

The Report of the Committee of Review of New South Wales Schools: Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

New South Wales. Committee of Review of NSW Schools, 1989 (Chair: Sir John Carrick)

Overview of the document

32 page document summarising the conclusions and recommendations of the Report of the Committee of Review of NSW Schools (based on an original report of 301 pages). The Committee was established on 16 September 1988 by the NSW Premier, Nick Greiner. Key recommendations include the introduction of a new Education Act, the replacement of the Board of Secondary Education with a new Board of Studies, minimum curriculum requirements in six Learning Areas, and the replacement of the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs with a new Office of Education and Youth Affairs.

Keywords

Blueprint for the future; educational outcomes; Learning Areas; devolution; common core curriculum; educational disadvantage; K-12 curriculum continuity; new Board of Studies; new Education Act; educational disadvantage; freedom of choice; evaluation; assessment; certification; structures of schooling; teaching; teacher education.

Terms of Reference

The Committee of Review was to:

1. Undertake a comprehensive review of education in NSW schools with particular study of all aspects of the Education and Public Instruction Act 1987 and any additional or alternative legislation deemed desirable; and including inter alia:
 - The registration of non-State schools;
 - Appeals procedures on non-registration;
 - The nature of information required by government of registered schools and the methods of obtaining that information;
 - The exemption of children from attendance at school;
 - The membership and functions of the Board of Secondary Education;
 - The needs of disadvantaged students;
 - The means by which effective and meaningful freedom of choice by parents, both between government schools and between government and non-government schools, might best be guaranteed and extended.
2. Examine ways of further improving the quality of education in NSW schools, bearing in mind the following:
 - The need for continuing public expenditure restraint;
 - The principle of equality of opportunity;
 - The concept of education for the whole of life as well as for vocational preparation;
 - The aim of achieving the highest possible quality of education for all.
3. Seek public submissions and responses to its proposals from education interest groups and the community in general.
4. Make recommendations to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs by 31 August 1989, including any proposals for legislative changes.

In addition, the Committee was asked to prepare and submit a complete draft of a new, comprehensive Education Act.

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FOREWORD

- Notes that the Report:
 - “Presents both an overview of existing school education in this State and a blueprint for high quality educational outcomes for the future”. (p. v)
 - Stresses the formative years of early childhood and the educative role of parents and emphasises K-6 in the development of essential basic skills.
 - Proposes the replacement of the existing Board of Secondary Education with a new Board of Studies, responsible for curriculum development over the compulsory years.
 - Recommends a minimum curriculum requirement for the registration of schools and for the compulsory years: “These requirements encompass the learning areas of English; Mathematics; Science and Technology; Human Society and its Environments; Personal Development, Health and Fitness, and Creative and Practical Arts. The Board of Studies is to provide syllabus statements which will give guidance to the content, skills, attitudes and experiences to be included in each Learning Area.” (p. v)
 - “Aims to ensure that all Years 11 and 12 students are provided with valuable and stimulating choices for curriculum for both vocation and life.” (p. v)
 - “Recommends flexibility of progress for the student as distinct from age progression, while appreciating the importance of social development.” (p. v)
 - “Focuses on the potential of all students, recognising the need to mitigate educational disadvantage, to strive for equality of opportunity and to provide appropriate support for those with disabilities and for the talented.” (p. v)
 - “Seeks to use new and emerging technology, especially in distance education, as exciting new aids for all students.” (p. v)
 - “Sees the school, the principal, the teaching teams, parents, students and the community as an educational unity, the centre and focus of all education policy and organisation.” (p. v)
 - “Acknowledges the special problems and challenges confronting the modern-day teacher and seeks to raise the public image, professionalism and morale of the teaching force.” (p. v)
 - Recommends a new Education Act and “the replacement of the existing Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs with a new Office of Education and Youth Affairs”.
 - “Provides for a regular qualitative audit to ensure that standards continue to improve.” (p. v)

A NEW EDUCATION ACT: PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES /FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Provides a one page overview of the proposed new Education Act.
- Identifies the proposed new Education Act Principle Objectives as: “Recognising that every child without exception shall be entitled to an education – that education of the child is the primary right and responsibility of the parent, guardian or other person having custody or care of the child – and that the State has the duty to prescribe basic standards and conditions to ensure the provision and delivery of education for all children.” (p. 1)

