

2 NATIONAL ASSESSMENT, PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

2.1 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda

All Australian Education Ministers have previously agreed that consistent and comparable data are essential to improving the quality and accuracy of national monitoring and reporting of progress towards the achievement of national goals and targets at various points of schooling. The nationally comparable data will better meet the needs of parents, schools and school systems, and the wider community for information on the performance of students and schools; and assist governments in identifying where resources are most needed to lift attainment.

In 2008 the Council of Australian Government (COAG), which comprises the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers, agreed to a new reform agenda to ensure that all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy. (For further information, see www.coag.gov.au.)

In order to advance its reform agenda, COAG has produced a framework of agreed outcomes, indicative progress measures, targets and policy directions. These include a commitment to ensuring that schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children.

The availability of information which allows disaggregation of data by student background characteristics, particularly by Indigenous status and socioeconomic background, is essential to measuring and reporting progress towards achieving COAG agreed outcomes. The Manual is a key document for improving the quality and national comparability of data available for this purpose.

2.2 Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians

The *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians*, which was developed by State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers in collaboration with the Catholic and independent school sectors, was released in December 2008, following consultation with the broader community. The *Melbourne Declaration* supersedes the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* which provided the framework for nationally comparable reporting of students' outcomes for over a decade.

The *Melbourne Declaration* sets the direction for Australian schooling for the next ten years. A 'Four Year Plan' to support the *Declaration*, developed in parallel with work undertaken through COAG and aligned with relevant COAG activities, was endorsed by all Australian Education Ministers in March 2009. The *Melbourne Declaration* and the Four Year Plan can be found on the MCEECDYA website at www.mceecdya.edu.au.

2.3 Commonwealth-State financial arrangements for 2009-2012

National Education Agreement

Australian Government funding for government schools is now being provided through a new Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on Federal Financial Relations agreed in the COAG forum. The IGA was accompanied by a rationalisation of the number of payments to the states for specific purpose payments and the creation of associated national agreements. The National Education Agreement (NEA), which came into effect on 1 January 2009, contains agreed objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators, and clarifies the roles and responsibilities that will guide the Commonwealth and the States and Territories in delivering school education services.

The NEA provides the States with increased flexibility in determining how education services should best be delivered, including services for students with special needs, which previously received funding support through the Commonwealth's targeted programs for schools. It also provides an improved focus on the accountability and transparency of all schools for students' outcomes.

Schools Assistance Act 2008

Australian Government funding for non-government schools for 2009-2012 will continue to be appropriated through the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*. Funding for non-government schools provides for recurrent and capital funding as well as targeted programs.

National Partnership Agreements and 'Closing the Gap'

The commitment of all governments to reducing disadvantage is being given effect through the additional National Partnership Agreements (on Low Socio-economic Status Communities, Literacy and Numeracy, and Improving Teaching Quality) and COAG's reform directions to 'Close the Gap' in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

2.4 2010 performance reporting requirements

As parties to the NEA, all States and Territories have agreed to a performance reporting framework, which includes collecting and publishing student and school data for the following three purposes

- accountability to students, parents, carers and the community
- public accountability in support of COAG outcomes and targets
- providing an evidence base to support future policy reforms and system improvements, including directing resources to areas of greatest need.

In order to meet the mutually agreed outcomes within the *NEA*, supporting performance benchmarks will be monitored, assessed and reported publicly on an annual basis by the COAG Reform Council.

Council of Australian Governments Reform Council

The COAG Reform Council has been established to monitor, assess and report on the performance of the Commonwealth and the States in achieving mutually agreed outcomes and performance benchmarks. In addition to providing annual performance reports to COAG, the COAG Reform Council will highlight examples of good practice and innovative reforms. The Council is independent of individual governments and reports directly to COAG.

The first annual report of the COAG Reform Council on the performance of governments in meeting the objectives of the NEA, *National Education Agreement: Baseline performance report for 2008*, was released in November 2009. The report can be accessed at www.coag.gov.au/crc.

The *Schools Assistance Act 2008* sets out the transparency and accountability requirements for non-government schools and school systems, including requirements relating to collecting and publishing student and school data. The accountability framework for the non-government sector is consistent with that set out in the new NEA for government schools.

Performance reporting framework

The performance reporting framework encompasses the following elements

- a. streamlined and consistent reports on national progress, including
 - i. an annual national report to be published within twelve months of the end of the calendar year on the outcomes of schooling in Australia, covering the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and the *MCEECDYA Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures (KPM)*
 - ii. the biennial COAG report on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage
- b. national reporting on the performance of individual schools to inform parents and carers, and for governments to evaluate school performance

- c. schools providing plain language student reports to parents and carers, and making an annual report publicly available to their school community on the school's achievements and other contextual information.

The reporting requirements also include a commitment by all government and non-government school systems and schools to report, by school sector, on the number of students who are provided with additional support, specifically students with disability and students with a language background other than English (including newly arrived migrants and refugees).

