

Review of the form and nature
of the
Queensland Year 3 Test



QUEENSLAND
SCHOOL
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COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the review

This report provides findings of a review of the form and nature of the Queensland Year 3 Test in aspects of literacy and numeracy.

The purpose of the review was to provide information to assist the Queensland School Curriculum Council in making recommendations to the Minister for Education on the future form and nature of the Queensland Year 3 Test in aspects of literacy and numeracy, in 2000 and subsequent years.

1.2 The Queensland Year 3 Test

At the March 1997 meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan was endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of Education to support the achievement of identified national literacy and numeracy goals (see Appendix 1).

Subsequently, in June 1997, the then Minister for Education (Hon Bob Quinn MLA) requested that the Queensland School Curriculum Council provide an implementation strategy that would achieve **rigorous, statewide assessment of all students** against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks in Years 3 and 5 by the Year 2000, and include planning for Years 7 and 9 statewide assessment as soon as possible.

In response to this request, in August 1997, the Chair of the Council forwarded recommendations for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 Testing Programs to the Minister for Education. With respect to Year 3 testing, the recommendation was as follows:

In order to achieve universal (all students), rigorous, statewide assessment of Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 by the Year 2000 in literacy and numeracy, the Council recommends:

- **Sample Testing of Year 3 in 1998 and 1999.** A further recommendation regarding the approach to be used for universal, rigorous, statewide assessment of Year 3 **in 2000 and subsequent years** will be formulated by the Council on the basis of information to be obtained in relation to research into the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (in 1997), a proposed review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (in 1998) and evaluations of the Year 3 Sample Test (in 1998 and 1999).

The Council also recommended to the Minister for Education that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net be maintained as an instrument for early identification of students 'at risk' in literacy and numeracy **but not be defined as an approved test for inclusion in regulation.** In October 1997, Cabinet subsequently endorsed the sample testing of Year 3 students in 1998 and 1999 to enable data to be collected for systemic reporting against the national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

The purposes of the 1998 and 1999 Queensland Year 3 Tests have been to:

- account for, and contribute to the improvement of, student learning in aspects of literacy and numeracy;
- collect data from a sample of Year 3 students for systemic reporting against the national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy;
- collect data relevant to aspects of the Queensland English and Mathematics syllabuses.

The 1998 and 1999 Queensland Year 3 Tests include the following features:

- a representative sample of approximately 10% of randomly selected Year 3 students from selected schools sit for the Queensland Year 3 Test;
- the sampling is based on class units and consists of selected classes of students from selected schools;
- the design of the sample for the Year 3 Test is such that participating students take different forms of test materials;
- the test is a paper and pencil test designed to measure the full range of student performance in literacy and numeracy;
- the test includes a calculator section in numeracy;
- the test is administered over two set days in August/September under standard conditions.

1.3 Review focus

The focus of this review was obtaining information relating to the **form and nature** of the Queensland Year 3 Test in aspects of literacy and numeracy (hereafter referred to as the Year 3 Test).

In response to the recommendation outlined above, this review focused on obtaining information relating to the form and nature of the Year 3 Test emerging from:

- research into the Year 2 Diagnostic Net conducted in 1997;
- the external review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net conducted in 1998;
- the evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program.

To further assist the Council in decision making with respect to the future of the Year 3 Test, the review also focused on obtaining information about:

- the form and nature of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in other Australian states and territories;
- opinions on the preferred form and nature of the Year 3 Test of some key stakeholder groups.

For the purpose of the review, the **'form'** of the test was defined as the form of participation in the test. For example, the form of the test could be a:

- **census** test (testing of total population which allows individual student, class, and schools reports as well as statewide reports);
- **sample** test (testing of a proportion of total population which allows statewide reports only);
- **combination** (combination of census test and sample test).

For the purpose of the review, the **'nature'** of the test was defined as the characteristics of the test, for example:

- the type of test (e.g. paper and pencil, teacher assessed);
- aspects of learning covered;
- duration and timing of the test;
- types of questions included;
- reports provided.