- Overviews the obligations of the Act (including the establishment and registration of schools; homeschooling; determination of curricula; certificates and credentials; transition to further education) and the operation of the Act, which includes:
 - The right of parents to choose schools.
 - Provision for parents to learn basic parents techniques of early childhood education.
 - The educational needs of students with disabilities.
 - Mitigation of educational disadvantage.
 - The unique needs of Aboriginal children.
 - The special problems of rural and isolated communities.
 - Encouragement of innovation and diversity.
 - The concept of education for whole of life.
 - Provision of opportunities for to children with special abilities.
 - Opportunities for parents to participate in their children’s education.
 - Maintenance and development of skilled teachers.
 - The values of home and community.
- Notes the large Commonwealth reductions in general revenue for the States and the slightly increased expenditure on education in NSW in 1988/89. Notes that the Committee believes that education can be “significantly improved in a period of financial restraint by establishing priorities, using available resources more efficiently and by enforcing greater accountability”. (p. 1)

THE PARENTAL ROLE IN EDUCATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Discusses the importance of early childhood education and the role of parents and makes 13 recommendations for how early childhood education/development can be improved.
- Also recommends that a Committee of Inquiry be established “to investigate all relevant aspects of early childhood education, particularly health, education and welfare, and to report upon the essential policy priorities and the optimum methods of coordination”. (p. 3)

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

- Begins by noting that: “Clearly there are markedly different limitations and opportunities in the whole spectrum of educational settings...The Committee sees its task as making recommendations conducive to the significant widening of access to a variety of schools. This improved access will enhance the opportunity for parents and others responsible for children to make what they deem to be the most appropriate choice of school for their children.” (p. 3)
- Makes a number of recommendations in relation to access to government schools (including that children have a right to attend schools in their local areas but they should also have access to schools outside their local area; that funds should be allocated on a needs basis while ensuring provision for all schools; and that government schools should include primary schools, comprehensive high schools, composite schools, special schools, specialist high schools, senior high schools and selective high schools).
- Makes a number of recommendations in relation to non-government schools (including how they fit with the new Education Act and several recommendations relating to funding and the sharing of resources.
- Briefly discusses homeschooling and the right of parents to home school their children.

THE PROVISION OF SCHOOLING

- Outlines the Committee's approach to registration and accreditation of schools and makes 20 recommendations, including that all schools (both government and non-government) should be registered. Discusses the details of registration requirements and accreditation processes at length.
- In regards to the minimum curriculum requirements for registration purposes, recommends that:
 - In each school, for each of the compulsory years of schooling, there shall be courses of study in the Learning Areas of: English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Human Society and its Environments, Personal Development, Health and Fitness and Creative and Practical Arts.
- Discusses the Committee's position on and recommendations in relation to: homeschooling, conscientious objection, discipline, distance education, school closures, class sizes, movement of children between schools, and parent participation in schools.

STRUCTURES FOR SCHOOLING

- Notes that "The Committee contemplated the nature of learning and the differences in readiness, abilities, motivation and learning styles of individual students. It has sought to encourage individual progress within the context of peer-interaction and social development, and consistent with the capacity of teacher and school to cope with the variables." (p. 12)
- Makes 12 recommendations including that:
 - "Schools and school systems encourage and emphasis upon school structures and patterns of progression which provide sufficient flexibility in, and across, the "years" of schooling to allow students to progress on the basis of individual capacity, readiness, needs, interest, and a degree of achievement in relation to a program of work, provided that due allowance is made for social growth and peer interaction." (p. 12)
 - "Teacher education institutions place greater emphasis in their courses upon giving teachers the skills to plan and provide, within appropriate group contexts, the facilitation of individual learning." (p. 12)
 - "Syllabuses be structured, not so much upon years and hours of study, but upon the content, skills and attitudes to be learnt and the experiences to be achieved by the student." (p. 12)
 - "Student progression through curriculum structures be based upon successful achievement of syllabus objectives and experiences." (p. 12)
 - "'Time' should be regarded in all schooling as a flexible factor in learning rather than as a determining factor." (p. 12)
 - "Schools and school systems ensure that all students are challenged and extended to reach the highest possible goals." (p. 12)
 - "Schools and school systems encourage structures which are alternatives to the traditional divisions between "primary" and "secondary" education such that there can be a greater emphasis upon learning as a continuous individual process." (p. 12)
 - "As funds become available, a program be introduced to extend pre-school opportunities." (p. 12)
 - "There be greater flexibility in the location of courses currently identified as courses within Technical and Further Education. There should be increased opportunity for at least some of these courses to be offered within secondary

- schools.” (p. 12)
- “There be articulation of these courses with further specialised courses in TAFE so that secondary students gain credit in TAFE courses.” (p. 12)
- “Post-compulsory credentialing be more flexible than at present and allow for cumulative achievement.” (p. 12)

THE BOARD OF STUDIES

- Recommends the constitution of a new Board of Studies to replace the Board of Secondary Education.
- Argues that the importance of primary education needs to be recognised and “a continuum of curriculum development achieved over the whole range of compulsory school years (K-10).” (p. 12)
- Makes recommendations in relation to the constitution, the membership, composition, committees, functions and support staff of the new Board.

