

**SAVE OUR SCHOOLS**

**Research Paper**

**Local Area School Comparisons are  
'Simplistic' and Unfair League Tables**

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## Overview

Australian education ministers claim to be opposed to ‘simplistic’ and ‘arbitrary’ league tables. Yet, they have agreed to publish simplistic local area school comparisons. Governments have agreed that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority will publish the results of all schools within yet to be defined local areas across Australia on its website.

These local area school performance comparisons will not formally rank schools, but for all intents and purposes they are league tables as it will be a simple matter for anyone to rank the results in each area.

The Australian Government’s position on local area school comparisons is totally contradictory.

The Prime Minister has stated that that he does not want to see Geelong Grammar compared with a school such as Nambour High, where he went to school, because of their vastly different resources and socio-economic circumstances. He says that comprehensive government schools in the outer suburbs of metropolitan cities should not be compared with “the likes of Geelong Grammar and the rest”.

Yet, this is precisely what local area school comparisons will do. While the Prime Minister does not want Geelong Grammar compared to Nambour High he has agreed to compare Geelong Grammar with government and Catholic schools in its local area of Corio and Norlane. These suburbs are amongst the most disadvantaged areas in Australia, even more so than Nambour.

Such “arbitrary” and unfair comparisons will be repeated in local regions around Australia. Government and private schools in low socio-economic areas in northern Melbourne, the outer north-west of Melbourne, the eastern suburbs of Sydney, inner Western Sydney, Newcastle, northern Brisbane, South Brisbane, south-west Brisbane, south-east Brisbane, South Adelaide, north-west Perth, inner South Perth, the area around Fremantle and the Belconnen area of Canberra are likely to be compared with other government and private schools serving high and very high socio-economic status communities in these areas (see table).

For example, a local area school performance table for the eastern suburbs of Sydney would likely compare some of the most prestigious schools in Australia such as Cranbrook, Moriah College and The Scots College with the government primary school in Daceyville, one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia.

Similarly, a local area school performance table for the inner west of Sydney would likely compare wealthy the Newington College and the academically selective Fort St. High School with government schools in the low SES suburbs of Marrickville and Campsie.

In South Adelaide, local area school comparisons could compare the higher socio-economic former schools of the Federal Education Minister and the Climate Change Minister with government and Catholic schools in very low socio-economic status suburbs such as Mitchell Park.

The Prime Minister and his Education Minister have themselves shown why such local area school comparisons should be opposed. The Prime Minister has said that “simplistic” league tables do not tell us how well a school is performing and that “everyone understands” why a private school on Sydney’s north shore might do better than a comprehensive government high school in the outer suburbs”. Julia Gillard has said that “I understand that league tables based on raw test scores can create a misleading picture”.

The fact is that local area school comparisons will largely reflect the socio-economic background of school communities. They will be more a measure of the family background of a school’s students than the quality of its teaching. They are ‘simplistic’ and ‘unfair’ because factors outside a school’s control strongly influence school results.

Even the Government’s key education advisory organisation, the Australian Council for Educational Research, considers local area school comparisons to be inappropriate.

At the very least, the Federal Education Minister should publish the boundaries of all local areas together with a list of schools to be included in each local area before any comparisons of test results are published. The public should have the opportunity to assess whether the Minister is meeting her own criteria of not publishing ‘simplistic’, ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unfair’ comparisons.

Apart from the unfairness of comparing results between schools with vastly different resources and family backgrounds, there are several other compelling reasons why local area school comparisons should not be published. They incur many of the same problems as full league tables.

Local area school comparisons are likely to encourage schools to select more students who will boost their ranking and reduce access for lower achieving students. This has been a common response to school comparisons overseas. As a result, many parents from low income or certain ethnic backgrounds are likely to find it more difficult to gain access to their school of choice in their region, whether government or private, and some may even be denied access to the school closest to home.

Private schools and high demand or selective government schools have a unique ability to select their enrolments. For many private schools, charging fees alone ensures a more advantaged clientele. Selection of students leads to greater social segregation between schools in local areas and a hierarchy of schools serving different social groups.

Local area school comparisons are likely to harm education in several ways. The competitive pressure placed on schools to maintain or improve their ranking will encourage them to devote more time to the subjects that are tested. Other subjects such as science, history, social studies, languages, arts and music, physical education and health could then receive much less time. This is established practice in other countries which publish school performance tables.

A particular concern in local areas is that increased competition for better rankings will undermine collaboration and co-operation between schools. Schools will be reluctant to share successful practices with other schools if it means those schools could leapfrog them in public comparisons of performance.

Some of the tactics used to boost school results can also harm the education of the lowest achieving students. One such tactic is to devote more time to students who are on the cusp of proficiency benchmarks at the expense of low achieving students. This too is now a common practice overseas.

Another reason to discard local area school comparisons is that schools often resort to rigging their results under the competitive pressure to improve their ranking. This further reduces the reliability of school performance results as a guide of school quality for parents and the public can be misled as to true quality of schools in their local area.

For all these reasons, publishing local area school comparisons is likely to be counter-productive. Far from driving education improvement as Julia Gillard hopes, it will humiliate many government and private schools serving highly disadvantaged communities by comparing them with some of the wealthiest and advantaged schools in Australia. As well, it will lead to strategic behaviour to manipulate school results in ways that will damage education and mislead parents and the public about their local schools.

## Simplistic Local Area School Comparisons

<b>Metropolitan Region</b>	<b>High SES Suburb/School</b>	<b>Low SES Suburb/School</b>
Northern Geelong	<i>Geelong Grammar (113)</i>	Corio (7), Norlane (2), Bell Park (13) <i>Several Govt primary (PS) &amp; secondary schools (SS)</i> <i>St. Thomas Aquinas (75)</i> <i>St. Francis Xavier's (80)</i> <i>Holy Family PS (87)</i>
Inner Northern Melbourne	Parkville (84), North Carlton (89), North Fitzroy (72) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>Fitzroy Community School (123)</i>	Collingwood (8), Fitzroy (26), Flemington (5) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>St. Joseph's (79)</i> <i>Sacred Heart School (85)</i>
Outer North-west Melbourne	Keilor (87), Keilor North (79), Taylors Lakes (80) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>Penleigh &amp; Essendon Grammar (109)</i>	St. Albans (5), Kings Park (6), Delahey (20) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>Holy Eucharist School (86)</i> <i>Sacred Heart School (87)</i> <i>Resurrection School (88)</i> <i>Catholic Regional College, St. Albans (88)</i>
Eastern Sydney	Bronte (94), Clovelly (97), Coogee (94), Randwick (84) <i>Several Govt PS</i> <i>Cranbrook School (128)</i> <i>Moriah College (127)</i> <i>The Scots College (126)</i> <i>Reddam House (124)</i> <i>St. Anthony's (122)</i>	Daceyville (2), Eastlakes (12) <i>2 Govt PS</i>
Inner Western Sydney	<i>Newington College (119)</i> <i>Fort St. High School (selective govt SS)</i>	Marrickville (24), Campsie (10), Belmore (13) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i>
Newcastle	Cardiff Heights (82), Garden Suburb (91), Hamilton East (81), Merewether (80), Merewether Heights (97), New Lambton Heights (96), Newcastle (82) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>Newcastle Grammar School (111)</i> <i>Holy Family PS (114)</i> <i>St. Joseph's PS (110)</i>	Carrington (16), Fern Bay (4), Hamilton South (15), Jesmond (6), Mayfield (12), Mayfield East (15), Stockton (4), Tighes Hill (17), Waratah (13), Wallsend (22), Windale (1) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; SS</i> <i>St. Pius X PS (76)</i> <i>St. Peter's PS (89)</i>
Northern Brisbane	Aspley (78), Everton Hills (85) <i>Several Govt PS &amp; HS</i> <i>Northside Christian College (110)</i>	Zillmere (15), Chermside (20) <i>Govt PS &amp; HS</i>