In fulfilling the purposes of the review, the following focus questions were considered:

1. **What is the form and nature of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories?**
2. **What information emerged in relation to the form and nature of the Year 3 Test from 1997 research into, and the 1998 review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net?**

3. What information emerged in relation to the form and nature of the Year 3 Test from the Evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program?
4. What are the opinions on the preferred form and nature of the Year 3 Test of selected stakeholders?

1.4 Review approach

The review adopted an approach that focused on the process of obtaining and providing systematic and valid information to assist in decision-making. The data collection processes used to answer the four focus questions are identified in Display 1.

Display 1 -Data collection processes

Focus Questions	Data source A: current literature on Year 3 testing programs in Australia	Data source B: test managers in Australian states and territories	Data source C: Year 2 Diagnostic Net research and review reports	Data source D: 1998 Test Evaluation Report and principal and teacher surveys
Focus Q 1	📖	☎		
Focus Q 2			📖	
Focus Q 3				📖 ✉

✉ = Questionnaire research 📖 = Scan of current literature ☎ = Telephone interview

Focus Question	Data source E: Representatives from school authorities	Data source F: representatives from parent bodies and union bodies	Data source G: Council test development panels	Data source H: Council project teams
Focus Q 4	😊 or 😊😊	😊 or 😊😊 or ☎	😊 or 😊😊	😊 or 😊😊

😊😊 = Group interview 😊 = Individual interview ☎ = Telephone interview

To investigate Focus Question 4, interviews were conducted with representatives of the following selected stakeholder groups:

- Education Queensland;
- Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Queensland;
- Office of the Council English Curriculum Development Project Team;
- Office of the Council Mathematics Curriculum Development Project Team;
- Office of the Council Literacy Test Development Panel;
- Office of the Council Numeracy Test Development Panel;
- Office of the Council Assessment and Testing Team;
- Queensland Catholic Education Commission (including staff from the QCEC and Brisbane Catholic Education);
- Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens' Associations Inc;
- Queensland Independent Education Union;
- Queensland Teachers' Union;
- The Association of Independent Schools of Queensland Inc. (AISQ).

It should be noted that some representatives of parent bodies, school authorities and union bodies acknowledged that the opinions they expressed did not necessarily reflect a recent collective or representative view of the organisation they were representing.

Sections 2 and 3 of this report address the focus questions. Information is organised according to the following two overarching questions:

- **What is the preferred form of the Queensland Year 3 Test?;**
- **What is the preferred nature of the Queensland Year 3 Test?**

2. Preferred form of the Year 3 Test

2.1 Form of 1999 Year 3 testing programs in Australian states and territories

Focus Question 1: What is the **form** of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories?

The review focused on Year 3 testing programs in Australian states and territories that primarily test aspects of literacy and numeracy. It should be noted that although the information about these programs was confirmed with relevant test managers, at the time of writing this report (May 1999), details of 1999 testing programs were yet to be finalised in some states and territories. It was evident from a scan of current practice that the endorsement by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of Education of the MCEETYA National Literacy and Numeracy Plan has impacted significantly on Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy around Australia.

Display 2 provides an overview of the form of testing for Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy proposed for 1999 in Australian states and territories.

Display 2 - Overview of the form of 1999 Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories

State/Territory and testing program	Form of testing program
Australian Capital Territory Australian Capital Territory Assessment Program (ACTAP)	Census: Population of Year 3 students from all government schools.
New South Wales* Basic Skills Testing Program (BST)	Census: Population of Year 3 students in all government and most Catholic schools. Independent schools participate on a voluntary basis.
Northern Territory Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP)	Census: Population of Year 3 students in all government and non-government schools.
Queensland 1999 Queensland Year 3 Testing Program in Aspects of Literacy and Numeracy	Sample: Approximately 10% of the total population of Year 3 students from all government and most non-government schools. Students are selected in class units.
South Australia Basic Skills Testing Program (BST) and the Writing Assessment	Census: Population of Year 3 students from government schools. Catholic and independent schools do not participate.
Tasmania Literacy and Numeracy Monitoring Program	Census: Population of Year 3 students in all government schools. Catholic schools participate and manage their own results and reporting. Independent schools do not participate.
Victoria Learning Assessment Project (LAP)	Census: Population of Year 3 students in all government and non-government schools. A small number of independent schools do not participate.
Western Australia Western Australia Literacy and Numeracy Assessment	Census: Population of Year 3 students from all government and Catholic schools. Independent schools are invited to participate.

