

28 September 2009

Letters to the Editor

The Age newspaper

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/letters/prejudice-not-faith-20090927-g7n4.html>

Like with like

PROFESSOR Barry McGaw asked if it is fair for parents not to be told how badly a school is doing. As a statistician, I ask: "Is it fair to accuse a school or a teacher of not doing their job when they are?"

NAPLAN results have large error margins. This can be shown statistically. But common sense will tell you that if we ever change the VCE to be based only on a couple of tests with 40 questions, there will be an outcry on the lack of reliability in the results. So how can NAPLAN results be used to assess school and teacher performance, when the performance of students is not measured well?

When schools are grouped into "like" groups, we need even more precision in the measures to detect differences between schools. It will be easy to demonstrate the difference between a high-profile private school and a low socio-economic government school, but it will be more difficult to determine significant differences between two high-profile private schools.

NAPLAN results just do not provide the precision to do that. Linking low student performance to school performance is at best a conjecture.

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