



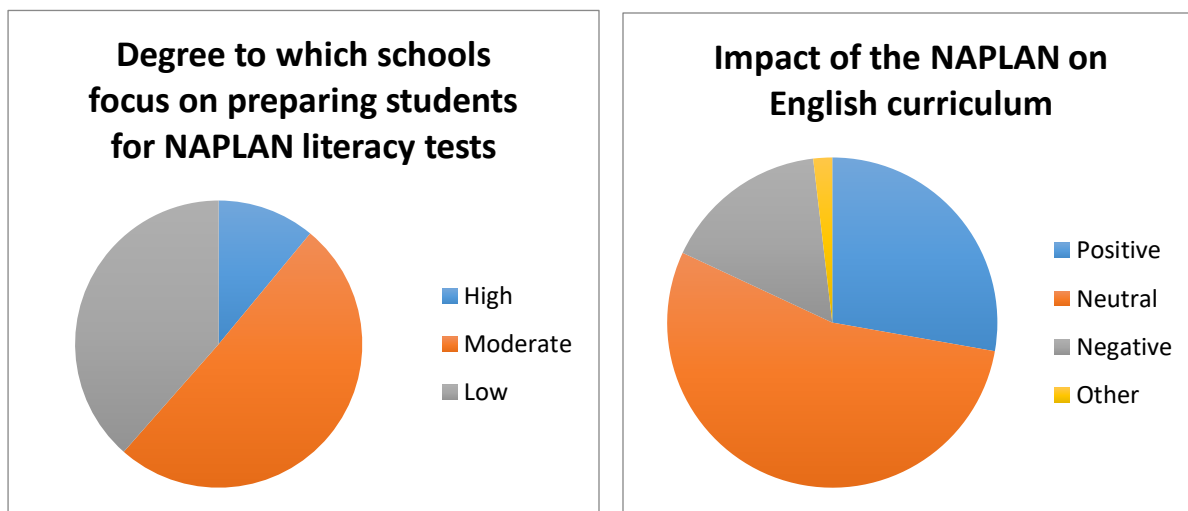
VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

## VATE CONDUCTS FIRST SURVEY OF TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARDS NAPLAN LITERACY TESTS

Recent research undertaken by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) has surveyed 216 English teachers across Victoria for their attitudes towards the NAPLAN literacy tests and how they impact on schools and students.

The survey reveals important insights as to how teachers, as the instigators of school curricula, engage with the literacy demands of NAPLAN. This initiative marks the first time that feedback has been sought from teachers since the NAPLAN was rolled out. The survey engaged with what teachers' attitudes to NAPLAN are, how their students experience the tests and how the data is used by schools to inform their teaching and learning.

According to VATE President Emily Frawley, "teacher attitudes towards the literacy tests in the NAPLAN are mixed. There is a considerable amount of variation across the state in terms of how much teachers explicitly prepare students for the tests and the extent to which teachers feel this preparation impacts on the standard English curriculum."



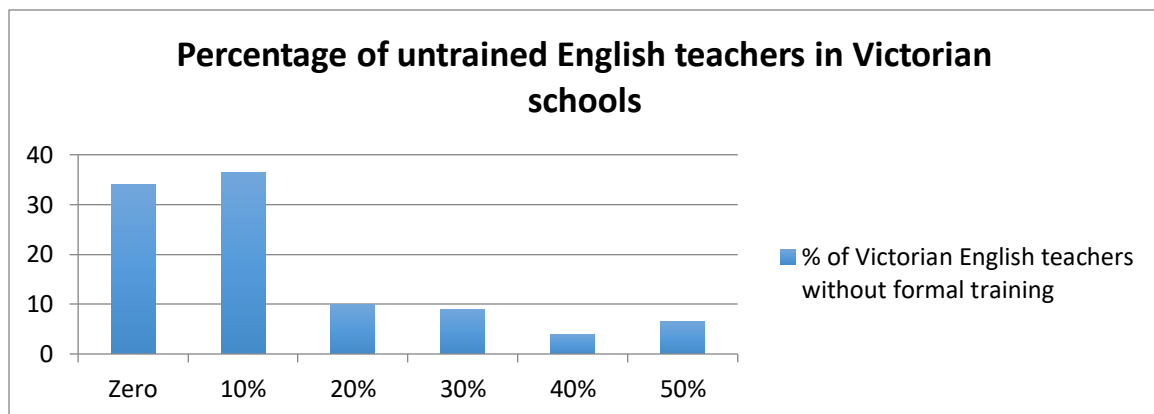
While some English teachers see the test as a valuable source of data on student learning, some sample responses from the survey included views such as "by the time

students reach secondary [school] they are used to, and either bored by, or feel pressured by, the test.” Many teachers particularly noted the attitudes of Year 9 students who, as one teacher observed, “come with negative attitudes towards NAPLAN, partially due to prior experience, to media sensationalism and to parental issues. This is why we tend not to focus on the test in the lead up and reassure students that the test is a useful tool in that it allows them to track their growth.”

The survey found that the main way that teachers make use of NAPLAN data is to inform their curriculum planning and to inform how to support their students. English teachers also reported that schools will often use the data to inform curriculum directions and long term goals. Having said that, an area of concern for some English teachers included the use of NAPLAN results to review teacher performance (14% of responses). A further 20% of English teachers also reported that the NAPLAN data has limited use in their school context.

The most significant finding to come from the data is the number of English teachers in schools across the state who do not have a formal English method background. This number was highest in regional and rural schools. “We know that schools will often allocate English classes to teachers who did not study English as part of their undergraduate or teaching degree—especially in the junior (NAPLAN) years,” says Frawley. “There can be the perception that anyone can teach English, when in reality we know that English requires a very distinct set of pedagogical skills.” Given the concerns about Australian students’ declining literacy scores<sup>1</sup>, the data is particularly interesting when one considers that over 50% of the English staff in some schools are not formally trained in the teaching of English.

VATE is currently developing a course to support English teachers teaching out of method. A full copy of the de-identified data is also available through VATE.



<sup>1</sup> E.g. <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/secondary-education-act/pisa-results-show-further-decline-in-australias-education-rankings-20161206-gt56yb.html>