

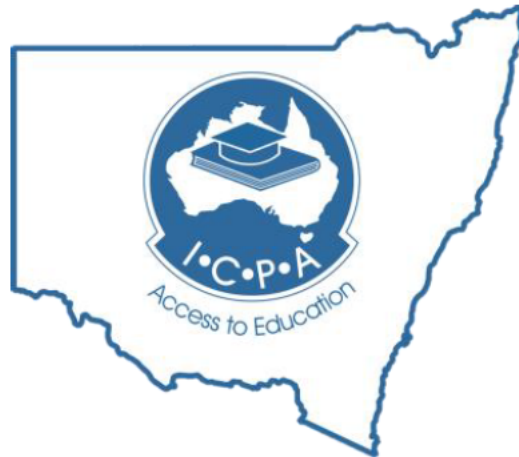
**Submission
No 67**

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc.

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**Isolated Children's Parents' Association
of New South Wales Inc.**



Submission to the
Parliamentary Review
of the New South Wales School Curriculum
NSW Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW advocates for members who have children who:

- Attend a rural pre-school or access early childhood education through a mobile service
- Attend a small rural or remote school
- Study by Distance Education and School of the Air lessons
- Travel to school by bus or private vehicle (daily, weekly or at the end of term)
- **Board away from home to access primary or secondary school at a boarding school, agricultural high school, hostel, private board or maintain a second home**
- Attend a Tertiary institution- University/TAFE/ College

Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales School curriculum

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:

(a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy.

ICPA-NSW supports the Masters Curriculum Review in designing new syllabuses for each subject, including subjects of the senior years, to reduce the volume of mandated content and prioritise the core facts, concepts and principles.

ICPA-NSW believes that the curriculum is overcrowded and there is a need to provide every child with solid foundations in the basics, especially oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematics knowledge and skills. These core subjects should take precedence over other aspects of learning until students have a deep knowledge and understanding. Teachers should have clear knowledge of what students are expected to know and understand before teaching any syllabus.

ICPA-NSW recognises that the curriculum must be flexible. This would allow teachers to better respond to individual learning needs. Some students need more time to process concepts otherwise they fail more significantly each year. Advanced students are often not adequately challenged by the content of the year level syllabus. Many of these students are not being extended to the level of which they are capable. Flexibility would provide the teachers to teach to the child's capabilities and needs.

ICPA-NSW believes the use of telehealth services or visiting trained allied health workers be utilised in the classroom allowing teachers to teach and therefore not needing to focus on specialty areas. In small rural remote and very remote schools, this would eliminate travel associated with specialist appointments and children would not miss out on valuable learning time away from the classroom.

ICPA-NSW agrees with the Masters Review on: -

“The successful introduction of the new curriculum also will depend on changes to other aspects of schooling to bring them into alignment with the principles and intentions of the new curriculum. These other aspects include, but are not limited to, approaches to classroom teaching, assessment and reporting, as well as

broader approaches to improvement, including professional development and networking, initial teacher education, performance monitoring and accountability.”

ICPA-NSW would like all universities to provide teacher training on the Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This is vitally important in the rural and remote areas where there is limited teaching staff and support. All teachers need to be able to identify the signs of ASD and get support before they escalate and create a disruptive classroom.

(b) Quality and relevance of the evidence-base underpinning for recommendations (compared to CESE findings)

An issue that ICPA-NSW has been passionate about and advocating for is:

Access to pre-school for all 3- and 4-year olds as per the Universal Guarantee (2018). Access is currently not available for many isolated children.

ICPA-NSW feels The Masters review does not address the importance of pre-school for 3 to 4-year olds. The curriculum review is tailored to K-12, yet the importance of access to quality early childhood education is proven to be the single determinant in a successful happy school career of a child starting Kindergarten, is not considered.

