

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA of NSW)

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Country Women's Association of NSW

*Incorporated in 1931 by an Act of NSW Parliament
Constituent Society of the Associated Country Women of the World*

ABN 82 318 909 926

18 August 2020

Hon Mark Latham MLC
Chair- Portfolio Committee No. 3- Education
Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales School Curriculum
NSW Legislative Assembly
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Sent via portfoliocommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Re: Inquiry into the review of the New South Wales school curriculum

The Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA of NSW) has a very strong interest in education policy and in particular, equitable access to high quality education for rural, regional and remote (RRR) children and students. This, along with improved and equitable health services for RRR areas, is a foundational principle of the CWA of NSW.

Some of the CWA of NSW policy on the subject of education, relevant to this review, is as follows:

- Retaining the core curriculum (literacy and numeracy);
- Equal professional development opportunities for regional school teachers;
- Adequate staffing for regional and rural schools, and teacher retention;
- Attracting teachers to regional, rural and remote areas of NSW;
- Access to digital technologies including reliable internet services for rural, regional and remote schools;
- Sport and physical education including self-defence.

CWA of NSW is supportive of many of the recommendations in the NSW curriculum review by Professor Geoff Masters (The Masters Review). In particular we support recommendations to give priority to providing every child with solid foundations in the basics, especially oral language development, early reading and writing skills, and early mathematics and knowledge skills.

CWA of NSW also strongly supports the recommendations to declutter the curriculum and teachers' requirements so that they can focus on classroom teaching.

CWA of NSW is disappointed to note that despite the Masters Review demonstrating a clear 'gap' in terms of educational disadvantage for rural, regional and remote students (along with other 'equity groups' such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students), the evidence from surveys of student attainment in literacy, numeracy, science, civics and citizenship and ICT literacy shows no consistent closing of the gap for any equity group.¹ Even more disappointingly, the Masters Review nor the NSW Government

¹ Professor Geoff Masters AO *NSW School Curriculum Review*, April 2020, page 9.

response provides any response or recommendation to addressing the inequity faced by groups such as rural, regional and remote students.

Educational disadvantage in rural and regional schools has been well documented: location and isolation, high-teacher turnover, low retention rates, school provision such as school size and staffing (less teachers), lack of program breadth, and lack of capacity to raise funds, are some of the factors for this disadvantage. Other social factors including economic conditions, limited cultural facilities in the community, and local industry structure, are also attributable². Whilst there is a need to review and reform the NSW School Curriculum, meeting basic equality requirements and closing the gap must be addressed as a priority.

Feedback from our members certainly demonstrated that there is a belief that our educational standards are slipping, and that teachers are overloaded. Other items of importance that the CWA of NSW would like to submit as part of this review of the curriculum include:

- Australia's history, including Aboriginal history;
- Handwriting, grammar, writing, spelling;
- More time to be active and creative (for the younger years);
- Lack of availability of speech therapists, who deal with communication as a whole, not just speech, and can significantly help to overcome learning problems that teachers may not be trained to identify. This is exacerbated for rural, regional and remote learning, where many schools would not have access to this service;
- Utilising the experience during COVID-19 in striving for better access for regional, rural and remote children. For example, pooling resources (made by teachers who are experts in their field) for online learning so that all students may benefit, not just the children in that school.

The CWA of NSW appreciates the invitation to provide a submission to this inquiry. We welcome further discussion on these issues, and can be contacted on

Yours faithfully,

Bronwyn Dunston
Chair- CWA of NSW Social Issues Committee

² Lamb, Stephen, and Glover, Sara *Educational Disadvantage and Regional and Rural Schools* Mitchell Institute for Health and Education Policy, Victoria University, 2014 page 65, pages 65-70.