



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3

# Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum

## Committee's Discussion Paper

October 2020

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Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

# **Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum**

## **Committee's Discussion Paper**

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## Terms of reference

That NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquire into and report on the contents of and proposed changes to the NSW school curriculum, and in particular:

1. The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:
  - (a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy
  - (b) Quality and relevance of the evidence-base underpinning the recommendations (compared to CESE findings)
  - (c) Recommendations for student-centred 'progression points' and 'differentiated learning' in schools and whether such initiatives are research-based and proven to be effective
  - (d) Relationship with the national schools curriculum
2. The extent to which the Masters Review meets key Government policy objectives, including:
  - (a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum
  - (b) Ensuring students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as deep knowledge of key subjects
  - (c) Professor Masters' explanation for NSW declining school results and the role a revised curriculum can play in reversing this decline
3. Other matters of public concern and interest in the development of the NSW curriculum:
  - (a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum priorities' are needed to guide classroom content and teaching
  - (b) To what extent, if any, knowledge and the curriculum are 'socially constructed', requiring the teaching of source verification and fluidity principles
  - (c) Whether and to what extent schools should be involved in the 'social and emotional development' of students, as per the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations, and growing popularity of 'wellbeing programs' in NSW schools
  - (d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian history, pre- and post-1788
  - (e) Given the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, adopting the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing

- (f) Role and effectiveness of vocational education syllabuses in NSW schools
  - (g) Effectiveness of NESA in curriculum development and supervision
4. Any other related matters.

The terms of reference were self-referred by the committee on 6 February 2020.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Minutes*, NSW Legislative Council, 25 February 2020, p 794.

## Committee details

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### Committee members

|                                  |                             |                     |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Hon Mark Latham MLC</b>       | Pauline Hanson's One Nation | <i>Chair</i>        |
| <b>Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC</b> | Liberal Party               | <i>Deputy Chair</i> |
| <b>Hon Anthony D'Adam MLC</b>    | Australian Labor Party      |                     |
| <b>Hon Wes Fang MLC</b>          | The Nationals               |                     |
| <b>Hon Scott Farlow MLC</b>      | Liberal Party               |                     |
| <b>Hon Courtney Houssos MLC</b>  | Australian Labor Party      |                     |
| <b>Mr David Shoebridge MLC</b>   | The Greens                  |                     |

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# Committee's discussion paper

## Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the inquiry, explains the purpose of the discussion papers and briefly explores the context of the New South Wales Curriculum Review.

### The inquiry

- 1.1 This inquiry was self-referred by the committee on 6 February 2020 with the aim of inquiring into and reporting on the contents of and proposed changes to the NSW school curriculum.
- 1.2 The initial round of public submissions to the inquiry closed on 9 August 2020 and 74 submissions were received.
- 1.3 The inquiry is scheduled to hold two hearings on 4 and 30 November 2020.
- 1.4 The final report is likely to be published in mid-March 2021.

### Purpose of the discussion papers

- 1.5 The purpose of this discussion paper is to highlight focal points of the inquiry for stakeholders and witnesses to consider before the public hearings.
- 1.6 Chapter Two of this discussion paper summarises key issues arising from the initial submissions, with a particular focus on proposals for decluttering the curriculum, integrating knowledge and skills and progression based on attainment.
- 1.7 The Chair of the committee has provided his perspective in a second discussion paper on the NSW Curriculum Review, which outlines key matters that the Chair is interested in addressing throughout the inquiry, including during hearings. This paper is published separately.

### Making a submission to the discussion papers

- 1.8 The committee is grateful to the individuals and organisations who have already made submissions to the inquiry. Throughout the inquiry, the committee hopes to hear from a wide range of people including students, parents, teachers and community members who are affected by the NSW curriculum and involved in NSW schools.
- 1.9 This is an opportunity for individuals and organisations with an interest in the inquiry to provide specific feedback on what they would like to see the committee recommend to the NSW Government, and to respond to matters highlighted in Chapter Two.



- 1.10** Submissions responding to the issues in the discussion papers are due by Friday 30 October 2020. Submissions may be provided via the online portal or by email to: PortfolioCommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au.
- 1.11** The committee will review all responses to the discussion papers and responses will inform our questioning at public hearings, which are due to be held in November 2020. The committee will then prepare its final report, for tabling in Parliament, which will be made publicly available. All committee reports recommending action require a response from the NSW Government within six months of the report being tabled.

## Background

- 1.12** The NSW Government announced the NSW Curriculum Review in May 2018 and released the Terms of Reference in September 2018.
- 1.13** The review was led by Professor Geoff Masters and is commonly referred to as the 'Masters Review'. Professor Masters is the Chief Executive Officer and a member of the Board of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- 1.14** Public consultation took place in late 2018 and again in late 2019 following the release of the Review's Interim Report.
- 1.15** The Final Report was released on 23 June 2020, together with the response from the NSW Government.
- 1.16** The Final Report makes 24 recommendations. The NSW Government supported 17 of these recommendations. Another five recommendations were supported in principle. Two recommendations were noted: the first relates to learning a second language in primary school, and the second sought to establish a taskforce on ending reporting of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).<sup>2</sup>
- 1.17** The Government's response to some of the most significant of these recommendations is discussed in Chapter Two, relating to decluttering the existing school curriculum, integrating knowledge (theory) and skills (application), and progression based on attainment.
- 1.18** The Government's full response is at Appendix 1.
- 1.19** The NSW Government implementation timeframe includes introducing new English and Mathematics curriculums for Kindergarten to Year Two students by 2022, and to have fully implemented a new curriculum for all students by 2024.

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<sup>2</sup> NSW Government, NSW Government Response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report, pp 16-21.

## Chapter 2      Summary of key issues raised in submissions

This Chapter summarises the views canvassed in submissions in response to three key features of the 24 recommendations made in the Final Report of the Masters Review: decluttering the existing school curriculum, integrating knowledge (theory) and skills (application), and progression based on attainment.

### Decluttering the curriculum

**2.1**      The first key feature of the Masters Review's recommendations is decluttering curriculum. The Masters Review found that 'the crowded nature of the current curriculum, including the amount of content some syllabuses expect teachers to cover, is not conducive to teaching in depth or helping students see the relevance of what they are learning'.<sup>3</sup>

**2.2**      Therefore, in response, the Masters Review recommended the curriculum be decluttered to focus on 'important concepts, principles and methods in each subject' and prioritise 'depth rather than breadth of learning'.<sup>4</sup> The Review envisaged the features of new syllabuses would be as follows:

...[a] strong focus on ensuring students learn with understanding. This is achieved by giving greater priority to fundamental concepts and principles in each subject and by providing opportunities for students to see how these concepts and principles can be applied in a range of meaningful contexts. In many subjects, this means emphasising depth rather than breadth of learning. Rather than attempting to cover large amounts of factual and procedural content, new syllabuses focus on a smaller set of core factual knowledge, concepts and principles and are designed to develop increasingly deep understandings of these over time.<sup>5</sup>

**2.3**      Recommendations related to decluttering the curriculum are reproduced below.

<sup>3</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p v.

<sup>4</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xiii.

<sup>5</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xiv.

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## Masters Review Recommendations

### 1. Design new syllabuses for each subject, including subjects of the senior years, to reduce the volume of mandated content where appropriate and to prioritise the learning of core facts, concepts and principles.<sup>6</sup>

1.1 In each subject of the new curriculum, identify essential facts, concepts and principles, the understanding of which is developed in increasing depth over time, and where required, use this to identify content that is more peripheral and could be removed.

1.2 Decide how this core content is to be sequenced through new syllabuses, informed by evidence of how increasingly deep knowledge and understandings in a subject commonly unfold and are best developed over time.<sup>7</sup>

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2.4 In its response to the Masters Review, the NSW Government supported the recommendations relating to decluttering the curriculum and committed to developing a new English and Mathematics curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 2 by 2022 and to implementing an entirely new curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12 by 2024.<sup>8</sup>

## The overcrowded curriculum

2.5 Submissions largely echoed the concern raised in the Masters Review that the curriculum is overcrowded. The Australian Catholic University, for example, used the data in *Education at a Glance* reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to illustrate the overcrowded nature of the Australian curriculum:

...Australian students have the heaviest workload, in terms of statutory requirements for instruction, than any other country in the OECD... [however, Australian students'] hours on reading, writing, literature and mathematics [are] just below the OECD average, [which] suggests that Australia's curriculum has been significantly expanded by other content, making it "overcrowded".<sup>9</sup>

2.6 Submission authors told the committee that there are too many points to cover in each syllabus, resulting in 'superficial' or 'surface' learning for some students:

- '...current syllabuses are overloaded with content and too explicitly prescribed. The large quantity of dot and dash points makes learning superficial and alienating for some learners. The new curriculum should provide core and additional optional content and outcomes that allow for deep learning and reflect the underpinnings of subject disciplines'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Emphases as per original.