The CESE findings from the Rural and Remote blueprint was “The aim of this focus area was to ensure that children in rural and remote areas are able to access early childhood education in the year before they start school, and that they start school as confident learners.” Their summary findings are as follows: -

“After the introduction of the Preschool Funding Model that was part of the Blueprint, enrolments of 4- and 5-year olds in rural and remote areas increased, particularly among Aboriginal children. Increases in these enrolments occurred despite an overall decline in population over time in these areas. Enrolments of 3-year-old non-equity children have declined over time while enrolments of 3-year-old Aboriginal children increased by 10 per cent.”

The decline of the non-equity groups could be that some Rural and Remote children have no practical access to pre-school and although this has been acknowledged by the Government yet there has been little redress of that situation. ICPA-NSW continues to need to advocate as there are only 2 preschools running despite there being 10 identified small villages/areas which are without practical access to pre -school.

ICPA-NSW believes another reason the decline of number in the non-equity groups is that **Rural and Remote 3-year olds are not considered priority access to attend a pre-school**. Currently four-year olds are travelling two days a week (often long distances). If they could attend pre-school one day a week over two years and therefore access their six hundred hours, it would be more practical.

ICPA-NSW strongly believes that preschool children who live in an area that is classified as outer regional, remote or very remote be eligible for the School Drive Subsidy (SDS). The recommendation by the Federal Government to access 600 hours of preschool in the years before compulsory schooling is making it very costly to families as there is limited access to preschools in outer regional, rural and remote areas. Some parents are driving considerable distances to access this early learning requirement. The ongoing drought is having a huge impact on affordability to transport children to preschool.

Services are required to give equal priority of access to:

- children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school
- children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July in that preschool year and from low income and/or Aboriginal families
- children with English language needs
- children with disability and additional needs
- children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

There is no order of priority assigned to the list of points above. Priority must be given to the groups outlined above before any other groups, including non-equity three-year olds.

The Masters review has acknowledged that

“The early years of school are crucial in establishing foundations for future learning success. By the time they commence school, children are at widely varying points in their learning and development. They have very different levels of social and emotional maturity, language skills, cognitive development and psychomotor development. The challenge in these early years is to ensure that every child, especially those with developmental delays and from disadvantaged backgrounds, gets off to a good start and builds the foundations for subsequent success at school.”

If pre-schooling was available for all children, there may not be the widely varying points in their learning and development when they begin Kindergarten.

(c) Recommendations for student-centred ‘progression points’ and ‘differentiated learning’ in schools and whether such initiatives are research-based and proven to be effective.

In the terms of reference there is a desire to examine recommendations for student centred progression points and differentiated learning in schools. One of the highlights to have come out of the COVID-19 pandemic is that children have been exploring and using more online programs. These programs have been in the field of sport, music and the arts. Parents have reported that these programs have been interesting and captivating for the students. These programs need to be extended to languages and should only be offered as extra curriculum items, as the current curriculum is overcrowded and needs to ensure the basics come first.

ICPA-NSW believes that there is enough evidence that students have a range of different avenues for understanding, different learning ways and work at different paces. It is then crucial that in the new curriculum teachers can provide students within a diverse classroom the ability to teach to individual learning needs.

ICPA-NSW acknowledges the scope of the Masters Review finding on self-centred ‘progression points’ “the most effective ways to promote learners’ confidence in their ability to learn, to encourage a degree of self-control over learning, and to build an appreciation of the relationship between effort and success, is to enable learners to see the personal progress they are making – regardless of how they are performing relative to age peers or beliefs about where they should be by particular ages”.

ICPA-NSW believes that the self-centred ‘progression points’ should be introduced, learnt and monitored from a young age as otherwise not all students will set appropriate standards for themselves.

d) Relationship with the national school’s curriculum

The Masters Review has detailed information on the national school’s curriculum reporting assessment program NAPLAN which is to report and monitors student’s performance in priority curriculum areas including numeracy and literacy. This has a national website to report publicly every school’s performance. NAPLAN tests have been conducted between 2008-2018 there has been no significant improvement in reading levels in secondary students in that period, there have been significant improvement in Year 3 and Year 5 reading levels. No significant changes in numeracy across any year group and a significant decline in the 15-year olds to apply knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics and science.

