

THE CONVERSATION

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NAPLAN online: will Australian schools and students be ready?

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Paper and pencil NAPLAN testing will go online in 2016, but will schools be ready? bibiphoto / Shutterstock.com

The Australian Government plans to conduct the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) online from 2016. This presents a significant challenge for Australia's 9,500 schools.

Conducting NAPLAN online has many potential benefits. As the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority accurately indicated, this will enable "tailored testing" and will provide more timely marking, feedback and results. A greater range of things can be tested once no longer restricted by paper and pencil tests, including testing students' ability to read, understand and apply digital texts.

However, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority acknowledges that NAPLAN online will present challenges for schools' digital capabilities. Plans need to be developed to manage this massive task.

So how do Australian schools and students get ready for NAPLAN Online? There are some important considerations relating to the physical implementation of NAPLAN online, as well as how the scope of NAPLAN can be broadened once it's in an online format.

Understand the scale of the task

The scale of NAPLAN being implemented online in all Australian schools is considerable. When the nation-wide roll-out of NAPLAN online occurs, it is likely situations could occur where students are unable to sit the test due to technical and infrastructure issues.

Pilot research and trialling studies have already been undertaken. It would be wise to conduct further trials in various sites and school contexts before scaling up to nationwide implementation.

Ensure school infrastructure is ready

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority already understands that most schools do not have enough computers or internet bandwidth to enable all Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students to sit NAPLAN online at the same time. There are many gaps in digital technologies and infrastructure within and between schools. There are serious doubts that all schools will be technologically ready for their students to do NAPLAN online by 2016.

Audits on each school's readiness need to be conducted. Having the infrastructure capability for NAPLAN online is essential. If this is done well, then more timely feedback can be provided to students, parents, and schools.

Recognise the importance of school leadership

School leaders will need to design and implement strategies to prepare schools for NAPLAN online. This requires more than preparing the technological infrastructure, but will require leadership vision, strategies and tactics to build online capabilities in the teachers and students themselves.

The strategies used to prepare students for the paper-based NAPLAN test will no longer be sufficient. School leadership will be needed to seriously shift attention from paper-based learning, teaching and assessment practices to online learning, teaching and assessment approaches.

Understand that many students use a range of devices at school and at home

While the focus will likely be on ensuring strict conditions for NAPLAN online to ensure integrity of the testing, instead greater focus should be on enabling students to demonstrate what they know about how to use digital technologies. Many students already use a range of devices and applications at school and at home, so the tests should be designed to enable students to demonstrate what they know about technology, and what they can do with what they know, using a range of devices.

As we move into a post-PC world, with many schools moving to a phenomenon known as "bring your own device", this presents a significant challenge for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. The authority must design and implement a test that understands the array of new and emerging technologies available.