<sup>7</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xiv.

<sup>8</sup> NSW Government, NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review, p 14 and p 16.

<sup>9</sup> Submission 25, Australian Catholic University, p 2.

<sup>10</sup> Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 4.

- 'Secondary teachers were critical of syllabus documents being content driven, with too many dot points to cover'.<sup>11</sup>
- '...because of the large number of syllabus dot points, teachers feel they have to teach every dot point leading to surface teaching and learning...which often means that children do not have enough time to process what they have been taught'.<sup>12</sup>
- 'The Review correctly identifies the crowded nature of individual subject requirements. The current centralized approach to content, skills development and assessment in learning constrains the professional judgement of teachers and limits their scope for exploring learning at a deeper level with students'.<sup>13</sup>

**2.7** In addition, concern was raised about the impact of the overcrowded curriculum on teachers, and their ability to teach across so many areas, leading not only to surface learning but also to surface teaching. An educator highlighted this point:

The number of new, updated or revised syllabuses introduced over the last five years has made it difficult for teachers to develop a deep knowledge and understanding of each syllabus.<sup>14</sup>

### **Decluttering the curriculum**

**2.8** While there is agreement among submission authors that the curriculum is overcrowded and needs to be decluttered, some submissions expressed concern that the Review did not provide details on what content should/should not be included in the new curriculum, and who would be involved in decisions on what should be taken out.

- '[The NSW Curriculum Review] does refer to a reduction in content, without describing exactly where this should be reduced'.<sup>15</sup>
- '[C]oncern was expressed in relation to: i. Who decides the "essential facts, concepts and principles..." in each subject of the new curriculum?...Who decides the removal of extra-curricular activities?'<sup>16</sup>
- '...there is no detail about what the intentions to reduce extra-curricular actually means...it is crucial that the rich, integrated curriculum with its focus on the arts, music, movement and performance is not compromised'.<sup>17</sup>
- 'Additionally, there have been key concerns as to what this [focus on core subjects] may actually look like within a new curriculum setting as no concrete examples have been provided, especially considering the somewhat ambitious timelines and targets that have been presented'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 4.

<sup>12</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 1.

<sup>13</sup> Submission 55, Anglican Education Commission – Anglican EdComm, p 3.

<sup>14</sup> Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 10.

<sup>15</sup> Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 1.

<sup>16</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 2.

<sup>17</sup> Submission 61, Steiner Education Australia, p 7.

<sup>18</sup> Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 8.

**2.9** In the absence of detailed guidelines on what would constitute mandated content, many submissions suggested a diverse range of content that they either consider should be introduced, or retained or removed. Evidence illustrating this point includes:

- '...the inclusion of additional extra-curricular activities, often driven by politics rather than educational imperatives, significantly impacted teaching time. The Review is urged to look at the impact the teaching of additional topics external to formal NESA syllabus documents has on schools eg road, swim, and e-safety programs'.<sup>19</sup>
- 'The core content of the curriculum needs to include topics such as student health, wellbeing and safety outcomes (eg road safety, cyber safety, sun safety, obesity, mindfulness) as a focus on the [Personal Development, Health and Physical Education] syllabus, not as add-ons'.<sup>20</sup>
- '...the best curriculum decision we can make for our young people's education is to provide EVERY child with high quality and extended music training'.<sup>21</sup>
- '[Special Religious Education] is a strength of the NSW education system that needs to continue to be available in school hours'.<sup>22</sup>
- 'The Society and Culture course must be retained to ensure these unique qualities are not lost and that it be used as a guide for other subjects to develop conceptually focused pedagogy and teaching and learning practice'.<sup>23</sup>

**2.10** However, some submissions contended that it was not the role of the Masters Review to detail the new curriculum's content and were satisfied with the broader recommendations made in the Review in relation to decluttering the curriculum:

- '...the NSW Curriculum Review...was a review of the current curriculum with a view to suggesting possible changes...[It] was not a review of syllabus content, pedagogy or systemic delivery although these were raised as part of the consultation process'.<sup>24</sup>
- 'The Masters Review's suggestion for syllabuses which identify essential facts, concepts and principles; provides time for those concepts to be thoroughly embedded knowledge; for there to be flexibility to extend the learning into opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge, is a strong and positive step toward addressing concerns with the overcrowded curriculum'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Should the cross-curriculum priorities continue to be taught?**

**2.11** Another issue raised in submissions was whether the three Australian cross-curriculum priorities should continue to be taught, given the concerns about overcrowding of the curriculum. The Independent Education Union NSW and ACT supported continued teaching of these priorities:

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<sup>19</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 3.

<sup>20</sup> Submission 56, NSW Primary Principals' Association, p 2.

<sup>21</sup> Submission 14, Name suppressed, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> Submission 51, Inter Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools NSW Inc., p 4.

<sup>23</sup> Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 4.

<sup>24</sup> Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 2.

<sup>25</sup> Submission 67, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, p 4.

...there is an ongoing need for these priorities to be part of the education of children in Australia. As with our comments about the downward drift in the curriculum, with children expected to understand and internalise knowledge and concepts before they are ready, careful consideration needs to be given to the timing of the teaching of these priorities.<sup>26</sup>

- 2.12** The submission from Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, also supported the teaching of the cross-curriculum priorities, stating: 'the application of the priorities/capabilities was the key to their greater use and understanding to benefit learner and society'.<sup>27</sup>

- 2.13** Contrarily, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) renounced these priorities as 'ideologically driven' and stated that they should not be considered for the purposes of the curriculum:

By insisting that these three current themes be embedded into all subjects, relevant or not, the curriculum's authors were deliberately prioritising ideology over knowledge, and what it is more, they did so with the full understanding that this particular ideology would come to dominate and define Australian education. They were in fact, deliberately imposing a political agenda on generations of impressionable Australian schoolchildren at a time in their lives where they are at their most vulnerable, and when their understanding of society, environment and politics is shaped by what they hear in the classroom.<sup>28</sup>

### **Relationship with the Australian Curriculum**

- 2.14** The relationship between the Australian curriculum and the new NSW curriculum was another area of contention among submission authors. For example, the Science Teachers Association NSW believed that '[t]he overcrowding issue can be solved if the content of the [Australian Curriculum] is used in the NSW syllabuses without additional content added'.<sup>29</sup>

- 2.15** The Primary English Teaching Association Australia emphasised the importance of developing the two curriculums together so that NSW curriculum would not become overcrowded when 'adapting' to the national curriculum. The Association asserted that:

We are not convinced that changes proposed to the NSW curriculum will make a difference to volume of core content. As noted above, much of the perceived overcrowding of curriculum content is a result of the reworking of national curricula for NSW syllabuses (the 'adapting' rather than 'adopting' of national curriculum). Given that this adapting occurred because stakeholders in NSW believed that the Australian Curriculum was inadequate, it is imperative that the review of the NSW curriculum occur in concert with that of the national curriculum.<sup>30</sup>

- 2.16** The Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW contended that, while they acknowledged the importance of having a consistent national curriculum, 'NSW should not

<sup>26</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 6.

<sup>27</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 5.

<sup>28</sup> Submission 36, Institute of Public Affairs, p 3.

<sup>29</sup> Submission 70, The Science Teachers Association NSW, p 5.

<sup>30</sup> Submission 49, Primary English Teaching Association Australia, p 5.

compromise the quality of its curriculum to a national approach that could possibly impact the rigour and value of the NSW curriculum'.<sup>31</sup>

### **Timeline for the design and implementation of the new curriculum**

- 2.17** Some submissions expressed reservations about the Government's proposed timeline for implementing the new curriculum. The Independent Education Union NSW and ACT characterised the government's timeline as 'unrealistic and unachievable' given the significant organisational implications for schools,<sup>32</sup> and observed that the Government had proposed a much shorter timeframe than that envisaged in the Masters Review:

Syllabus development needs to be done in a planned, structured and informed fashion, with extensive input from teachers. Masters' implementation phase is 7 years. The Government proposes that the reform take place over 3 years.<sup>33</sup>

- 2.18** Steiner Education Australia (SEA) considered the timeline inadequate given the time needed to involve educators 'in genuine collaboration and consultation about how these reforms will be implemented'.<sup>34</sup> The submission stated:

SEA is concerned that the very short time frame for review of the English and Mathematics curriculum for the early and middle years of schooling, for example, will not allow for genuine collaboration.<sup>35</sup>

- 2.19** The Primary English Teaching Association Australia stated that consideration should be given to the time required for curriculum design, changes required in schools and in classrooms and professional training for teachers, which were unlikely to be resolved within the proposed timeline:

Curriculum development requires careful consultation during development to ensure 'buy-in'; i.e. that all stakeholders are given opportunity to have input and that such input can be responded to appropriately. Further time is needed to finesse curricula and to adequately support implementation in schools and classrooms, for example, through professional learning and resource development.<sup>36</sup>

- 2.20** The Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, considered the Review's suggested timeframe of seven years to be too long and indicated their preference for 'a shorter timeline or a move away from NSW syllabuses to the existing Australian Curriculum documents'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 8.

