

Evaluation of 1998 Queensland Years 3 and 5 Testing Program

Results of Principal and Teacher Surveys

Inclusivity Issues



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Preface

The Office of the Queensland School Curriculum Council is committed to the development and publication of Evaluation and Review Series Reports and related Evaluation and Review Focus Reports. The Series Reports provide the results of an evaluation or review undertaken by the Council, while the Evaluation and Review Focus Reports provide specifically-focused information relating to an Evaluation and Review Series Report.

The Evaluation and Review Series Report, *Evaluation of 1998 Queensland Years 3 and 5 Testing Program: Results of Principal and Teacher Surveys*, was noted by the Queensland School Curriculum Council at its February 1999 meeting, and publication and dissemination of the report was supported.

This report focuses on inclusivity issues and provides more detailed information on this topic than contained in the above report.

1. Introduction

This report focuses on **inclusivity issues** emerging from the evaluation of the 1998 Queensland Years 3 and 5 Testing Program in aspects of literacy and numeracy (hereafter called 1998 Testing Program or Program).

The purposes of the evaluation were to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of aspects of the 1998 Testing Program. The results of the evaluation are presented in the Evaluation Series Report *Evaluation of 1998 Queensland Years 3 and 5 Testing Program: Results of Principal and Teacher Surveys* (hereafter called the 1998 Test Evaluation Report).

The Program was evaluated from a school perspective with the major data source being surveys of principals and teachers participating in the 1998 Testing Program. The response rates for the two surveys were high and included principals and teachers from state and non-state schools. Overall, 3669 responses were analysed: 1402 principal responses and 2267 teacher responses.

This report focuses on inclusivity issues related to:

- pre-test information provided to schools;
- Year 3 Test materials;
- Year 5 Test materials.

These aspects are reported in Sections 2, 3 and 4 respectively, using the following format:

1. The overall summary of results presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report is reprinted (S)*. This provides a suitable context for a consideration of more specific inclusivity aspects; and following this summary
2. Issues categorised as being related to inclusivity are reported.

In Section 5 of this report:

1. Reference is made to the overall conclusions presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report (C)**;
2. More specific conclusions are then drawn in relation to the inclusivity issues presented (IC)***.

It should be noted that issues related to inclusivity were raised by a very small number of participants in the evaluation. However, this paper has been developed to reflect the commitment of the Queensland School Curriculum Council to furthering the understanding of issues facing marginalised groups as they participate in the testing program.

2. Pre-test information provided to schools

The evaluation focused on two pieces of pre-test information that were provided to schools:

- an *Information for Schools* booklet, the major source of Council advice to schools on the 1998 Testing Program;
- a brochure to be distributed to parents (hereafter called the parent brochure).

Other pre-test information provided to schools (e.g. flier, school brochure and newsletter) was not included in the evaluation. Principals and teachers were asked to rate this information on a five point scale ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'. Responses to this question were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S1. Overall, principals and teachers had very high opinions of the *Information for Schools* booklet and the parent brochure in assisting their preparation for the 1998 Testing Program. A total of 76.9% rated the *Information for Schools* document as 'good' or 'very good' and 67.2% rated the parent brochure similarly.

Further questions were asked about the *Information for Schools* booklet. In two open-ended questions, principals and teachers were asked to comment on aspects of the *Information for Schools* booklet that they felt worked well and should be retained; and they were also asked to indicate ways the booklet might be improved.

Responses to these questions were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S2. In respect of the *Information for Schools* booklet specifically: nearly one half (48.8%) of principals and teachers responded to a request to indicate what aspects of the booklet they felt worked well and should be retained. Many sections and subsections were mentioned. about three tenths (29.2%) responded to a request to indicate aspects for improvement. These aspects included: the manner in which the chosen writing genre is communicated; the level of detail required in respect of information on special considerations and exemptions; the incorporation of additional content e.g. a template letter to parents, an index, a flowchart, and removable checklists and timetables; and a closer alignment of the booklet and the Test Administration Handbooks.