ICPA-NSW support the National School Reform Agreement 2018

The overarching policy priority in school education currently is to ensure that Australia has a high quality, high equity school system. The National School Reform Agreement of 2018 committed the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments to the pursuit of this objective through three common national goals:

- to improve academic achievement for all students, including priority equity cohorts such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; students living in regional, rural and remote locations; students with disability; and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds
- to ensure all students are engaged in schooling; and
- to ensure students gain the skills they need to transition to further study and/or work and life success.

A high priority has been given to building the professional capacity of teachers and school leaders to deliver improved teaching and learning and thus improved outcomes. At a national level, this priority has been pursued largely through the work of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

2. The Extent to which the Masters Review meets key Government policy objectives, including:

(a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum

ICPA-NSW agrees with the Masters Review regarding the urgency for streamlining the overcrowded curriculum. 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.

ICPA-NSW believes that the efficacy and therefore the ‘extent’ of the recommendation will be in the delivery in all classrooms, including classrooms in remote and very remote settings, of the revised syllabuses.

The Masters Review addresses the need to develop and deliver professional learning to build teacher’s skills. (Executive Summary Masters Review key points -Curriculum 10.2)

ICPA-NSW has collated data and recommendations to address those concerns and would welcome the opportunity to speak to them.

(b) Ensuring students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as a deep knowledge of key subjects

The Masters Review prioritises oral language development, early reading and writing skills and early mathematical skills. These are to take precedence over all other aspects of learning. ICPA-NSW concurs with the need for this intention and believes, as a basic tenet, it should enable students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as a deep knowledge of key subjects and thus addresses government policy 2 (b).

Amongst the recommendations are those asking for the maintenance of programs which exist in remote and very remote NSW and are successful in delivering excellence in literacy and numeracy. An example is 2019 Broken Hill School of The Air (BHSOTA) having implemented an individualised and engaging number program which is successful because the basics are revisited to ensure deeper knowledge.

ICPA-NSW also notes that in remote and very remote NSW, practical access to pre schooling is currently not provided to all 3- and 4-year olds, impacting further on those students' acquisition of any language proficiency.

Furthermore ICPA-NSW continues to acknowledge that while Professor Masters recommends that early reading, writing and mathematical skills are priorities in the early years of school and that syllabuses are 'untimed' which theoretically will allow for more thorough attainments of language and number, **in actual fact in the remote and very remote areas of NSW, some stage four and five students do not have access to a tutor to deliver their Distance Education. They therefore are still as effectively prohibited from a meaningful education.**

NSW Department of Education must understand the limiting factors for its remote and very remote students otherwise a new curriculum will not decrease the gap (as per ARIA figures) in education which exists due to remoteness.

(c) Professor Master's explanation for NSW declining school results and the role a revised curriculum can play in reversing this decline.

Australian students are rated only two places above the world average, placing in PISA testing below significantly smaller countries. Professor Masters acknowledges that there has been for twenty years a consistent downward trend in education standards. ICPA-NSW advocacy historically is in accordance with Professor Geoff Master's findings and Review.

"That decline is almost unmatched in the rest of the world, it's very hard to find places that have seen such a steady decline over such a long period" Geoff Masters

Professor Masters explained that there has been student disengagement with syllabus content. Not only is the content no longer relevant but students are often 'glazing over' the subject matter because it is not flexible enough to cater to students at the highest and lowest levels in any year group.

The Masters Review recommendations speak to these issues explicitly. The extent of which the review may or may not address this decline depends on the rigour of the delivery of the following.