<sup>32</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 10.

<sup>33</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 10.

<sup>34</sup> Submission 61, Steiner Education Australia, p 3.

<sup>35</sup> Submission 61, Steiner Education Australia, p 3.

<sup>36</sup> Submission 49, Primary English Teaching Association Australia, p 7.

<sup>37</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 4.

## Integrating knowledge and skills

- 2.21** The Masters Review suggested that there is a need for the NSW curriculum to 'provide better integration of theory and the application of theory [and] build students' skills in applying knowledge'.<sup>38</sup> The Review found that:

the frequent separation of knowledge and skills, theory and application, and academic and vocational learning in the current curriculum, and the associated undervaluing of skills, do little to support students' understandings of how knowledge can be put to use or their development of skills in applying knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

- 2.22** The recommendations related to integrating knowledge and skills are reproduced as follows:

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### Masters Review Recommendations

- 2. Design new syllabuses not only to develop increasingly sophisticated knowledge and deeper understandings of a subject, but also skills in applying that knowledge.**
    - 2.1 Make explicit in new syllabuses for every subject that skills in applying knowledge are part of the intended learning, and show how these skills are to be developed over time. These skills include subject-specific skills, but also skills in using technologies, sourcing and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, collaborating, and communicating.
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<sup>38</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p v.

<sup>39</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p v.



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- 6. In the later years of school, give priority to providing every student with opportunities to pursue personal interests and strengths through rigorous, specialised subjects, each of which builds solid theoretical foundations, provides opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge, and develops skills in the practical application of subject learning.**
- 6.1 Eliminate the current bifurcation of learning in the later years by developing over time a new set of HSC subjects, each of which involves rigorous, high-quality learning that integrates knowledge and the practical application of knowledge.
- 6.2 Replace the existing learning areas in the later years with a newly defined set, allocate all future HSC subjects to these areas and promote them as focal points for schools' connections with relevant industries and post-school providers and pathway and career advice.
- 6.3 Require every student to undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing, with common assessment criteria, moderation of teacher assessments, and performances forming part of a student's HSC results.
- 6.4 Establish a taskforce comprising representatives of the higher education sector, the school sector and the Universities Admissions Centre, to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).<sup>40</sup>
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- 2.23** The NSW Government supported recommendations 2.1 and 6.2. However, recommendations 6.1 and 6.2 were supported in principle, and the Government is seeking further advice from NESA. Recommendation 6.4 was noted.<sup>41</sup>
- 2.24** In its response to the Masters Review, the NSW Government stated that 'VET' and academic subjects must be supported to attract high-quality students into both. Both theoretical knowledge and applied skills are needed to meet the future challenges faced by the NSW economy'.<sup>42</sup>
- 2.25** In relation to these recommendations, the three key themes that emerged from submission were firstly, whether all forms of study needed both theoretical and practical components, such as a major project; secondly, the relationship between academic and vocational study; and thirdly, the value of exam-based summative assessments and ranking systems like the ATAR.

### **Opportunities to apply knowledge and develop skills**

- 2.26** Submissions generally supported the greater integration of knowledge and skills through practical application of theory, where this was appropriate and relevant. However, many

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<sup>40</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, pp xiv and xviii.

<sup>41</sup> NSW Government Response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report, pp 16 and 19.

<sup>42</sup> NSW Government Response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report, p 12.

submissions were concerned about the implementation of such reform, including the resources and assessments required to effectively deliver more practical courses:

- 'We support the emphasis on depth rather than breadth of learning where knowledge and understanding are developed in an increasingly sophisticated manner and in which skills are more effectively integrated'.<sup>43</sup>
- '...new syllabuses should ensure the skills required to apply knowledge are taught with the theory of each subject. Theory and the application of theory must be intertwined. These skills are necessary to use technologies, source and analyse information, think critically and creatively, collaborate and communicate'.<sup>44</sup>
- 'Syllabus demands, including literacy and numeracy, should be relevant and aligned to the knowledge, skills and understandings required of students to achieve their vocational studies. Assessment practices should reflect the demands of this pathway...'.<sup>45</sup>
- 'Some of the data used in this reform is perhaps out of date since the COVID-19 pandemic and so more time is required to revisit this research'.<sup>46</sup>
- 'The proposal to integrate vocational applications is cautiously supported. Our concerns are for any move away from providing appropriate foundational knowledge and skills that prepare more able students for tertiary study. We welcome further rigorous debate and consultation. We note however that the high achievers in the PISA testing arena... do not integrate vocational education with mainstream schooling'.<sup>47</sup>
- '...the option to study VET courses as an ATAR course or not, provides required access points for students to continue their learning while developing skills for the workplace and it is clear that vocational educational syllabi have an important role to play within NSW schools'.<sup>48</sup>

**2.27** Submissions from organisations representing teachers tended to note the challenges of creating practical experiences for students in an overcrowded curriculum and the need for professional development in this area. These submissions indicated that pursuing better integration of knowledge and skills would require dedicated time and resources. For example, the Mathematical Association of New South Wales (MANSW) stated that:

Because teachers are concerned about completing the work, interesting methods of delivery are often left out making it difficult to incorporate real life applications or problem solve. However, exploring topics more deeply will require stronger pedagogical content knowledge and additional professional development...<sup>49</sup>

**2.28** The recommendation of a compulsory major project as a means to provide practical opportunities for all senior students was controversial. Organisations representing teachers emphasised that many senior syllabuses already offer opportunities for applying knowledge

<sup>43</sup> Submission 37, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (NSW and ACT), p 1.

<sup>44</sup> Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools, p 3.

<sup>45</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 5.

<sup>46</sup> Submission 70, Science Teachers Association, p 8.

<sup>47</sup> Submission 72, Professional Teachers Council NSW, p 5.

<sup>48</sup> Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 15.

<sup>49</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of NSW, p 2.

through optional major projects, for example, in Society and Culture, and the Extension subjects of English, History and Science. Submissions were divided on the merits of the proposal:

- 'Inquiry Based approaches already expect senior secondary courses to include a balance of underpinning theory and transfer and application of knowledge'.<sup>50</sup>
- 'The pedagogy of using investigative projects to deepen knowledge and support the application of skills has been in practice since the 2001 syllabus... From experience we recognise the need for professional development to support new teachers with managing the practice of these projects. The Science Teachers Association NSW run significant volunteer led programs every year for teachers to improve their student learning in this area'.<sup>51</sup>
- 'All students should have to complete some practical skill application in their Major Project. This matches the final report recommendations more accurately, where significant concern is expressed over the separation of hand and mind with subjects...'.<sup>52</sup>
- 'Take-home assignments like this proposed major investigative project are far less fair than exams in demonstrating proficiency of a subject. For example, students from disadvantaged backgrounds would have less access to parental help or tutors at home for their major projects'.<sup>53</sup>
- 'The recommendation for a compulsory major project is flawed and very problematic... Equity here is also an issue, with regional and remote schools not having access to the resources that city schools do. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds may be disadvantaged by not being able to purchase the materials needed for projects'.<sup>54</sup>

### Availability and resourcing of vocational training

**2.29** Several submissions from organisations and individuals expressed significant concern about the lower value and priority that is afforded to vocational education and training (VET), compared to conventional academic teaching and pathways to university. For example, the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia supported 'the minimisation of the current academic-vocational dichotomy'.<sup>55</sup>

**2.30** In its submission to this inquiry, the NSW Department of Education wrote:

The effectiveness of senior secondary curriculum, including vocational education, in providing strong pathways to post-school education and employment is a current focus at state and national levels. The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways, led by Professor Shergold, together with the Review recommendations related to the senior secondary years and the forthcoming report for the Department on VET delivered to secondary students will provide a strong foundation for future provision.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 4.

