



## Stop Indoctrinating Kids

### **Publish Date:**

September 2020

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The news that some schools in NSW are bringing in extra teachers to help 6000 Year 12 students meet minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy skills to pass their HSC should ring very loud alarm bells for parents.

Much of fault lies with the current NSW curriculum.

One of the most problematic elements of the curriculum is the existence of “cross-curriculum priorities” – “Sustainability”, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures” and “Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia”, which were taken directly from the National Curriculum.

The first major problem with these priorities is that they are ideologically driven.

It is true that the curriculum will always be ideological in some way or another because in the basic sense, an ideology is the lens through which we understand the world, the fact is that by calling “Sustainability”, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures”, and “Asia and

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Australia's engagement with Asia", priorities, they are being consciously prioritised over everything else in the curriculum.

When the insisting that these three current themes be embedded into all subjects, relevant or not, this means that ideology is being prioritised over knowledge.

When the original authors of the priorities invented the themes in 2011, they did so with the full understanding that this ideology would come to dominate and define Australian education.

They were in fact, deliberately imposing a political agenda on generations of impressionable Australian schoolchildren at a time in their lives where they are at their most vulnerable, and when their understanding of society, environment and politics is shaped by what they hear in the classroom.

The second major problem with these priorities is that they serve no other purpose than to overcrowd an already crowded curriculum, as they are embedded into every subject with complete disregard for whether they are relevant to the subject or not.

Take English for example.

We are told by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) that in learning English, "students have the opportunity to engage with texts that give them experience of the beliefs and value systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples." NESA also tells us that "English provides learning opportunities for students to explore and appreciate the rich tradition of texts from and about the peoples and countries of Asia, including texts written by Asian authors."

And when it comes to 'Sustainability', the study of English "provides students with the skill required to investigate and understand issues of environmental and social sustainability, to communicate information about sustainability, and to advocate action to improve sustainability."

An examination of the mathematics K-10 course descriptions reveals what can only be described as a tokenistic and artificial shoehorning of the "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures" cross curriculum priority.

In the section on how to work out mass, students are asked to "investigate the use of hefting in practical situations, eg the practice used by Aboriginal people of hefting duck eggs to determine whether ducklings will be male or female", while in addition and subtracting students are told that they should "investigate different methods of adding and subtracting used in various cultures, eg. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methods involving special patterns and reason, Asian counting tools such as the abacus."

NESA believes that the "cross-curriculum priorities enable students to develop an understanding about and address the contemporary issues they face."

These are highly ambitious claims indeed, but unfortunately, they have shown to be patently wrong.



The cross-curriculum priorities are not needed in the classroom, either for content or for teaching. There is absolutely no reason for the themes to be repeated in every subject.

The addition of these extra elements into the lessons detracts from the acquisition of real skills, such as literacy and numeracy, which are the fundamental building blocks of education.

This has been proven over the last 18 years, during which time standards in reading, science, and mathematics across every socio-economic quartile— and in government, Catholic and independent schools—have been falling in NSW.

In response to the falling standards, the NSW government has commissioned a review of the curriculum from education expert Professor Geoff Masters.

In his review, Masters concluded that there is too much clutter in most syllabuses and that some students are not getting the solid foundations in English and maths that they need and deserve.

However, he fails to mention the single most obvious solution to the problem – get rid of the cross-curriculum priorities.

Not once in the 24 recommendations made to the government does Masters even mention cross-curriculum priorities. The only conclusion you can reach is that his silence on the matter means that he must believe in the ideology behind them and wants them to remain embedded into all learning areas.

The government plans to have a new curriculum ready by 2024, claiming that it will prepare students to “meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” This is all very well and good, but they will not be able to meet these challenges if they are unable to read or write.

The ideology-driven cross- curriculum priorities need to go once and for all. Until this happens, students in NSW will find themselves woefully under prepared for the real world.

**Originally published in:**  
The Daily Telegraph