	Hamilton (89), Hendra (84) 2 Govt PS <i>Our Lady of Help Christians School (112)</i>	Pinkenba (18) Govt PS
South Brisbane	Coorparoo (81), Hawthorne (95), Norman Park (91) Several Govt PS <i>Somerville House (118)</i> <i>Our Lady of Mount Carmel (118)</i> <i>Anglican Church Grammar School (117)</i>	Dutton Park (26), Woolloongabba (30) 2 Govt PS
South-west Brisbane	Jindalee (92), Middle Park (94), Mount Ommaney (97), Sinnamon Park (91) 3 Govt PS & 1 HS <i>St. Aidan's Anglican Girls' School (123)</i> <i>Christ the King School (120)</i>	Acacia Ridge (8), Carole Park (2), Darra (12), Inala (2), Richlands (10), Wacol (4) Several Govt PS & 1 HS <i>Aboriginal and Islander Community School (87)</i> <i>St. Marks Catholic School (85)</i>
South-east Brisbane	Cornubia (93), Shailer Park (88), Springwood (76) Govt PS & SS <i>John Paul College (105)</i>	Logan Central (3), Kingston (5), Loganlea (6), Woodridge (4), Eagleby (6), Slacks Creek (16) Several Govt PS & SS <i>St. Pauls PS (82)</i> <i>Groves Christian College (89)</i>
South Adelaide	Highgate (91), Malvern (95), Netherby (94), Torrens Park (93), Unley Park (98) Several Govt PS & HS <i>Scotch College (118)</i> <i>Mercedes College (118)</i> <i>St. John's Grammar (116)</i>	Edwardstown (11), Mitchell Park (8), Morphettville (10), Oaklands Park (13), Plympton Park (18), Ascot Park (24) Several Govt PS & 1 HS
North-west Perth	Carine (97), Coolbinia (90), Duncraig (95), Gwelup (97), Karrinyup (87), Marmion (96), Wembley (85), Wembley Downs (96) Several Govt PS & HS <i>Hale School (120)</i> <i>Holy Rosary School (115)</i> <i>Our Lady of Grace (116)</i> <i>St. Mary's Anglican Girls' School (117)</i> <i>Chrysalis Montessori School (116)</i> <i>Bold Park Community School (120)</i>	Balga (5), Girrawheen (8), Glendalough (18), Mirrabooka (7), Nollamara (18), Osborne Park (22) Several Govt PS & HS

Inner South Perth	Como (77), Kensington (83), South Perth (89) 3 Govt PS <i>St. Columba's School (119)</i> <i>Wesley College (116)</i> <i>Penrhos College (115)</i>	Bentley (9) <i>Govt PS</i> <i>Clontarf Aboriginal College (SAS)</i> <i>St. Clare's School (SAS)</i> <i>Sowilo Community HS (SAS)</i>
Fremantle and East of Fremantle	Ardross (93), Attadale (97), Bateman (94), Booragoon (91), East Fremantle (87), Kardinya (86), Melville (87), Mt. Pleasant (95) <i>Several Govt PS</i> <i>St. Benedict's School (118)</i> <i>All Saints College (115)</i> <i>Mel Maria Catholic PS (114)</i> <i>Yidarra Catholic PS (114)</i>	Coolbellup (11), Hamilton Hill (15), Hilton (16) 3 Govt PS
Belconnen – Canberra	Aranda (97), Bruce (99), Fraser (92), Hawker (95), Weetangera (100) <i>Several Govt PS</i> <i>Radford College (123)</i>	Charnwood (34) <i>Govt PS</i>
South Canberra	Forrest (100), Red Hill (90) <i>Several Govt PS</i> <i>Canberra Boys' Grammar (125)</i> <i>Canberra Girls' Grammar (125)</i> <i>St. Bede's Primary (128)</i>	Lower Narrabundah <i>Govt K-2 PS</i>

**Notes:**

1. Suburb and school SES scores are measured on a different scale and are not comparable. The suburb SES scores are percentage points (percentiles) and are taken from the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage. School SES scores are scaled around a median of 100 and derived from the published scores for the Commonwealth Government's SES funding model.
2. High SES suburbs are defined as those ranked in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above. Low SES suburbs are defined as those in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile or below.
3. High SES schools are defined as those with an SES score of 110 and above as determined by the Commonwealth SES funding measure. Low SES schools are defined as those with an SES score below 90. Government schools are not ranked by the Commonwealth SES funding scheme.
4. The schools indicated, especially private schools, may draw from a broader area than their local suburb.

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## 1. Local Area Comparisons are League Tables

Under the National Education Agreement signed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments a range of information on government and private schools will be published on a central website by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. This includes the literacy and numeracy results and a range of other information for each school.

Many Australian education ministers claim that they are opposed to ‘simplistic’ comparisons of school results and that such results will not be published by governments, even if they are by other organisations. The protocols agreed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs on 12 June state:

Governments will not publish simplistic league tables or rankings, and will put in place strategies to manage the risk that third parties may seek to produce such tables or rankings.

The Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, has repeatedly given assurances that reporting school results will not lead to league tables. For example, she told the Independent Schools Council of Australia last year that “I want to emphasize that these will not lead to the creation of dumb league tables that tell us little” [Gillard 2008a]. In April this year, she said “...there’s no point in reporting on raw scores, or having simplistic league tables” [Gillard 2009b]. More recently, she stated that:

The Rudd Government is not interested in simplistic league tables which rank schools according to raw test scores. [Gillard 2009c]

The NSW Minister for Education, Verity Firth, recently assured the state Parliament that:

...when this data is provided to the Commonwealth it will not be used to rank schools in a simplistic manner. It will not be used to prepare league tables. [Hansard, 18 June 2009]

Even the Prime Minister has entered his own assurance that greater transparency in school reporting “...is not about creating an arbitrary public league table” [Rudd 2008a].