<sup>51</sup> Submission 70, Science Teachers Association of NSW, p 4.

<sup>52</sup> Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 1.

<sup>53</sup> Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 2.

<sup>54</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 2.

<sup>55</sup> Submission 37, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (NSW and ACT), p 2.

<sup>56</sup> Submission 64, NSW Department of Education, p 6.

**2.31** The Institute of Technology Education told the committee that '[m]ost VET subjects delivered in NSW schools provide students with a Certificate II qualification. They are effective at providing this. Some deliver at the Certificate III level'.<sup>57</sup> However, the quality and availability of vocational options was seen by some as a problem, which was closely linked to resourcing issues:

- '...there are many students in Years 11 and 12 who do not want to be there and who would prefer other pathways, and this may exacerbate disengagement and other behavioural challenges. Their interests could be better served by having more viable vocational options'.<sup>58</sup>
- 'The current curriculum is academically focused, specifically to cater for students going to university... Non-academic pathways are considered lower priority'.<sup>59</sup>
- 'In small rural centres it is almost impossible to get the number of students required to employ a tutor – Rural and Remote places need other methods which consider different learning styles or lowering of required student numbers'.<sup>60</sup>
- 'It is not so much the vocational education syllabuses that is the question – it is more the availability of the courses for students. There has been a regrettable reduction in access to this pathway compared to the turn of the century, which has an impact not only on students but the economy'.<sup>61</sup>
- 'VET is a valued and valid pathway, and the new curriculum needs to support this... It increases their reputation and reconsiders the perception that university is the only path to a rewarding career. Further, this supports the need to strengthen the vocational education sector, which is currently in decline, to ensure that this is a pathway that continues to be available for all students'.<sup>62</sup>
- 'The IEU notes the additional workloads of teachers delivering vocational education and training within the current framework and propose the equitable allocation of time and funds to maintain the current status of VET in schools'.<sup>63</sup>

**2.32** A number of submissions from individuals expressed strong views on the need to equally value vocational and academic education:

- 'We need to address a culture that devalues vocational education against academic education, and this is much bigger than NESA, or in fact, curriculum... Promoting university, vocational education and training and other post-schooling pathways as equally valid and valued is a shared responsibility of schools, government and broader society'.<sup>64</sup>
- 'The Report has not adequately grappled with the fact that low skilled work persists in Australia; it has shifted from manufacturing into services, such as security and personal

<sup>57</sup> Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 8.

<sup>58</sup> Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW, p 14.

<sup>59</sup> Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 2.

<sup>60</sup> Submission 67, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, p 7.

<sup>61</sup> Submission 63, Northern Sydney and Central Coast District Councils of Parent & Citizens Association, p 5.

<sup>62</sup> Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 6.

<sup>63</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 9.

<sup>64</sup> Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 7.

care which cannot be sent off shore; and it persists in seasonal agricultural work, fishing, forestry, meat processing and packaging to name a few... The question to be asked is how well the new curriculum will serve the learning and progression of all students, regardless of their post school destination'.<sup>65</sup>

### **The potential for microcredentials in schools**

- 2.33** The Masters Review noted community input that suggested that opportunities for students to obtain microcredentials at school needed to be increased, to better link schooling with demonstrable skills. The Masters Review summarised the proposal by stating:

the curriculum could be 'modularised' to allow students to design more tailored learning programs leading to valued credentials, including possible 'microcredentials' linked to individual modules of learning. High quality senior subjects should incorporate the possibility of students undertaking study with external providers, including TAFE and universities, and to accumulate credit while at school towards post-school qualifications. Where relevant, these should include workplace experiences.<sup>66</sup>

- 2.34** Several submissions to this inquiry welcomed microcredentials, while recognising the challenges of regulation and recognition of such schemes:

- 'Attainment Levels should be linked to micro-credentials. In the senior school at least, these micro-credentials should provide opportunities for accreditation at tertiary levels'.<sup>67</sup>
- 'Micro-credentials provided at point of attainment would be a welcome addition to the credentialing of the curriculum though... the processes of gaining NESA approval may be significant with issues of who does the certifying and which organisations will recognise them'.<sup>68</sup>
- 'The curriculum should provide opportunities to incorporate VET courses, non-NESA registered courses, work experience and apprenticeships, whilst still qualifying for the HSC'.<sup>69</sup>

### **The future of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)**

- 2.35** The Masters Review recommended that a taskforce be established to examine reporting of the ATAR to address 'the way ATAR dominates student, parent and teacher thinking in the later years of school and overshadows the HSC as the primary measure of 13 years of learning'.<sup>70</sup> Submissions differed markedly on their opinion of the value of the ATAR and its future role in NSW schools.

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<sup>65</sup> Submission 38, Ms Vicki Steer, p 5.

<sup>66</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p 41.

<sup>67</sup> Submission 48, Institute of Technology Education, p 9.

<sup>68</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 4.

<sup>69</sup> Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 6.

<sup>70</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p 102.

- 2.36** The Centre for Independent Studies maintained that the ATAR is necessary because it is the primary means of university admissions and ATAR scores are closely related to academic achievements and university drop-out rates.<sup>71</sup> The Centre considered the proposal to replace the ATAR with a 'learner profile' to be unfair for high-achieving disadvantaged students, who may have fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activities.<sup>72</sup> While the submission acknowledged that a review of the ATAR could be warranted, the Centre argued that 'it is a national education issue and it does not make sense for the NSW government to have yet another time-consuming education review on a topic that clearly affects the entire nation'.<sup>73</sup>
- 2.37** In contrast, many submissions expressed concern over the priority afforded to the ATAR and called for measures to address the imbalance in assessing school achievement. There was significant support for the Masters Review recommendation:
- '...we strongly endorse Professor Masters' recommendation that this be investigated. We have often expressed our concerns about the ATAR being the de facto single-figure indicator of a student's 13 years of schooling. The recently released federal report, *Looking to the Future*, endorses this concern'.<sup>74</sup>
  - 'Professor Masters rightly reflected the concerns about the ATAR and the impact it was having on teaching and learning in schools...'.<sup>75</sup>
  - '...teaching is primarily focused on pushing students to obtain an ATAR specifically for the purpose of university entry'.<sup>76</sup>
  - 'There was Strong-to-Very Strong Agreement [in the Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta consultation feedback] that the ATAR will become redundant as a learning signifier'.<sup>77</sup>
  - 'We need better options for senior students (or those who have progressed to this level at any age) on a 'non-ATAR' path, similar to the options we have for VET Courses'.<sup>78</sup>
- 2.38** Related to questions over the value of the ATAR and the prevalence of test-based teaching, submissions also raised issues about other forms of standardised testing and benchmarking, such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).
- 2.39** A view was presented that curriculum and assessment reform should '[c]hallenge definitions of success with regards to equity and excellence so that learning is not limited to structured benchmarks such as NAPLAN, HSC, PISA etc'.<sup>79</sup> This was echoed by a number of other submissions:

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<sup>71</sup> Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 3.

<sup>72</sup> Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 3.

<sup>73</sup> Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 3.

<sup>74</sup> Submission 37, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (NSW and ACT), p 2.

<sup>75</sup> Submission 70, The Science Teachers Association NSW, p 4.

<sup>76</sup> Submission 58, Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, p 13.

<sup>77</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 4.

<sup>78</sup> Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 7.

<sup>79</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 5.

- 'Declining school results have been influenced by "pen and paper" testing... NAPLAN skewed the actual curriculum away from a focus on understanding, communications and applications to those curriculum aspects more easily tested on paper – that is instant recall. Teachers felt and continue to feel pressure to cover as much content as possible before the external test and HSC. In many cases students are 'studying' for NAPLAN'.<sup>80</sup>
- 'We have to be extremely careful when comparing countries on measures such as the Programme for International Student Assessment because we are often not comparing like with like. Different countries and states vary on a vast range of factors, including economic activity and demographics, attributes that are likely to affect educational outcomes'.<sup>81</sup>
- 'Standardised testing (such NAPLAN and PISA) has a place in terms of accountability of the education provided, but it should not be the sole measure of the success of schooling and the school curriculum'.<sup>82</sup>

## Progression based on attainment

**2.40** The third key feature of the Masters Review's recommendations relates to progression based on attainment. Currently, students in New South Wales progress to the next syllabus based on age, which, according to the Masters Review, could hinder students' learning by either under- or over-challenging the student. According to the Masters Review:

...the timed nature of syllabuses that specify not only what should be taught, but also when it should be taught and how long should be spent teaching it, means some students are being required to move to the next year-level syllabus before mastering the content of the prior syllabus and so are falling increasingly behind in their learning over time. Other students are being required to mark time rather than advance to the more challenging material for which they are ready. Teachers require a more flexible curriculum to ensure every student is provided with well-targeted stretch challenges and so makes excellent ongoing progress.<sup>83</sup>

**2.41** To address this issue, the Masters Review proposed an 'untimed syllabus' which would require teachers to 'determine when students have achieved a syllabus and are ready to move to the next'.<sup>84</sup> A key to this would be, according to the Masters Review, 'teachers' ability to "differentiate and personalise learning to their students' needs and developmental progress".<sup>85</sup>

**2.42** Relevant recommendations are reproduced below.

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<sup>80</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 4.

