

INQUIRY INTO THE REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES

SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN HEARING – 04 November 2020

Supplementary questions

1. What would be the estimated additional resources required to ensure students receive appropriate support to enable them to engage with the curriculum?

- The NSWPPA position is that all schools must be resourced to the full School Resourcing Standard as outlined in the Review of funding for Schooling Final Report December 2011 (Gonski Review). <https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review-of-funding-for-schooling-final-report-dec-2011.pdf>
- The NSWPPA position is that consideration must be given to ensuring schools can access specialist support for students to engage with the curriculum.
- The NSWPPA position is that all FTE support positions MUST be staffed and that NSW Public Schools require additional counsellors and wellbeing officers to enable students to engage with the curriculum.
- The NSWPPA position is that curriculum specialists are required to provide expert advice to school leaders and teachers to enable them to engage with the curriculum.

2. What is the anticipated percentage of school resources currently used to assist students with additional psychological and physical needs which is currently not funded through NDIS or other schemes?

- The percentage is not possible to quantify due to the complexities and variables across school contexts.
- Schools provide a wide range of financial and human resources to assist students with additional psychological and physical needs; this is currently not funded through NDIS or other schemes. Schools are supporting students / families in a wide variety of ways - feeding, medical needs, employing speech therapists and other specialists because of the barriers to families being able to do so, and the lack of services available in some communities.
- Factors include:
 - The psychological and physical needs of students
 - Community trauma (e.g. NSW Fires 2019/2020, Drought, Floods, Covid19 Pandemic)
 - The capacity of parents to access support for the children.
 - Dependence on integration funding support.
 - Socio-economic status.
 - Language barriers /refugee status
 - Out of home care.
 - Unaccompanied minors.

- Depends on local resources (e.g. Royal Far West)
- Access to medical practitioners and specialists
- Access to private counselling services
- Employment of SLSO's and additional staff to provide a range of support, including academic and social skills programs.
- Parent support (e.g. Positive Parenting Strategies - Triple P Parenting Programs)
- Research shows that the percentage of such students is higher in NSW public schools compared with non-government schools due to higher proportion of students with a disability and complex needs.

3. Would a change to require Special Religious Education to be delivered outside of school hours free up more time for curriculum?

NSWPPA Position Paper – Special Religious Education / Special Education in Ethics

This position paper focuses on issues related to the current Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) programs being implemented within NSW public schools.

Rationale

- NSW public primary schools have a significant issue with an overcrowded curriculum, making it difficult for teachers to address all curriculum requirements due to insufficient time.
- The requirement to allocate 30 minutes per week (minimum) to SRE/SEE lessons contributes to this issue, particularly as many school teachers spend an additional 5-10 minutes before and after these lessons moving some students to different learning spaces.
- Timetabling of the varying SRE denominational groups plus the SEE groups can result in limiting options for other school activities.
- Students who are not involved in SRE/SEE programs are unable to receive academic instruction or other formal school activities.
- The requirement of SEE classes to have no more than 22 students can lead to accommodation issues for schools with a lack of additional learning spaces.
- Principals have expressed concerns about the inconsistent quality of instruction and variable content delivery from some teachers involved in the current SRE/SEE programs.

The NSWPPA position is that:

- SRE/SEE providers should be given the same access to NSW public schools as other community organisations, who provide their lessons outside school hours - i.e. they be able to use school learning spaces either before or after school hours, with parents having responsibility to make transport arrangements for their children.

If SRE/SEE remain part of the curriculum during school hours, the NSWPPA believes that:

- Student involvement in these programs should be determined via an “opt in” model for parents. All students not involved should then be able to participate in the full range of learning activities deemed suitable by the school.

4. What impact would universal preschool of 3- and 4-year olds have on the educational levels expected at school?

The NSWPPA Position is that all children would be advantaged by attending preschool at 3 & 4 years of age.

Research shows young children's readiness for engaging in the social setting of preschool puts them far in advance of students who do not attend formal settings.

The groups likely to be most advantaged by early exposure to early learning educational settings are children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait backgrounds and children who are disadvantaged by their low socio- economic backgrounds.

As we know from our RAM equity allocation a lower percentage of parents from these families are likely to be gainfully employed or have completed school beyond a Year 9 level. They are more likely to find it difficult to support their young child's learning.

Many families have dysfunctional lifestyles, and this has an enormous impact on young children.

