

## **INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

**Organisation:** NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby

**Date Received:** 3 November 2020

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# **Submission to Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum**

**November 2020**



## **Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby**

## About the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby

The New South Wales (NSW) Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby has a proud history. We are the peak organisation representing the rights of gay and lesbian people. We advocate on behalf of the gay and lesbian community and their families, as well as joining advocacy efforts of our partners and allies across the LGBTIQ community.

We work closely with bisexual, transgender and intersex organisations, and all Members of Parliament to advance the rights of our communities in NSW. The GLRL has been in continuous existence since 1988, but the origins of our organisation date back to the 1970s and the efforts to decriminalise homosexual acts and to provide phone counselling support to community members impacted by bigotry.

The GLRL has established strong ties to the community, consulting with our members and hearing their stories, many of them describing incidents of violence, discrimination and hatred. In the past 31 years, our community-based organisation has been composed of volunteers with lived experience of this bigotry. We draw on our history of bearing witness to those stories in making this report.

A full list of our advocacy efforts is published on our website and in our annual reports.

Any questions are welcome and can be directed to

**Stay proud,**

**Co-Convenors,**

**NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby,**

**Audrey Marsh**

**Jack Whitney**

## Context of this review

The NSW Government in 2018 announced a comprehensive review into the NSW curriculum. This review would be inclusive of all years of schooling and was touted as the first major review into curriculum since 1989. A two-year process of statewide consultation, led to an Interim Report, which again sought engagement from the public before the final NSW Curriculum Review was released in 2020, titled ***Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion***. The NSWGLRL believes to go through another review of NSW school curriculum would be to disregard and degrade these community contributions.

Indeed, this Review, chaired by Mark Latham, should be understood in the context of other legislation and inquiries. Namely, the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Complaint Handling) Bill 2020, introduced by Mr Latham in February 2020, the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020, introduced by Mark Latham in June 2020, and the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020, and introduced by Mr Latham in August 2020. The combination of all these reviews and bills represents varied concern among the community and sector workers, especially those of the LGBTQI+ community. As a combination, this reform package would:

1. Amend the operation of the Anti-Discrimination Board, introducing impractical decision-making requirements for the President and limiting the scope of matters which can be considered by the Board.
2. Prohibiting educators and counsellors from educating and talking about trans and gender diverse people **(subject of this review)**.
3. Impacts the wellbeing of all students where social and emotional development supports anti-bullying and harassment within schools **(subject of this review)**.
4. Require schools to take a 'both sides' approach to teaching about issues such as vaccination, World War 2, climate change or evolution **(subject of this review)**.
5. Threatens the employment of educators or counsellors who affirm trans and gender diverse young people.
6. Allow bodies which define themselves as religious to challenge government programs and policies.
7. Limit the ability of government and non-government employers to respond to religiously-motivated behaviour from an employee which hurts or vilifies others.
8. Allow bodies which define themselves as religious to discriminate in employment, service delivery or education, even if it is a publicly funded position or program.
9. Protect religious behaviour, even in circumstances in which it is unlawful.
10. Prioritise freedom of religion over other human rights<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Equality Australia 2020, One Nation Bill Factsheet <[equalityaustralia.org.au/resources/onenationbillfactsheet/](http://equalityaustralia.org.au/resources/onenationbillfactsheet/)>

## Schools for everyone

*... My daughter deserves health, social, education, employment, planning and other policies that best serve her needs.*

**Cindy (54), mother of a lesbian daughter**

The NSWGLRL is supportive of the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations and the importance of the 'social and emotional development' of students. NSWGLRL members share the widely held view amongst the community that promoting the social and emotional development of students is a central role of education.

Despite this, there is no consistent approach to students' social and emotional wellbeing in NSW schools. One example of this inconsistency is how schools provide education around healthy relationships, respect and tolerance. Religious affiliated schools and private schools adopt various approaches to student wellbeing depending on levels of funding provided and their underpinning philosophies. The absence of a consistent approach is undermining the delivery of services for children who are experiencing suicidal ideation and mental health conditions.

Historically, the 'social and emotional development' of young people and children has largely been inconsistent and fragmented across schools, depending on individual teacher capacity or beliefs and school resourcing. The education and 'social and emotional development' of LGBTQI communities have largely been framed within the context of sexually transmissible infection (STI) and blood borne virus (BBV). Very little investigation has gone towards the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of this community, nor has it been included in any educational context.

In the last 20 years there has been no national strategy, no plan or research to identify and meet the needs of the particular groups within this community, namely the LGBTQI+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, people with disability, LGBTQI+ culturally diverse populations and more. Previous LGBTQI+ reports have excluded these diverse groups in national strategies, health and education plans specific to LGBTQI+ people. It is therefore evident the nuanced intersections of needs of these communities requires further work. Furthermore, research asserts that improved and greater collection of community profiles and data of the LGBTQI+ populations is required.

Below are international initiatives that are in line with best practice and evidence-based that should be reviewed when assessing the need for wellbeing and emotional development for all students in the NSW curriculum.

### **World Health Organisation - Standards in Sexuality Education**

Standards from the World Health Organisation states that schools should teach from age 9 to 12, the importance of acceptance, respect and understanding of diversity in sexuality and sexual orientation as a process <sup>2</sup>.

### **United Kingdom (UK) - Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education**

The UK Department for Education has introduced compulsory *Relationships Education* for primary pupils and *Relationships and Sex Education* (RSE) for secondary pupils from September 2020. Also, from September 2020 it will be compulsory for all schools to teach *Health Education*. Through these subjects, the aim is to support young people to be happy, healthy and safe, and equip them for adult life and to make a positive contribution to society.