* A Writing Test was trialed in NSW in 1998 in sample schools (approx 20%). Decisions are yet to be made about the inclusion of the Writing Test in 1999.

As can be seen from Display 2:

- all states and territories except Queensland proposed **census testing** for 1999 Year 3 Testing programs in aspects of literacy and numeracy;
- the census test population varies between states and territories with respect to the participation of non-government schools.

2.2 Year 2 Net research and review

Focus Question 2: What information emerged in relation to the **form** of the Year 3 Test from 1997 research into, and the 1998 review of, the Year 2 Diagnostic Net?

No information emerged in relation to the preferred form of the Year 3 Test.

2.3 Evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program

Focus Question 3: What information emerged in relation to the **form** of the Year 3 Test from the Evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program?

The Evaluation and Review Series Report, *Evaluation of 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program: Results of Principal and Teacher Surveys* (hereafter called the 1998 Test Evaluation Report) was presented to the Council in February 1999. The 1998 Test Evaluation Report outlined the opinions of principals and teachers participating in the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program (N= 3669) on the preferred form of statewide testing. Principals and teachers were asked which form of statewide testing they favoured.

The 1998 Test Evaluation Report indicated (page 17):

Census testing was the most preferred form of statewide testing, with 45.5% of principals and teachers preferring this form of testing. This was followed by 32.7% who preferred a combination of census and sample, and 10.1% who preferred sample.

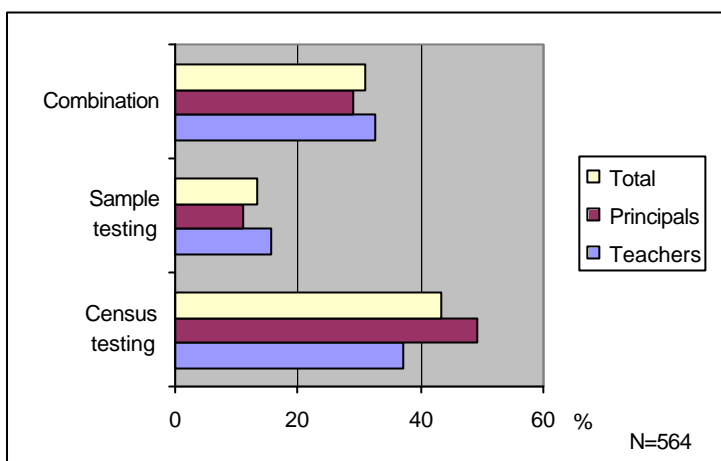
Principals and teachers were also invited to comment on their preferred form of testing. The few responses to this request were summarised in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report as follows (page 17):

Altogether 16% of principals and teachers responded to the invitation to comment on the form of testing. Comments were wide ranging and covered both concerns and benefits of statewide testing. Altogether 5.2% of principals and teachers had concerns about the nature of statewide testing, 0.9% felt that statewide testing was inappropriate, 1.1% desired results and feedback from the Year 3 Test, and 1.4% provided comments which supported statewide testing and outlined its benefits.

Further analysis for this review focused attention on the comments of principals and teachers about statewide testing that related specifically to the Year 3 Test. This analysis revealed that a very small proportion of comments were about the lack of results and feedback provided from the Year 3 sample test and the inappropriateness of statewide testing for young students.

Further analysis for this review also focused attention on the opinions of the principals and teachers who participated in the 1998 Year 3 Test (N=564) on the preferred form of statewide testing.

Display 3 - Preferred form of statewide testing for principals and teachers participating in 1998 Year 3 Test



Display 3 shows the following:

- Census testing was the most preferred form of testing with 43.3% of principals and teachers participating in the Year 3 Test preferring this form (N=564). This was followed by 30.9% who preferred a combination of sample and census, and 13.3% who preferred sample testing.
- There was a difference between the opinions of principals and teachers. A greater proportion of principals than teachers involved in the 1998 Year 3 Test preferred census testing (49.3% of principals compared to 37.1% of teachers), while a greater proportion of teachers than principals preferred sample (15.5% teachers compared to 11.2% principals) or combination (32.7% teachers compared to 29.0% principals).