<sup>81</sup> Submission 12, Mr Greg Ashman, p 1.

<sup>82</sup> Submission, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 6.

<sup>83</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p v.

<sup>84</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p xv.

<sup>85</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority, *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion: Designs for a new school curriculum*, p 21.

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### Masters Review Recommendations

#### 3. Design new syllabuses that do not specify when every student must commence, or how long they have to learn, the content of each syllabus.

- 3.1 Make new syllabuses untimed, with students progressing to the next syllabus once they have mastered the prior syllabus. Students who require more time should have it; students ready to advance should be able to do so.
  - 3.2 Specify what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of being taught each syllabus in a subject and illustrate this standard with samples of student responses and work.
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- 2.43 The NSW Government gave in-principle support to Recommendation 3.1 pending consultation with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and rendered its full support for Recommendation 3.2.<sup>86</sup>

### Differentiated teaching under progression based on attainment

- 2.44 Submissions mostly indicated their support for the concept of progression based on attainment. They tended to recognise the limitations of the existing age-based progression and students' need to be provided with tailored syllabuses and to learn at their own pace.

- '[T]he traditional transition points in schools currently have the capacity to adversely affect student progress'.<sup>87</sup>
- 'The variance of students at any given stage is well documented but needs to be recognised in curriculum and in learning experiences'.<sup>88</sup>
- '[T]here should a syllabus restructure where attainment levels could inform learning progression for students. Reasons include, some students are not ready to learn concepts at the same age as their peers; some may not have the prerequisite knowledge from previous years to engage effectively with content...'<sup>89</sup>
- 'The curriculum content and outcomes should be organised more flexibly to reflect different paces of learning, instead of fixed age-based stages, to allow students to make good progress from their own starting points and to support continuity of learning'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> NSW Government, NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review, p 17.

<sup>87</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 3.

<sup>88</sup> Submission 32, Name suppressed, p 2.

<sup>89</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 1.

<sup>90</sup> Submission 35, Association of Independent Schools of NSW, p 5.



### Potential increase in teachers' workload and its impact on students' learning

**2.45** While there was general support for a more tailored syllabus for each student, some submissions questioned its practicality, in particular, how the demands of tailored syllabuses for each student would affect teachers' workload and, subsequently, impact on students' learning.

**2.46** The Mathematical Association of New South Wales stated that while they saw the merit of progression based on attainment, they were concerned about the potential increase in teachers' workload. The Association submitted that:

The intention to guide students along progression points with differentiated practices targeted to their learning is commendable. However, there is concern that differentiating for every student based on the numerous progression points in every lesson, will be problematic from an organisational and workload perspective. Concerns are around the amount of planning, preparation, assessment, and programming required to support students, even for very experienced teachers.<sup>91</sup>

**2.47** The Society and Culture Association of NSW suggested that students' learning might be compromised when the teachers' time was over stretched as the result of having to deliver tailored syllabus for individual students. The Society stated that:

...While we appreciate the need to present students with appropriately challenging material, this is often achieved through differentiation, as opposed to entirely different syllabi. The challenges of managing this seem considerable...How is it feasible to expect individual students to attain the depth of understanding this curriculum review is aspiring to achieve when the teacher is potentially teaching 24 different students 24 different things at the same time?<sup>92</sup>

### Determining levels of attainment

**2.48** Another concern about attainment-based progression is how to determine a student's level of attainment. For example, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, sought more clarity on attainment levels. It queried:

What will an overlay of "Attainment Levels" on Learning Progressions look like? eg. will students need 80% before they can move along the continuum? Or should it be Mastery of learning (100%)?... Will "Attainment Levels" be based on knowledge or skills or understanding or application of understanding or all of these? How will these be described such that understanding is possible for all relevant audiences? ...How will "Attainment Levels" be described for the Senior Secondary Curriculum?<sup>93</sup>

**2.49** For the Society and Culture Association of NSW, the 'validity and reliability' of the progression based attainment levels was another concern. In their submission, the Association noted that:

Even with moderation, teachers interpret the simplest samples of student work differently. If there is no regulation of how teachers 'judge' whether a student has achieved a minimum standard. (and the existing grade structure is not to be used for

<sup>91</sup> Submission 45, Mathematical Association of New South Wales, p 1.

<sup>92</sup> Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 6.

<sup>93</sup> Submission 57, Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, p 3.

this purpose) then how it is meant to be achieved? There is significant potential for inconsistency across school context.<sup>94</sup>

- 2.50** The Independent Education Union NSW and ACT also had questions surrounding attainment levels; however, they felt that they could not provide further feedback given that there was not much detail in the proposal. The Union commented:

Many teachers wanted to know what the attainment levels would be, who would have access to seeing them...Professional concern was expressed about who makes the decision about what is 'on track', and whether that discussion would be inclusive and informed by feedback from a range of stakeholders... Wide-ranging opinion was that much more detail would need to be provided before teachers as a profession could give insightful feedback to this reform proposal.<sup>95</sup>

- 2.51** It is noted that in 2020, the Lindfield Learning Village, a K-12 school established by the Department of Education to facilitate individual student learning progression, took its first intake of students. A submission author suggested that while it might be too early to use the school data to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed progression model, the school might provide insights into these unanswered questions.<sup>96</sup>

### Other concerns

- 2.52** Other than the more commonly asked questions about attainment-based progression, a range of other concerns were raised in submissions, including whether it could lower expectations, the potential impact on students who are held back, and the lack of established systems that use progression-based attainment:

- "The proposal would also remove any absolute standard for what all students should be expected to achieve by a given age. This lowering of expectations is concerning, because while progress is important, the absolute level of achievement is what ultimately matters for students...This would hinder the ability of parents to know their child's current level of ability and what standard their child is expected to achieve for their age...Despite the review's proposal for an extensive overhaul of the curriculum, the review cannot point to any high-achieving school system, anywhere in the world, that has an 'untimed' curriculum. This would appear to indicate that the proposal may be impractical and is in fact an education experiment unsupported by evidence'.<sup>97</sup>
- '...a student being retained at a level in a subject due to delayed mastery may wrongly be interpreted as the student being 'slow' or have learning difficulties. The expectations of parents and significant others have a profound effect on student performance and sense of wellbeing. Delaying a student's progression in their learning may be right from an educational perspective but without the support or their social network (explicit and implicit) the wellbeing of students could be significantly harmed'.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Submission 62, Society and Culture Association of NSW, p 6.

<sup>95</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 3.

<sup>96</sup> Submission 43, Dr John Mack, p 2.

<sup>97</sup> Submission 39, The Centre for Independent Studies, p 2.

<sup>98</sup> Submission 55, Anglican Education Commission – Anglican EdComm, p 9.

- '...what it would mean psychologically to a student if they established a self defining narrative of being "off track"'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Submission 34, Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, p 3.



# NSW Government response to the **NSW Curriculum Review** **final report**

**It is vital students  
have strong  
foundations  
in literacy and  
numeracy**





## Ministerial Statement

# Our Future, Our Schools

Nothing is more important for our society, and our nation, than the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.

Schools must be the place where students receive an education that provides them with a solid foundation for life - preparing young people for their future careers and equipping them to make a productive contribution to our society.

In a world that will continue to be transformed by globalisation and technology, with many jobs disappearing and new ones being created, the importance of a high quality school education has never been greater.

It is no longer a case of going to school to obtain the knowledge for the same job for life. With all the changes occurring across society and in the workplace, young people must have the knowledge and skills necessary to be lifelong learners.

After they graduate from school, today's students will need to be able to continue learning. To develop new skills for jobs that have yet to be created. To use new technology that has yet to be invented. Every job will be transformed in some way in the future, and everyone will need the ability to learn and re-learn throughout their careers.

A student who started Kindergarten in one of the state's 3000 schools this January will finish Year 12 in 2032.

