



APPA'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) wishes to provide the National Curriculum Board with a clear statement of its views about the national curriculum. This paper concerns the development process, the products to be developed and issues concerning implementation of the national curriculum which should be taken into account during development. It represents the views of APPA and its constituent bodies, representing over 7200 Australian Government, Catholic and Independent primary school principals. It is accompanied by copies of APPA's *Charter on Primary Schooling* which sets out the organisation's position on the primary years and provides one basis for this paper.

DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

1. Some past curriculum projects have been built from the roof down, with the requirements of the senior secondary curriculum shaping even the primary curriculum. On this occasion, APPA expects that the Board will develop a primary curriculum that properly reflects the needs, circumstances and conditions of primary schooling and is developmentally appropriate for primary age children. The preamble to the national curriculum should include a brief statement regarding the nature of the learning which occurs in primary schools and their culture and purpose, which are integral to effective curriculum development.
2. APPA notes that Board membership includes little experience of teaching or leadership in primary schools. It is critical that all forums, subject committees and decision-making processes include representation of personnel with current, recognised and credible experience in and knowledge of primary schooling and primary curriculum. APPA would expect to be represented in all such groups and activities. The representation of primary personnel should at least equal that of secondary personnel on all groups. Primary teachers and other personnel in primary education (including early childhood teachers) should be involved in all consultation and trialling.
3. Many previous curriculum projects have taken no account of the demands on teachers working in primary classrooms with responsibility for a number of subjects. The national curriculum should assist in uncrowding the curriculum rather than making it more complex. Before development of subject documents is started, the Board must develop criteria and management controls to ensure that the workload of primary teachers and the volume of national curriculum materials applying to their work are managed effectively.
4. Before initiating development, the Board should ensure that there is clarity about the structure of the whole national curriculum (including those subjects which are not yet formally included in the process). This is designed to avoid the progressive and unplanned development of a volume of materials across all learning areas and subjects, leading to a crowded curriculum that is impossible for primary teachers to implement successfully.

5. Instructions to writers should ensure that documents are consistent between subjects (eg in language, structure and level of expectation) and that the needs of teachers in primary classrooms are taken into account in the writing. These instructions should also include the requirement that cross-curricular and generic matters (including the literacy and thinking skills requirements of each subject) are embedded in subject documents, not treated separately.
6. Extended trialling should occur with typical groups of teachers in the full range of schools. It has sometimes been the case in the past that trialling has given an unrealistic impression of teacher views because it has concentrated on the most effective and talented teachers. Trialling should engage the full range of teachers and should be extended in time to ensure that it provides high quality advice on how well the documents work in real classrooms and with a range of approaches to pedagogy.
7. Throughout the development process, the NCB should provide schools and teachers with a thorough and sustained information program enabling informed participation in the process and effective planning.

THE NATURE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

8. The national curriculum should have the character of a syllabus, focusing on what is to be taught. It should avoid advice about other matters. It is not the role of the national curriculum to decide what is an appropriate teaching approach or to advise teachers about how to engage students. Teachers and schools will make decisions about how to implement the curriculum to achieve learning and the national curriculum should encourage thoughtful and diverse approaches. It would, however, be useful for the Board to provide separate advice about the assumptions regarding pedagogy and assessment that underpin the national curriculum.
9. Within each subject, the national curriculum should specify particular knowledge and skills for each subject. In English, for example, the document should identify those elements of grammar and spelling for each year which are essential components of knowledge about language. It should also identify specific skills in reading and writing which are essential to the effective use of English for communication. In addition, in each subject, the documents should incorporate broader literacy and thinking skills characteristic of the subject.
10. It is the view of APPA that the audience for the national curriculum should be understood to be intelligent lay readers and classroom teachers. The language of the documents should reflect the audience. Given the fact that many primary teachers teach across a range of curriculum areas, the language should be accessible to non-specialist readers.
11. The subject curricula should clearly state the curriculum expectations for each year level. This requirement is essential if the documents are to be of greatest use to primary teachers and if the benefits of the national curriculum (eg in supporting mobile students and teachers) are to be realised.
12. The suite of documents should be designed to reduce the crowding of the curriculum and should take account of what can be covered in a day or week in a primary school. The critical focus of primary schools on literacy and numeracy, especially in the early years, should not be put at risk by the inclusion of substantial expectations in other subject areas.