CURRICULUM

- States that “The Committee proposes that a Board of Studies, replacing the existing Board of Secondary Education, should be responsible for curriculum development over the compulsory school years. The Board would have responsibility for determining guidelines for the minimum curriculum requirements for the purposes of registration of all schools. It would develop a common core of curriculum through the years K-10 and provide syllabus material adequate to overcome the difficulties widely experienced in school-based curriculum development.” (p. 15)
- Makes 24 recommendations including:
 - Recommendation 1: “The Board of Studies develop and issue at all levels comprehensive and detailed syllabuses which provide support and guidance to teachers.” (p. 15)
 - Recommendation 3: “There should be a broad secondary school curriculum which balances general education for life with education for work.” (p. 15)
 - Recommendation 4: “The curriculum for the post-compulsory years should cater for an increased range of student abilities and interests.” (p. 15)
 - More flexible arrangements between schools and TAFE courses.
 - Recommendation 8: “There should be a common core curriculum for both primary and secondary schools defined in terms of the traditional subjects within learning areas.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 9: “The Board of Studies should undertake a study of the feasibility of developing a core curriculum based on essential learning experiences.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 10: “The proposal to introduce learning areas in the secondary curriculum should be implemented. As far as possible the secondary learning areas should follow the same organisational pattern as those at primary level.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 13: “The Board of Studies issue manuals to assist schools with curriculum implementation.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 14: “The Board of Studies allow innovation in curriculum development at school or system level.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 15: “The Board of Studies give particular attention to curriculum continuity from Kindergarten to Year 12.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 18: “The Department of Education continue to ensure that policies on personal development are adhered to by government schools,

- particularly the requirement that parents be consulted prior to the implementation of personal development programs.” (p. 16)
- Recommendation 19: “The Department revise its policy on the staffing of personal development courses to ensure that teachers of personal development courses are appropriately selected and trained.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 20: “Current initiatives by the Department of Education to establish and maintain liaison with business and industry be extended.” (p. 16)
 - Recommendation 21: “The local comprehensive high school remain the predominant way of organising secondary schooling.” (p. 16)
- Discusses religious education, noting that: “The situation regarding Special Religious Education appears satisfactory” (p. 16). Recommends some minor changes to the Act.
 - Notes that some submissions to the Committee raised concerns about the teaching of values, particularly moral values.
 - Makes 3 recommendations in relation to Values Education:
 - “The document, the Values We Teach, be amended to further include specific reference to spiritual values.” (p. 17)
 - “The revision of the primary syllabus in Moral Education be expedited.” (p. 17)
 - “The Department examine ways, including the issue of support material, to improve the teaching and learning of values across the curriculum.” (p. 17)

CERTIFICATES OF EDUCATION

- States that “There has been considerable public interest in the nature and content of school certificates. Some submissions to the Committee urged the reinstatement of the Certificate of Secondary Education. Others supported the current School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. Many drew attention to what they say to be the inadequacy of the Tertiary Entrance Score (TES) when perceived as an overall indication of student achievement.” (p. 17)
- States that “The Committee concluded in support of the current certificates and Record of Achievement. It acknowledged that the TES is a special calculation designed solely for tertiary entrance purposes and should not be taken by employers and others to be a full measure of studies and outcomes. The Committee concluded that the TES should not appear on the Higher School Certificate or Record of Achievement and, in addition, on whatever the separate document the TES is printed, it should contain a brief description of its specialised purpose.” (p. 17)
- Makes seven recommendations in relation to Credentials, 5 recommendations in relation to Details on Credentials, and 3 recommendations in relation to Students with Disabilities.