When we think about how the world may have changed by the time they leave school, we only have to think of how different today is from a decade ago.

Now there are billions of smartphones. Thousands of programs streaming on your TV. Libraries on tablets. Drones in the sky. Driverless trains, trucks and cars. From science fiction to a daily reality.

In education, we have seen entire schools develop the capacity to deliver teaching and learning online, with classes, assemblies and even playgrounds streamed. STEM subjects have advanced considerably, and students are more aware of the world outside their classroom than ever before.

What will the world be like by the second half of the 21st century, where today's Kindergarten students will spend most of their working lives?

The future may be hard to predict. However, there are elements that are essential to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and success for our students.

Every student must be able to read, write and understand mathematical concepts. Mastering literacy and numeracy in the early years is vital. This mastery of knowledge is important, not just because these are the building blocks for all further learning, but also to ensure that students can develop advanced skills using that knowledge: critical and creative thinking, collaboration and communication skills.

We need to ensure that every student is improving every year, able to fulfil their own potential, develop skills and talents and explore their creativity. We need a system that meets the needs of every child, no matter where they live or which school they attend. Our commitment must be to ensure that every school is a safe and supportive place, where every student can improve and thrive.

The NSW Government is reforming the curriculum that will be taught in every NSW classroom to ensure that we focus on the key areas of learning to successfully prepare our students for a complex and fast-changing world.

We are reforming the NSW education system, one of the largest in the world, with a clear focus on making sure our schools and teachers are supported to deliver improved student outcomes. This includes the opportunity for students to engage in further education and employment when they leave school.

These reforms are vital for the young people in our schools today and for those who will arrive in the years to come. These changes are an investment in their lives and in the future of our society.

## Reforming the NSW School Curriculum

The Curriculum Review, developed by Professor Geoff Masters, charts a course to rework what is taught in NSW schools, and to equip every student for success both at school and beyond.

Our ultimate aim, to use the words of the Review, is to “ensure every student leaves school well-prepared for a lifetime of on-going learning and informed and active citizenship and with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help equip them for meaningful work and satisfying careers.”

The review has been informed by extensive consultation with thousands of teachers, parents and education experts from around the state, along with detailed examination of curriculum in the world’s top performing education systems.



This is the first comprehensive review of the NSW school curriculum in three decades and the recommendations will help shape the design of the new curriculum, identifying priorities for the early, middle and later years of schooling.

The review recognises that there is too much clutter in most syllabuses. The new curriculum will give teachers and students more time to focus on the key learning areas necessary for a deeper understanding of core concepts. The new curriculum will also ensure every student develops strong foundations for learning, life and work.

The NSW Government is setting an ambitious timeline for reform. A new English and Mathematics curriculum for Kindergarten – Year 2 students will be introduced by 2022. By 2024, the new curriculum will be available across all years.

The NSW Government wants to ensure that both VET and academic subjects are recognised as equally valuable. By 2022, new learning areas will be developed for Years 11 and 12 to clearly link school-based subjects to employment and study options. We will work with industry and post-school providers to ensure students have even better connections for their future.

The New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA), comprised of the leaders of all NSW government and non-government education systems, will oversee the rewriting of the curriculum to meet high community expectations.

I would like to sincerely thank Professor Masters for his important work, along with all those who have contributed to the review process. Over the next four years, we will be streamlining and strengthening what is taught in our schools, so that every student is prepared and ready for their future.

It's an exciting time.



**Sarah Mitchell MLC**

**Minister for Education and  
Early Childhood Learning**

**We aim to:**

**Improve  
school  
performance  
and student  
outcomes**

**Improve  
teaching  
quality**

**Strengthen  
school  
leadership**

**Build pathways  
to lifelong  
learning**





# The NSW Curriculum Review recommended:



## A new curriculum

- **De-cluttering the curriculum**  
Reducing content where it's needed
- **Learning with understanding**  
New curriculum focused on essential learning and structured to clearly show how deep learning develops from early to senior years
- **Skills in applying knowledge**  
Provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate skills in applying knowledge
- **Excellent ongoing progress**  
Students progress to new learning when they have mastered current learning



## Building strong foundations

- **The early years**  
Strong foundations in the basics, focusing on English and maths
- **The middle years**  
Clear standards that every student is expected to achieve in mandated subjects
- **The later years**  
Stronger pathways into vocational education for senior students; designing and linking subjects to deliver clear paths to both university study and vocational training; ensure rigorous subjects that integrate knowledge and the practical application of knowledge



## Making the change

- **Time for teaching and learning**  
“Declutter” a teacher’s day to give more time to focus on student learning
- **Extensive consultation**  
Involve all key education stakeholders in reform
- **An aligned learning ‘system’**  
Make sure assessment and reporting, support for teachers, and other system improvements best support what the new curriculum aims to achieve
- **Support for Teachers**  
Giving teachers what they need to make sure they can implement the new curriculum

## NSW Curriculum reform

The NSW Government has considered the recommendations of the review and is supportive of the overall principles of reform proposed.

Some recommended reforms will require additional work by government agencies, in partnership with the education sector, and other key stakeholders, to inform implementation.

The NESA board will take a leading role in providing advice to the NSW Government on all aspects of the implementation of curriculum reform.

In response to the recommendations, the NSW Government is committed to developing a new curriculum for NSW students from Kindergarten to Year 12 over the next four years.

The NSW Government response to individual recommendations is provided on page 16.

**Some students  
are missing out  
on developing  
the solid  
foundations  
they need**



## NSW Curriculum reform

### **Professor Masters' review of the NSW Curriculum tells us:**

- There is too much clutter in most syllabuses, meaning less time to focus on the basics.
- Some students are not getting the solid foundations in English and maths that they need and deserve.
- Not all HSC subjects provide clear links to further study and career pathways.

### **The NSW Government is prioritising reform with an ambitious delivery timeframe:**

- Building strong foundations for future learning by 2022 with new English and Mathematics curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 2
- More time for teaching by 2022 by reducing the hours teachers spend on extra-curricular topics and issues, as well as compliance requirements
- Strengthening post-school pathways by 2022 with new learning areas for Years 11 and 12 that clearly link learning to future employment and study options
- A new curriculum from 2024 with new syllabuses focused on what is essential to know and do in early and middle years of schooling, and key learning areas in senior years.

**“If students are to find meaningful employment, avoid long-term economic disadvantage and become active and engaged adult members of society, then every student will require levels of knowledge and skill currently achieved by only some.”**

(NSW Curriculum Review, p. 103)





# The new curriculum

### Review recommendations

Some students are missing out on developing foundations in the basics that they need for future learning and life beyond school.

The review makes recommendations about the content and structure of the new curriculum including:

- Most syllabuses are 'overcrowded' with content and need to be stripped down to focus on what is essential in each subject.
- Content should build across the school years to support deep understanding in each subject.
- Application skills should be developed for every subject, including subject-specific skills, and other application skills, such as, using technology, sourcing and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, collaborating, and communicating.
- Students should have opportunities to develop and demonstrate practical skills through problem-solving activities and projects.
- Students should have appropriate learning challenges and be supported to make excellent ongoing progress.
- Students should have the time they need to master a syllabus before moving on to the next one.

### NSW Government response

New syllabuses will be developed describing core learning in each subject area. Syllabuses will clearly identify essential concepts, knowledge, skills and understandings.

Knowing what is core will ensure teachers can prioritise learning and have the flexibility they need to teach to a variety of different student abilities within the one classroom.

### The NSW Government is committed to:

**By 2024, a new curriculum for NSW students from Kindergarten to Year 12.**

### Why change is needed

Teachers want more time to teach core content in depth and to give students opportunities to apply skills, which builds depth of learning. When requirements are broad or unclear, students don't have time for mastery or further learning.

To stay engaged students need learning challenges that give the appropriate 'stretch' – too much and they disengage and fall behind; too little and they become bored, failing to reach their full learning potential. Teachers need a curriculum that provides flexibility to meet students where they are at with their learning.

**"The underlying principle is that learning is maximised when learners are presented with appropriately challenging material, rather than being under-challenged by what they already know or over-challenged by what they are not yet ready to learn."**

(NSW Curriculum Review, p. xv).



## NSW Curriculum Review

# Building strong foundations: the early years

### Review recommendations

The review recommends:

- The early years of school should focus on providing every child with solid foundations in the basics.
- Priority learning needs to focus on oral language skills, early reading and writing skills, and early mathematics knowledge and skills.
- New syllabuses should include evidence-based teaching advice to support teachers to identify and respond to children's development and learning needs.