MCEECDYA Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures

School systems and schools will continue to meet the requirements of the MCEECDYA KPM Framework, which sets out the basis for reporting progress towards the achievement of the National Goals, including through the provision of performance data. The core of the framework is a schedule setting out the key performance measures and an agreed assessment and reporting cycle for the period 2006 -2014. (The *Measurement Framework* can be accessed on the MCEECDYA website at www.mceecdya.edu.au).

2.5 Development of an improved measure of students 'language background other than English' (LBOTE) status

Education Ministers have agreed that, as part of its program of developmental work, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), working with jurisdictions and the non-government sector, should develop a 'language background other than English' (LBOTE) measure that better identifies students whose language background has a measurable effect on their outcomes. Initial development work has been undertaken during 2009 by MCEECDYA's Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce, pending the migration of the data collection, assessment and reporting functions from MCEECDYA to ACARA (see sub-section 2.7).

2.6 National Assessment Program (NAP)

The National Assessment Program (NAP), as endorsed by all Education Ministers, has both national and international components. It includes

- annual full cohort literacy and numeracy assessments in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (NAPLAN)
- triennial national sample assessments in science literacy (Year 6), information and communication technology literacy (Years 6 and 10), and civics and citizenship (Years 6 and 10)
- participation by samples of 15 year old students in the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* conducted every three years by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which assesses students' reading, mathematical and scientific literacy
- participation by samples of Year 4 and Year 8 students in the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)* conducted every four years by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) which assesses students' performance in mathematics and science.

Further information on both the national and international components of the National Assessment Program can be found on the MCEECDYA website at www.mceecdya.edu.au.

2.7 Establishment of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

A new independent statutory authority, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), was established in 2008 to develop the national school curriculum, to develop and coordinate national assessments, and to collect, analyse and publish student assessment data and other data relating to schools and comparative school performance.

A number of MCEECDYA's functions will be transferred to ACARA. These include managing and overseeing the delivery of tests for the National Assessment Program: the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests and the triennial sample assessments in science literacy, civics and citizenship, and ICT literacy – as well as associated tasks, including reporting student achievement by the relevant student background characteristics. It may also include the production of a successor publication to this Manual.

Further information on the role of ACARA can be accessed on the authority's website at www.acara.edu.au.

2.8 National reporting on the performance of individual schools

The new agreements governing funding for government and non-government schools include a commitment to national reporting on the performance of individual schools.

From early 2010, ACARA will publish profiles of all Australian schools via a new website. The *My School* website will contain statistical and contextual information on each school, including the characteristics of the school's student population and the school's capacity, including the numbers and qualifications of its teaching staff. It will also contain information on the performance of each school in the NAPLAN tests by publishing the overall national mean scale score and the mean scale score for the school, which can be compared with the mean scale scores of statistically similar schools across Australia. Information on the percentage of students in the school achieving at each NAPLAN band for each of the domains tested will also be included on the website.

While the *My School* website is still under development, a number of fact sheets and a sample school report can be downloaded at www.myschool.edu.au.

For 2010, the first year of individual school reporting, each school has been assigned a value using the Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) to provide an interim measure for making reasonable comparisons between schools, pending the development of a longer term measure by ACARA. ICSEA is a purpose-built index, which places schools on a numerical scale by reference to their relative socio-educational advantage. The index takes into account a range of socio-economic factors derived from ABS Census data for the households from which the school draws its students and other factors known to have a strong correlation with student performance in NAPLAN tests, such as the percentage of Indigenous enrolments and the geographic location of the school.

It is important to distinguish between the use of ICSEA, as a broad measure used to determine socio-educational similarities between schools where the focus is on *the school*; and the two individual level measures of socioeconomic background used for the monitoring and reporting of *individual student outcomes* – parental education and parental occupation.

Parental occupation group and parental educational attainment are used as two separate and distinct indicators of socio-economic background ('Socio-economic background – occupation' and 'Socio-economic background – education'), with the higher of the two parents' levels of education and occupation being used for national reporting purposes, except in the case of sole parents. This allows governments and school education authorities to evaluate the influence of socioeconomic background on educational outcomes across and within jurisdictions, and to draw valid conclusions about the independent effects of other student background characteristics, such as Indigenous status, language background other than English or geographic location. (Section 4 emphasises the importance of improving the quality of data available on the two socioeconomic background variables.)

2.9 Principles and protocols for reporting on schooling in Australia

All Education Ministers have agreed to a statement of principles and protocols to guide and inform the use and publication of data generated in the process of measuring the performance of schooling in Australia. The principles encompass such issues as protecting the privacy of individual students and teachers, including publication safeguards where the small size of a school population or of a specific student cohort may compromise individuals' privacy; and protocols to ensure that information on

schools contains accurate and verified data, contextual information to aid interpretation of the information, and a range of indicators to provide a fair and balanced view of performance.

The document can be accessed on the MCEECDYA website at www.mceecdya.edu.au.