However, the National Education Agreement also provides for comparisons of the performance of each school with other schools in the local community [COAG 2008: para 32]. The Federal Minister for Education has stated on several occasions that parents will be able to compare results for schools in their local area, most recently on Radio 2GB in Sydney: “...you’ll be able to compare schools in your local area” [Gillard 2009e]. The Prime Minister has said:

...what parents want is in a particular geographical area, just say within a wider suburban area, they would like to be able to know how one school is going against the other and we think that’s a fair thing too. [Rudd 2008c]

The proposed template for the new school reports released by the Federal Minister clearly shows that anyone will be able to click on to a list of schools in a given local area and compare their raw results [*Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 2009; *Canberra Times*, 13 June 2009]. The template clearly distinguishes local area school comparisons from so-called ‘like-school’ comparisons.

The Federal Government has not stated how the local areas will be determined and how many schools will be listed in each table. Whether local areas are defined broadly or narrowly, it is clear a table of school results in each local area will be produced for comparative purposes.

While they may not formally rank schools, they will be school performance tables. It will be a simple matter for anyone to cast their eyes down the table of results and rank schools on their performance - after all, this is the purpose of providing them. For all intents and purposes they will be 'simplistic' league tables. To deny that these local area school comparisons will be league tables is playing with semantics.

## 2. Rich Schools will be Ranked Against Poor Schools

The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and other Australian education ministers say they are opposed to "simplistic" league tables because they lead to unfair comparisons between schools facing with vastly different circumstances. For example:

Simplistic league tables don't really tell us how well a school is performing. They don't tell us about the student population that the school started with – and its level of educational advantage. Everyone understands why a private school on Sydney's north shore might do better than a comprehensive government high school in the outer suburbs. [Rudd 2008a]

But what is too simplistic is just comparing a school in the richest suburb in the country with an outback school serving predominantly Indigenous kids and comparing the two of those. That's not going to tell you much. We all know that the school in the richest suburb is going to do better. [Gillard 2008c]

I understand that league tables based on raw test scores can create a misleading picture and make the jobs of principals and teachers that much harder. [Gillard 2009a]

Despite these assurances, the Government is going ahead with local area school comparisons which will pit some of the poorest schools (both government and Catholic schools) in Australia against very high socio-economic status (SES) and wealthy schools in several regions. This is demonstrated by the following examples in Geelong, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Victoria

#### North Geelong

A local area school performance table for northern Geelong, or for the whole of Geelong, will compare government and Catholic schools serving some of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia with Geelong Grammar, one of the most wealthy and elite schools in Australia.

Corio and Norlane are residential and industrial suburbs in northern Geelong. The Shell refinery and Ford are located in this area. These suburbs are amongst the most disadvantaged in Australia. Norlane is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> percentile (percentage point) of the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED) for suburbs across Australia, ranked from one to 100.<sup>2</sup> Corio is in the 7<sup>th</sup> percentile for Australia. These suburbs have a large amount of government

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<sup>1</sup> The Federal Government has not released any information on how local areas are to be defined. The following examples use fairly narrowly defined local areas based on common usage and which minimize the scope for mixing high and low SES suburbs in the same local area. However, if local areas are more broadly defined, for example, by using the administrative districts of state education departments or large geographical regions, the likelihood that the comparisons will involve comparing schools serving high and low SES communities will be much greater.

<sup>2</sup> The IRSED is published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2008). It is based on data from the Census of Population and Housing. The suburb scores are percentage points (percentiles). High SES suburbs are defined in this paper as those ranked in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile or above. Low SES suburbs are defined as those in the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile or below.

housing and about one-quarter of the population were born outside Australia. Just south-west of Norlane is Bell Park which is ranked in the 13<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile.

According to the Victorian State Register of schools, there are 11 schools in Corio and Norlane – 8 government schools, 2 Catholic schools and one Anglican school. The two Catholic schools have amongst the highest proportion of students from low SES families of any private school in Australia as measured for Commonwealth Government SES funding model. St. Thomas Aquinas has a SES score of 75 and St. Francis Xavier a score of 80.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Family Primary School in nearby Bell Park has an SES score of 87.

Corio is also the location of Geelong Grammar School, the Anglican school covering both primary and secondary school years. According to *The Australian* [2 January 2009], Geelong Grammar is the most expensive school in the nation, charging \$28 886 for a Year 12 student.

In 2008, the school raised \$200,000 from parents and the community in its "annual giving" fundraising effort. According to the school's website, the Geelong Grammar School Foundation has raised \$15 million over recent years towards new buildings, including the Wellbeing Centre which cost \$16 million and opened in 2008. The Centre comprises a multi-purpose sports hall, a 25-metre pool, a fitness centre, a dance studio and a medical centre. The Foundation is now raising funds for the conversion of the senior school gymnasium into an indoor cricket centre and rebuilding the yacht club and new sailing boats.

Not only does Geelong Grammar have 'gold plated' facilities, but students are able to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are not available to most families. For example, a squad of 15 cricketers from the school recently toured England and a group of students will spend 3 weeks in Antarctica next December.

In rejecting arbitrary league tables last year, the Prime Minister told the National Press Club last year in answer to a question that an "arbitrary" league table was:

....basically one which would try and line up a comprehensive government school in the outer suburbs of, you know, Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne with the likes of Geelong Grammar and the rest. [Rudd 2008b]

He later stated that he didn't want to see Geelong Grammar compared with a school such as Nambour High, where he went to school because "it's got a different set of, shall we say 'challenges', than Geelong Grammar" [Rudd 2008c].<sup>4</sup>

Yet, it seems perfectly acceptable to the Prime Minister and his education minister that Geelong Grammar is to be compared with very low SES schools in its local area, areas whose SES is even lower than Nambour's. Either the Prime Minister does not understand the nature of the school comparisons that will be made under his own "education revolution" or he has deliberately misled the public about the nature of his government's new school reporting arrangements.

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<sup>3</sup> School SES scores are not comparable with the IRSED rank. School SES scores are scaled around a median of 100 and are derived from the published scores for the Federal Government's SES funding model. They are only available for private schools. High SES schools are defined as those with an SES score of 110 and above and low SES schools are defined as those with an SES score below 90.

<sup>4</sup> Nambour has a very low IRSED score (14<sup>th</sup> percentile), but it is higher than the scores for Corio and Norlane.

## Melbourne northern suburbs

In the area just north of the Melbourne CBD there are schools located in contrasting communities which are likely to be compared in a local area school performance table.