- Foundation skills in literacy and numeracy to be consolidated as deep knowledge is to be prioritised and delivered through explicit teaching. Students to have challenging learning material appropriate to their current level of attainment.
- 8.2 Review current paperwork and compliance requirements of teachers, allowing teachers time to work with students
- Promote learning with understanding allowing for students to build skills which they can apply
- Develop, implement, and promote assessment and reporting points to establish points reached in learning.
- Teachers are to be supported to attain skills to assess and diagnose student learning and their knowledge of effective, evidence-based teaching strategies

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.

"Too much information turned into useless knowledge".

The curriculum urgently needs to prioritise content and teaching of KLA's (key learning areas). Decluttering of syllabus could be organised, for example, if a craft activity were appropriate to a history unit it could be presented in an art lesson.

(b) To what extent, if any, knowledge and the curriculum are 'socially constructed', requiring the teaching of source verification and fluidity principles

In remote and very remote NSW curriculum concerns are real however the delivery of and access to quality education is a real issue.

Experienced teachers possibly are more likely to have developed the skill of recognising what knowledge students have as a deep understanding and from which they can extend them or choose to not overload them with more information. This level of decision making is not limited to experienced teachers however to be able to identify the difference in students' consolidation of deep understanding is vital to achieving positive outcomes for the class.

The criteria to assist in the above are:

- **Research resources in isolated areas need to be able to cope with internet data requirement and schools need to be resourced adequately and appropriately with all types of media to compliment the curriculum content.**
- **All Distance Education students in pre-school, primary and secondary must have access to a competent tutor.**

(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

While social and emotional development of students is important ICPA-NSW believes the provision of professional health assistance in isolated areas should be provided by: -

- Teachers trained to identify different learning styles and or physiological trauma and disabilities.
- Telehealth with quality counsellors who are consistently managing the one child and Allied Health Services such as speech and other services.
- These extra professional services must be claimable on Medicare and IPTAAS (Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme).
- Clarity of availability of services and how to access them.

(d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian history, pre- and post-1788

Australian history – pre and post 1788 the curriculum needs to take advantage of the comparatively recent research and resources to include indigenous stories allowing for a more thorough view.

(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

For there to be a realistic goal of language acquisition proficiency for students to be able to participate in the curriculum of upmost importance in isolated areas is access to quality early childhood education. **Currently, in Far Western NSW some 4-year olds are unable to achieve any of their 600 hours pre-schooling.**

- **The travelling mobile resource units must be continually funded.**
- **Preschools must be established immediately in remote locations.**
- **The School Drive Subsidy needs to be immediately extended to pre-schoolers**

Students studying teaching at University need to be exposed in their courses to the actual content they will be teaching in schools e.g. Writing Genres and etcetera. While some university students would be familiar with many primary school processes those that are not require more explicit units, to ensure all graduating teachers are confident in delivering the correct information.

Teachers who work in TP1 and TP2 schools should be trained in either R2L (Read to Learn) and or Reading Recovery before they take the position.

- Appointing teaching staff who are proficient in literacy themselves and who openly demonstrate a love of reading and writing would be a good strategy.

(f) Role and effectiveness of vocational education syllabuses in NSW schools

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.

4. Any other related matters.

For many years, ICPA-NSW has been lobbying for better access to internet for all schools. There are many components of the curriculum within schools today that require the internet. In our members' areas, these

components of the curriculum are not being accessed because of the lack of internet services. If they are able to access the internet it takes a long time, and the service drops out continually. This is not offering quality teaching and learning. In the schools where Satellite is the internet connection type, ICPA-NSW believes these schools need to be connected to a reliable and stable internet connection provided by the NBN Sky Muster Satellite Service. This connection is not just an issue in the classroom, but also in the school administration centres, as the management systems are all internet based. Smart boards were to be used extensively in classrooms, and the lack of internet connection is not seeing the full use and potential of these boards.