In respect of the topic of **inclusivity**:

- issues related to inclusivity were not evident in responses from principals and teachers about what aspects of the booklet they felt worked well and should be retained;
- a small proportion of principals and teachers (**1.1%–1.3%**) suggested ways related to inclusivity in which the *Information for Schools* booklet might be improved. Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Suggested ways relating to inclusivity in which the *Information for Schools* booklet might be improved

Suggestion for improvement (%PT; N)	Examples of comments by principals and teachers
Include more information about levels of assistance allowed for students requiring special considerations (1.3% PT; N=3669)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I believe more detail is needed regarding exact measures to take with students who have learning difficulties. How much should we read to them etc?' • 'We found special circumstances difficult to follow...what reading instructions could be given to whom.' • 'Explain fully ways students who have support e.g. support a reader, may be assisted during the test.' • 'More information could be provided as to the sort of help/support staff can give to students with special considerations.' • 'More explanation of assistance allowed for learning disability students.' • 'More explanation about children with special needs and the amount or type of assistance that is appropriate. This was far too brief.'
Include more information about special considerations or exemptions (1.1% PT: N=3669)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Not enough information on what to do for exemptions, children who didn't do the test, special considerations.' • 'Address NESB issues in special considerations more comprehensively.' • 'More detailed information for children with difficulties.' • 'Special considerations/exemptions should be given a specific section to explain it fully and make it stand out more clearly to teachers.' • 'More information on exemptions, what constitutes reasonable exemptions.'
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Exemptions, not really clear if Intellectual Impairment category was exempt.' • 'More information and guidelines needed for exclusions or special considerations.'

Key: %PT = percentage of total principals and teachers; N = number of total principal and teacher respondents.

3. 1998 Year 3 Test materials

The following 1998 Year 3 Test materials were evaluated: practice materials; Numeracy Test; Literacy Test Session 1 (dictation, reading and viewing); Literacy Test Session 2 (writing); and Test Administration Handbook.

Principals and teachers participating in the (sample) Year 3 Test were asked to rate these materials on a five point scale ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'.

Responses to this question were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S3. Overall the Year 3 Test materials were considered in a positive light, with the most frequently reported rating being 'good' (31.7% to 42.9% of principals and teachers). Far more principals and teachers rated the materials 'good' or 'very good' than 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Principals and teachers were next asked whether or not there were any aspects of the Year 3 Test materials that caused them concern and if so, to record their specific concerns.

Responses to these questions were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S4. A large proportion (61.3% of principals and teachers) indicated that there were aspects of the Year 3 Test materials that caused them concern.

Overall, the most frequently reported concerns were related to perceptions about the:

- difficult literacy/language demands of the Numeracy Test (10.3%), Literacy Test (8.7%), or Test in general (7.3%);
- Numeracy Test not matching the Year 3 syllabus/curriculum (8.3%);
- difficulty of some items of the Numeracy Test (8.2%) or Literacy Test (7.8%);
- Test generally being too difficult (6.9%);
- Test being too long (6.4%);
- inappropriateness of formal testing for students of Year 3 age and experience (5.9%).

In respect of the topic of **inclusivity**, a small proportion of principals and teachers (**3.9%**) indicated specific concerns that were categorised as relating to the inclusivity of the Year 3 Test materials. Details of the reported specific concerns are contained in Table 2.

Table 2
Specific concerns categorised as relating to the inclusivity of Year 3 Test materials

Specific concern (%PT; N)	Examples of comments by principals and teachers
Test/Test items not inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (1.1%PT; N=564)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The test was culturally inappropriate for Aboriginal children. They could not read the questions or understand the wording of the questions. There were no questions involving concrete materials.' • 'Aboriginal children learn better in small groups.' • 'Style in which the Test was given was foreign to the (Aboriginal) children. Aboriginal children do a lot of oral work.'
Test/Test items not inclusive (0.9%PT; N=564)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Many parts of the test were not contextually relevant to isolated bush children.'
Test/Test items not inclusive of students with learning difficulties (0.9%PT; N=564)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'LD students had difficulty with format.'
Test/Test items not inclusive of students from a non-English speaking background (0.4%PT; N=564)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'No allowance was made for the differences in language.'
Literacy Test/Test items not inclusive (0.5%PT; N=564)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Whilst materials in literacy were culturally inclusive they did not reflect the socio-economic community of this school and its related problems.'

