



New Minister Must Get Curriculum Right

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The latest NSW Cabinet reshuffle has resulted in some significant front bench arrivals and departures in the new Berejiklian Government.

One of those changes is the replacement of Adrian Piccoli, Minister for Education, with Rob Stokes, previously Minister for Planning.

During Piccoli's six years in office, which have been described as everything from disappointing to a debacle he seemed to focus his attentions on Gonski funding rather than what was actually being taught to school children in NSW.

In 2013, he sheepishly signed up to Julia Gillard's socialist inspired, needs- based funding model which was essentially all about throwing money at the problem in Australia's public school system rather than improving both what is taught and how it is taught.

Piccoli also failed to do anything about the existence of the leftist secular 'ethics' classes for



children which had been snuck into NSW Primary schools, and which Premier Barry O'Farrell committed to dispense with but never did.

While Piccoli was in office, he was aware that a senior academic and public servant, Dr Paul Brock sent an email to all NSW Department of Education and Training principals asking that teachers make a point of linking the 2013 bushfires to global warming.

Under his watch, the NSW Board of Studies released a new draft curriculum in 2016 which manages to gloss over thousands of years of western development, focussing instead on climate change, sustainability, indigenous culture, feminism, and Australia's relationship with Asia.

In 2018, Year 11 students will be offered a range of subjects such as 'People Who Changed Australia', or more specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who changed Australia such as aboriginal activist Eddie Mabo.

Our 15 and 16 year olds will not only be familiarised with 'The Environment Movement 1960s and 1970s' but they will also become experts in 'The Women's Movement, 1960s-1970s.' Meanwhile, they will leave school with knowledge of fewer historical figures than did previous students.

Another deeply troubling element of the NSW draft curriculum is the existence of the so-called cross-curriculum priorities where select topics are inserted into every subject regardless of their relevance.

These select areas, taken directly from the National Curriculum, these are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.

All are of course worthy topics for Australian school students. But why should they be taught across all subjects when they clearly don't belong?

It is obvious that the idea of sustainability should be part of environmental studies, but it is less obvious as to why it is included in ancient history.

Aboriginal culture should of course be taught in modern history but it is not a key element of chemistry. And although Australia's engagement with Asia belongs in politics, it is certainly the odd one out in creative arts.

The individuals who have come up with the priorities clearly believe that they are more important than the foundations of Western Civilisation, the power of economic freedom to deliver human prosperity or the development of liberal democracy and free speech.

And this comes at a time when our education system is failing our young people. According to the OECD, 14% of Australian 15 year olds are functionally illiterate and would be unable to understand the instructions on a packet of headache tablets.

20% of Australian youth lack basic arithmetic skills and wouldn't be able to tell how much fuel was



left in their cars by looking at the fuel gauge.

Australia is being outclassed by Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan in international maths and science testing.

Even though Piccoli had just announced that students would be required to meet a minimum literacy and numeracy standard to receive their HSC, last year's dismal NAPLAN results showed that more than half of NSW Year 9 students would fail to hit the required band in reading, grammar, punctuation, spelling and numeracy.

This embarrassing statistic is because the government has been too busy focussing on progressive issues and indoctrination rather than the business of real education.

Every moment spent teaching the children of NSW about ideologically driven cross -curriculum priorities is valuable time not spent on developing the fundamental life skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

It will be interesting to see if Mr Stokes will follow in his predecessor's footsteps, or if, as the new Minister for Education, he will succeed in wresting the NSW Curriculum back from the ideologues who are more interested in teaching students what to think rather than how to think.

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