

Submission
No 76

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Asia Education Teachers' Association

Date Received: 30 October 2020

AETA Submission Review of NSW Schools Curriculum 2020

The Asia Education Teachers' Association (AETA), is a voluntary non-profit organisation. The organisation was established in 1972 to promote studies of Asia in Australian schools whether as a separate discipline or as part of studies in other disciplines. We value cultural diversity and promote intercultural understanding in an interconnected world.

AETA strongly opposes any removal or reduction in the teaching of Asia literacy in NSW including through the cross-curriculum priority, Asia, and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Australia is not an isolated country and never was. We have a multitude of connections with nations and states around the world. Some of these connections significantly predate European engagement with Australia. During the first century and a half of white colonisation of Australia, these connections were with the countries of Europe. More recent history has pivoted towards engagement with the countries of the Asia Pacific region - reflecting the changing geopolitical structure of the world. As such it is imperative that we have a deep understanding of those nations geographically closest to us and with whom we have significant linkages through trade, travel, sport, migration, and culture.

Our history is contested and involves influences from many parts of the world, including Asia. Indeed, the implementation of the White Australia Policy was a reaction to the reality that even in 1900, Australia was already a very multicultural society. Australian society is not universally admired around the world and it is our responsibility to educate our students to be good global citizens, to ensure that Australia and Australians are universally admired around the world. This requires us to be good neighbours to the countries with whom we are closest geographically and to understand those neighbours, respect their cultures, contributions, and histories. Now more than ever, we need to develop NSW students' understanding of Asia. AETA support the national agreement on the importance of prioritising general capabilities, specifically 'Intercultural Understanding' in the school curriculum.

The Master's Review handed down earlier this year identified 'aspects of the environment in which NSW schools now operate and possible implications for the school curriculum', (p. 5), including: 'in an increasingly globalised world, students will require knowledge and skills to participate as active citizens and to work across national borders, including high levels of inter-cultural understanding.'

Additionally, The Ministerial Statement in the NSW Government's own response to the NSW Curriculum Review final report refers to the need to respond to globalisation: 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.'

The Asia Education Teachers' Association has not been able to identify 'hostile material in many courses' or discerned teaching that is leading to 'self-loathing' and in fact learning about different political systems and contemporary and historical responses to challenges and changes, and reflecting on similarities and differences between other countries and our own, would rather have the opposite effect. Being self-reflective, learning from others and perhaps considering how an 'Australian' response might or should be different would enhance self-knowledge.

AETA rejects the notion that Asian studies is a distraction. Studies of Asia are central to our future. Engagement with Asia is vital to a prosperous, successful, and influential, Australia. Any suggestion

to the contrary flies in the face of evidence of our two-way trade links, diplomatic links, familial links, cultural links, and sporting links. Being Asia literate is, because of these engagements; a skill highly prized within many industries which undertake operations with countries in Asia.

Given our deteriorating relationship with China, our reliance on China as a major trading partner and growing power on the global stage, let alone in the Asia Pacific region, it is more important than ever that we have a cultural appreciation and understanding of China. The notion that we are an island (figuratively) insulated from the happenings of Asia due to our cosy relationships with the USA and England misses completely the reality of the world that we live in. Engaging with the Asia Pacific region is far wider than engaging with China only and crucial to successfully diversifying Australia's trade and diplomatic links.

AETA supports the Independent Education Union NSW and ACT, The Catholic Diocese of Paramatta and others in supporting the continued teaching of the cross-curriculum priorities. It disagrees with the Chair's and Institute of Public Affairs' renouncement of the priorities and considers that they are relevant, important and a necessary part of a comprehensive education this century and do not dominate or define Australian education nor impose any political agenda on it. We believe that there is an ongoing need for these priorities to be part of the education of children in Australia agreeing with the Diocese that 'the application of the priorities/capabilities was the key to their greater use and understanding to benefit learner and society'.

AETA recognises and advocates for the teaching of Asia literacy through the cross-curriculum priority Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. We oppose any attempts to reduce or remove the teaching of Asia as to do so would be detrimental to the best interests of our students and to Australia's national interest.