Parents have their say on new student reports

Bronwyn Ridgway
Consultant
Coordinator of parent discussion groups on new written reports
October 2006
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1.0 Executive summary

1.1 Parents whose children currently attend primary and secondary schools in NSW participated in discussion groups about new student reports.

1.2 Discussions included groups of parents who had already received new reports using A to E grades and groups of parents who were yet to encounter the new reports.

1.3 The majority of parents expressed disappointment with older style reporting (with the exception of portfolios).

1.4 Parents want consistency in reporting and they also want teacher comments on each subject.

1.5 Parents want reporting on achievement, development and effort.

1.6 The majority of parents appreciate the clarity of a grade based on a scale of achievement.

1.7 Information from schools and from the Department of Education and Training about the new reports is crucial for parents’ understanding.

1.8 The new reports provide a clear focus for parent teacher discussions.

1.9 Parents want to know where students need help and/or how they can be extended.

1.10 Parents appreciate a common achievement standard established by the Board of Studies that applies across government and non-government schools.
The author

Bronwyn Ridgway is a journalist and consultant. She has extensive public sector experience in health, education, industrial relations and communications.

As a mother of two primary school children she has been an executive member of a School Council and various P&C Associations. She has worked as a Community Liaison Officer for a public primary school in rural NSW.

Some of the information gained through her parent discussion groups this year has been used in the creation of literature for parents about the new written reports in New South Wales.

Acknowledgements

I’d like to thank all parents who participated in the discussion groups over the last few months.

Thank you for giving your time, for being so honest and forthcoming with your opinions and for sharing so much in such an open way about your children and their learning.

Bronwyn Ridgway
2.0 Background and introduction

**Preparation for change in NSW**

Parents want to understand how their child is progressing at school. If extra assistance is needed, parents want to know what is available to help their child. If their child can be extended, then they want to know how that can be assisted too. Parents want to be part of the discussion about their child’s learning. This has been confirmed through parent discussion groups that I have conducted over the last five months on the new written school reports for NSW primary and secondary schools.

Previous research, The Eltis Report: Time to teach–time to learn in 2003, published a range of findings about outcomes assessment and reporting in NSW government schools. Professor Ken Eltis determined after extensive study that:

- Parents were disappointed with reporting methods and found school reports difficult to understand
  
  “The Evaluation has shown that, while schools have worked really hard to involve their communities in agreed approaches to reporting on student progress and achievements, the ultimate outcome has often left teachers and parents disappointed.”

- Teachers and parents thought it was time for consistency in reporting methods across NSW
  
  “Strongly stated guidelines from the Department about the essential elements of a report could help refocus teachers’ work as well as provide the benefits of a more standardised reporting framework across the State, reducing the level of inconsistency or replication”.

- Parents wanted grades to read along with an indication of where their child sat in relation to others.

  “…they did not necessarily need all the information shown in individual sections of a school report – the final grade was what most wanted to read, along with an indication of where their daughter or son sat in relation to others. That is the nub of the reporting problem.”

Research by Professor Peter Cuttance and Shirley Stokes published in 2000, Reporting Student and School Achievement, contributed significantly to the discussion that reports should be presented in a format and language that is readily understood by parents; schools should support and encourage all parents to attend parent teacher meetings and schools should ensure that the standard of achievement of students is reported to parents.

The scene has been set for a considerable time for changes in reporting methods in primary and secondary schools throughout NSW.

In 2005 the Commonwealth Government tied reporting requirements to school funding for NSW schools. The Board of Studies, which develops state-wide curriculum standards for all government and non-government schools in NSW, set out A to E descriptions of achievement for all NSW schools. The grades describe student achievement as A- Outstanding, B- High, C- Sound, D- Basic and E- Limited.

In July 2006 the NSW Minister for Education and Training sent correspondence and a comprehensive brochure explaining student report changes to parents of children in primary and secondary government schools. After considerable consultation with NSW Department of Education and Training representatives, primary and secondary principals, teachers and parents, NSW Education Minister Carmel Tebbutt announced in September 2006 that the new written reports would provide a choice about the way student achievement could be described.
The new reports allow choice between grades and word descriptions but include five common elements

The new written reports include...

- Either A to E grades or word descriptions from Outstanding to Limited to describe student achievement in each subject, such as English.
- Information on achievement in areas of learning in a subject. For example on reading, writing, talking and listening in English.
- A comment from a student’s teacher on each subject, such as English.

- Information about other school activities.
- Information about social development and commitment to learning including effort.

Children in Kindergarten won’t receive grades. Neither will children with significant learning difficulties, or those who have recently arrived in Australia and are learning English as a second language. The new reports are to be distributed by schools towards the end of 2006.