Key: %PT = percentage of principals and teachers; N = number of principal and teacher respondents.

4. 1998 Year 5 Test materials

The following 1998 Year 5 Test materials were evaluated: practice materials; Numeracy Test; Literacy Test Session 1 (dictation, reading and viewing); Literacy Test Session 2 (writing); and Test Administration Handbook.

Principals and teachers participating in the (census) Year 5 Test were asked to rate these materials on a five point scale ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'.

Responses to this question were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S5. Overall the Year 5 Test materials were considered in a very positive light, with the most frequently reported rating being 'good' (44.1% to 50.1% of principals and teachers). Over one half of principals and teachers rated each of the Year 5 Test materials as 'good' or 'very good'.

Principals and teachers were next asked whether or not there were any aspects of the Year 5 Test materials that caused them concern and if so, to record their specific concerns.

Responses to these questions were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows:

S6. Just over one half (55.4%) indicated that there were aspects of the Year 5 Test materials that caused them concern.

Overall, the most frequently reported concerns were related to perceptions about the:

- Numeracy Test not matching the Year 5 syllabus/curriculum (9.0%);
- difficult literacy/language demands of the Numeracy Test (8.8%);
- difficulty of some items of the Literacy Test (7.3%) or Numeracy Test (7.0%);
- 'tricky', ambiguous or confusing nature of some items of the Numeracy Test (4.8%);
- Numeracy Test (2.9%) or the Test in general (2.7%) being too difficult.

In respect of **inclusivity**, a very small proportion of principals and teachers (**2.9%**) indicated specific concerns that were categorised as relating to the inclusivity of the Year 5 Test materials. Details of the reported specific concerns are contained in Table 3.

**Table 3:
Specific concerns categorised as relating to the inclusivity of Year 5 Test materials**

Specific concern (%PT;N)	Examples of comments by principals and teachers
Test/Test items not inclusive (0.8%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Language used not totally inclusive of low socio-economic/disadvantaged students.' • 'The language used was not totally applicable to children from low socio-economic areas in both numeracy and literacy booklets.' • 'Many of the questions were out of context for country children.'
Test/Test items not inclusive (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Needs to be more culturally and regionally appropriate activities.' • 'The current practice certainly disadvantages small schools especially of the Band 4-5 size all around the state.' • 'Children with emotional/physical disabilities were not adequately catered for.' • 'Does the test truly cater for all learning styles? Some students would not perform well on any test of this sort — yet are creative, divergent thinkers.' • 'I support a totally blind student doing the Year 5 Test...Other issues that may be of value when preparing a test for a blind child in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ More tactile representation of objects to help lighten the on-going braille reading... ◊ All symbols on a map must be in code... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Tactile map/other reference material needs to be exactly opposite the question...'
Literacy Test/Test items not inclusive (0.7%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Literacy material, especially the magazine, not inclusive for all students.' • 'The literacy test did not take into consideration the cultural differences we encounter at school.' • 'Literacy Q28 and Q9 seemed to have a gender bias towards girls.' • 'I felt that including a whole class discussion in the literacy test (Session 2) is biased towards larger, so-called "normal" classrooms. How can similar outcomes occur from a class of 2 children compared to a class of 25 children?' • 'Some of the material in the magazine was culturally inappropriate, given the children's Aboriginality and their relative geographical remoteness.' • 'Language in some questions in literacy test was such that a number of our ASTI students were confused. Consequently they were not able to give correct answers, which they could have done if the questions were able to be reframed.' • 'Thought needs to be given to the text of the dictation passage so that all words used can be found in signed English.' • 'It may be pertinent to seek the advice of a Hearing Impairment teacher to help with the text for next year's dictation passage.' • 'Idea of a blind child making sense of what was really a visually based Literacy Test was not sound.'
Test/Test items not inclusive of students from a non-English speaking background (0.6%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The ESL students are discriminated against because of the language required to answer questions.' • 'Failed to take into account ESL students adequately.' • 'Lack of translations for ESL students.' • 'Inappropriateness for indigenous Australians who do not have English as a core language.'
Test/Test items not inclusive of students with learning difficulties (0.5%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Effect on children with learning difficulties, lots of pressure and anxiety.' • 'Did not allow for children with learning difficulties to show what they can do.' • 'Test not appropriate for students with learning difficulties.' • 'The vocabulary used and the concepts involved make use of the test by LD students almost impossible.'
Test/Test items not inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (0.3%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Culturally inappropriate for students in an Aboriginal community school.' • 'Children's learning styles (hands on) not catered for.' • 'The tests had little or no cultural meaning to the children.' • 'Style of test was foreign to the children. Aboriginal children do a lot of oral work.' • 'Very inappropriate for Aboriginal children in isolated areas.' • 'The overall format of the tests did not suit our Aboriginal students.'
Numeracy Test/Test items not inclusive (0.2%PT; N=3363)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'The timetable in maths is not really relevant to children in a low socio-economic rural setting, especially Year 5 level.' • 'Wordiness and structure of the language needs to be addressed... if the Government wants to gain a true indication of the mathematical ability of hearing impaired students rather than their reading ability... (Suggest) rethinking some of the questions to include more visual information rather than written information.' • 'There were too many visual tasks such as interpreting graphs and tables (for a student with a visual impairment).'