The content covers some of the following areas:

- Different types of relationships, including friendships, family relationships, dealing with strangers and, at secondary school, intimate relationships.
- How to recognise, understand and build healthy relationships, including self-respect and respect for others, commitment, tolerance, boundaries and consent, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships.
- How relationships may affect health and wellbeing, including mental health;
- Healthy relationships and safety online.
- Factual knowledge, at secondary school, around sex, sexual health and sexuality, set firmly within the context of relationships.

### **Canada - LGBTQ Inclusive Education**

This program was designed with the aim to improve school wellbeing through anti-homophobia education. The program is called *Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism: A K-12 Curriculum Resource Guide*, and states that, "It is the responsibility of administrators, teachers, and all staff to implement these policies in their practice, from the main office, to the hallways, to the classrooms, and to the school yard. It is important to integrate anti-homophobia education into our schools

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bzga-whocc.de/en/publications/standards-in-sexuality-education/>

because homophobia and heterosexism hurt our students, whether they are LGBTQ, heterosexual, or too young to define themselves".<sup>3</sup>

### **Taiwan - Gender Equality Education Laws**

Enacted in 2003 and 2007 respectively to ensure that those in educational establishments are not discriminated against as a result of gender or sexual orientation. Implement gender equality education in the revised provisions of the 2011 "Gender Equality Education Law", teach respect for various gender and sexual orientations. The law adds new provisions on sexual bullying. Schools are obligated to prevent and report bullying against someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1.** Include timely, holistic and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in the NSW school curriculum to promote students' wellbeing, emotional development and safety.
- 2.** Provide access to professional development and evidence-based resources to teachers and educators to facilitate comprehensive sexuality education.
- 3.** Consistent implementation of a national comprehensive sexuality education framework is needed to ensure all student needs are met, including students belonging to diverse groups.
- 4.** Integrate comprehensive sexuality education into the NSW core curriculum.
- 5.** Promote a whole of school approach and whole of life approach to wellbeing.

## **Mental health in our schools**

NSW GLRL is concerned that NSW students, especially the most vulnerable, are not receiving the best quality support services possible. We have consulted with members and community stakeholders who are teachers and students and have extensive experience working with young people in schools and in other settings.

The NSWGLRL is supportive of the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations and the importance of the 'social and emotional development' of students. NSWGLRL members share the widely held view amongst the community that promoting the social and emotional development of students is a central role of education. Despite this, there is no consistent approach to students' social and emotional wellbeing in NSW schools. The absence of a consistent approach is undermining the delivery of

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.as-seerah.com/resources/editor/fmgr/uploads/Challenging-Homophobia-and-Heterosexism-2012-update.pdf>

services for children who are experiencing suicidal ideation and mental health conditions.

The NSWGLRL welcomes the NSW government's budget commitment to additional mental health practitioners including social workers in schools and believes it is critical that they are employed in a capacity that enables them to use the full extent of their knowledge and skills, in providing evidence-based and robust interventions to vulnerable students and their families.

## Support for our teachers

The NSWGLRL is broadly supportive of many of the suggestions put forward by Professor Masters in the review. The NSWGLRL, however, cautions that many external factors also significantly impact the efficacy of schools, including but not limited to: a lack of appropriate resourcing for early childhood care, the social impact on schools and teachers due to changes in technology and societal expectations, conflicting requirements between state and federal governments regarding data collection, and the impact of registration requirements on teachers capacity and time.

*Teachers' wellbeing is crucial to student wellbeing, they are not mutually exclusive. Teachers are the first point of call for many students - especially some LGBTQI+ students where home is not as supportive as many would like.*

**Anonymous (26)**

### Recommendations:

**6.** That the NSW government consider the Victorian Wellbeing model as a blueprint and create the role of Counsellors and Social Workers who will be remunerated accordingly.

**7.** That every NSW school with a student population beyond 500 should be allocated, or required to employ at least 1 School Social Worker or Counsellor to promote the well-being of students and provide therapeutic interventions for students who need them.

**8.** That all schools are provided with access to specific teacher resources and training, in order to provide more comprehensive and intensive learning around bullying and harassment.

## Recommendation and Conclusion

Our submission has sought to highlight the concerns of some members of the LGBTQI+ community. The sample of quotes provided throughout this submission show the real world impacts of our education system and the importance of 'social and emotional development' of our community, and the impacts it also has on



students, teachers and staff. These are real people whose education, work and health will be impacted.

**Summary of Recommendations:**

- 1.** Include timely, holistic and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in the NSW school curriculum to promote students' wellbeing, emotional development and safety.
- 2.** Provide access to professional development and evidence-based resources to teachers and educators to facilitate comprehensive sexuality education.
- 3.** Introduce a compulsory, state-wide, consistent, comprehensive sexuality education framework to ensure all student needs are met, including students from diverse groups.
- 4.** Integrate comprehensive sexuality education into the NSW core curriculum similar to the UK *Relationships Education* for primary pupils and *Relationships and Sex Education* model.
- 5.** Promote a whole of school approach and whole of life approach to wellbeing.
- 6.** Consider the Victorian Wellbeing model as a blueprint and create the role of Counsellors and Social Workers who will be remunerated accordingly - please refer to the submission by the *Australian Association of Social Workers* for more information.
- 8.** Enable schools to employ a Social Worker or Counsellor to promote the well-being of students.
- 9.** That all schools are provided with access to specific teacher resources and training, in order to provide more comprehensive and intensive learning around bullying and harassment.