**“A key to ensuring every child establishes strong foundations in the early years is to identify the points they have reached in their learning – for example, the extent to which they have mastered early reading skills – and to tailor teaching accordingly.”**

(NSW Curriculum Review p. xvi)

### NSW Government response

The NSW Government recognises the critical importance of ensuring that students develop the foundational basics in English (reading, writing, oral language) and mathematics in the very first years at school.

**The NSW Government is committed to:**

**By 2022, new curriculum available for schools for English and Mathematics in the early years.**

### Why change is needed

Literacy and numeracy skills are essential to unlock children's academic potential at school, improving their overall academic outcomes and increasing the likelihood they will attain tertiary qualifications. Too many students move on from their early years of schooling without the foundations they need for subsequent success at school.

The reforms support the NSW Premier's Priority to increase the proportion of public school students in the top two NAPLAN bands (or equivalent) for literacy and numeracy.





## NSW Curriculum Review

# Building strong foundations: the middle years

### Review recommendations

The review recommends:

- The existing set of mandated subjects should be maintained.
- A minimum level of attainment should be identified for every subject, which students should achieve by the completion of school.
- New syllabuses should prioritise deep learning of core concepts and principles in each subject, as well as build students' skills in applying subject knowledge.
- Each syllabus should be designed to build on the content of prior syllabuses and provide the foundations for subsequent syllabuses.
- Students progress to new learning when they have mastered current learning.
- Teachers and parents and carers should be provided with a way of monitoring whether students are on track.

**“In the middle years of school, the new curriculum maintains existing subject requirements and a strong discipline focus. These are recognised as essential to a rounded education and crucial foundations for advanced and specialised learning in the later years.”**

(NSW Curriculum Review, p. 81)

### NSW Government response

The NSW Government supports the introduction of a minimum level of attainment in mandatory subjects by the completion of schooling.

The NSW Government is committed to providing better information to parents and carers about where their child is at in their learning. The current curriculum makes it difficult for teachers, parents and carers, and students to see their growth across the years of schooling.

A priority in the development of new syllabuses is to work with teachers and parents to determine the most appropriate ways to monitor and report on student progress.

### The NSW Government is committed to:

**By 2023, Kindergarten to Year 2 new curriculum available to schools.**

**By 2024, Years 3 to 10 new curriculum available to schools.**

### Why change is needed

There is a lack of clarity about the purpose and expectations of schooling in the middle years. Students can lose focus and start to disengage from schooling. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has identified minimally acceptable levels of attainment in reading, mathematics and science by 15 years of age. Between one in five and one in four students in NSW do not reach these levels.

Setting clear standards for every student will provide a basis for monitoring student progress and identifying students who are not on track to achieve these standards.



## NSW Curriculum Review

# Building strong foundations: the later years

### Review recommendations

The review recommends a smaller number of rigorous high-quality senior secondary courses.

All courses should:

- build strong theoretical foundations
- provide opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge
- develop skills in practical application, including through undertaking a major project.

Changes to existing senior secondary learning areas are recommended to strengthen pathways from school to further learning and employment and minimise the current academic-vocational divide.

Although out of scope of the Terms of Reference, public feedback on ATAR has been reflected in the review.

### NSW Government response

VET and academic subjects must be supported to attract high-quality students into both. Both theoretical knowledge and applied skills are needed to meet the future challenges faced by the NSW economy.

Introducing new learning areas will be a first step to strengthening senior secondary pathways, by providing clear information for students about the subjects they study and their options beyond schools. Stronger links are needed between schools, universities and VET providers, employers and industry.

The NSW Government supports the development of a smaller number of rigorous, high-quality HSC courses. All senior secondary subjects must provide a strong foundation for future learning and life beyond school.

### Why change is needed

Since the school certificate was abolished in 2011, students who may have traditionally left school in Year 10 to pursue vocational careers, have struggled to find the right pathway in their senior years at school.

Public consultation on the review made clear that there is a strong divide in the later years of school between academic and vocational learning.

**“It is not obvious that these existing arrangements provide the strong foundations that every student now requires for further learning, adult life and the world of work. Both provide relatively narrow preparations in their own way, either driven by the needs of universities or by industry bodies.”**

(NSW Curriculum Review, p. 85)

### The NSW Government is committed to:

**By 2021, review and reduce by approximately 20 per cent the number of school-developed elective courses in secondary school.**

**By 2022, strengthen post-school pathways in the senior secondary school by redefining learning areas.**

**By 2024, new syllabuses for senior secondary courses in key learning areas available to schools.**



## NSW Curriculum Review

# Requirements needed to drive change

### Review recommendations

The review indicates conditions for success in curriculum reform, including:

- continuing to engage stakeholders in curriculum reform
- more time for teachers to focus on teaching and learning by reviewing extra-curricular issues and topics, and streamlining compliance-related requirements
- making sure that all parts of the education system – such as assessment and reporting, and professional capacity building – are consistent with the new curriculum arrangements
- teacher professional learning to support the implementation of the new curriculum.

### NSW Government response

The NSW Government has set an ambitious timeframe for reform. We acknowledge the need to work closely with the education sector and other key stakeholder groups to achieve effective change and reform.

The NSW Government will work closely with the sectors to ensure that appropriate professional learning, supported by educational research and evidence, is accessed by teachers.

As a priority, the NSW Government will work with the sector to identify the impact of current extra-curricular issues and topics and compliance demands. Making more time for teaching is key to achieving the curriculum reforms.

**The NSW Government is committed to:**

**By 2022 reduce extra-curricular issues and topics and compliance requirements.**



# Implementation timeframe 2020 to 2024



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## 2021

- Reduce 20 per cent of elective courses in high school e.g. puppetry, leather and wearable art to free up study for core subjects.

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## 2022

- New English and Mathematics curriculum for K – 2.
- Provide more opportunities for credit towards qualifications in apprenticeships, robotics, Artificial Intelligence, engineering etc.

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## 2023

- Full Implementation of new K – 2 curriculum.
- New English and Mathematics curriculum for Years 3 – 10.

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## 2024

- New syllabuses for Years 11 and 12.
- Full implementation of new curriculum K – 12.

**For students to have a deeper understanding of subjects, we need to declutter the curriculum**



## NSW Government response to the recommendations of the NSW Curriculum Review

### Learning with understanding

- 1. Design new syllabuses for each subject, including subjects of the senior years, to reduce the volume of mandated content where appropriate and to prioritise the learning of core facts, concepts and principles.**

| Recommendation  | Position |
|---|----------|
| 1.1 In each subject of the new curriculum, identify essential facts, concepts and principles, the understanding of which is developed in increasing depth over time, and where required, use this to identify content that is more peripheral and could be removed. | Support  |
| 1.2 Decide how this core content is to be sequenced through new syllabuses, informed by evidence of how increasingly deep knowledge and understandings in a subject commonly unfold and are best developed over time.   | Support  |

### Skills in applying knowledge

- 2. Design new syllabuses not only to develop increasingly sophisticated knowledge and deeper understandings of a subject, but also skills in applying that knowledge.**

| Recommendation   | Position |
|--|----------|
| 2.1 Make explicit in new syllabuses for every subject that skills in applying knowledge are part of the intended learning, and show how these skills are to be developed over time. These skills include subject-specific skills, but also skills in using technologies, sourcing and analysing information, critical and creative thinking, collaborating, and communicating. | Support  |

## Excellent ongoing progress

- 3. Design new syllabuses that do not specify when every student must commence, and how long they have to learn, the content of each syllabus.**

| Recommendation  | Position  |
|---|---|
| 3.1 Make new syllabuses untimed, with students progressing to the next syllabus once they have mastered the prior syllabus. Students who require more time should have it; students ready to advance should be able to do so. | Support in principle<br><br>Further advice will be sought from NESA |
| 3.2 Specify what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of being taught each syllabus in a subject and illustrate this standard with samples of student responses and work.                  | Support   |

## Building strong foundations

### The early years

- 4. In the early years of school, give priority to providing every child with solid foundations in the basics, especially oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematics knowledge and skills.**

| Recommendation  | Position |
|---|----------|
| 4.1 Make explicit in the curriculum that oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematics skills are top priorities in the early years of school, particularly for children who are less advanced in these areas, and that these take precedence over other aspects of learning. | Support  |
| 4.2 Develop a detailed and explicit curriculum for the teaching of reading as part of new syllabuses for subject English, structured to assist teachers to establish and diagnose where individual children are in their reading development, and accompanied by evidence-based teaching advice.                  | Support  |
| 4.3 Structure the early mathematics curriculum to support teachers to establish the points children have reached in their mathematics learning, including by diagnosing conceptual gaps and skills deficits, and provide accompanying evidence-based teaching advice as part of new syllabuses in mathematics.    | Support  |