Key: %PT = percentage of principals and teachers; N = number of principal and teacher respondents.

5. Conclusions

In this section:

- reference is made first of all to the overall conclusions (C) presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report; and
- more specific conclusions are then drawn in relation to the inclusivity issues presented (IC).

The following conclusion was presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report:

C1. The *Information for Schools* document and the parent brochure were appropriate and effective. Most sections and subsections of the *Information for Schools* document worked well and should be retained. However, the suggestions for improvement made by principals and teachers (see S2) are worthy of further consideration.

In respect of **inclusivity issues**, the following conclusion is made:

IC1. Suggestions to include more information on the levels of assistance allowed for students requiring special considerations and more information on special considerations and exemptions are worthy of further consideration (See Table 1).

The following conclusion was presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report:

C2. In general the Year 3 Test and Year 5 Test materials were effective and appropriate. However, the varying comments and concerns of principals and teachers are worthy of noting and discussing.

In respect of **inclusivity issues**, the following conclusion is made:

IC2. The concerns of principals and teachers about the Year 3 and Year 5 Tests or Test items not being inclusive of all students are worthy of noting and discussing. In particular, attention should be paid to the inclusiveness of Tests or Test items for:

- students from Aboriginal and students from Torres Strait Islander backgrounds;
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- students with vision, hearing or physical impairments;
- students with learning difficulties.

The following conclusion was presented in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report:

C4. In noting and discussing the various comments and concerns of principals and teachers, attention should be paid by testing program managers to those comments and concerns which:

- might be included in a 'checklist' for the development and improvement of future tests;
- point to the need for greater effort to be made in providing schools with a clearer understanding of how test items link with the syllabus and support materials;
- point to the need to provide further information about the purposes and nature of statewide testing and its benefits. In particular, further information needs to be disseminated about the fact that the Year 3 and Year 5 tests were designed as universal paper and pencil tests. Of particular importance is the brief that the tests are required to measure the full range of student performance across the state, while at the same time reporting against the national benchmarks. Given such a wide brief, it needs to be communicated that it is inevitable that not every principal and teacher will regard the tests as being compatible with all activities undertaken in specific classes or schools. Indeed, some might regard such a wide brief as disadvantaging some students. But others might regard it as advantaging them, because at one point in time in the school year, all students for a particular year level are being assessed on the same instrument, using the same criteria.

In respect of **inclusivity issues**, the following conclusions are made:

IC3. In response to the comments and concerns of principals and teachers a 'checklist' for the development and improvement of future tests could include questions that direct attention to inclusivity issues, for example:

- Is the item (content and task) inclusive of all students participating in the Test?;
- Are the literacy/language demands of the item appropriate to all students participating in the Test?

IC4. In the light of some comments and concerns raised by principals and teachers, further information needs to be provided to principals and teachers about the purposes of statewide testing and the associated benefits. This information, if read in conjunction with clearly articulated guidelines for special considerations and exemptions, should provide enough information for principals and teachers to enable them to make decisions about the participation of particular students in future testing programs.