Collingwood, Carlton and Fitzroy are low socio-economic areas. Collingwood is ranked in the 8<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile, Fitzroy in the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile and Carlton in the 27<sup>th</sup> percentile. There are 7 government and private primary schools in these suburbs that will be compared on a local area league table with schools serving nearby well-off communities. Two Catholic primary schools (St. Joseph's and Sacred Heart School) have amongst the highest proportion of students from low SES families of any private school in Australia as measured for Commonwealth Government SES funding model, receiving SES scores of 79 and 85 respectively.

The neighbouring suburbs of North Carlton and North Fitzroy are significantly better off areas, being ranked in the 89<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> IRSED percentiles respectively. There are 5 government and 2 private schools in these suburbs. One of the private schools (Fitzroy Community School) has a very high proportion of students from well-off families and has a SES score of 123.

Debney Park Secondary College is located in Flemington, which is one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia, and is likely to be compared with University High School, a well-known high achieving school in the area. Flemington is ranked in the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of the IRSED for Australia. Debney Park also serves neighbouring suburbs such as Ascot Vale, Kensington and North Melbourne. North Melbourne has a relatively low IRSED score while Ascot Vale and Kensington are less disadvantaged suburbs, especially Kensington.

University High School is located in Parkville but serves neighbouring suburbs such as Carlton, Carlton North, Kensington and North Melbourne. Although a non-selective government school it has a long history of high academic achievement. Many of its students come from the local area north of the CBD, but a significant proportion come from other areas to participate in special programs such as music and as a result of sibling admissions.

Parkville has a low level of disadvantage, being ranked in the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile of the IRSED. Kensington and Carlton North have low levels of disadvantage while Carlton and North Melbourne have high levels of disadvantage.

## Outer north-west Melbourne

The outer north-west of Melbourne between the Calder Freeway and the Western Highway includes a number of medium SES suburbs. It also includes pockets of high SES and very low SES areas virtually side-by-side. As a result, a local area school performance table will inevitably compare the results of schools communities with vastly different resources and education backgrounds.

Keilor, with an SES score in the 87<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile, Keilor North (79<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Taylors Lakes (80<sup>th</sup> percentile) are the main high SES suburbs in the area. There are several government primary and secondary schools in these suburbs and one private school (Penleigh & Essendon Grammar) at Keilor East which has a relatively high SES rank on the Commonwealth SES funding model of 109.

These schools will be compared with several other government and private schools in the low SES suburbs of St. Albans (5<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Kings Park (6<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Delahey (20<sup>th</sup> percentile). The low SES private schools in the area include the Holy Eucharist School with an SES score of 86 on the Commonwealth SES funding model, Sacred Heart School (SES score of 87) Resurrection School (88), and the Catholic Regional College (88), all of which are in St. Albans. St. Peter Chanel School in Deer Park is also a relatively low SES school with a Commonwealth funding score of 91.

## **2.2 New South Wales**

### **Sydney eastern suburbs**

Just to the north-east of Sydney airport are two small suburbs that have amongst the highest levels of disadvantage in Australia. Daceyville has nearly the highest level of disadvantage in Australia, being ranked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> IRSED percentile making. Eastlakes is ranked in the 12<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The two government primary schools in these suburbs are likely to be compared with government schools in the wealthy eastern suburbs of Sydney in a local area school performance table. For example, they could be compared to primary schools in Clovelly in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile, Bronte and Coogee in 94<sup>th</sup> percentile, Randwick ranked in the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile, Bondi in the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile and Waverley in the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile.

If the local area is defined more broadly to cover the eastern suburbs, these schools will be compared against those in Woollahra, Double Bay and Paddington which are ranked in the 96<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile as well as Bellevue Hill, ranked in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The government primary schools in Daceyville and Eastlakes will be compared also with private schools ranked by the Commonwealth Government SES funding model as very high socio-economic status schools. These include Claremont College (SES score of 117), Cranbrook (128), Holy Cross Junior School (122), Moriah College (127), St. Anthony's School (122), St. Charles' School (117), Reddam House (124), The Scots College (126) and Waverley College (117).

Even if comparisons are confined to the less wealthy southern part of this region, they will be stark. Several nearby suburbs have a much higher IRSED ranking than Daceyville or Eastlakes. For example, Kensington is ranked in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile, Kingsford in the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile, Maroubra in the 54<sup>th</sup> percentile and Pagewood in the 57<sup>th</sup> percentile.

### **Inner western Sydney**

Local area school comparisons in the inner west of Sydney are likely to also involve unfair comparisons between government schools and a privileged private school. Newington College in Stanmore could be compared with government schools in Marrickville. Marrickville is in the bottom quartile of the IRSED for Australia and is ranked in the 24<sup>th</sup> percentile. On the other hand, Newington is one of the most elite schools in Australia and serves high income families.

Newington is ranked by the Commonwealth Government SES funding model as being high socio-economic status schools with a score of 119. It is a high fee school charging \$22 170 for Years 11 and 12 in 2009.

In 2008, the Annual Giving Fund raised an additional \$284 322 for the College. The College has also established a tax deductible Foundation in the United States whereby Old Boys and friends of the College who pay USA income tax are able to donate to the College and receive taxation concessions under US income tax legislation through the Australian Independent Schools' USA Foundation.

Depending on how local areas are defined, Newington could be compared with government and private schools in highly disadvantaged suburbs further west such as Belmore (13<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Campsie (10<sup>th</sup> percentile), and Lakemba (7<sup>th</sup> percentile).

It is also possible that government high schools in Marrickville, Belmore and Campsie could be compared with the highly selective Fort St. High School in Petersham.

## Newcastle

Local area school comparisons for Newcastle, or even for a more narrowly defined local area of inner Newcastle, will involve comparing the results of some relatively high SES private schools with government and private schools in some of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia.

There are several suburbs in the older central area of Newcastle which are classified as very low socio-economic status. These include Carrington (16), Fern Bay (4), Hamilton South (15), Jesmond (6), Mayfield (12), Mayfield East (15), Stockton (4), Tighes Hill (17), Waratah (13) and Wallsend (22). There are several government primary schools located in these suburbs.

A local area school performance table would compare the results of these schools with government primary schools in very high SES suburbs nearby, including Hamilton East (81), Merewether (80), Merewether Heights (97), New Lambton Heights (96) and Newcastle (82). It would also compare the results of government primary schools in the low SES suburbs with some high SES private schools in the area such as Newcastle Grammar School (111) in the city centre and Holy Family PS (114) and St. Joseph's PS (110) in Merewether. St. Peter's PS in Stockton (89) would also be compared with government primary schools in the high SES suburbs and the high SES private schools.

If the Newcastle area is defined to include the urban area to the south towards Lake Macquarie, some very low SES schools would be compared to the government and private schools in the very high SES suburbs of Newcastle. For example, Windale is ranked in the 1<sup>st</sup> IRSED percentile. It includes a government and Catholic primary school. St. Pius X Primary School has an SES score of 76, which is one of the lowest in Australia.

