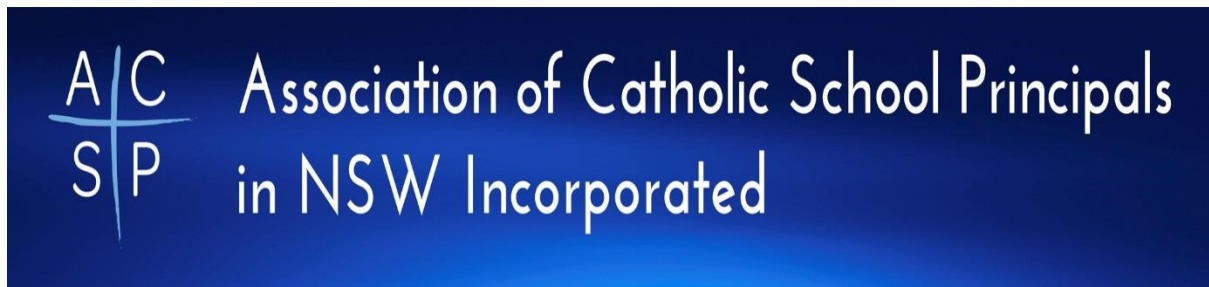


INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Association of Catholic School Principals (ACSP)

Date Received: 28 August 2020



Inquiry into the New South Wales School Curriculum ACSP NSW Curriculum Inquiry Submission

The Association of Catholic School Principals (ACSP) is an umbrella organisation for all Catholic School Principals, K-12. Its main purpose is to promote the overall aims of Catholic Education. The Association also promotes the personal, pastoral and professional development of Principals as leaders in Catholic Schools. As the peak professional body for Catholic Principals, the ACSP confers, negotiates and liaises with all levels of government and other industry organisations and is the key representative for its members.

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

(a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy

- The review does indicate that the current curriculum is overcrowded and this idea is supported by feedback from many teacher groups. There is a view that teachers need to 'cover' the dot points within the syllabus documents in order to comply with requirements but there is simply not enough time for anyone to cover everything in every KLA (primary schools) effectively. The result is a less than thorough education for our children, stressed teachers and overburdened schools.
- Focusing on key ideas and concepts encourages students to gain depth of understanding across disciplines in a way that allows them (and their teachers) time to engage thoroughly with content. Such an approach would be a welcome relief to students and teachers. During the pandemic, schools embraced the opportunity to teach the essentials, wind back expectations of curriculum coverage for the duration of 2020. The resulting freedom from curriculum accountabilities was a breath of fresh air allowing many schools to experiment, create and enjoy teaching and learning again.
- The idea of assessing through a series of progressions as opposed to achievements to be reached at a particular age and stage is gaining momentum as a key educational idea. Using progressions would provide the opportunity for students and teachers to better manage and assess individual student progress and need in relation to expected learning. It may well lead to different ways to organise learning and schools. I see, however, that the task is not without challenge as the development of the actual progressions raises questions in terms of how many, how detailed, how effective the identified progressions would be and how often they would be evaluated and re-adjusted over time in a well researched way for a range of KLA's.

(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. The Australian Curriculum uses progressions in Mathematics and English.

(d) Relationship with the national schools curriculum

- NSW sets itself apart from the national school curriculum by retaining its own set of outcomes. I think this places NSW teachers in a position of prioritising the NSW outcomes in their teaching and undervaluing the national curriculum. From a teaching perspective I don't believe teachers in NSW feel as confident in their understanding of the national curriculum as they could be because of this prioritisation.

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

(a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum

- We believe this has emerged as a major concern of teachers and leaders. It is expressed correctly as a key point in the review and it is an aspect of curriculum that is sorely needing to be dealt with.
- Teachers are not able to effectively teach the expectations of the current syllabus documents in a thorough manner. The idea of focusing on depth, conceptual understanding and linking of ideas is supported.

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

- The review supports the idea of acquisition of foundational skills and knowledge which is predicated on sufficient experience with play, social and emotional experience in the early years. The developmental aspect of learning, especially in the early years needs thorough consideration.
- The use of progressions of learning in these would support teachers in making decisions about how to effectively monitor and support children's learning and provide an effective platform for professional learning across disciplines.
- The implications for assessment in relation to deep learning would impact the NAPLAN approach and hopefully cause a re-think about how relevant, 21st century assessment looks.

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

- Governments continually approach a decline in test results with more stringent regimes of standardised testing and rigour in relation to the basics leading to prescribed curriculum and targets, tied to funding which leads to constriction in

learning, reduced autonomy in relation to teaching and learning for schools and worse results for students.

- Successful countries have an approach which places trust in professional judgement and skills, a focus on engaging curriculum approaches for schools, encouragement of innovation and creativity and effective professional learning models underpinned by adequate funding for education. We cannot continue to keep doing the same thing and expect a better result.

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

- Recent emphasis on social and emotional learning and building of capacity in students to be more resilient should be further developed and supported in schools. Unless students have a positive sense of wellbeing and self worth, they simply cannot learn effectively or be equipped to function adequately in modern society.
- The Commonwealth commitment to 'Be You' should be sustained and further developed as a means of supporting all schools with this aspect of learning.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 - EDUCATION

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

- Australian students should have the opportunity to develop a thorough understanding and critical appreciation about their story and heritage as well as an understanding and critical appreciation of the history and culture of our First People in an equal and balanced way. In this way, we can raise a generation able to appreciate the cultural and historical perspectives of our country and capable of honouring our identity.
- The resourcing available for teachers in relation to First Peoples, needs particular attention in terms of accuracy and access.

(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

- Compliance is a major burden within Australian schools resulting in valuable time and energy being taken away from the learning of our children and the excellent capabilities of our teachers. The reduction of this burden is long overdue and should be a major focus of organisations such as NESA and the Commonwealth Government.
- Having said the above, schools must be held accountable for the work they do but in a contemporary and meaningful way. How can compliance strategies improve the work done in schools rather than have them continually prove they meet required standards or requirements which are often interpreted differently across systems and amongst various authorities?

4. Any other related matters.