
NAPLAN results again show 1 in 3 students don't meet minimum standards

Jessica Holloway



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The latest national [NAPLAN results](#) are out and they are [very similar to last year](#). In both 2023 and 2024, we have seen about [1 in 3 school students](#) fall short of minimum numeracy and literacy expectations and about 1 in 10 needing additional support. What does this mean?

What is NAPLAN?

Introduced in 2008, NAPLAN is an annual test of all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It aims to see whether students are developing basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Students receive one of four bands: 'needs additional support', 'developing', 'strong' and 'exceeding'.

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What are the results?

In reading, the average proportion of students who achieved 'exceeding' and 'strong' levels in 2024 was 67%. This increased from Year 3 (66.3%) to Year 5 (71.4%), then dropped in Year 7 (67.3%) and Year 9 (63%).

The average proportion of students who achieved 'needs additional support' was 10.3%. This dropped from Year 3 (11.3%) to Year 5 (8.7%) and increased in Year 7 (10.2%) and Year 9 (11.1%).

In numeracy, the average proportion of students who achieved 'exceeding' and 'strong' was 65.5%. This increased from Year 3 (63.5%) to Year 5 (67.8%), was relatively stable in Year 7 (67.2%) and then dropped in Year 9 (63.4%).

The average proportion of students who achieved 'needs additional support' was 9.5%. This dropped from Year 3 (9.7%) to Year 5 (8.6%) and increased in Year 7 (9.4%) and Year 9 (10.4%).

Like last year, more Indigenous students and students in very remote schools were identified as 'needs additional support' than their peers. For example, in reading, across all year groups, around 1 in 3 Indigenous students are in the 'needs additional support' level, compared to about 1 in 10 non-Indigenous students.

Recent changes

This is only the second year of the [current NAPLAN system](#).

Early last year, the testing window was moved from May to March. In 2023, NAPLAN was also done entirely online for the first time. There was also a major change in how NAPLAN is reported. Now, results are reported against four [proficiency levels](#) instead of 10.

How did these changes affect the 2024 results?

It was possible such big changes could have created years of instability, but this hasn't been the case so far.

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This lack of change in the results can be interpreted a couple of ways. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Chief Executive, Stephen Gniel, said the results are a “testament to the hard work” of schools and students.

Not only have NAPLAN changes been difficult to navigate, but we also cannot forget the impact of COVID-19 on student learning. Teachers have had a tremendous responsibility to help students return to a sense of normal in the past two years.

However, the Education Minister, Jason Clare, has a different interpretation. As he said, “We have a good education system, but it can be a lot better and a lot fairer and that’s what these results again demonstrate.”

These results provide another year of evidence our system is fundamentally unfair and too many children are being left behind.

Who ‘needs additional support’?

One advantage of the new proficiency levels is they explicitly tell us how we should respond to the results.

This is not new information. [Year](#) after [year](#), students from more advantaged backgrounds perform higher on tests like NAPLAN. We also know inequitable access to resources is a major [factor](#) in these results.

What is new is these results themselves tell us what to do: ‘provide additional support’.

How can we do this?

Last month, the federal government released details of the [next funding](#).

[agreement](#) for Australian schools, due to start in 2025.

As [part of this](#), Clare announced \$16 billion of federal funding for public schools. This funding is only available if schools implement significant changes, including phonics and numeracy checks in the early years, evidence-based teaching and catch-up tutoring.

Clare has said he wants this money to make a difference to “the kids who really need it”.

We know government schools have [not received adequate funding](#), as promised by previous reforms.

As the next phase of school funding in finalised this year, governments should ensure schools with large proportions of disadvantaged students receive the support they need to help all Australian students succeed.

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This article originally appeared on [The Conversation](#).

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