Schools have an option to …..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use this grade</th>
<th>Or use this word</th>
<th>To describe this achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>The student has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the content and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>The student has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the content and a high level of competence in the processes and skills. In addition, the student is able to apply this knowledge and these skills to most situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>The student has a sound knowledge and understanding of the main areas of content and has achieved an adequate level of competence in the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>The student has a basic knowledge and understanding of the content and has achieved a basic level of competence in the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>The student has an elementary knowledge and understanding in few areas of the content and has achieved very limited competence in some of the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools that choose to use word descriptors will need to indicate on each student’s report that the five-point achievement scale used in the report equates to the A to E scale.
Old and new reports by contrast

Information taken from an actual old report stated...

Your child’s performance is detailed by outlining the progress they have made in each Key Learning Area this year. Your child will be assessed as:

- Working towards (WT)
- Achieved (A) or
- Working beyond with proficiency (WP)

A full list of Stage Outcomes, which describe the standard expected in English and Mathematics are available from your child’s class teacher.

Outcomes are identified by a code eg RS2.5 which can be cross referenced with class overviews. Class overviews are distributed at the beginning of each semester.
Information taken from an actual new report states...

Our school reports your child’s progress with written reports twice a year and through interviews or meetings.

Please contact the school to discuss this report and your child’s progress with the teacher. You are encouraged to ask the school to provide you with written information that clearly shows your child’s achievement compared to his or her peer group at school.

This information will show you the number of children in the group in each of the achievement levels. If you would like to see this information, your child’s teacher will have it at the parent teacher interviews.

Excerpt...

Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Limited achievement</th>
<th>Basic achievement</th>
<th>Sound achievement</th>
<th>High achievement</th>
<th>Outstanding achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Mathematically</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement and Data</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns and Algebra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Space and Geometry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Overall Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Mathematics Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
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Our school reports your child’s progress with written reports twice a year and through interviews or meetings.

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This information will show you the number of children in the group in each of the achievement levels. If you would like to see this information, your child’s teacher will have it at the parent teacher interviews.

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<tr>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Alternately this report could now be written with the word descriptions and the A to E legend or key explanation within the report...

**Mathematics**

<table>
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**Mathematics Comment**

______ can count to 70 and order, read and write numbers up to 30. He needs to continue working on his addition and subtraction number facts so that he can make the connection between the two for numbers up to 20. He still requires practice in solving number problems for multiplication and division.

______ can make halves, but still needs help when working with quarters. He is able to ask questions and describe mathematics using some mathematical language e.g. square, triangle, numeral.

______ is able to compare the length of two objects and use language such as taller and shorter. He needs to continue working on correctly naming two dimensional shapes, such as hexagons, rhombuses and trapeziums.

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**Views sought on new student reports**

Over the last five months I have conducted parent discussion groups in:

- inner metropolitan Sydney (29 May)
- the Hunter (30 May)
- Western Sydney (28 June)
- a primary school in northern metropolitan Sydney (28 July), and
- in southern metropolitan Sydney (8 August),
- the Illawarra and South Coast (1 September), and
- an additional group in the Hunter (18 September).

Each discussion group has been the subject of a detailed report which included comments made by parents.

The Council of the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of NSW was advised at its meeting of regional delegates on 17 June 2006 that ongoing discussion groups would be taking place throughout Sydney and NSW rural areas.

I have received feedback from parents with children attending primary and secondary schools throughout New South Wales. Additional discussion groups will be conducted in the state’s country regions.

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**Consultation before and after introduction of new reports**

The first three groups were conducted with parents prior to their children receiving the new graded reports. The last four groups were conducted with parents who had received the new report towards the end of Semester 1 this year.
3.0 What parents said

Student reports are for parents

A school report is about a student’s learning. It’s written for the purpose of communicating with parents or carers about their child and parents believe they need to be able to clearly understand its contents. They want to be able to celebrate their child’s achievements, be able to discuss extra assistance if needed and extend their child where necessary.

Parents would like the end of year reports to be issued with enough time for them to meet with teachers to discuss any issues that their child may face; to discuss how they can help him or her and to discuss what might be done in the following year to address these issues.

Parents want reports to give clear feedback about the way their child is progressing, especially in subjects like English and Mathematics. Parents want more than one concise, detailed school report in a year. They want to be able to compare results using the same criteria in any year. They appreciate that the new grades describe achievement and allow consistency in reporting in all primary and secondary schools throughout New South Wales.

Parents want greater clarity

Parents want a report that provides a good base for informed discussion with the class teacher in parent teacher interviews or at other opportunities provided by the school to discuss the reports. They value open discussion about their child. They don’t want their child to slip through the net with problems undetected and they are keen to understand how their child is progressing. They want open and honest written reports.

