

COPY



NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF NEW ZEALAND
TE RUNANGA WAIRUA TAPU O NGA BAHÁ'Í O AOTEAROA

PO Box 21551
(180 Candia Rd), Henderson,
Auckland 1231, New Zealand
Phone: 09-837 4866
Fax: 09-837 4898
Email: natsec@nsa.org.nz
Website: www.bahai.org.nz

**Response to the
'Draft New Zealand Curriculum Document 2006'**

**A submission by the National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand.**

1.

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the new Curriculum document. We regard this as an issue of the highest importance, one deserving of very serious and earnest consideration. Our submission is primarily concerned with what the draft document identifies as the six key elements. (As per page 7 of the Draft for Consultation: vision, principles, values, key competencies, learning areas and pedagogy).

2.

For an education system to be effective it must first understand and then take full cognizance of the underlying reality of the human being. The Bahá'í view is that this underlying reality is the mysterious but undeniable spiritual nature of man of which the marvelous powers and capacities of the human mind are but one aspect. One of the two fundamental purposes of education therefore must be to awaken and develop the inherent capacities of each child. We share the vision of the Ministry of Education when it states that '*Education has a vital role to play in helping our young people to reach their individual potential...*'

3.

The second essential purpose of education must be to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills that will enable all to contribute towards the building of an ever advancing civilisation. The two go hand in hand and are inseparable. Each child has noble qualities that need to be fostered and developed and this happens in the context of each contributing to the advancement of our society. '*Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.*' (Bahá'í Writings)

4.

Our secular education system was developed to avoid contention between religious groups but this does not do away with the fact that the essential reality of human beings is a spiritual one

— a fact never lost by a majority of the Pakeha community nor by Maori or Pacific Islanders nor by most recent immigrant communities. What we must develop is an education system that acknowledges and is based on that reality and yet does not alienate different religious groups or others in society. Here it is appropriate to note with approval the Government's commitment to producing a strategy for peacefully accommodating religious diversity in our society and of the obvious role that the education system has in achieving this.

5.

We strongly believe that developing high levels of motivation, confidence and self-esteem in all students is essential if education is to be effective and that this cannot be achieved if students are unaware of their inherent nobility and of the fact that each one has a valuable contribution to make, however great or small, to the collective task of building an ever advancing civilisation. Our schools therefore must do much better at imparting to students a vision of their reality and of the basic reasons for their education.

6.

We note with particular interest the section on 'values'. (p. 10). We feel this area needs to be significantly developed. In current New Zealand society there is considerable confusion and even suspicion when 'values' are mentioned. One approach that can surely appeal to all thoughtful people in our society is that emphasis be placed upon the 'virtues' – that is, the set of all positive universal human qualities. The 'virtues' are in essence the spiritual qualities of humanity. Development of the virtues is not only related to individual behaviour and the quality of social interactions but is directly relevant to effective learning. For example, the virtues of perseverance, dedication, self control, initiative and the like are all essential learning skills. This approach should be greatly developed and promoted in our schools. It can and should be done in a non-sectarian way. There are voices that will claim that schools are not the place for the teaching of values but these voices are apparently unaware of the fact that there is no such thing as a "values neutral" environment and that this being so our education system should squarely face the task of identifying essential values and devising comprehensive ways in which they can be overtly fostered.

7.

We note an absence of emphasis on moral and character education and feel that this should be corrected. We draw attention to the fact that an emphasis on moral and character education is not incompatible with the goal of economic development — in fact to the contrary. An education system that avoids these dimensions of life rather than being 'neutral' actually contributes to growing problems of disaffection with our increasingly materialistic and individualistic society. This disaffection is increasingly manifest in lawlessness, alcohol and substance abuse, violence, the growth of mental illness in our community, and the weakening of the bonds of family and of the concept of social responsibility. The economic costs, let alone the human costs, are tremendous.

8.

The Bahá'í community applauds those elements of the Social Studies curriculum that aim to develop tolerance and reduce racism in our multicultural society and the building of an awareness of the key contemporary historical trend of globalization and growing world consciousness. Whilst there is always a place for a sane and moderate patriotism it must take second place to instilling in our youth a firm knowledge of the reality of the oneness of humanity and the development of attitudes that actually welcome and celebrate diversity.

9.

With regard to effective pedagogy, the Bahá'í community feels there should be much more emphasis on both the theory and the practice of the concept of service to others. Service components should be introduced into all levels of the education system. The inclusion of service elements in the curriculum that help to foster an attitude of service, will not only provide balance for what is currently an excessively individualistic focus in our curriculum, but will also help considerably with the improvement of student motivation and the development of a sense of worth in our young people.

10.

Another area that needs emphasis is that of group work and the learning of those skills of consultation and cooperation that are essential for people to work successfully in groups. Most of life beyond school involves people living and working in groups of various kinds and yet our curriculum is inadequate in preparing students for this fact.

11.

We support the continued emphasis of the arts. We see the arts as an expression of the inherent creativity of all people and thus the arts should never be considered as peripheral or non-essential in a well balanced curriculum. Greater development and use of the arts will contribute to increased involvement in schooling, more effective learning in all curriculum areas, as well as to positive self-development.

12.

We fully support the concept that 'managing self' should be seen as a 'Key Competency' (p.11) and applaud its inclusion. We feel this needs increased emphasis. We feel that the current societal trend to prolong childhood and adolescence with its emphasis on individualism and the pursuit of pleasure, and correspondingly to delay the acceptance of the responsibilities of maturity, is not helpful to either teenagers nor to society as a whole. To this end we advocate a greatly increased emphasis on students developing the concept of personal responsibility — not only in the sphere of individual behaviour, but also in regard to the natural environment and in the area of contribution to community.

13.

We fully support the inclusion of 'Thinking' as a key competency (p.11). We see the development of the ability to independently investigate truth as essential for a society that

seeks to rid itself of inherited prejudices. Thinking skills are essential for successfully coping with change and for unlocking the extraordinary capacities of the human mind.

14.

In the Social Sciences learning area we note that the 'Identity Culture and Organisation' strand provides for the learning about 'communities and how they function' (p.22). We feel that thorough learning about the religious communities that exist in New Zealand should be specific and detailed rather than a vague possibility as it currently stands. To do so is necessary to avoid the prejudice that ignorance breeds and this would also be in keeping with the current Government strategy on developing a policy on 'Religious Diversity for New Zealand'

15.

We applaud the inclusion of the statement 'Creating a supportive learning environment' within the 'Effective Pedagogy' section (p.24 & 25). In particular we support the idea that the quality and the status of teachers should be raised and to this end we recommend that character should be of equal weight to academic competence in the selection of teacher trainees.

16.

We thank the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to make this submission and we share the desire to develop the very best education system for our children.

Yours sincerely

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'IS OF NEW ZEALAND



Suzanne Mahon
Secretary

Our ref: 2372