## 2.3 Queensland

### North Brisbane

The North Brisbane area has a mixed SES profile, ranging from low to relatively high. Chermside is ranked in the 20<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile, Pinkenba in the 18<sup>th</sup> percentile and Zillmere is ranked in the 15<sup>th</sup> percentile. Several other suburbs in the area have a high SES profile, including Aspley (78<sup>th</sup> percentile), Hamilton (89<sup>th</sup> percentile), Hendra (84<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Wavell Heights (75<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Government primary schools in Chermside, Pinkenba and Zillmere will be compared with other government and private primary schools in the high SES suburbs. They will be compared also with several private primary schools in the area with SES scores on the Commonwealth Government's SES funding scale significantly above the median. For example, Our Lady Help of Christians School in Hendra has an SES score of 112, Northside Christian College in Everton Park has a score of 110 and the Queen of the Apostles Primary School in Stafford and Padua College in Kedron are measured at 109.

As a result, a North Brisbane area league table will compare the government primary schools in Pinkenba and Zillmere with other government and private schools in the area serving higher educated, higher income families.

### South Brisbane

Broadly speaking, the area south of the Brisbane River from the CBD has a medium SES profile. However, the suburbs of Dutton Park and Woolloongabba are moderately low SES (IRSED percentiles of 26 and 30 respectively). Just a few kilometres to the east, Coorparoo is ranked in the 81<sup>st</sup> percentile, Hawthorne in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile and Norman Park in the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile. As a result, a local area league table for this region could result in comparing the results of government schools serving significantly different communities.

In addition, there are several private schools in the area which are ranked as high or relatively high SES schools on the Commonwealth SES funding model. These include Somerville House (118), Our Lady of Mount Carmel School (118), Anglican Church Grammar School (117) and Villanova College (113). The fees for primary students at the Anglican Church Grammar School were \$11 864 in 2009 and \$11 049 for Year 6 at Somerville House. The well-educated, high income background of students at these schools will make it difficult for the government primary school serving the lower SES Dutton Park-Woolloongabba area to compare favourably on a local area performance table.

It is possible that a broad local area school performance table would take in the nearby area further to the south-west across the Brisbane River. This is a very high SES region including suburbs such as Toowong (89<sup>th</sup> percentile), Indooroopilly (92<sup>nd</sup> percentile) and St. Lucia (87<sup>th</sup> percentile). This area is the location of some of the highest SES private schools in Brisbane such as St. Joseph's Nudgee Junior College (125 SES score), Brisbane Boys College (123), Ignatius School (123), St. Peters Lutheran College (123) and the Holy Family Primary School (122). A local area league table including these schools would result in unfair comparisons with lower SES government primary schools across the river.

### South-west Brisbane

There is potential for very unfair comparisons of schools in the south-west of Brisbane, depending on how the boundaries are drawn for performance tables in this region.

The area includes some very low SES suburbs including Acacia Ridge (8<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Carole Park (2<sup>nd</sup> percentile) Darra (12<sup>th</sup> percentile), Durack (14<sup>th</sup> percentile), Goodna (5<sup>th</sup> percentile), Inala (2), Richlands (10<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Wacol (4<sup>th</sup> percentile).

A few kilometres to the north-west are some high to very high SES suburbs along the Brisbane River. These include Jamboree Heights (80<sup>th</sup> percentile), Jindalee (92<sup>nd</sup> percentile), Middle Park (94<sup>th</sup> percentile), Mount Ommaney (97<sup>th</sup> percentile), Seventeen Mile Rocks (95<sup>th</sup> percentile), Sinnamon Park (95<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Sumner (87<sup>th</sup> percentile). Slightly further

north, there are more high SES suburbs such as Chalmer, Fig Tree Pocket, Graceville and Kenmore. There are also a couple of high SES suburbs to the south – Ellen Grove (76<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Forest Lake (73<sup>rd</sup> percentile).

A school performance table for the region would compare the results of several government schools in both the low and high SES suburbs. For example, there are three government primary schools and one high school in the wealthy area south of the Brisbane River. There are many primary schools and a high school in the low income area.

It would also compare two very low SES private schools - the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (SES score of 87) in Acacia Ridge and St. Mark's Catholic School in Inala (SES score 85) - with government and private schools in the high SES suburbs. There are some very high SES private schools in the region that could be included in a local area league table, depending on how the area is defined. These include St. Aidan's Anglican Girls School in Corinda (SES score 123), Christ the King School in Graceville (120), Brisbane Independent School in Kenmore (117) and Brisbane Montessori School in Fig Tree Pocket (121).

### **South-east Brisbane**

The area to the south-east of the Brisbane CBD in the Logan City region is generally a low to medium SES suburban area. Several suburbs are amongst the most disadvantaged in Australia. They include Eagleby (6<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Karawatha (7<sup>th</sup>), Kingston (5<sup>th</sup>), Logan Central (3<sup>rd</sup>) Loganlea (6<sup>th</sup>), and Woodridge (4<sup>th</sup>). There are several government primary and secondary schools in these suburbs. There are also two private schools classified as low SES schools on the Commonwealth SES funding model. These are St. Paul's School (SES score of 82) in Woodridge and Groves Christian College (89) in Kingston.

A local area school performance table would compare these schools against others in some high SES suburbs just to the east of the Pacific Highway such as Cornubia (93<sup>rd</sup> percentile), Shailer Park (88<sup>th</sup>) and Springwood (76<sup>th</sup>). There are three government primary schools and one high school in this area.

There are relatively few private schools in the south-east area and most of them are ranked in the medium SES funding category with scores of between 95 and 105. The school with the highest SES score is John Paul College at Daisy Hill, between Springwood and Shailer Park, with a score of 105. While it is therefore considered as a medium SES score for the purpose of the Commonwealth funding scheme, it has luxurious facilities that stand in stark contrast with those available to the low SES government and private schools in the nearby suburbs. For example, its facilities include a fully-heated 10 lane swimming pool, an indoor sporting complex with sprung floor and world-class sporting ovals. It recently completed a \$17 million refurbishment program.

## **2.4 South Australia**

### **South Adelaide**

There are significant differences in the socio-economic status profile of suburbs in South Adelaide. It varies from very low to medium and very high. As a result, a performance table for the area will compare schools with very different SES composition.

Hamilton Secondary College serves a broad area of low income communities, including Mitchell Park (ranked in the 8<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Morphettville (10<sup>th</sup> percentile), Edwardstown (11<sup>th</sup> percentile), Oaklands Park (13<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Park Holme (14<sup>th</sup> percentile). It also serves slightly higher SES areas such as Clovelly Park (24<sup>th</sup> percentile) and St. Mary's (28<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the medium SES suburbs of Marion (44<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Warradale (54<sup>th</sup> percentile).