They didn’t see as useful in a report, terminology such as “Jessie is working towards outcome … in key learning area …” or “in some areas Jessie is working at outcome …”. They believed many parents would have difficulty understanding what this meant. Some asked questions such as “What is the teacher trying to say here? Why doesn’t the teacher give feedback to parents in plain English? Is education too complicated for a parent to be part of the discussion?”

Parents want reports that give a clearer picture of their child’s achievements, including their strengths and weaknesses.

They appreciate information about the effort that their child is putting into learning. They want to know about their child’s social development and involvement in school activities. They consider that if they know what effort their child is putting into learning at school, they can gauge with the graded result what they can do to assist their child. They want a concise written report part way through as well as towards the end of the year.

Parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds particularly value a concise, plain English report. The descriptions of achievement, which include A to E grades, assist their understanding. Given such a report they are comfortable talking with their child’s teacher or relevant teachers at school.

Parent quotes

“I think what’s important about these new reports is that there are two written reports each year, that they are in plain language that parents can understand, that the report is a snapshot of our child at that time and there’s opportunity to improve and change. I think it’s important that there is information about social development and commitment to learning in these new reports too.” Parent, Western Sydney school

“This new report is clear, it’s not confusing language, what’s the problem? I think these new reports are a step in the right direction. At least we should be able to understand the reports and not let anything slip by. I mean I’ve found the ‘working towards’ and ‘working above’ quite difficult to really understand where my children sit in their education. I think what’s critical is that the teachers understand how to write it all up and do it consistently.” Parent, Hunter school

“I think the A to E grades for students are the way to go. They tell it the way it is, C is OK but if a child gets a D or an E there are additional programs and work that can be done at school and at home. As a parent, I want to know and I have the right to know how my child is going at school.” Parent, Hunter school

“I was concerned and so was my husband that when we came to a very small country school with around 25 children that it would be hard to gauge how they were going. These reports help us keep some perspective on my son’s progress. We do move quite a lot because of work and I can see how my son is going in comparison to other children and if we move then the reports will still have meaning.” Parent, Illawarra/South Coast school
Parents see introduction of new reports as important

Parents considered that the introduction of the new graded report is important. They want to be informed about the changes and know what the new grades actually mean. So much so that they provided advice on ways the Department of Education and Training (DET) could publicise key features of the new report.

They believed that if this was done parents would be prepared for the advent of the graded reports and their key features and not consider them to be like the old graded reports of years ago.

Parent quotes

“This is an important issue. Parents and students need to know about it prior to the reports going out. It needs leadership and information that parents and children will look at and see in locations that we pass everyday: for example in buses on trains in libraries and around schools. Is there any decent reason that there can’t be some advertising on this? I mean it affects every child in school in NSW and it needs to be publicized. It affects the family as well.” Parent, inner metropolitan Sydney school

Parents suggest specific information for the community

Parents said that promotion of the new reports by the government and DET would assist this positive change in the reporting process. Parents believed that as budgets allowed, a community-based information campaign, would assist a smooth transition to the new graded reports.

Parents’ suggestions

- Posters, newspaper advertisements radio and television as well as articles in magazines and newspapers. They supported the establishment of a 1800 phone number for easy access to information.
- Information from DET and the Federation of P&C Associations of NSW should be explained and made available at P&C Association meetings in schools.
- Information campaign to impact on parents and students in the lead up to and at the time of the distribution of the new reports.
- Public information about the new graded reports to be eye-catching and have a recognizable theme through colour, image, text and the use of the DET logo.

Parents receive new reports and view them positively

Over 100 primary and secondary public schools implemented the new graded reports at the end of Semester 1. Discussions with parents who received the new reports reveal that generally they view them positively.

They particularly appreciate the clarity of the report, the concise information it gives and the detail specific to their child in different subjects. Most popular are the teachers’ comments in each key learning area as well as meaningful information about their child’s achievements and feedback about their child’s strengths and weaknesses.
They considered information about their child’s effort at school as very valuable. The grade given for each key learning area clarified specific information about their child’s achievements at school.

A small number of parents were concerned about students being labelled, however on most occasions these concerns diminished with greater understanding of various aspects of the new reports.

Parents believed that the teacher parent interviews were more useful based on these new reports, that the written document encouraged discussion about their child’s learning in different subject areas.

**Parents say new graded reports**

- need to be carefully introduced by the principal with follow-up through parent teacher interviews after distribution
- necessitate education for parents and students that ‘C is on track’
- are written in clear, concise language
- are easier than the old reports to understand
- are considered better and more practically informative than the old reports
- are comprehensive and gave a clear picture of their child’s progress
- included insightful teacher comments for each subject/key learning area
- offer valuable information about their child’s learning and effort
- convey meaningful and useful advice about their child’s achievements
- provide a snapshot of their child’s learning
- tell parents about their child’s strengths and weaknesses
- tell parents where their child needed assistance
- are easy to follow
- are a lot easier to read
- provide straightforward guidelines
- give a good and simple overview showing where their child was positioned in relation to the curriculum and the class
- give a clear idea of their child’s progress
- give clear teacher comments on English and Mathematics
- give a lot of information through an increased number of teacher comments
- do not provide a lot more ‘in depth’ information about a child’s learning when compared to the old portfolio style of reporting.