On comparing the preferences of principals and teachers participating in the Year 3 Test with the preferences of principals and teachers participating in the 1998 Year 3 and 5 Testing Program overall, it is evident that for both groups census testing was the most preferred form of testing. For both groups this was followed by a combination of sample and census, and then sample.

2.4 Opinions of selected stakeholders

Focus Question 4: What are the opinions on the preferred **form** of the Year 3 Test of selected stakeholders?

Display 4 summarises the overall opinions of the twelve stakeholder groups interviewed on the preferred form of the Year 3 Test. It was assumed that the opinion of each group had equal importance. In ten of the interviews there was consensus of opinion. In the other two cases, the view of the majority has been reported in Display 4.

Display 4

Preferred form of Year 3 Test for selected stakeholders

Preferred form	Number of stakeholder groups
Census test	5 groups
Sample test	4 groups
Census test with given conditions, otherwise sample	2 groups
No preference identified*	1 group

*This group did not identify a preference in acknowledgment of the fact that the constituents of the organisation represented would have a range of views on the preferred form of the Year 3 Test. It is evident from Display 4, that although selected stakeholders had mixed opinions, overall a census test was the most preferred form of Year 3 Test.

The reasons given for preferring a **census test** included the following:

- There is opportunity to report to all parents at the end of the early childhood years about their child's performance in literacy and numeracy.
- A commitment has been given to the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan for testing all Year 3 students against the national benchmarks.
- Schools can be provided with individual student results that could be used to identify individual student needs in literacy and numeracy and to initiate intervention strategies for individual students.
- The resources and administration required to develop a sample test (with multiple forms of test papers and an accompanying resource kit) are comparable to, if not more than, those required to develop a census test, yet significantly more valuable data is provided from a census test.
- Census testing provides information on many student groups that sample testing cannot provide unless the sample size is very large.
- All schools can be provided with comprehensive information about their specific school context that can be used to inform the development of school-based programs in response to the identified literacy and numeracy needs.
- Systems can be provided with data on system, school, individual and target group performance.
- There is opportunity for data from Years 3, 5 and 7 Tests to be linked to provide a comprehensive picture of individual performance in literacy and numeracy and also permit the tracking of system, school and target group performance in numeracy and literacy over time.

The reasons for supporting a **sample test** included the following:

- Sample testing provides adequate data for system and statewide reporting against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.
- Sample testing provides sufficient data to identify statewide trends in literacy and numeracy, which can inform the development of school programs.
- A sample test design that includes multiple forms of test papers affords opportunity for greater curriculum coverage and the inclusion of a broader range of test items than census testing.
- Sample testing can adequately provide systems with the information needed to identify groups of students with particular needs in order to allocate appropriate resourcing.
- Sample testing obviates the practice of allocating funding on the basis of individual test results which is an undesirable practice as it rewards non-achievement.
- Census testing is intrusive to normal classroom practice in the early childhood years and as a result can be stressful for early childhood students.
- Census testing is associated with 'high stakes' for teachers as they may feel they may be held responsible for the success or failure of their students.
- Census testing has the potential to narrow the curriculum and affirm poor practice if teachers 'teach to the test' to ensure the success of their students.
- Census testing provides information that can be used for making invalid comparisons among schools, teachers or students.
- Census testing may not give valid information as students are unfamiliar with testing of this nature.
- There are teacher workload issues related to census testing, particularly with respect to the time required by teachers to complete the front cover of test booklets.

The reasons for preferring a **census test with conditions** included the following:

- Census testing is only of value if the nature of the test is grounded in school-based assessment and the purposes of the test include the provision of information about individual student learning in literacy and numeracy. If testing is not of this nature and is primarily for the purpose of statewide reporting, then sample testing is adequate.

- The purpose of testing should be to provide diagnostic information about individual student needs in literacy and numeracy. A census test that used The Early Years Net for diagnostic purposes is preferred. If testing is not of this nature then a sample test is adequate.