On a local area league table for South Adelaide, Hamilton Secondary College will be compared to government high schools such as Unley HS, which Julia Gillard attended, Urrbrae Agricultural HS, Blackwood HS and Mitcham Girls HS. These schools are located at the centre of several suburbs with very high SES profiles. These include Highgate (91<sup>st</sup> IRSED percentile), Malvern (95<sup>th</sup> percentile), Netherby (94<sup>th</sup> percentile), Springfield (100<sup>th</sup> percentile), Torrens Park (93<sup>rd</sup> percentile), Unley Park (98<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Urrbrae (98<sup>th</sup> percentile). Several other suburbs in the area have only slightly lower SES profiles, for example, Hawthorn (81<sup>st</sup> percentile), Kingswood (79<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Mitcham (83<sup>rd</sup> percentile).

Hamilton Secondary College will also be compared with several private schools ranked by the Commonwealth Government SES funding model as very high socio-economic status schools. These include Mercedes College (SES score of 118), St. John's Grammar School (116) and Scotch College (118). Scotch College is the most expensive school in South Australia and has high grade facilities such as a special theatre, music recording studio, two gymnasiums, 11 tennis courts and a heated swimming pool. The Federal Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong, is a former student.

Similarly, a number of government and Catholic primary schools located in the low SES suburbs would be compared with government, Catholic and Independent primary schools serving well educated, high income communities in the South Adelaide area.

## **2.5 Western Australia**

### **North-west Perth**

The area of north-west Perth has a wide socio-economic demographic profile, with several suburbs nearer the coast with a high SES ranking and others further inland with a very low SES ranking. High SES suburbs include Carine (97<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile), Coolbinia (90<sup>th</sup>), Duncraig (95<sup>th</sup>), Karrinyup (87<sup>th</sup>), Gwelup (97<sup>th</sup>), Marmion (96<sup>th</sup>), Warwick (82<sup>nd</sup>), Wembly (85<sup>th</sup>) and Wembley Downs (96<sup>th</sup>). The low SES suburbs include Balga (5<sup>th</sup> percentile), Girrawheen (8<sup>th</sup>), Glendalough (18<sup>th</sup>), Mirrabooka (7<sup>th</sup>), Nollamara (18<sup>th</sup>) and Osborne Park (22<sup>nd</sup>).

There are several government primary and high schools in the high SES suburbs which are likely to be compared with government and primary schools in the very low SES suburbs. Similarly, the latter are likely to be compared also with several high SES private schools in the region. These include Hale School (120) in Wembly Downs, Holy Rosary School (115) in Doubleview, Our Lady of Grace (116) at North Beach, St. Mary's Anglican Girls' School (117) in Karrinyup, Chrysalis Montessori School (116) in Glendalough and Bold Park Community School (120) in Wembley.

## Inner South Perth

Bentley Primary School in South Perth is located in a very low income community which is in the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of the IRSED and so is one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia. It is a small multicultural school with students from all over the world. About one-third of students are from overseas whilst another third are Aboriginals.

Also located in this area is Clontarf Aboriginal College at Waterford, a private school catering for Aboriginal children from 15-18 years of age. This is one of the most highly disadvantaged schools in Australia, being officially recognised as a Special Assistance School automatically entitled to maximum funding under the Commonwealth SES funding model.

Another highly disadvantaged private school in the area is St. Clare's School in Lathlain. It is open to girls of secondary school age who are disengaged from education or who are at risk of disengaging. It too is recognised as a Special Assistance School.

Sowilo Community High School is another Special Assistance private school in the region, formerly located in Cannington and which is now temporarily located in Wilson. Sowilo enrolls young people in need of psychological and emotional support and has a strong youth work component.

A local area school performance table would compare student achievement in these highly disadvantaged schools with students at other schools in the areas from very well-educated and high income families. The high SES suburbs of Como (77<sup>th</sup> percentile), Kensington (83<sup>rd</sup>) and South Perth (89<sup>th</sup>) include three government primary schools and several private schools. The private schools with primary age students include St. Columba's School (119), Wesley College (116), Aquinas College (114) and Penrhos College (115).

## Fremantle and East of Fremantle

The area east of Fremantle contains some contrasting demographic profiles. East Fremantle is in the IRSED 87<sup>th</sup> percentile. The area immediately on the south side of the Swan River includes several high SES suburbs including Ardross (93<sup>rd</sup> percentile), Attadale (97<sup>th</sup>), Booragoon (91<sup>st</sup>), Mt. Pleasant (95<sup>th</sup>) and Melville (87<sup>th</sup>). The area further south includes Kardinya (86<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Bateman (94<sup>th</sup>). However, further south are several low SES suburbs including Coolbellup (11<sup>th</sup> percentile), Hamilton Hill (15<sup>th</sup>) and Hilton (16<sup>th</sup>).

In any local area school performance table, the three government primary schools in the low SES suburbs will be compared with several government and private primary schools in the high SES suburbs. The private primary schools are ranked as high SES schools for the purpose of Commonwealth funding for private schools. These schools include St. Benedict's School (SES score of 118), All Saints College (115), Mel Maria Catholic PS (114) and Yidarra Catholic PS (114).

## 2.6 Australian Capital Territory

### Belconnen

Comparisons of school results in the Belconnen area of Canberra would unfairly compare schools in very different circumstances. It would compare the results of a very high SES private school and several government schools in high SES suburbs with the most disadvantaged K-6 primary school in the ACT.

Charnwood primary school serves one of the most disadvantaged communities in Canberra. Charnwood is ranked in the 34<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile for Australia and in the 4<sup>th</sup> percentile for the ACT. The school is ranked as highly disadvantaged for the purpose of additional priority funding under the ACT Government's School Equity Fund.

Its results will be compared with the government primary school in the next door suburb of Fraser. There is a stark contrast between the socio-economic circumstances of Charnwood and Fraser. Fraser is ranked in the 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile for Australia. Charnwood would also be compared with several other government primary schools a few kilometres to the south which serve very high SES communities, including Aranda (97<sup>th</sup> IRSED percentile for Australia), Bruce (99<sup>th</sup>), Hawker (95<sup>th</sup>) and Weetangera (100<sup>th</sup>).

Charnwood primary school would also be unfairly compared with Radford College in school comparisons for the Belconnen area. Radford College has an SES score of 123 on the Commonwealth SES funding model and is one of the most advantaged schools in Australia in terms of the socio-economic status of families whose children attend the school.

### South Canberra

In Canberra, a local area league table for South Canberra will pit three of the highest SES score schools in Australia against a school serving a highly disadvantaged community with a high proportion of Indigenous students.