**Parent quotes**

“I was worried that with the new graded reports there would be less information, but actually there’s more. I think it’s very useful to have a comment from the teacher about each subject and that the report is written in a concise way and the language is easy to understand.” *Parent, Western Sydney school*

“The teacher’s comments were fabulous.” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*

“The comments on each subject or key learning area allowed much greater understanding about my child’s learning.” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*

“I think it’s straightforward and I like the format and the teacher comment. We have to get used to C being ‘it’ though, don’t we? It’s a bit down from there isn’t it!” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*

“These new reports are so much better than the old reports, the detail is incredible, I have information about my child that I never got with the old reports.” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*

“The most valuable was the teacher’s comments. It depends on whether the comment is descriptive enough though. I found there wasn’t as much information about my child’s performance in maths, but I’m a maths teacher and I wanted more detail. Compared to the other report it doesn’t tell me more about my child’s performance in maths.” *Parent, southern metropolitan Sydney school*

“The old reports told me nothing about one of my children, I knew there was something wrong with his learning but the old reports didn’t pick it up or demonstrate where his problems lay, these reports pinpoint his strengths and weaknesses.” *Parent, southern metropolitan Sydney school*

“I found stage based reports really frustrating, I really like these new reports, they give more information and they are easy, much easier, to understand.” *Parent, southern metropolitan Sydney school*

“I like to give my children’s reports to their grandparents: they’re really interested in their grandchildren’s progress at school. They both said how much easier the new reports were to understand and the information about each subject was really good and helpful.” *Parent, Hunter school*

“They are better than the old reports but not perfect.” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*

“I think that if we wanted a positive story for every child it would be back to the ‘working towards’ reports, the ones without specific detail really. It’s in the nature of having in-depth reporting. Self-esteem is very important but there’s a lot to work on in these reports. There are more tools in these reports to work with your child and that’s a positive aspect of education.” *Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school*
It was generally known by parents that independent, systemic and non-systemic schools throughout NSW had produced and distributed graded written reports at the end of Semester 1 this year. A number of parents raised issues about non-government schools being able to efficiently provide the new reports much earlier than government schools.

One parent participant was the community nurse attached to a number of schools in the region and the coordinator of a project for financially and socially disadvantaged families. She outlined the case for honest, graded, ‘tell it how it is’ reporting. She said:

“…The families with whom I work live in challenging circumstances. The issues they face on a daily basis are far more severe than any school report could hold. They confront life in caravan parks, homelessness and substance dependency. These parents want their children to be able to read and write efficiently and well. They want them to progress at school. In some cases their child’s school provides new social models and educational opportunities that can help change the cycle of their lives. These families want to be told the truth in plain English and the grades help them see what is happening with their child’s learning. If their child gets a D or E, the school and the family can discuss ways of assisting that child to improve his or her levels of learning."

Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

The grades help communicate information to parents which they need. These children don’t stay at school as long as other children. So when they are there, they need clear guidelines in written reports, not confusing descriptions that they can’t understand.”

Reports for students with D or E grades

Parents who had received a report that included their child receiving a D or E grade said they were pleased that they had been told that information in a concise way. They were motivated to get as much information from the parent teacher interview as possible, after the reports had been distributed. They wanted to know what could be put in place at school for their child and how they could assist at home.

Some parents commented that they had believed there had been learning problems for quite some time, but it had not been acknowledged in previous old style reports. Others said that they had thought their child had challenges with certain subjects and the new graded reports confirmed their concerns.

Parents valued the honesty and clarity of the new reports. They said that the changes in reporting appeared to make it easy for teachers to inform parents more clearly about the strengths and weaknesses of their child’s learning.

Parent quotes

“I have one child who got C’s and one child who got D’s. That’s hard. But a lot has come out of meeting with the teacher and we came up with some ideas and ways we can help her. She’s on an extra program now and we’ll see how she’s going in three months. The old report didn’t pick this up and no teacher told us. It’s been a problem for quite some time. The reports are good and the follow up interview with the teacher is vital.”

Parent, southern metropolitan Sydney school

“We definitely appreciated the honesty of these new reports. Our child got a D grade. We were concerned that we hadn’t been told about this before. It wasn’t until this report that we were told. It must be hard mustn’t it? I’m always at the school doing things. The teachers might have found it hard to say. We’re getting help through the school now and doing extra at home.”

Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“Really with the graded reports there should be no surprises, but there can be.”

Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“The report provides a tool for parents to sit down and see what’s happening in school. I’m on the end of the ‘E stuff’, I wouldn’t be part of a large group of parents at this school.”

Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school
Parents appreciate being kept informed

Parents said a briefing on the new reports provided by the principal gave them crucial information about features of the new report, including the definitions of the A to E grades. These educational sessions for parents highlighted important issues: there was no pass or fail; C was on track; each subject area received a teacher comment; there was no set number or spread of A to E grades a teacher or school has to use; there were two written graded reports per year and the school still conducted parent teacher interviews where more information could be shared.

Parents saw their school’s newsletter as a valuable way that information about the new graded reports could be disseminated to the school community. Some schools had already published information with updates about the new reports: one principal had circulated information to the school community in 26 out of 40 newsletters in the year leading up to distribution of A to E reports. At this particular school, teachers issued the new reports at the end of Semester 1 this year. They believed that the parent teacher interview after the issue of the report was an important and very positive adjunct to the new reports.

In some schools the P&C Association provided another forum for proper, responsible distribution of information from DET and the Federation of P&C Associations of NSW. They thought that a discussion led by the principal based on the facts would educate a significant group of parents within the school community.

Parent quotes

“The transition to these new reports was handled very well at our school. Parents were involved with the process and the product.” Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“Just educate parents that ‘C is good, on track’…” Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“Preparation and implementation of the new reports are both so important: they contribute to the report’s success.” Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“I think that the most important things for parents to know is that C means on track, there is no pass or fail, there is no set spread of A to E grades that a teacher or school has to use. Also that there are comments from the teacher included in the reports and that we still have the same access to parent/teacher and student interviews and information forums.” Parent, Hunter school

“The school newsletter is really important, I mean giving information and updates to parents about the new reports.” Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school

“At our school we had a seminar given by the principal, telling us what the new reports were all about. It was an hour long and I think it gave us what we needed to know. You could have private appointments with the principal as well. Then after the reports parents had a 15-minute meeting with the teacher. But we can book in to speak to our teachers at any time. This part of it is essential.” Parent, northern metropolitan Sydney school
Preparation of students prior to report distribution

Parents considered that their principal or class teacher should inform students about the change in school reports. They were especially concerned that students were told and that they understood: ‘C was on track’ and ‘there was no pass or fail’.

They thought that material produced by DET that publicised the new reports should consider students as part of the audience and produce images and text accordingly.

Parent quotes

“I trust that our children are going to be told how it all works, because they play the important role and they are coming home with the news. They have to be informed, they’re participating in the process! Can you imagine getting an appraisal at work but not being informed about it or the assessment tools? I’m sure at our school they’ll talk to the children about it first.”

Parent, Hunter school

Comprehensive brochure for parents prior to report distribution

Focus group participants were asked to comment on a brochure prepared for parents by DET about the new written reports. They considered that the parent brochure was an important introduction to the new written reports and was:

- a useful tool
- well written and informative
- needed to be used in conjunction with other education such as a parent/principal education session on the A-E graded reports
- may be more thoroughly read if distributed by the school
- should be distributed prior to receiving the new reports
- clear and easy to read
- easy to understand, especially for people whose first language was not English
- useful for people who didn’t go to meetings, information nights or read school newsletters
- good that it had translated fact sheets available through school and DET offices but it would be interesting to monitor the number of calls that were made to the interpreter service number on the back cover.
4.0 Key recommendations

The following key recommendations were prepared after:

- Feedback from parent discussion groups prior to receiving graded reports.
- Feedback from parent discussion groups after receiving graded reports.
- Participation in the preparation of material and resources for the introduction of the new graded reports since April 2006.
- Research and preparation of communication resources for parents, principals and schools re the new graded reports since April 2006.
- Discussions with the Executive Director of Strategic Relations and Communications, Director of Curriculum K-12, General Manager of Learning and Development, Director of Communication and Principal Liaison Officers.
- Discussion with the Executive of the Federation of Parents and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales and Regional Councillors.
- Observation of the policy and position of the NSW Primary Principals’ Association.
- Observation of the policy and position of the Catholic Education Office, Sydney.
- Observation of the policy and position of the NSW/ACT Independent Education Union.
- Observation of the policy and position of the NSW Teachers Federation and the promotion of their position on the new graded reports.

Recommendations A (1-2)

To assist a smooth transition to the new graded reports, parents and students should be informed about the new reports through:

1. Promotion and advertising through print media, radio and television.
2. Information to parents through all levels of DET and P&C Associations in schools.