3. Preferred nature of the Year 3 Test

3.1 Nature of 1999 Year 3 testing programs in Australian states and territories

Focus Question 1: What is the **nature** of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories?

Display 5 provides an overview of the nature of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy proposed for 1999 in Australian states and territories.

Display 5

Overview of the nature of 1999 Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories

State or territory	Nature of testing program	
	Aspects of literacy and numeracy covered	Type of program
ACT	Reading, Viewing, Writing, Speaking and Listening Number, Space, Measurement, Data	An extensive range of set literacy and numeracy tasks based around a common stimulus package are integrated into normal classroom practice and administered at teacher discretion over an extended period of time.
NSW	Reading, Language Number, Space, Measurement (Writing: decisions are yet to be made about inclusion of a Writing Test for 1999)	Set paper and pencil tests are administered under standard conditions at a given time.
NT	Reading, Viewing, Writing, Spelling Number, Space, Measurement	In reading and mathematics, tests are set multilevel non-timed tests hand marked by classroom teachers. Students work through tests at their own pace until the teacher determines that the questions are too hard for the student.
QLD	Reading, Viewing, Writing, Spelling Number Sense, Spatial Sense, Measurement and Data Sense	Set paper and pencil tests are administered under standard conditions at a given time.
SA	Reading, Language, Writing Number, Space, Measurement	Set paper and pencil tests are administered under standard conditions at a given time.
TAS	Reading, Writing (Content, Conventions) Number, Space, Measurement, Chance and Data	Set paper and pencil tests are administered at teacher discretion over a given period of time.
VIC	Reading, Writing Number, Space, Measurement, Chance and Data	Combination of set paper and pencil tests administered under standard conditions at a given time and teacher assessed tasks administered at teacher discretion over a given period and assessed against given criteria.
WA	Reading, Writing, Spelling Number, Space, Measurement, Chance and Data	Set paper and pencil tests are administered at teacher discretion over a given period of time.

Further details on the nature of Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy with respect to the length of tests, timing of tests, types of questions included and reports provided are included in Appendix 2.

3.2 Year 2 Net research and review

Focus Question 2: What information emerged in relation to the **nature** of the Year 3 Test from 1997 research into, and the 1998 review of, the Year 2 Diagnostic Net?

In 1997, the Council commissioned research into the Year 2 Diagnostic Net (The Net). The findings of this research were presented to Council in the following report: *Report of an intrinsic critical appraisal of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net continua and associated teacher support materials* (Luke, Land, Kraayenoord and Elkins, 1997).

The research report included the following recommendation (page 3):

That the QSCC maintain the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as a statewide formative assessment and reporting strategy aimed at supporting early student learning in literacy and numeracy, but not as a designated 'test' in terms of its enabling legislation.

At the time, this view was considered consistent with the Council's position regarding the use of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as a key strategy for early identification/intervention in Queensland in the context of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

In August 1997, the Chair of the Council outlined the Council's position and the above recommendation to the Minister for Education (see Section 1.1) and also referred the recommendation to the proposed review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net.

In 1998, the Council commissioned a review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and subsequently the findings of the review were presented to the Council in the following report: *External Review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net* (Stewart-Dore and Bartlett, 1999). By the time the review was commissioned the Year 3 Test had been regulated.

Overall, the review report identified continued support for The Net and raised a number of issues to be addressed, including the issues related to the current name, timing of validation, the non-alignment of the continua with current English and Mathematics syllabus documents and teacher workload.

The review report did not examine the relationship between the Year 2 Diagnostic Net and the Year 3 Test directly. It focused on the early intervention clause of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (see Appendix 1, clause a)i) rather than the assessment against national benchmarks clause (see Appendix 1, clause a)iii).

The review report made the following conclusion (page 85):

There was general but weak consensus that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as (sic) least addressed, if not contributed directly to achieving the national literacy and numeracy goals. This agreement may be due to teacher ignorance of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, however. Further, the timing of early intervention as a feature of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan was seen by teachers to be critical, if problematic insofar as there was the need to compress intervention support into a defined period of time. Overall, the Year 2 Diagnostic Net offered a reasonable means of identifying students with learning difficulties and of validating the nature of those difficulties.