## The middle years

- 5. In the middle years of school, give priority to providing every student with challenging learning material appropriate to their current level of attainment in the expectation that they meet (and ideally exceed) a minimally acceptable standard in each mandated subject by the completion of school.**

| Recommendation  | Position |
|---|----------|
| 5.1 Maintain the existing set of mandated subjects; for each subject define the minimum level of attainment every student should achieve by the completion of school; and provide teachers and parents/carers with a way of monitoring whether individuals are on track to achieve that standard. | Support  |
| 5.2 Require every student to commence learning a second language during their primary years, making use of technology where possible.   | Noted    |
| 5.3 Develop a curriculum that specifies what every student should know and understand about Aboriginal cultures and histories, and incorporate this into Human Society and its Environment.   | Support  |

## The later years

- 6. In the later years of school, give priority to providing every student with opportunities to pursue personal interests and strengths through rigorous, specialised subjects, each of which builds solid theoretical foundations, provides opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge, and develops skills in the practical application of subject learning.**

| Recommendation   | Position  |
|--|---|
| 6.1 Eliminate the current bifurcation of learning in the later years by developing over time a new set of HSC subjects, each of which involves rigorous, high-quality learning that integrates knowledge and the practical application of knowledge.                             | Support in principle<br><br>Further advice will be sought from NESA |
| 6.2 Replace the existing learning areas in the later years with a newly defined set, allocate all future HSC subjects to these areas and promote them as focal points for schools' connections with relevant industries and post-school providers and pathway and career advice. | Support   |
| 6.3 Require every student to undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing, with common assessment criteria, moderation of teacher assessments, and performances forming part of a student's HSC results.   | Support in principle<br><br>Further advice will be sought from NESA |
| 6.4 Establish a taskforce comprising representatives of the higher education sector, the school sector and the Universities Admissions Centre, to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).                    | Noted<br><br>Further advice will be sought from NESA                |

## Stakeholder engagement

### 7. Involve stakeholder groups, especially teachers, in all implementation phases of the new curriculum.

| Recommendation  | Position |
|---|----------|
| 7.1 Consult and actively involve all relevant stakeholder groups in the planning, development and pilot testing of new curriculum arrangements.   | Support  |
| 7.2 Implement a communications plan to explain the urgency of curriculum reform and the key intentions, guiding principles and underpinning evidence base for the new curriculum, including by clarifying what is not intended. | Support  |

## Creating enabling conditions

### Time for teaching and learning

### 8. Review current external demands on teachers' and school leaders' time in an effort to maximise the time available for teaching, learning and instructional leadership.

| Recommendation  | Position |
|---|----------|
| 8.1 Review recent requests that schools add extra-curricular issues and topics to the school curriculum to determine whether all are still necessary, and review protocols for adding such issues and topics in the future.   | Support  |
| 8.2 Review current paperwork and compliance requirements of teachers and school leaders with a view to reducing the time currently spent on such activities. This review should be undertaken by NESA and each school sector. | Support  |

## An aligned learning ‘system’

- 9. Work to ensure all components of the learning system — including professional capacity building, assessment and reporting processes, and broader improvement efforts — are aligned with the principles and intentions of the new curriculum.**

| Recommendation  | Position             |
|---|----------------------|
| 9.1 Build a coherent system of support for the new curriculum's goals to promote learning with understanding, to build skills in applying knowledge, and to assist teachers to establish where students are in their learning so that individual needs can be addressed with appropriately targeted, evidence-based teaching. | Support              |
| 9.2 In assessing student learning, give greater priority to students' understanding of core facts, concepts and principles, ability to apply these understandings in relevant settings, and skills in knowledge application..   | Support              |
| 9.3 Develop, implement and promote assessment and reporting practices to establish the points individuals have reached in their learning, to provide diagnostic feedback to support further learning, and to monitor students' long-term learning progress.   | Support in principle |

## Professional capacity building

- 10. Invest in professional capacity building to support the implementation of the new curriculum.**

| Recommendation   | Position             |
|--|----------------------|
| 10.1 Promote an understanding of teaching as the process of first establishing where students are in their learning and then providing stretch learning challenges appropriate to individuals' current levels of attainment. | Support in principle |
| 10.2 Develop and deliver professional learning to build teachers' skills in assessing and diagnosing student learning and their knowledge of effective, evidence-based teaching strategies.                                  | Support              |



**There will be a  
new curriculum  
from Kindergarten  
to Year 12**



## Reforming NSW public schools

# Implementing a new NSW Curriculum will support us to achieve our ambition for the students of NSW



## Reforming NSW public schools

# Our work to prepare our teachers and schools for this change has already begun

**We have been systematically implementing the measures that the evidence shows will lift student outcomes across the NSW public school system, getting our schools ready to get the most value out of these curriculum reforms.**

### **Increased focus on student performance in NSW public schools**

The government has made its commitment to improving educational standards for our students in public schools clear.

NSW public schools have committed to targets to increase the number of students who achieve NAPLAN results in the top two bands for literacy and numeracy. We have implemented targets at a regional level to focus our system on increasing the proportion of Aboriginal students attaining the HSC while maintaining their sense of cultural identity.

From Term 1 2021, all schools will be embedding these targets in new four-year Strategic Improvement Plans, which will set out how they will strengthen teaching to drive student growth and attainment.

### **Strengthening the quality of our school leaders**

We know that a good principal can make a great difference to students. We want strong leaders in all our schools. Building on the work started in 2016 with the School Leadership Strategy, we are improving how we develop, support and equip principals to ensure that every leader, every school, every teacher and every student improves every year. New principal performance management approaches will be piloted this year, drawing from international best practice to link evidence that supports improved assessment and management of performance.



### **Established the Best in Class Teaching Unit**

The Best in Class Teaching Unit is employing outstanding teachers from NSW schools, identified based on their impact on student performance, and involving them in the development of new resources and professional learning for their peers.

The unit will focus initially on driving high – and equitable – performance in popular HSC subjects, including English and maths, as well as embedding effective teaching of writing across subjects in the early years of secondary school.

### **Better use of evidence-based practice for teacher training**

All teachers now have access to the What Works Best resources. This is a practical guide teachers can use which give examples of the best strategies teachers can which have the highest impact on student outcomes in our classrooms.

Through the the Disability Strategy, we have invested in the development of our workforce to ensure that we are building and applying the evidence of what works best for all our learners.

These teaching strategies will become the cornerstone of teaching across the curriculum.

### **Mapping students' progress**

A curriculum that enables teachers to meet every student at their point of need requires effective use of formative assessment data by teachers. The NSW Department of Education is rolling out the use of Best Start Assessments for Kindergarten and Year 7 students, to every school by 2021 so that teachers know each student's level of literacy and numeracy on entry to primary and secondary schools. Additional diagnostic assessment tools are being rolled out to support the teaching of phonics, including piloting the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check in more than 500 schools in 2021. Similar assessments in other school systems have demonstrated opportunities to better support teachers in teaching phonics, and we expect to see these benefits in NSW.

We are leading the development of assessment tools to measure the learning progression of our students with additional needs to support effective differentiation for all learners.

In addition to these system-wide tools, we are developing assessments and resources for individual teachers to use in their classrooms. These assessment tools will align to the syllabus and will help teachers map their students' progress in literacy and numeracy.





### **Building the resilience of our students so they are ready to learn**

International evidence demonstrates that higher levels of wellbeing are linked to higher academic achievement. The NSW Government is expanding access to additional support for mental health and wellbeing, by ensuring every high school has a full-time counsellor or educational psychologist by 2023. The first cohort of 24 has already started supporting students. These psychological services will be complemented by 350 full-time student support officers in high schools.

Building on the rollout of trauma-informed practice training at scale across the state, the NSW Government will release a new Behaviour Strategy and Student Behaviour Policy this year. The focus of this will be on striking the balance in our schools between supporting teachers and leaders with managing challenging behaviour, while providing the right help and support to the student to address the underlying needs and keep them engaged with education.

### **Implementing the Schools Digital Strategy**

This strategy is the department's response to the requirements of the Digital NSW Plan and the recommendation in the NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038. We have already introduced a vision and roadmap for new services and ways of working. This will improve equity, professional development, and access to digital tools and technologies to empower both teaching and learning, as well as to support the digital literacy of students, teachers and organisational staff. It will also improve the functionality of legacy systems.





