

Raumati Beach School

Feedback on the Draft Curriculum

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Introduction

This document was produced as a result of group discussions and debate at a Teacher Only Day held on Friday 20 October 2006. The views contained herein are generally those of the staff as a whole; where specific groups and teaching levels hold differing views, this is noted (some of the views relate to the document as it applies to specific levels, not to the Draft Curriculum as a whole). As a Primary School, we have not attempted to comment on the Draft Curriculum as it may apply to Secondary Schools.

The school is a Decile 9 Full Primary School with a roll of 625, an attached Special Needs (satellite) Unit and a 5-teacher Technology Centre catering for surrounding schools.

In general there is much to commend the "slim" nature of the document, although it raises issues of coverage and leaves a number of questions unanswered.

As important as the content to the intent of the Draft Curriculum is that of accountability/compliance. There is no information available as to how the Ministry of Education intends to monitor the implementation of the Draft Curriculum –experience of "Tomorrow's Schools" in 1989-90 suggests that while schools are initially given the freedom to develop in their own way (see "Designing a School Curriculum", P26-32), structures are quickly put in place to ensure that schools adhere to a centrally-directed model and document this in specific ways (e.g. Vision Statements and School Charters). Much of the success of schools' implementation of their own curriculum will depend on this, and on the support mechanisms in place to assist schools with the implementation process. This applies especially to the "questions unanswered" aspects referred to above.

Comments, Section by Section

Overview

While this document focuses on these elements one at a time, they need to be parts of a whole. We question whether this document is "seamless". Reading the whole document it appears that different groups of people have written each piece –the step of integrating the parts to form the whole, has not been taken. There is an inconsistency of style and terminology through the document.

There needs to be greater acknowledgement of the bicultural nature of our society, not just in the opening paragraph but in the body of the section.

Para 2: "belief": How does this affect families who want to opt out or home-school?

Vision

There is a need to be more explicit what is meant by a "knowledge based society". The Minister defines it as a society of lifelong learners and continuing education, yet reading this document gives the impression that it doesn't account for change and continuous learning. This needs to be made more explicit in order to avoid confusion.

We have strong concern about words like entrepreneurial, enterprising, growth of our economy. They are very market-oriented (does this apply more to secondary than to primary schools?) "Transformation into a knowledge-based society": needs defining for many. Knowledge also must include the need for physical skills.

It is the weak definition of these terms rather than the general direction they are trying to take us in, that raises concern.

Principles

There was a generally positive response to the intent of this section.

Te Reo Maori needs to be explicitly included in this section. We feel very strongly about this – NZ is the only country in the world where we can keep the language/culture alive. Please read the old NZ Curriculum Framework, pg 7, *The Principles*, 4th point. We want something like this included.

The fallback reasoning of the NEG's providing Maori coverage is weak. NEG 9 "increased participation and success by *Maori*..." and NEG 10 talks about respect, not actual learning experiences and participation.

Cultural Heritage: All students should have the opportunity to experience te ao Maori –not just those who identify as Maori

Equity: There needs to be a reference to "respect" or "value" of identity; "affirm" does not require this (see dictionary definition).

Values

Responses to this section were positive overall.

There needs to be specific mention of NZ's bi-cultural society (this is not to dilute our multi-cultural society).

Some staff were wary of where the values came from –whose are they? Respect for human rights is an example -whether it is the individual or the community that has the greater right, is open to debate depending on one's culture.

Where does this learning take place? Is it separate learning or is it integrated? Are we expected to assess values? By assessing are we saying that some values are 'right'?

Some staff liked the last set of bullet points – they allow for difference of opinion and considered debate. The list is basically a way of dispelling fears.

There is potential for conflict or the values to be watered down. At times a school's values are challenged/not upheld by parents. This applies particularly to schools where there are different ethnic/cultural/social groups with strong, sometimes entrenched views –it will be very difficult for these schools to develop a value set that is accepted and adhered to by all community members.

Teachers of older children like the aspect of students learning different kinds of values and value sets, and developing their own values.

Key Competencies

These are seen as simpler, more streamlined and better than the Essential Skills.

ICT is now a KC, not part of Technology. A very good change.

"Accountability" is not mentioned –maybe part of managing self (This is a key issue for many schools, who have difficulty with children who do not see themselves as being accountable for their actions, and too often are supported in this by their parents).

There is no reference to physical health/healthy living (See P20 of current Framework). Could this be part of Managing self?

Some staff would like to see the KC's used as an umbrella to all curriculum areas (the curriculum areas are then used as a context and tool).

Curriculum Areas

The Arts

More specific, helpful, active language, more encompassing.

At Y7/8 level, we can only touch on introductory levels of drama/music/dance. We need trained professionals to deliver much of the content and support skills development. Primary teachers are generalists –there is no way we can be experts at all areas.

The document doesn't identify the essential AO's. Do they need to be prioritised?

The old curricula are definitely still needed to support the briefs given in the new curriculum.

English

Junior School teachers were happy with this at Levels 1 and 2.

Senior School (Levels 2-4) teachers find it very wordy, verbose. Surely (of all the areas) shouldn't this be written in clear English that everyone can understand? We now need another document to tell us what it all means (Note that the same criticism has been levelled at the marking criteria in AsTTLe –the terminology tends to be more at a University than Primary School level).