Recommendations B (3-9)

To assist a smooth transition to the new graded reports, parents and students should be informed about the new reports through a variety of communication tools:

3. School newsletters publishing information and updates on the implementation of the new graded reports both regularly and frequently.
4. Principals conducting information sessions for parents about the reports. These could be at different times to cater for different family arrangements. For example there could be a one hour day session and evening session.
5. Principals or class teachers informing students about the features of the new report stressing that ‘C is on track’.
6. P&C Association meetings providing a venue for parents to be informed by the principal about the new reports. Information updates could be given at each meeting.
7. Schools introducing the new report toward the end of Semester 2 should do so leaving sufficient time to maximize attendance of parents at the parent teacher interviews before end of year activities and festivities.
8. Parent teacher interviews allowing for a discussion about the assistance a child might need at school and at home.
9. Supportive information about the new reports, in and around the community, through print, radio and television coverage. This would assist the new reports to get the attention it deserved from parents and students.

Recommendations C (10)

10. Further discussion groups could be conducted with parents whose children have received new reports from schools in the:

- New England region (Tamworth) or Western NSW (Bathurst)
- Other areas in Sydney and throughout New South Wales.
Memorandum to all school principals

Reporting To Parents – DN/06/00303

The Department is introducing important changes to student reporting. These are:

- The NSW Minister for Education and Training has written to the Federal Minister seeking her agreement for schools to use A-E grades OR the equivalent word description to describe student achievement;
- The Government will prevent data collected from individual student reports from being used to generate “league tables”, as is currently the case for BST, ELLA and SNAP information; and
- Additional support will be available to schools to assist them to prepare reports, and principals may approach their School Education Director to discuss options.

I also advise that the Federal Minister for Education recently rejected the NSW approach of exempting students in Years 1 and 2 from receiving achievement grades in subjects other than Mathematics and English.

The Commonwealth Government has advised that Federal funding will be withheld if NSW government schools do not comply with their requirements. As Federal funding for NSW government schools totals $3.7bn over four years, schools will need to meet the Commonwealth requirements to ensure the funding is maintained.

**Schools may choose to use A to E grades or the equivalent word description**

Under the plan forwarded to the Federal Minister, schools will be able to use either the A-E grades or the equivalent word description to describe each student’s level of achievement against the five-point achievement scale developed by the Board of Studies. In other words, to prepare student reports, schools have the option to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use this grade</th>
<th>Or use this word</th>
<th>To describe this achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>The student has an extensive knowledge and understanding of the content and can readily apply this knowledge. In addition, the student has achieved a very high level of competence in the processes and skills and can apply these skills to new situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>The student has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the content and a high level of competence in the processes and skills. In addition, the student is able to apply this knowledge and these skills to most situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>The student has a sound knowledge and understanding of the main areas of content and has achieved an adequate level of competence in the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>The student has a basic knowledge and understanding of the content and has achieved a basic level of competence in the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>The student has an elementary knowledge and understanding in few areas of the content and has achieved very limited competence in some of the processes and skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools that choose to use the word descriptions of achievement will need to indicate on each student’s report that the five point achievement scale used in the report equates to the A to E scale.

By way of comparison, this is similar to the approach that the Commonwealth Minister has required of South Australian government primary schools which will be using word descriptions to describe student achievement.

**Government to protect student report data**
The NSW Government has determined that data collected from individual student reports will be protected from Freedom of Information requests. This will provide the same protection that applies to data collected from state-wide tests such as the Basic Skills Test.

**New arrangements for reporting student achievement in Years 1 and 2**
The Commonwealth Government rejected the NSW approach to exempting students in Years 1 and 2 from receiving achievement grades for HSIE, Science and Technology, PDHPE and Creative Arts.

Schools will need to meet the Commonwealth requirement to ensure that NSW government schools continue to receive Federal funding.

To meet this requirement, schools will need to summarise a student’s overall achievement in each KLA using A to E or the equivalent word description (outstanding, high, sound, basic or limited) as is required for English and Mathematics.

As always, teachers will need to grade student performance according to their own knowledge of the student and their achievement of syllabus outcomes.

**Student reporting software**
To assist schools to prepare student reports, upgraded School Based Student Reporting (SBSR) software will be available to schools on 16 October.

Schools are not required to use the Department’s software and may use other tools as long as the student reports contain the required information.

The SBSR software will provide a web based template that teachers can use to prepare reports. Initially it will support the preparation of reports that use the A-E grades, but a further version will be available shortly after the commencement of Term 4, to support schools that choose to use the word descriptions in their reports.

Regional support teams are receiving training on the software this week and will be available to assist schools from the start of Term 4.

Features of the SBSR software can be found at http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/software/index.htm

**Support for schools preparing to issue new reports**
To prepare to issue the new reports, schools in 2006 will have analysed their current reports against the new requirements to identify what changes need to be made.