Canberra Grammar School and Canberra Girls Grammar have SES scores of 125 and St. Bede's Primary School has a score of 128. Canberra Girls Grammar fees in 2009 are \$10 090 a child for Preparatory and Years 1 and 2 and \$12 075 for Years 5 and 6. It also has an Early Learning Centre for children aged 3-5 and its fees are \$10 300 per child with an additional \$5 705 for full-time before- and after-school care. Fees at Boys Grammar in 2009 are \$11 195 a year for Pre-School and Pre-Kindergarten, \$10 210 for Kindergarten, \$10 750 for Years 1 and 2 and \$12 890 for Years 5 and 6.

In contrast, Narrabundah Primary School has long been one of the two most disadvantaged schools in the ACT. It has a strong Indigenous enrolment and is a centre for the local Indigenous community. The school serves a low income area surrounded by major thoroughfares that is separated from the rest of Narrabundah which is a much higher SES area.

Narrabundah is now an early childhood school catering for children from Birth to 8 years, including early childhood schooling for K-2 students, after having been closed to Years 3-6 at the end of 2008. As NAPLAN only applies to Years 3 and 5 in primary schools a local area table will not be able to directly compare results. However, other indicators of school characteristics and performance will be contrasting schools with vastly different family backgrounds of students.

### **3. Local School Comparisons Will Encourage 'Cream Skimming' and Segregation**

Not only are local area school comparisons likely to be unfair and compare schools in vastly different circumstances, they are likely to induce greater efforts by schools to select or attract students who will boost their ranking. As a result, parents from low income or certain ethnic

backgrounds are likely to find it harder to gain access to their choice of school in their region, whether government or private, and some may even be denied access to the school closest to home. This leads to greater social segregation between schools in local areas and a hierarchy of schools serving different social groups.

There is extensive overseas evidence that competition for enrolments in local areas encourages schools to adopt practices to influence the composition of their enrolments rather than pursue more effective or diverse educational practices.

A favourite strategy is to use formal and informal enrolment criteria to “cream skim” or “cherry pick” students most likely to achieve good results. In England, the misuse of school admission procedures to maximize school results has been a major ongoing issue since the introduction of league tables. Various methods have been used to select certain groups of students and exclude others, such as giving priority to the children of employees, former students, those with a family connection to the school, and selecting a proportion of children on the basis of aptitude/ability in a subject area(s) or on the basis of general ability [West et.al. 2004]. Many schools also required parents to provide supplementary information unrelated to the school’s admissions criteria, such as their occupation, whether the family lived in a hostel or bed and breakfast accommodation and whether parents had refugee status. Many of these practices continue despite government efforts to stamp them out [West et.al. 2009].

A newly published study of public sector religious secondary schools in London has found that selective ‘élite’ schools appear to ‘select out’ low income religious families, thereby displacing them to religious schools with a less affluent composition [Allen & West 2009]. It identified a range of different admissions criteria and practices used by the socially selective schools including school-administered banding, aptitude tests, tests of religious or denominational commitment, primary school references and others that may have contributed to the under-representation of lower ability pupils. Moreover, the hierarchy of schools that has developed also tends to dissuade many parents from even applying to the more selective schools because they believe they will not meet the selection criteria.

...schools’ admissions criteria and practices are important determinants of which pupils are offered places, whether on account of schools attracting applications from certain parents or in terms of the admissions process itself. [Allen & West 2009: 19]

As a result, some parents from low income and ethnic backgrounds continue to be discriminated against in gaining access to some local schools.

This experience has direct relevance for Australia where private schools have control over their enrolments. It suggests that local area school comparisons are likely to lead to even greater selection to protect local area rankings. Such selection processes may also extend to the government sector where some schools are in such high demand that they can effectively choose their own enrolments. Australian governments are unlikely to even attempt to stamp out enrolment discrimination by private and government schools.

Selective enrolment practices tend to increase social segregation between schools. While school populations are often socially segregated by housing patterns competition does not reduce it, indeed, the evidence is that it deepens segregation.

A range of studies show that competition between schools has contributed to increased socio-economic and/or racial segregation in schools in Chile, Denmark, England, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden and the United States [Burgess et.al. 2007, Cobbold 2009]. For example, a recent review of research studies on US charter schools shows that school choice and competition lead to greater racial segregation between schools [Bifulco & Bulkley 2008]. A new study of education markets in Detroit, New Orleans and Washington DC has found that competition between schools for enrolments tend to create hierarchies of schools in education markets serving families of different social backgrounds [Lubienski et.al. 2009].

#### **4. Local School Comparisons May Damage Education**

The responses of schools to the competitive pressure on them to maintain or improve their ranking as a result of local area performance tables may harm student learning in several ways.

It may lead to a greater focus on the tested subjects at the expense of non-tested subjects. . This has already happened in NSW when it mandated additional hours for history and geography (both tested) in Years 7-10. Education authorities in Queensland and Victoria have already started putting pressure on schools to spend more time on test preparation for the subject areas tested.

Overseas evidence shows that schools direct more resources into the tested subjects of literacy and maths while untested subjects such as science, history, social studies, languages, arts and music, physical education and health receive much less time. There is also less teaching of more complex thinking and writing skills.

A major review of the English primary school curriculum published earlier this year by Cambridge University criticised the dominance of a rigid testing regime and its distorting effect on the curriculum [Alexander 2009]. It said that children were receiving an education that was “fundamentally deficient”. It was neither broad nor balanced, and it valued memorization and recall over understanding and inquiry.

A study by the US Center on Education Policy last year showed that since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2001 to require more testing and reporting for reading and maths, average class time in US primary schools on reading increased by 47% and by 37% for maths [McMurrer 2008]. Time on social studies, science, art and music, gym and recess was cut by an average of 145 minutes a week. Recess time was cut by nearly 30%.

A particular concern to schools in local areas is that increased competition for better rankings also undermines collaboration and co-operation between schools. Collaboration between schools is generally seen as an important way to spread innovative approaches and good teaching practice [for example, see Ainscow & West 2006]. However, the extent and potential for this is reduced by the publication of comparative school results. Schools are reluctant to share successful practices with other schools if it means those schools could leapfrog them in public comparisons of performance. For example, a survey by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research found that 38 per cent of schools who faced competition were prepared to share resources or offer mutual support to other schools compared with 58 per cent of schools who did not face competition [Wylie 2006]. A lower ranking for a school could result in a decline in enrolments, less financial resources and greater difficulty in holding and attracting staff.

Increased competition as a result of school comparisons and rankings appears to more lead to standardization rather than innovation in classroom practice and curriculum [Cobbold 2007]. Competition seems just as likely to discourage educational innovation for fear of losing support from parents wanting a traditional academic school program.