Where are Spelling and Handwriting? These are core skills, necessary for all young children to master. They need to be explicitly included.

Health and PE

There is sudden inclusion of specific mention of Maori – could this be because of obesity/diabetes levels?

Inclusion of Science and Technology in the middle of Health and PE is nonsensical.

There is no mention of Education Outside the Classroom. Given the nature of NZ's environment, and the difficulty schools already have in providing safe but challenging EOTC programmes, removal of this from the curriculum is only going to further water down the provision of this vital element by schools, leading to reduced skills, confidence and participation in outdoor activities and increased incidents through risk illiteracy.

Learning Languages

This is not "doing less better" –it adds to an already overcrowded curriculum. Where do we fit it in?

Who teaches it? None of us are trained, even Teachers' Colleges don't teach their students to teach it, how can unqualified teachers teach a language competently, will specialist staff be provided/funded? It's all very well deciding that all schools will teach languages, but without resources and expertise, how will it be effectively delivered?

The AO's are unclear. We would not be able to teach from this. Will there be any Professional Development?

Is Maori one of the choices of language? Benefits for students of learning a second language would be gained from learning Te Reo. Professional development for learning new languages is money and time taken away from Maori and other curriculum areas.

Mathematics and Statistics

There are good groupings of focus areas (strands). Well set out, easy and practical (Levels 3-4).

There is a big jump in Number and Algebra between level 2 and 3. How well does it line up with the Numeracy Project ?

Language needs to be simplified for clarity and universal understanding (Levels 1-2).

Science

Good layout, more focused on thinking, more flexible.

Material World: We do not have a Science lab/environment for practical exercises/experiments –unsafe in ordinary classroom. Again, at college such lessons are taught in a specialised room by qualified Science teachers.

Social Sciences

Wordy, complex, difficult to understand. Couldn't teach from this (Levels 1-2).

Flexible, lots of focus on people (Levels 3-4).

There is no mention of the Treaty of Waitangi.

What is the "social inquiry process"? A definition would be useful.

The AO's are virtually identical from Levels 1 thru 8 in some strands. There will need to be expansion of the content of each area to provide a usable sequence of concepts and skills.

How do bullet points under social inquiry tie in with planning? Do we choose these for each unit along with KC's?

Technology

Positives: now part of key competencies, not taught in isolation. One team feel it is more flexible, has good layout, less prescriptive, with a more realistic number of AO's. The three strands are however not clearly defined.

Other teams' feeling is that it is riddled with jargon, there is an over-emphasis on "study" and paperwork (planning, recording etc.). More emphasis is needed on processes and skills. These need to be taught so that product (i.e. what students make) does not fail due to lack of skills; the technologies can then be experimented with and the students challenged.

Technology is an area where students can use kinaesthetic learning –many students who succeed in this area have limited academic (paperwork) abilities. Technology needs for them to be essentially practical –emphasis on the paperwork aspects of the subject sets them up for failure.

The document does not embrace the nature and teaching needs of Primary/Intermediate level Technology Centres, where students need to focus on developing the practical skills necessary to completing a project or construction. It focuses on the innovative thinkers and designers to the detriment of the doers and makers. Tech Centres need to be valued as providing the foundation and opportunity for practical technological skills, for all Y7/8 students.

The document is not a basis for teaching the trades that underpin an economy.

Effective Pedagogy

A positive section that acknowledges that teachers have expertise. It acknowledges current good practice.

In order to have effective and up to date pedagogy should there be reference to Professional Development? "Providing multiple opportunities to learn": shouldn't this also apply to teachers' PD? (this is an important point –with the current rate and complexity of change, effective implementation will depend heavily on providing teachers with the knowledge and expertise to do so).

New material is continually introduced and we feel overwhelmed. Could we have a year to consolidate new learning?

Designing a School Curriculum

While positive in its intent, this section is most confusing. It uses terms that do not appear in the rest of the document, and seems to have been written in isolation. There is a need to put in some safeguards to protect the quality of the rest of the document, otherwise the requirement of developing the curriculum could unravel and undermine the progress made. (However, we would not like to see us having to go back to covering all the objectives in the document again.)

It is a huge task. Who will undertake it, and when? Will time be provided? How long will it take (and what processes might be used) to collate "the shared values and beliefs of the community..."? How practical is this? Will it have to be redone with each new Board of Trustees? What say do teachers have? As noted earlier, this may be problematic in a diverse community. Given a number of increasingly entrenched views (especially on the part of some ethnic groups), how will schools develop a curriculum that meets the expectations of all groups? Will there be central (e.g. Ministry) support for schools to complete this process in such cases, and what monitoring and accountability/compliance processes will be implemented?

Extra points made

Little mention is made of children with special needs throughout the document. While catering for their needs is implied in a number of places, this could be made more explicit without adding to the length of the document.

For easier use of the document:

- The Levels of the AOs for each curriculum area to be included on every page. They could be added to the coloured bar to the left of each grey "nautilus".
- Could the Introduction to each curriculum be placed alongside the AOs?