RETENTION

- Begins by noting that “Retention rates to Year 12 in NSW have risen from 35 percent in 1979 to 51 percent in 1988. Comparison with other States suggests that NSW has the lowest retention rates on the mainland. However, these statistics may be unreliable due to factors such as the different entry points for TAFE in various States.” (p. 18)
- Forecasts that retention rates will continue to increase at least over the next five years.
- Notes the challenge facing schools in responding to “the needs of the broader mix of ability, motivation and aspiration in senior classes.” (p. 18)
- Notes that “Meeting students’, parents’ and the wider community’s expectations of the benefits of accruing from six years of secondary education means introducing changes that make schools more attractive learning environments and making

curriculum and credentialing arrangements more relevant to students' and the wider community's needs." (p. 17)

- Makes the following recommendations:
 - "Approaches to encourage increases in the apparent retention rate from Year 7 to Year 12 should focus on the provision of more courses in Years 11 and 12 which students recognise as worthwhile in terms of their further education and employment opportunities." (p. 18)
 - "Curriculum and credentials be provided so that the full range of students in Years 11 and 12 is catered for." (p. 18)
 - "There be full coordination between schools, TAFE and other providers of further education in order to make optimum use of resources." (p. 18)

THE SCHOOL AND THE TEACHER

- Notes that "the image of the school" and "educational outcomes" are largely a reflection of the quality of the principal and teaching staff. (p. 18)
- Makes a number of recommendations which aim to "overcome current criticisms of pre-service training, reduced practical teaching and the difficulties of attracting a sufficiency of appropriate students to universities and training colleges." (p. 18)
- Makes thirty six recommendations in relation to the school and teaching including in relation to principals, salaries, support for teachers, appointment and promotion of teachers, inefficient teachers, seeking trainees, recruitment for employment, pre-service education, in-service education, library and teacher librarians, support systems and the use of schools. (pp. 18-20)

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Disadvantaged Students

- Discusses educational disadvantage. Notes that girls and gifted and talented students "are liable to disadvantage, although in a different sense". (p. 20)
- Notes that when educational disadvantage occurs, it is often associated with the "circumstances of the particular family". (p. 20)
- Notes difficulties for the teacher that has resulted in significant changes in Australian society such as single parent families, working parents, poverty and unemployment.
- Notes that "An aroused national conscience towards Aboriginal Australians has demanded a wider understanding of Aboriginal history and culture by all children." (p. 21)
- Emphasises the importance of cooperation and coordination of government services in health, social welfare, housing, employment and family community services, for schools and education as a whole. But also states that "In the wider and more enduring sense, the Committee cannot envisage the effective mitigation of educational disadvantage as deriving wholly or even substantially, from the ever-increasing extension of community services by teachers or, indeed, by the proliferation of government agencies." (p. 21)
- Notes that it is beyond the capacity of schools to "resolve fully educational handicaps of the disadvantaged child. Any further extension of limited teacher resources into community liaison work could further weaken the school's essential purpose of education." (p. 21)
- Argues that educational disadvantage is a problem of the community itself and that all must have a role in trying to overcome this problem.

Special Education

- Discusses learning disabilities and difficulties and the importance of early detection and intervention and makes a number of recommendations for improvements, including better detection and early intervention, curriculum support materials, the need for an expert review of the integration process and a range of other measures to improve special education.

Aboriginal Students

- Notes that although significant improvements have been made in recent years, Aboriginal students still experience severe educational disadvantage.
- Makes twelve recommendations which aim to redress the problem of disadvantage by Aboriginal students. These include: appropriate Aboriginal representation on the Board of Studies and on the curriculum and syllabus committees of the Board; that Aboriginal children not be placed in special remedial classes without a thorough review of their abilities; that the teaching of Aboriginal history, culture and achievements be endorsed; that high priority be given to training and employment of additional Aboriginal Education Assistants; and that parents be encouraged to become members of parent bodies.

Multicultural Education

- Notes that “In submissions to the Committee, competence with the English language, retention of background language and culture and socio-economic difficulties were stressed as the major issues.” (p. 24)
- Notes that the Committee is concerned that a Commonwealth immigration policy that does not adequately fund ESL programs creates significant educational disadvantage for students from NESB.
- Notes that the Committee believes that learning and retention of the child’s background language and culture is important both for the child and Australian society as a whole. Notes in particular the general impoverishment in people with multi-lingual skills.
- Notes that multicultural classrooms demands sensitivity of the teacher and emphasises tolerance, anti-racism and the recognition of religious practices.
- Makes six recommendations, including the recognition that adequate ESL courses are vital to the education of many children and the NSW Government should “strongly urge the Commonwealth Government to provide adequate funding for this purpose”. (p. 24)
- Other recommendations relate to support for students in learning and retaining background language and culture and for greater appreciation of diverse cultures as a goal of schools.

Gifted and Talented Students

- Notes that children with exceptional gifts and talents “have sometimes been overlooked and inadequately nurtured in regular schools. Such children must be regarded as a highly prized resource for our nation’s future. Failure to develop their gifts and talents makes for a significant loss, both for the community at large, and for those individual children.” (p. 25)
- Makes seven recommendations for improvements in education of gifted and talented students.