Children not exposed to preschool are more likely to arrive at school with low knowledge of literacy and numeracy concepts and have often not been exposed to regular routines.

For many young children life is extremely chaotic. In many households people may come and go at all times of the day and night, with children falling asleep on lounges and waking up late. There are no bedtime routines, story time and singing or games. Eating of meals are random.

Many of these children have no literacy and learning exposure through picture books, appropriate early childhood TV or electronic games suitable for young children.

Many children come to school without being exposed to counting games or rhymes that assist in the development of numeracy and phonemic awareness.

Lack of exposure to these things have an enormous impact on children starting formal education. They find it extremely difficult to engage in learning in a style that is so foreign to them let alone engage in school life of rules and expectations.

Often their social skills are quite poor as their life is so haphazard. They arrive at school at 5 or 6 and are disengagement so quickly and then become extremely disruptive.

When 3- & 4-year olds access preschool/ Early Learning Centers they have routines of; arrivals and departures, social and imaginative play, eating healthily and appropriately, hygiene practices through toileting and hand washing. Understanding routines helps them to see patterns and how the world works.

Preschool provides an excellent environment in which to develop social skills, an empathy towards others and the importance of language to communicate needs.

Starting at 3 would give Early Learning/ Preschool settings increased time to have an impact on a child's education.

Education levels would increase, the gap between achievers and non-achievers would decrease.

Research, university entrance data and evidence such as NAPLAN show children in higher socio- economic backgrounds overall do much better than students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the gap is increasing.

Research evidence includes: Why Early Childhood Education Results is Everyone's Business (Tricia Eddie, University of Melbourne 2019)

Other advantages would include:

- Vocabulary research showing the difference in the number of words children have when accessing early education.
- Early Intervention Ability to identify special needs and access early.

NSWPPA calls upon the government to investigate models of best practice of universal preschool of 3- and 4-year olds, based on research.

The NSWPPA believes that a common Kindergarten starting age would enhance the educational outcomes of students.

The existing variable starting age is problematic due to the significant variations in the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of students starting Kindergarten with an 18-month chronological age difference.

Case Study:

One example of a school taking affirmative action, based on research and best practice is that of Granville Public School, twice recognised in the short listings of Best Government Primary School in Australia (2019 & 2020); also, as an Innovative Australian Primary School in 2018.

- Granville Public School after looking at longitudinal data, over an 11-year period, of where LaST time and Equity Funds were targeted; designed a 2-year program for children starting school at 4.5 years as of 27 January
- This data showed that approximately 87% of the students who commenced school at the age of 4.5-years
- These children turned 5 in either April, May, June or prior to 31 July of their first year of schooling
- They absorbed 80+% of the Learning and Support Teachers' time over the remaining years of their primary schooling and absorbed a disproportionate % of equity funding over the same period.

The program is based around research of the Early Years Framework, Best Practice, and Play-based Learning. Key aspects of the program include:

- 2 Teacher to 20 student ratios, as per Early Years Framework
- The curriculum is play-based, language based and social development based
- Access to a speech therapist each week
- At the completion of the first year, if student data indicates that the student has reached the national benchmarks for Kindergarten, then the students are transitioned onto Year 1 the next year

- If, however, data indicates that the student has not reached these milestones they transition into the mainstream-non-play-based curricula-oriented program
- Throughout the program, the parents are constantly engaged with the 2 educators on the class, as well as the Assistant Principal

To date with 3 years completed of the program, data shows the following:

2018	20 students	80% transitioned into year 1 for 2019 & 20% transitioned into kindergarten 0% of this cohort has required any other intervention
2019	20 students	20% transitioned into year 1 for 2020 & 80% transitioned into kindergarten 100% of cohort are at or above national expectations
2020	20 students	20% will transition into year 1 for 2021 & 80% into kindergarten Further intervention required, is an unknown factor at this point

Questions on notice:

Transcript: Mr WILLETTTS: Mr Latham, going back to your original question, I do not know the numbers of the teachers in New South Wales who have mental health training but I am happy to take that as a question on notice.

I was not able to ascertain the number of teachers with mental health training as there are a range of professional learning providers and I do not have oversight of the variety of systems that would capture that data.

The NSW Government is committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of every student in NSW public schools. The Department offers professional learning opportunities to staff in supporting the mental wellbeing of students. The Department also partners with leading mental health organisations to support schools in their professional learning around responding to children/young people's mental health and wellbeing.