculum planning – and delivery – contributes to 'better learning' for ALL learners.

Additionally, a full and comprehensive curriculum that also incorporates such things as science, studies of society and the environment, health and physical education, and the arts – and of course the religious life of the school - contributes to holistic learning that is life-long, life-broad, life-deep – and life-giving.

Q10: What analyses of NAPLAN are possible – for each individual student, and for specific groups of students?

Schools receive the following data:

- raw score correct
- % correct
- scale score
- achievement band
- below, at, or above national minimum standard
- correct and incorrect responses to each item.

Teachers that conduct item-by-item analyses of questions both correctly and incorrectly answered can see shapes and patterns in the data that reveal individual 'students' stories'

and ‘curriculum stories’ that can then inform specific curriculum planning. Better than adding up the number of questions and dividing by the total to calculate a percentage, is identifying what questions a student answered incorrectly – and more importantly – why? This informs targeted attention to specific students and specific areas of the curriculum.

Similarly, if there are patterns in incorrect answers for groups of students (for example boys) and these patterns are understood in context, teachers can change resources or teaching styles to better meet the learning needs of their students.

Q11: How are teachers supported in making discerning analyses of NAPLAN data?

The Queensland Studies Authority that administers NAPLAN in Queensland has developed a software program called SunLANDA that enables individual teachers and groups of teachers to analyse what an item was intended to test; what the most common incorrect responses were; likely causes of these incorrect responses; and potential teaching strategies and resources to assist.
(Because of copyright conditions, a sample page of this kind of support for teachers cannot be reproduced in this set of FAQs.)

BCE has developed a range of resources to assist teachers become more data-oriented, data-informed, and data-activated. There is also a great deal of expertise in the two School Service Centres as well as Dutton Park with officers who assist schools not only with NAPLAN data but also other kinds of data.

Q12 : What is the experience of other countries with ‘high stakes’ national testing?

Finland, which currently outranks all other countries that participate in international tests such as Trends in International Mathematics and science Study (TIMMS) and program for International Student Assessment (PISA) does not have national testing. Finland also allows schools and groups of schools to design their own curriculum.

The United States and England are countries that have national testing and are countries whose education developments often influence developments in Australia.

In the US, for example, standardised tests are conducted for each level. Progression of children from one year level to the next depends on their standardised test scores. The following is an example of how some schools respond to the pressure of ‘high stakes’ testing.

School districts in Atlanta, New York, Chicago, New Jersy, and Conneticut are opting to eliminate recess, even to the point of ***building new schools in their districts without playgrounds***. According to Benjamin O. Canada, the superintendent of Atlanta schools, ***“We are intent on improving academic performance and you don’t do that by having kids hang on monkey bars”***. [emphasis added]

Source: http://library.adoption.com/articles/no-recess-policies-being-implemented-in-u.s.-school-districts.html
(last visited Thursday, 18 August 2011)

Q13: Does NAPLAN tell something about students, or do students tell us something about NAPLAN?

Care needs to be exercised when interpreting low facility rates (small numbers of students correctly answering a particular question).

Tests need to be designed with some harder questions to allow higher achieving students to demonstrate what they know and understand.

The following is an analysis of some NAPLAN 2010 tests for all Australian students.

- 9/25 (36%) of NAPLAN Year 3 Spelling questions were **NOT** correctly answered by 76 - 89% Aust students
- 6/35 (17%) of NAPLAN Year 3 Numeracy questions were **NOT** correctly answered by 73 – 92% Aust students
- 6/25 (24%) of NAPLAN Year 5 Spelling questions were **NOT** correctly answered by 78 - 91% Aust students
- 8/40 (20%) of NAPLAN Year 5 Numeracy questions were **NOT** correctly answered by 74 - 85% Aust students

Analysis of test data that goes beyond a simplistic comparison of 'averages' either of individual students, classes, or schools contributes to teachers identifying what is need to support their particular learners with their specific needs in their current circumstances.

Put in websites re NAPLAN information