Given that the reporting requirements reflect quality current practice, it is anticipated that most schools will need to make some adjustments, but not wholesale change.

Schools will build on the procedures that they have used in previous years to write and issue reports. These procedures include steps to develop and review constructive teacher comments and consistency of ‘grading’ within a year group.

These procedures typically involve professional dialogue between staff, common preparation and marking of assessment activities, moderation activities and shared understanding of syllabus standards. All of these activities will readily apply to preparation of the new reports.

Throughout Terms 1, 2 and 3 more than 8,000 school leaders and teachers have attended a variety of workshops designed to inform schools of the changes and to assist them in preparing for the new reports. Many have also attended workshops conducted by Regions and by the Board of Studies.

In addition, comprehensive advice on Departmental requirements for student reporting can be found at www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/curric_plan/PD20050290.shtml

Materials (including Powerpoint presentations) from workshops are also available at www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/timetoteach/supportmat
Further advice may also be obtained from the Board of Studies at www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au reflecting professional development sessions run by the Board.

Schools that have concerns about meeting the 2006 requirement should contact their School Education Director immediately to discuss options for additional support. This support could involve advice and guidance from School Education Directors, consultancy support from Regional personnel or support from state office directorates.

**Industrial Relations Commission direction to the NSW Teachers Federation**

On Friday 22 September the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) directed the Federation to take all steps to remove any industrial action in connection with the implementation of the new reporting requirements. A copy of the IRC Direction is attached to this memo.

**Further information on student reports**

Schools should prepare the new reports in Term 4, 2006. It is acknowledged that the new reports will require some teachers to record their professional judgement of their students’ achievement in a different way. The co-operation and support of schools will ensure parents receive plain English reports this year and guarantee Commonwealth funding for our schools.

For further information on the new requirements for reporting to parents, as part of the Curriculum planning and programming, assessing and reporting to parents K-12 policy, please contact:

- Director Curriculum (02) 9886 7602 or robert.randall@det.nsw.edu.au
- Assistant Director Curriculum (02) 9886 7746 or robyn.mamouney@det.nsw.edu.au
- Manager, School Based Assessment and Reporting (02) 9886 7765 or kerry.long@det.nsw.edu.au

Bulletin 8, which will update you on SBSR software, will be in schools for the beginning of Term 4.

Please ensure that all teaching staff receive a copy of this memorandum.

**Andrew Cappie-Wood**

*Director-General of Education and Training*

*Managing Director of TAFE NSW*

26 September 2006
Common Grade Scale – NSW Board of Studies

All schools in NSW will report student achievement in (Early) stage 1 to Stage 5 using the Common Grade Scale.

The Common Grade Scale aligns A – E against defined standards. The standards reflect those described within syllabus documents.

The Common Grade Scale is to be used for reporting achievement for each subject/Key Learning Area (KLA) studied.

The NSW Board of Studies is developing support for schools in implementing the K -10 Common Grade Scale on its Assessment Resource Centre website
http://arc.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au

Provision of comparative data

The regulations require schools to provide comparative data of the child's achievement relative to the achievement of the child's peer group at the school by at least quartiles.

In correspondence to the NSW Catholic Education Commission (dated 22 Dec 2005) Dr Brendan Nelson, Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training, approved the following arrangements as alternatives to quartile ranking to apply for NSW Catholic schools.

Option 1

Written information on the student report shows the number of students achieving the grades A – E.

Option 2

When student reports do not provide comparative information they must include one of the following statements in writing.

You can ask the school to provide you with written information that clearly shows your child's achievement in the subjects studied in comparison to that of other children in the child's peer group at the school.

This information will show which 25 per cent of his/her peer group your child is performing.

Or

You can ask the school to provide you with written information that clearly shows your child's achievement in the subjects studied in comparison to that of other children in the child's peer group in the school.

This information will show you the number of students in each of the achievement levels A – E.

For student reports of students who have undertaken BST, ELLA and SNAP test

The Regulations indicate that if the child undertakes standard assessments in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy (i.e. BST, ELLA, and SNAP tests) in Year 3, 5 or 7 then one of the student reports for that year must include the test results against appropriate national benchmarks.

The reports provided to parents of students in Catholic schools by the testing agency comply with this requirement.

However, the written student report provided by the school to parents of students in Year 3, 5 and 7 should refer to the BST/SNAP/ ELLA (or equivalent) reports.

The following wording provides an example of what is to be used:

In October, you received a report on your child's performance in the Year 3 Basic Skills Test.

‘This report provided information on how your child performed in the test compared to other students in the State and also indicated:

whether (or not) your child achieved the national benchmark in reading, writing and numeracy.

what skill band your child achieved in reading, writing, language (including spelling) and numeracy

what the average achievement was for students at this school in reading, writing, language (including spelling) and numeracy.’