Towards a Non-Sexist Education

- States that “The Report draws attention to the education and vocational disadvantages that girls have traditionally experienced, some elements of which still remain.” (p. 25)
- Notes that “Rather than concentrating exclusively on those disadvantages, the Committee believes that emphasis for the future should be on equal educational opportunity for both girls and boys, offered free of gender preference or bias.” (p. 25)
- Argues that “In their education both girls and boys should be:
 - given similarly varied visions of their future;
 - encouraged to become as confident as possible;
 - shown the same breadth of choices in education and employment;
 - provided with opportunities for developing competence and understanding of social and family responsibilities as well as vocational and academic competencies.” (p. 25)
- Makes eleven recommendations for overcoming the disadvantages faced by girls.

Technology and Education

- Notes that the present technological revolution is “as profound as the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th Centuries.” (p. 26)
- Makes three recommendations including: that teachers should be encouraged to appraise and make use of emerging technology; that the use of technology should be emphasised in teacher education; and that more emphasis should be given to the study of technology in the school curriculum. (p. 26)

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

- Notes that the Committee’s approach to evaluation is that: “It is appropriate for the Government to call for a level of formal evaluation when considering:
 - education as a totality in NSW;
 - the government schools as a system;
 - individual schools, both government and non-government;
 - individual teachers in government schools;
 - programs and curricula; and
 - students.” (p. 27)
- Discusses student evaluation, standardised tests, teacher assessment and government schools, teaching positions and promotions, evaluation of schools and state-wide evaluation of programs.
- Makes the following recommendations in relation to state-wide program evaluation:
 - “Formal evaluation should be used to serve decision-making with respect to planning, developing and, at time, assessing student learning, teaching practices, school performance and the educational curriculum. It should not become oppressive in terms of resource usage.” (p. 29)
 - “The School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate should be retained. In order to encourage students to continue past Year 10, the School Certificate should be updated for students who continue to Years 11 and 12 but who do not sit for the Higher School Certificate. The updating should indicate the further work undertaken by the student beyond Year 10.” (p. 29)
 - “Secondary schools should be encouraged to develop further the practice of providing students with a descriptive profile of their attainment, skills, and activities to be of use when applying for employment.” (p. 29)
 - “The Tertiary Entrance Score should not be indicated on the Higher School Certificate. It should be provided on a separate presentation to qualified

students.” (p. 29)

- “Standardised testing annually in two or three Year levels of schooling is supported providing safeguards to ensure proper use of the data are in place and providing modern test development procedures are used to set up the tests. Basic skills need not be the only focus of these tests. Other concerns should be focused on from time to time. Some monitoring of the effects of these tests should be undertaken.” (pp. 29-30)
- “The assessment of teachers should have as a major objective the development of teachers’ professional skills.” (p. 30)
- “School evaluation should occur at three levels: (a) Schools should be evaluated for registration/accreditation by Board Inspectors; (b) Whole school self-appraisal, using external education experts, together with the principal and staff, should be carried out at intervals not greater than 6 years. A report of such evaluation should be made available to School Councils and should provide the school with a program of future development; and (c) A system of evaluation of the quality of state-wide achievement in particular educational programs should be undertaken by small teams of experts authorized by the Minister. Such evaluations should involve visits to and collection of data from government and non-government schools resulting in a report on general, state-wide achievement in the selected programs.” (p. 30)

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Office of Education and Youth Affairs

- States that “The Committee believes that the existing structure of the Ministry of Education is inadequate to meet the proposed reforms suggested by both the Scott Review and this Committee...It recommends a new structure, the Office of Education and Youth Affairs, to meet the requirements of the reorganised Department of Education, the non-government schools, homeschooling, the Board of Studies, an independent Inspectorate and other foreshadowed changes.” (p. 30)
- Makes seven recommendations in relation to the function of the new Office of Education and Youth Affairs.

Department of Education

- Makes a number of recommendations in relation to the functions of the Department.

Decentralisation of Government School Administration

- Notes that “Because it sees the essential purposes and outcomes of education as focused in the school and its students, the Committee supports the broad principles of decentralisation and devolution.” Discusses the Regions, Cluster Directors and Principals and makes recommendations in relation to Regions and Principals. (p. 31)

The Annual Report

- Discusses the Department’s Annual Report and notes that: “In its traditional form, the Department’s Annual Report offers no real insight into the quality of education in NSW schools.” (p. 32)
- Recommends that: “The Department be required by statute to furnish annually to the NSW Parliament a detailed calendar year report enabling and accurate assessment of the year’s progress and offering a genuine opportunity for parliamentary and public debate and analysis; the report to be presented no later than 6 months after the end of the year in review.” (p. 32)