Video conferencing is an important part of schools today. This is a method whereby students can be offered extra curriculum options, as well as providing extension opportunities for those students who are needing to be challenged. Video conferencing can also be used by the Principal and teaching staff to gain professional development rather than travelling away from the school, which can easily turn into a three-day event requiring alternative staff arrangements whom have to be found, which is not easy in the remote, rural and very remote areas.

ICPA-NSW is excited about the capability of NBN Sky Muster Satellite and believes it is an internet connection for all schools, and that the NSW Department of Education needs to expedite the transfer of all satellite schools to an NBN Sky Muster connection.

ICPA-NSW is adamant that rural and remote schools need to be prioritised in any expansion of mobile coverage in regional Australia.

The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of face to face teaching for students across Australia, in fact on many occasions ICPA-NSW has heard from all education ministers of the importance of getting children back into classrooms and in front of teachers. For Distance Education students who can never receive daily face to face interaction, the use of technology is vitally important.

With minimal lead in time, schools across the nation displayed how flexible they could be and explored the use of technology to deliver learning. Some of these platforms have been successful.

The combined issue of limited home computers, no WIFI capabilities and the use of limited studios to deliver lessons via REACT means that DE students are unable to access other platforms to enhance interaction and face to face teaching.

ICPA NSW believes the process of converting Distance Education classrooms to NBN Sky Muster should be expedited. It is also vital that the NSW Department of Education investigates adopting a policy where a second computer is issued to a family upon commencement of the second student if that family is going to become a '3 children classroom.' ICPA NSW believes that this is not an additional computer, it is simply allocating the computer in advance, to assist with the face to face teaching and learning of students in this setting.

Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

This commitment will be supported by a range of inter-related areas for action: such as developing stronger partnerships and supporting quality teaching and leadership and strengthening early childhood education and building foundational skills in the primary school years. This in turn enhances middle years development and is supporting senior years of schooling with embedded pathways for learning throughout life. We need

to be supporting effective transitions for promoting world-class curriculum and assessment and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to reach their full potential supporting all young Australians at risk of educational disadvantage and strengthening responsibility mechanisms with strong, meaningful, accountable and transparent measures.

While the below comments do not pertain directly to students' standard of literacy and numeracy acquisition in terms of the actual curriculum; the following describes the only way forward for achieving positive progress of that standard for students who live in remote and very remote parts of NSW.

1. The Regional Director's job description **must** contain: -
 - Multiple physical visits to remote schools to support the Teaching Principals. During these visits, the director must thoroughly check the program, daybook or register and cross reference it with the actual work of the students.
 - Constant and genuine consultation with the communities in which their Teaching Principals are placed. This is to ascertain that the position is being rigorously completed. Also, that the schools' funds are being well spent.
2. The Rural Area Relief (RAR) teacher is employed to assist the Teaching Principal. This position needs to be constant so that students rarely have their school day wasted as in the case of a supply teacher who is unaware of where the students are working on the curriculum. Incentives such as accommodation and vehicle must be supplied for this RAR position to ensure there is someone to fill it.
3. To ensure maximum benefit for remote and very remote students in TP1 schools a Rural Experience teacher should be employed.
 - This would allow for teachers to learn how to teach in a multistage classroom.
 - It affords an opportunity to allow students to have their learning hours maximised as the class can be divided so that they could be taught within their stage.
 - Another benefit is for students with difficulties being able to one to one attention.
4. The NSW Department of Education ensures that there is always a 'hand over' between principals in TP1 schools particularly the learning program so that students start working from Term 1 day 1. the implementing the Rural Experience Program that has brought experienced teachers to rural and remote areas.
5. ICPA-NSW is heartened that the 2020 intake of experienced teachers leaving their city posts to teach in rural and remote areas under the Rural Experience Program now numbers 150 teachers! The Rural Experience teacher is an additional teacher at the new school and can return to their former position after the twelve months they have spent out in the bush. Alternatively, the experience may have been so gratifying they may choose to stay in rural and remote areas.

ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Parliamentary Committee No 3 – Education for the opportunity to comment on this review.