A similar statement is to be used, as appropriate, for Year 5 and Year 7.

Reporting student achievement in Kindergarten

The Minister’s letter stated ‘it is highly desirable that parents (of Kindergarten children) be informed of their child’s progress to enable them to assist their children’s learning and development.’ It is the Minister’s belief that ‘diagnostic assessment and reporting on children’s progress to parents is crucial in the early years where reporting of this kind may help in identifying children who may be in need of assistance.’

The Minister indicated that, for 2006 alternative arrangements for reporting the first year of school could be used.

For Sydney Catholic schools the following will apply in 2006:

1 Parents of Kindergarten students will be provided with two written reports as required by the regulations.

2 Student achievement in Kindergarten will be reported using teacher comments with reference to the NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements for both written reports.
These written reports will not report overall achievement for each KLA using the A-E grading scale.

Comparative information will not be available to parents of Kindergarten students.

Schools will need to have in place appropriate diagnostic processes to identify students who are at risk and who may be in need of assistance.

The reporting to parents in Kindergarten will be monitored and evaluated during 2006.

Parents will have opportunities to meet with the child’s teacher to discuss their child’s development and achievements in more detail.

Schools need to ensure the timely and honest reporting of the development and achievements of Kindergarten children in both academic and non-academic areas through parent-teacher interviews and the written reports.

Students with Disabilities

The Minister’s letter to the Catholic Education Commission indicated that he believed a ‘sensible approach’ needs to be taken to ensure that the most appropriate assessment and reporting arrangements are put in place. It was the Minister’s expectation that ‘parents of students with disabilities would continue to receive a report of their child’s progress against their individual learning program (or equivalent)’.

ESL Students

The Minister’s letter also indicated that ‘a sensible approach’ would need to be taken in terms of teachers and schools providing parents with an explanation of ESL reporting arrangements in the report. It was the understanding of the Minister that ‘All parents, including those from a non-English speaking background, want to be assured about their child’s achievement’.

Religious Education

For 2006 schools are to continue to report on Religious Education as they have been doing.

Support and advice

The CEO, Sydney has been proactive in expressing concerns about the reporting requirements and the implementation timeline.

- There has been consultation with groups of Principals and parents about the requirements, issues and the support required.
- Advice has been developed and made available through SAO and through Curriculum OnLine http://www.deo.sydney.edu.au/portal/site/curriculum/

Primary Curriculum Advisers have participated in an interdiocesan forum examining the regulations and the issues for Catholic schools in NSW.

A resource package, Assessment and Reporting in the Catholic Primary School, has been developed and distributed to primary schools.

Discussions are underway to use technology to assist schools in providing written reports to parents. A trial will occur during 2006.

It is recognised that the use of the A-E grade scale will not necessarily be an easy adjustment. Our teachers will require support and training in its use over the next few years. The CEO is committed to providing that support.

I trust that this Bulletin clarifies the implementation of the Australian Government’s requirements for plain English reporting. I do not underestimate the challenge involved. It is important that our students remain the focus of these new procedures.

For further advice contact

Primary
Regional Primary Curriculum Advisers or Franceyn O’Connor (02) 9568 8218.

Secondary
Regional Secondary Curriculum Advisers or Tim McMullen (02) 9568 8244.

Yours sincerely

Br Kelvin Canavan, fms
Executive Director of Schools
Catholic Education Office, Sydney
38 Renwick Street
PO Box 217, Leichhardt 2040
Telephone (02) 9569 6111
Facsimile (02) 9550 0052
Discussion groups included parents with children attending the following schools:

- Arncliffe West Infants School
- Bardwell Park Infants
- Blacktown High School
- Blacktown South Public School
- Blacktown West Public School
- Blaxland High School
- Booragul Public School
- Burwood Girls High School
- Camdenville Public School
- Erskine Park High School
- Goulburn Public School
- Hunter School of Performing Arts
- James Erskine Public School
- Jamison High School
- Jamisontown Public School
- Jasper Rd Public School
- Kellyville Ridge Public School
- Kogarah High School
- Lake Macquarie High School
- Maitland Public School
- Mariyong South Public School
- Morpeth Public School
- Mount Riverview Public School
- Newtown High School of the Performing Arts
- Nillo Infants School
- North Newtown Public School
- Paxton Public School
- Pendle Hill Public School
- Quakers Hill High School
- Quakers Hill Public School
- Richmond Public School
- Rutherford Public School
- Ryde East Public School
- Summer Hill Public School
- Tallong Public School
- Ultimo Public School
- Undercliffe Public School
- Valentine Public School
- William Dean Public School
- Warners Bay High School
Parents have their say

Bronwyn Ridgeway
Consultant Coordinator of parent discussion groups on new written reports

August 2006