This review report conclusion affirmed the 1997 research report with respect to the role of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net as a strategy for formative assessment to identify students with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

3.3 Evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program

Focus Question 3: What information emerged in relation to the **nature** of the Year 3 Test from the Evaluation of the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program?

The 1998 Test Evaluation Report outlined the opinions of principals and teachers who participated in the Year 3 Test (N=564) about the 1998 Year 3 Test materials.

The 1998 Test Evaluation Report noted (page 16):

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 asked to indicate if they had any specific concerns about the Year 3 Test materials. The 1998 Test Evaluation Report summarised these concerns as follows (page 16):

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%).

Other concerns identified in the 1998 Test Evaluation Report that related to the nature of the test as defined for this review included:

- students needing more assistance during the test (4.4% of principals and teachers);
- nature of the test having a negative effect on the students (4.1% of principals and teachers);
- students needing more time for the literacy test (3.7% of principals and teachers);
- students needing more breaks between test sessions (3.0% of principals and teachers).

3.4 Opinions of selected stakeholders

Focus Question 4: What are the opinions on the preferred **nature** of the Year 3 Test of selected stakeholders?

Overall the stakeholder groups interviewed described the preferred nature of the Year 3 Test in either of the two following ways:

- Preferred models of testing were described as alternatives to the current nature of the test.
- Preferred characteristics were identified with respect to the current nature of the Year 3 Test.

Four groups preferred that the current nature of the test be replaced by either the Early Years Net or school-based assessment with moderation between and among schools.

The reasons for preferring these models of testing as alternatives to the current nature of the test included the following:

- The Early Years Net has already proved to be an effective tool for diagnosing student's needs and for monitoring individual student progress in literacy and numeracy.

- It would be valuable to investigate how statewide reporting requirements could be built into processes that already effectively being used rather than impose another test.
- Formal testing conditions are not appropriate for early childhood students and as a consequence do not necessarily yield valid and reliable data.
- School-based assessment provides a broad range of valuable information that could be used for reporting against the national benchmarks and could also be used to improve individual student learning and inform school programs.
- Paper and pencil tests cannot effectively address the broader concepts of literacy and numeracy.

With respect to the current nature of the test, preferred characteristics included that:

- the nature of the test should ensure the collection of valid and reliable data for reporting against the national benchmarks;
- the test should match the classroom experiences of Year 3 students (e.g. include performance-based tasks or teacher tasks that are not teacher assessed; include hands-on activities with concrete materials, use genres and stimulus materials that match the interests of Year 3 age students);
- the attention spans of Year 3 students should be considered in determining the duration and timing of the tests (e.g. test sessions short in duration, include sufficient breaks between sessions, administer the sessions on separate days);
- tests should include a variety of question types including open-ended questions rather than overly relying on multiple-choice questions;
- the literacy levels of students of Year 3 age should be considered in test development (e.g. test not overly dependant on writing, numeracy test not too much reading, read the test out loud, include verbal responses requiring objective answers);
- the timing of the test should optimise opportunity for results to be effectively utilised (e.g. adequate time for authorities and schools to use results effectively, facilitate issues of national comparability);
- reports should be 'parent friendly' and similar in format across the year levels; adequate student support should be allowed during the test to promote inclusivity.

4. Summary and conclusions

This section provides a succinct summary of the information emerging from the review and draws appropriate conclusions.

4.1 Summary

With respect to the preferred **form** of the Year 3 Test the following information emerged from this review:

- In 1997, the MCEETYA National Literacy and Numeracy Plan was endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of Education. The Plan identified as an objective that in assessing students against the Year 3 benchmarks all states will move to universal assessment.
- All states and territories except Queensland use census testing for Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy.
- For principals and teachers overall participating in the 1998 Years 3 and 5 Testing Program, **census testing** was the most preferred form of statewide testing, with 45.5% preferring this form. This was followed by 32.7% who preferred a combination of census and sample, and 10.1% who preferred sample. Census testing was also the most preferred form of statewide testing for principals and teachers participating in the 1998 Year 3 Test.

