Taking a new
The assessment of students and the reporting of these assessments to parents take place in a variety of ways. Some reports are oral at parent-teacher interviews, some are school report cards, some are officially printed and certified statements, as in Year 12. What these reports encompass is also varied: primarily academic achievement. However, in many places, the student's personal development, behaviour, attitudes, extra-curricular abilities and other individual attributes also get assessed and reported. In schools, most assessing and reporting procedures are conducted by one teacher about one student in one subject area.

Aiming to find an alternative form of assessment that might be less time consuming and more collegial while taking into account the student's personal attributes and abilities, ACER researchers developed and trialled an assessment procedure known as Whole School Assessment.

The judgements made in the Whole School Assessment process are concerned with general aspects of education (cross-curricular competencies) rather than the knowledge and skills that are specific to individual subjects and which are the basis of subject-based assessments. The objective is to create an overall judgement that arises from a range of teacher perspectives that can be seen as escaping the limitations of any individual teacher's perspective, and, as a result, increasing the reliability of the assessment and giving a more in-depth view of the student's progress through the school.

In the Whole School Assessment method, judgements are made based on the individual student's achievement in the seven Mayer competencies. Since 2001 ACER has worked with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to trial the assessment method using three
The seven key competencies as listed in the 1992 Mayer report are:

1. **Collecting, analysing and organising information**
   The capacity to locate information, sift and sort information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way, and evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it.

2. **Communicating ideas and information**
   The capacity to communicate effectively with others using a range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression.

3. **Planning and organising activities**
   The capacity to plan and organise one’s own work activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring one’s own performance.

4. **Working with others and in teams**
   The capacity to interact effectively with other people both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, including understanding and responding to the needs of a client and working effectively as a member of a team to achieve a shared goal.

5. **Using mathematical ideas and techniques**
   The capacity to use mathematical ideas, such as number and space, and techniques, such as estimation and approximation, for practical purposes.

6. **Solving problems**
   The capacity to apply problem-solving strategies in purposeful ways, both in situations where the problem and the desired solution are clearly evident and in situations requiring critical thinking and a creative approach to achieve an outcome.

7. **Using technology**
   The capacity to apply technology, combining the physical and sensory skills needed to operate equipment with the understanding of scientific and technological principles needed to explore and adapt systems.

Assessment, but teachers were encouraged would obviously be the main basis of the Competencies. Contact in subject classes 1 to 8 for each of the seven Key was to be given by assigning a grade from her assessment. A global impression of the performance of each of the target students give the Key Competencies a high profile classroom procedures and activities, to more readily see that re-jigging their parents and their future teachers. It has shown them to be supportive of the, to analyse and report on the results of the assessments for the school, and evaluate the whole trial process.

What the trials showed
The trials over a period of three years offered some challenge and enrichment to participating teachers and schools. They helped schools develop their understanding of the possibilities for Whole School Assessment, going beyond the Key Learning Areas and the requirements of any specific curriculum. Schools were also encouraged to use the Whole School Assessment method to assess other generic skills and attitudes which were important to them, in addition to trials relating to the Key Competencies.

There are a number of potential advantages in using this form of assessment. It replaces various onerous activities with one procedure which is quicker, but no less reliable. Moreover, in the long run, the procedure came to be seen as more informative and useful to students, their parents and their future teachers. It has the added advantage that teachers can more readily see that re-jigging their classroom procedures and activities, to give the Key Competencies a high profile as organising principles, improves student participation, increases motivation to learn, and allows students to see their learning whole.

They, like their teachers, came to see that the development of positive attitudes and enhancement of personal attributes has a place within, not apart from, academic advancement.

The assumption behind the process is that the judgements made in this assessment are stage related, in that they are made explicitly about students in specified grade levels, at a particular point in time (the end of Semester One of Year 10, in the case of our field trials). The judgements are made on the basis of participating teachers’ knowledge and experience of students at the chosen grade level, and they are based on what teachers know and expect of students at this level.

The trials also indicated that Whole School Assessment of generic skills can yield important and useful information about the student. For example, a poll of employers showed them to be supportive of the procedure and receptive of the information provided, even if some indicated they might require more than just Whole School Assessments when choosing employees. Teacher agreement on the individual student’s levels of achievement of the generic skills was consistently high, and the whole assessment and reporting model and software proved quite robust.

Indications are also clear that it is able to be adapted to a range of cohorts (ages and year levels) and for a range of purposes, including diagnostic use, as a spur to student self-assessment, as well as general reporting. However, Whole School Assessment of generic skills needs to be given further endorsement and support from education authorities if it is to be widely adopted by schools.