13. This limitation of curriculum coverage will be assisted by a rigorous focus only on what is essential for every Australian child to learn. In areas such as history and the sciences, the early years undertake at most a limited range of preparatory work. Even in the upper primary years, these subjects are a significantly lower priority than English and mathematics. Accordingly, APPA believes that no history national curriculum should be developed for the first three years of schooling and the science national curriculum should be very limited in scope in the first three years.
14. The volume of material to be developed should also be limited. APPA believes that it is possible to articulate the curriculum requirements for the whole of primary schooling in all of English, mathematics, the sciences and history in a single document of no more than 40 pages, including requirements for each year level. Specification of requirements for English and mathematics might take about two pages per year and sciences and history less than one page each per year. Limitation of the volume of material in the descriptions for the primary years has two purposes: limiting the amount of reading required of teachers and limiting curriculum coverage so that teaching in depth is supported.
15. The national curriculum ought to constitute substantially less than the whole curriculum in the subjects included, leaving room for additions to reflect local circumstances, traditions and interests. Specific elements of the national curriculum will be filled out and given substance locally. Schools should also be free to choose forms of classroom organisation and pedagogy (including integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches) which best enable them to deliver the national curriculum to all children.

ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

16. Achievement standards should mirror the national curriculum being developed for each year of schooling. This reflects the circumstances under which teachers work and supports the parent and community expectation that assessment should indicate whether students are making satisfactory progress at a year level.
17. Standards should be clearly and explicitly based on and driven by national curriculum. National assessment should, in turn, clearly reflect the achievement standards.
18. Achievement standards taken together should reflect a continuum of achievement occurring throughout the primary years. They should provide explicit criteria for progress along this continuum to assist teachers in making credible and reliable judgments about student learning.
19. The achievement standards should reflect, among other purposes, the importance of support for the continuing improvement of teacher skills in assessment, judgment of student achievement, understanding of data and reporting. They should assist classroom diagnosis and be designed to improve student learning. To this end, the standards should include benchmarked samples of student work and resources to assist teachers in monitoring and reporting progress through classroom assessment. They should be clear, simple and easy to use.
20. Standards should also assist in raising expectations of student achievement. They should be more than minimal.
21. The achievement standards, like the curriculum, should reflect the priority of subjects in primary schooling. They should be more detailed, specific and substantial in English and mathematics, and significantly less substantial in history and the sciences.

IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

22. APPA believes that the national curriculum should be mandatory for all schools. This is the only means by which the intentions of the national curriculum can be realised. Once developed, national curriculum documents should be provided directly to teachers to ensure that all teachers and all schools have a common foundation for the curriculum.
23. National curriculum documents should be made available in a variety of forms, including print and digital forms. The print version should be published not as separate subject documents, but as a single volume for the primary years.
24. The relationship between the national curriculum and existing state and territory curriculum documents must be made clear. It is the view of APPA that the new national curriculum should replace rather than supplement existing documents. It should be clear to teachers that in the subjects in which the national curriculum has been developed, they are responsible for implementing the national curriculum.
25. It should also be made clear how any inconsistencies between national curriculum documents in the initial four subjects and state and territory documents in other subjects and learning areas are to be resolved. This resolution should be articulated and disseminated well before the national curriculum is complete so that schools can engage in effective planning.
26. The Board should develop a resource impact statement to provide advice to jurisdictional and sectoral authorities on the resource implications of implementing the national curriculum. The Board should be clear that effective implementation will depend on additional resourcing, the development and delivery of professional development as early in the process as possible, the provision of print and web-based support materials illustrating forms of classroom implementation and the need for teachers with expertise in required subject areas. The specific additional support needs of particular categories of schools (eg small, remote and special schools) should also form part of the resource impact statement.
27. APPA notes that unless states and territories agree to harmonise their starting ages and schooling structures, the implementation of a national curriculum will be more difficult and the benefits will be to some extent undermined. This difficulty also suggests the value of clarity about the relationship between the national curriculum and curriculum developed for pre-schools, kindergartens and day care centres.