Some of the tactics used to boost school results can also harm the education of the lowest achieving students. One such tactic used by schools to boost results quickly is to devote more time to students who are on the cusp of proficiency benchmarks. There is extensive evidence from overseas that schools respond to the pressure to improve their ranking by focusing on students whose gains are likely to make the greatest marginal contribution to their school's overall proficiency rating. For example, a recent study published by the US National Bureau of Economic Research using data from the Chicago public school system demonstrated that school accountability systems involving 'high stakes' testing and reporting provide weak incentives for schools to devote extra attention to students who have no realistic chance of becoming proficient in the short term or to students who are already proficient [Neal & Shanzenbach 2007]. Detailed studies based on Texas and English school results have made similar findings in recent years [Reback 2008, Burgess et.al. 2005; see also Hamilton et.al. 2007].

This evidence suggests that local area school comparisons are likely to result in less attention and support being provided to low achieving students because of the intense pressure on schools to maintain or improve their ranking in the region. It may lead to worse outcomes for low achieving students.

## **5. Local School Comparisons Will Encourage Schools to Rig Their Results**

Just as occurs with full league tables, local area school performance tables are likely to quickly become corrupted by strategic behaviour designed to artificially boost school results. Public comparisons of school results create such competitive pressure on schools to improve rankings that they often resort to rigging their results.

Overseas experience shows that many schools rig their results in various ways, including by poaching high achieving students from other schools, not admitting low achieving students or suspending them on test days, classifying students as exempt from tests, helping students with answers or changing answers. For example, a recent study of an urban district in Texas found that so-called high stakes testing policies that involved reporting school results and rewarded or punished schools based on average student scores created incentives for schools to "game the system" by excluding students from testing and, ultimately, school [Heilig & Darling-Hammond 2008]. In the elementary grades, low-achieving students were disproportionately excluded from taking the Texas standardised tests. The gaming strategies also reduced educational opportunity for African American and Latino high school students.

There is extensive evidence of such strategic behaviour by schools in England and the United States to manipulate their results to boost school rankings [Wilson et.al. 2006, Nichols & Berliner 2008]

Local area comparisons of school results are therefore likely to demonstrate a well known phenomenon in social science research called Campbell's law, which states:

“The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor”.

As a result, the reliability of reported school performance outcomes is reduced and parents and the public can be misled as to true quality of schools in their local area.

## **6. Competition Fails to Increase Student Achievement**

Julia Gillard has placed complete faith in greater competition between schools through public comparisons of school results to improve school performance.

Through better monitoring of performance at the student and school level, educational outcomes can be lifted across all schools and all sectors. [Gillard 2009c]

She recently told the Brookings Institution in Washington DC that she wants to report school results so that “parents drive change” for school improvement through greater competition [Gillard 2009d].

However, the evidence from many recent overseas studies is that encouraging greater competition between schools fails to improve education. For example, a major study by the London School of Economics concluded that “...there are no general benefits to be had from increasing school competition” and “...pupil achievement is generally unrelated to the competitive pressures a school faces” [Gibbons et.al. 2008: 914, 942].

An extensive review of research studies published last year by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago concluded that students who exercise choice do not experience achievement gains and that school choice does not induce public schools to improve their performance [Rouse & Barrow 2008].

The latest evidence on the failure of competition to improve school outcomes is a study by academics at the London School of Economics and the Institute of Education. It concluded that there is "significant evidence that religious schools are associated with higher levels of pupil sorting across schools, but no evidence that competition from faith schools raises area-wide pupil attainment" [Allen & Vignoles 2009: 1].

One of the co-authors of this study, Anna Vignoles from the London School of Economics, told *The Economist* magazine: “What is described as a quasi-market clearly is not working” (23 April 2009). *The Economist* itself was forced to concede that the pro-market competition policies of Britain’s Labor Government have failed: “That it hasn’t worked is clear”.

As Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago and the co-author of the best-selling *Freakonomics*, Steven Levitt, says of the idea that school choice and competition will improve student outcomes: “the theory sounds great, but evidence confirming it has been hard to find” [Levitt 2007].

## **7. Conclusions**

The Prime Minister, the Federal Education Minister and other education ministers around Australia are in an untenable and contradictory position. They say they are opposed to ‘simplistic’ league tables which allow unfair comparisons between the Geelong Grammars

and low SES government or private schools. However, they are going ahead with publishing local area school comparisons which will do precisely what they say they opposed to.

There is a strong likelihood that many local area school performance tables in major cities around Australia will involve comparisons of schools in vastly different circumstances.

The Federal Government has itself given a reason why such comparisons should not be proceeded with because they involve ‘simplistic’, ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unfair’ comparisons in vastly different socio-economic circumstances. One of its own key advisors, the Australian Council for Educational Research, has said that local area school comparisons are inappropriate:

....schools in geographic proximity do not necessarily represent appropriate comparisons. Comparisons in geographic areas would only be appropriate if schools in the same area were serving the same population but clearly this is not the case. For example, schools serving public housing estates are sometimes in close proximity to wealthy private schools. In addition, the appropriate geographic area for a rural school might be large when the nearest school is far away and meaningless in terms of choice because of accessibility.

[Masters et.al. 2008: 31]

At the very least, it is incumbent on the Federal and other Australian governments to demonstrate that local area school performance tables will not result in ‘simplistic’, ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unfair’ comparisons of schools. The Federal Education Minister should publish the boundaries of all local areas to be used together with a list of schools to be included in each local area before any school comparisons are published. The Minister should give the public an opportunity to scrutinize the proposed local area comparisons to ensure that they do not involve ‘arbitrary’ and ‘unfair’ comparisons.

There are also other good reasons, however, for not proceeding with local area school performance tables. They have many of the same problems as full league tables.

They are likely to encourage schools to select or attract students who will boost their ranking and deny entry to low achieving students. Overseas evidence suggests that ‘cream skimming’ of this kind leads to greater social segregation between schools.

A particular concern to schools in local areas is that increased competition for better rankings also undermines collaboration and co-operation between schools. They are also likely to damage student learning because the competitive pressure for improved rankings encourages schools to focus more on the tested subjects than the non-tested subjects.

Local area school performance tables are also likely to mislead parents because the comparisons create such competitive pressure on schools to improve rankings that they often resort to rigging their results in various ways, including reducing the participation of low achieving students and outright cheating.

Finally, government education ministers place much weight on school performance comparisons as a way of encouraging schools to compete with each other to improve student achievement. The evidence is that promoting greater competition between schools fails to improve student outcomes.

For all these reasons, publishing local area school comparisons is likely to be counter-productive. Far from driving education improvement as Julia Gillard hopes, it will humiliate

many government and private schools serving highly disadvantaged communities by comparing them with some of the wealthiest and advantaged schools in Australia. As well, it will lead to strategic behaviour to manipulate school results in ways that will damage education and mislead parents and the public about their local schools.

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