

TEACH to the test, schools told

Fears over the My School website and league tables appear confirmed by new instructions to schools and reports of falling enrolments.

Nic Barnard *AEU News*

TEACHERS are already being told to teach to the test and target borderline students as the first effects of league tables and the My School website reverberate through schools.

Advice from Loddon Mallee region instructs teachers and principals to run regular practice NAPLAN tests, and to “privilege the test as an event of significance”, “explicitly teach for NAPLAN”, and “provide additional assistance for students identified capable of making significant improvement”.

The document confirms fears that the Government’s publication of NAPLAN data has turned the tests from a useful diagnostic tool into a high-stakes verdict on school performance.

AEU branch president Mary Bluett said: “This will take vital time and resources away from educating students. The region is proposing a 10-week program — it confirms what we have warned, that high-stakes testing is going to narrow the curriculum.”

The advice to identify students capable of significant improvement sets the stage for schools to focus on “borderline” students at the expense

of those with no hope of reaching the expected standards in the 10 weeks leading to NAPLAN.

Some AEU members have already told the union they will no longer enter students with learning difficulties for the test — something they had done in the past to give those students the same experience as other children.

Schools quickly felt the impact of the launch of the My School site, with papers drawing up lists of the top and bottom schools based on raw results.

The AEU federal conference voted in January not to cooperate with NAPLAN in May if the Government fails to prevent the future misuse of My School data. Executive will meet after April 12, the deadline given for Education Minister Julia Gillard to act.

Ms Gillard has threatened to use the Government’s Fair Work Act — its replacement for WorkChoices — to act against the union and members who refuse to hand out the tests.

One school has already felt the impact of being “named and shamed”. Debney Meadows PS, serving one of Melbourne’s most disadvantaged communities made up almost exclusively of migrants and refugees, was highlighted in the *Moonee Valley Leader* in December following the Victorian Government’s launch of

its own data.

The Flemington school had expected 96 students to enrol this year. Instead only 86 enrolled.

Principal Christine Nash, who took over in 2007, said: “They’ve enrolled (elsewhere) without us being given the opportunity to talk to them.

“It’s quite devastating. We’ve made significant improvements, but the data that’s reported doesn’t show that at all, and change takes time.”

The school’s experience belies the Government’s claim that My School will be used by parents to demand answers from principals and teachers who are held to be under-performing.

The My School data was further undermined by question marks over the validity of its comparisons. The census data used to create lists of “like” schools covered all households in an area, not just those with children.

It also fails to give critical information such as whether a school is selective, student turnover, or how many students do not speak English as their mother tongue. ♦

League tables analysis: p16

Christine Nash profile: p18

Federal conference report: p20



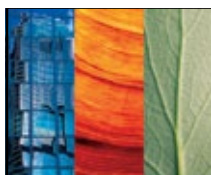
Bushfire school's anger

“A KICK in the guts” was how principal Sharon Walker described seeing her school branded “under-performing” on the My School website.

Five of Dixons Creek PS’s 23 families lost their homes in the Black Saturday bushfires. Since then, the school has stretched all of its energy and resources to help students feel secure.

Sharon is outraged by the Government’s lack of sensitivity in using a “snapshot” created just four months after the fires to rate her school.

Of the five Year 3 students that sat NAPLAN last May, two had lost their homes, two had endured life-threatening situations, and the other was a new enrolment. ♦



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