- The opinions of selected stakeholders on the preferred form of testing for the Year 3 Test were mixed. However, overall a **census test** was the most preferred form of Year 3 Test.
- Selected stakeholders reasons for preferring a census Year 3 Test focused on the opportunity this form of testing provided to obtain information about individual student performance in literacy and numeracy and the consequent advantages to parents, schools and systems.
- Selected stakeholders reasons for preferring a sample Year 3 Test focused on the adequacy of this form of testing to provide data for system and statewide reporting against the literacy and numeracy benchmarks and the adequacy of statewide trends to inform school programs.

With respect to the preferred **nature** of the Year 3 Test the following information emerged from this review:

- All states and territories are testing, or moving towards testing Year 3 students against the national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. Most states and territories use set paper and pencil tests that are administered under standard conditions, either at a given time or over a given period of time. There is variation among states and territories with respect to the length of tests, timing of tests, types of questions included and reports provided.
- Research into the Year 2 Diagnostic Net recommended that The Net not be used as an 'approved test in regulation' and supported the Council's position that the Year 2 Diagnostic Net be used as a key strategy for early identification/intervention in Queensland in the context of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. The review of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net supported this notion although the relationship between the Net and the Year 3 Test was not investigated directly.
- Principals and teachers participating in the 1998 Year 3 Test received the test materials in a positive light. Principals and teachers indicated specific concerns about the nature of the test that included concerns about: literacy demands; formal testing not being appropriate for students of Year 3 age; the test having a negative effect on students; the test being too long; not enough breaks between sessions; and students needing more assistance during the test.
- Preferences of selected stakeholders about the nature of the Year 3 Test included ensuring the nature of the test provided valid and reliable data and matching the test to the age, interests, literacy levels, attention spans and classroom experiences of students of Year 3 age. Suggestions included considering: the inclusion of performance-based tasks; ensuring test sessions are short with adequate breaks between sessions; reading the tests out loud; and including more open-ended questions. A small minority of selected stakeholders indicated a preference that the Year 3 Test be replaced by the Early Years Net or school-based assessment.

4.2 Conclusions

Based on the information that emerged from the review, the following conclusions can be drawn with respect to the two overarching questions noted in Section 1.

What is the preferred **form** of the Queensland Year 3 Test?

In respect of this overarching question, the following conclusions (C) may be made:

- C1 Overall, the form of the Queensland Year 3 Test should be a census test of aspects of literacy and numeracy in which:
- all participating students receive reports on their performance;

- schools receive reports on the overall performance of the school;
- school authorities receive data on the performance of their respective students.

C2 In developing the census Queensland Year 3 Test, the concerns and issues raised by respondents preferring a sample test should be considered.

What is the preferred **nature** of the Queensland Year 3 Test?

In respect of this overarching question, the following conclusions (C) may be made.

- C3 The Year 3 Test should continue to be centrally set and be predominantly a paper and pencil test, with consideration being given to augmenting this approach with other methods appropriate to the developmental age of Year 3 students.
- C4 The aspects of literacy and numeracy to be covered in the census Year 3 Test should be in accordance with those covered by other states and territories and conform with the requirements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.
- C5 In developing the census Queensland Year 3 Test, the experiences of other states and territories should be taken into account and also the concerns and suggestions of respondents.
- C6 The Year 2 Diagnostic Net should continue as a key strategy for early identification and intervention, and not be considered as a 'test'. It should not be regarded as a substitute for the proposed census Year 3 Test.

Appendix 1 National Plan on Literacy and Numeracy in Schools (1997)

At the 6th MCEETYA Meeting (Melbourne, 1997) Ministers agreed to achieving national literacy and numeracy goals 'that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write, and spell at an appropriate level'

- (a) by endorsing a national plan consisting of the following key elements, subject to State and Territory budgetary considerations:
 - (i) comprehensive assessment of all students by teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling with the purpose of adequately addressing their numeracy and literacy needs and identifying those students at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national numeracy and literacy goals;
 - (ii) intervening as early as possible to address the needs of all students identified as at risk;
 - (iii) assessing students against the Year 3 benchmark to be numerate and to be able to read, write and spell from 1998 onwards (and against the Year 5 benchmark as soon as possible) using rigorous state-based assessment procedures;
 - with the objective that all states will move to universal assessment (universal assessment means all students assessed i.e. not a sample); and
 - that speaking, listening and viewing will be incorporated as soon as practical.
 - (iv) progress towards national reporting by systems and school authorities on student achievements in numeracy, reading, writing and spelling against the Year 3 and 5 benchmarks to report in 1999 on 1998 results, data provided being comparable by State/Territory;
 - (v) development of national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy;
- (b) by providing professional development to support the key elements of the national plan.

