Secret curriculum changes leave teaching profession in the dark



The Turnbull Government has blindsided the teaching profession by planning the biggest Australian school curriculum reforms in decades without consulting the very teachers, principals and support staff who will be forced to implement the changes, according to the Australian Education Union (AEU).

The planned reforms are contained in a leaked draft report, the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), which was discussed by Federal Minister for Education and Training Simon Birmingham and state and territory education ministers at the June Education Council meeting in Adelaide.

The report outlines massive reforms proposed across the Australian curriculum, including introducing learning progressions and online formative assessment across 15 areas of the curriculum, all in the next two to three years and without any additional funding or resourcing for schools to implement the changes. The report also includes a phonics test as part of a formative assessment tool.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said that the NSW experience with the Assessing Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN) program had shown these curriculum reforms would leave teachers overwhelmed.

She said the changes had no chance of successful implementation without extra school funding and the Turnbull Government failed to include the teaching profession in consultations.

“Ignoring the teaching profession when it comes to school reform is simply a recipe for disaster,” Ms Haythorpe said. “This report is a blueprint for the biggest school reform in decades, all in the next two to three years, without any additional funding or resourcing and without any consultation whatsoever with the teaching profession.

“Simon Birmingham’s educational reforms simply will not work to lift student outcomes if the government implements them without consulting the teaching profession.

“If teachers and principals are not involved in education reform, then history will show that the Turnbull Government’s efforts in the education sector will be a dismal failure.”

The draft report calls for introducing learning progressions and online formative assessment across 15 areas of the curriculum[1].

Ms Haythorpe said real-world experience had already shown these reforms just wouldn't work.

"We've seen in New South Wales the rollout of learning progressions in just two curriculum areas has been catastrophic," Ms Haythorpe said.

"Teachers were overwhelmed and their stress levels skyrocketed. Data about student outcomes is useful, but it should be kept in the classroom. It should not be about clicking thousands of boxes.

Data needs to help us inform teaching decisions, not determine them.

"Now Minister Birmingham wants to rush out learning progressions across 15

curriculum areas in only three years, with no extra funding.

"The New South Wales example highlights why curriculum changes like this must not be developed without the deep engagement of teachers and principals."

Ms Haythorpe said Minister Birmingham hadn't established any evidence on which to justify his reform agenda.

"He is asking teachers to implement a program which has not been successfully tested. We are basically entering into uncharted waters here," she said.

"The Turnbull Government is determined to roll out this one-size-fits-all reform in a deeply inequitable funding environment, where 87 per cent of public schools will be below the Schooling Resource Standard in 2023 while 65 per cent of private schools will be above it.

"The Turnbull Government has already betrayed public schools by ripping $1.9 billion from public education funding over the next two years. Expecting these curriculum reforms to be successfully implemented in this funding climate is just a pipe dream."

The AEU Federal Executive has called on the federal government to put on hold any decisions on the NSRA and to commit to consultation with the teaching profession about what the agreement should contain, and how any introduced changes should be funded.

The AEU is also seeking urgent meetings with state and territory education ministers to discuss the teaching profession's concerns about the lack of consultation around the NSRA and to raise awareness of the issues in the proposal.

"Simon Birmingham's reforms are an attack on the professionalism of the teaching profession," Ms Haythorpe said.

"There has been absolutely no consultation with the teaching profession, meaning that these reforms have absolutely no chance of success. Our children deserve better."

1. The Australian curriculum has eight learning (or content) areas: *English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies* and *Languages*. There are also seven general capabilities which refer to the knowledge, skills and behaviours that can be developed and applied across the curriculum. They cover *literacy, numeracy, ICT capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding* and *intercultural understanding.*

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