Appendix 2 Details of the nature of proposed 1999 Year 3 testing programs in literacy and numeracy in Australian states and territories

State or territory	Duration of tests (approximate times)	Timing of the test	Types of questions used (excluding writing tasks)	Methods of marking	Reports provided
ACT	Literacy Tests: 5 hrs Numeracy Tests: 3 sessions, 2 hrs overall	Administered over 6 week period commencing in August at teacher discretion.	Predominantly open-ended questions requiring extended responses with a small proportion of multiple choice.	Responses hand marked using trained raters. Speaking is teacher assessed using set criteria.	Parent Report School Report State Report
NSW	Literacy Test: Reading 40 mins Language 15 mins Numeracy Test: 40 mins	Administered on first Wednesday in August.	Predominantly multiple choice with some closed questions requiring objective responses.	Responses scanned and scored electronically	Parent Report Individual Student Report School Report State Report
NT	Reading: untimed Writing Task: 30 mins and 10 Mins for editing Mathematics: untimed	Administered over a five day period in August at teacher discretion.	Equal mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions.	Writing and spelling centrally hand marked. Reading and Mathematics responses are hand marked by class teacher.	Report to Schools Report to School Council
QLD	Literacy Test: 85 mins Session 1: Dictation 10 mins Reading & Viewing 35 mins Session 2: Writing 45 mins Numeracy Test: 60 mins Section 1: 20 mins Section 2: 40 mins	Administered on two consecutive days in August with Numeracy Test on one day Literacy Test on the following day.	Predominantly multiple choice with some open-ended questions requiring objective or short answer responses.	All responses centrally hand marked. Writing task hand marked against set criteria by two trained markers working independently.	Statewide Report
SA	Literacy Test: 40 mins Numeracy Test: 55 mins Writing Assessment: 40 mins	Literacy Test and Numeracy Test administered on one day in early August. Writing Assessment administered on a common day yet to be determined.	Predominantly multiple choice with a few open-ended questions that do not require extended responses.	Writing task is centrally marked using set spelling and writing criteria. Other responses are scanned and scored electronically.	Parent Report School Report

TAS	Yet to be determined for 1999, past practice has been: Literacy Tests: 4 sessions of 20 Mins each Numeracy Tests: 4 sessions of 20 mins each	Administered over a set period yet to be determined (e.g. 1–3 weeks) at teacher discretion.	Equal mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions.	Writing is centrally marked by trained raters. Open response questions are centrally marked by trained raters. Other responses are scanned electronically.	Student Report School Report Statewide Report
VIC	Centrally assessed tasks: Reading: 40 mins Writing: 40 mins Mathematics: 35 mins Teacher assessed tasks: Writing Task: time allocated at teacher discretion Mathematics Task: 20–30 mins	Series of assessment tasks administered over a period of two weeks in Term 3. Centrally assessed tasks are administered on two set days during this period.	Centrally assessed tasks are predominantly multiple choice with some closed questions requiring objective responses. Teacher assessed mathematics task is a problem solving task.	For centrally assessed tasks responses are scanned electronically. Writing task is centrally assessed by trained markers. Teachers use set criteria for teacher assessed tasks.	Report to Parents School Summary Report School Report Data Analysis Service
WA	Reading: 45 mins Writing: 65 mins which includes 30 mins for writing Spelling: 20 mins Numeracy: 30 mins	Administered over a one week period in late August at teacher discretion.	Predominantly multiple choice with small proportion of open-ended questions that require short responses.	Responses to open ended questions, spelling and the writing task are hand marked by trained teachers. Multiple choice questions are electronically marked.	Parent Report School Report State Report