

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Australian Curriculum Review

from the

Federal Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

ICPA (Aust)

July 2021

Contact:

(Mrs) Suzanne Wilson

Federal Secretary

ICPA (Aust)

122/8 Gardiner St

DARWIN NT 0800

FedSecretary@icpa.com.au

Phone: 0418 830 214

Contact:

(Mrs) Alana Moller

Federal President

ICPA (Aust)

Star of Hope Station, 5090 Pioneer Rd

CLERMONT QLD 4721

FedPresident@icpa.com.au

Phone: (07) 4983 5353

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Australian Curriculum Review Consultation to highlight the curriculum needs, issues and challenges from a rural and remote context raised by the ICPA (Aust) member base.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical, national parent organisation, which advocates on behalf of our members for equity of access to an appropriate education for all geographically isolated children and students, from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia, and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to education for their children.

Due to geographical isolation, many rural and remote students across Australia access their schooling from Foundation to Year 10 either by distance education in the home schoolroom or at small rural schools, often with a small teaching staff.

It is for this reason that ICPA (Aust) is encouraged by the intention of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to improve the Australian Curriculum F-10 by refining, realigning and decluttering curriculum content. The complexity of the curriculum and the impracticalities of its delivery in a rural and remote context has caused a high degree of consternation for our members since its inception, particularly in states where the curriculum has been implemented in its entirety.

As ICPA (Aust) is a member based organisation and is guided by Policy, it is difficult to encapsulate feedback via the online Consultation Survey. ICPA (Aust) has therefore compiled the below feedback for consideration with regards to the future Australian Curriculum updates:

Distance Education Curriculum Resources

Any review of the curriculum and its content needs to take into account unique geographically isolated distance education contexts. Curriculum development for Distance Education courses should be undertaken by those who have a working knowledge of the needs of rural and remote students and distance education tutors in geographically isolated schoolrooms. Consideration of the time commitment required for course implementation as well as ensuring the resources are suitably prescriptive, readily available and easily interpreted by untrained home tutors is essential.

In the majority of geographically isolated distance education home schoolrooms, the curriculum resources are taught by untrained home tutors, often the mother. While students are allocated a class teacher based at the School of Distance Education or School of the Air centre and learning materials are provided by a blend of print and online resources, the home tutor/supervisor has the responsibility of daily supervision of their student/s and must ensure learning is adequately grasped by students. Often the person supervising in the home classroom is also responsible for the actual teaching of the curriculum which is provided by the school.

Basic literacy, numeracy and computer literacy

It is vital that basic literacy, numeracy and computer literacy be regarded as essential skills for all students upon the completion of primary school, regardless of location.

When the curriculum is cluttered and overly complex, it becomes very difficult to fit the assigned content in to the allocated timeframes. Distance Education home tutors therefore have to make decisions on which concepts should take priority if they have run out of time in a classroom. A trained teacher can make these decisions and adjustments in their own classroom and choose to focus on certain areas, improvise and/or combine learning concepts, however, an untrained home tutor needs to supervise their students in completing all assigned work, even if time has run out. Unfortunately, this situation can lead to the basics and foundation principles – literacy, numeracy and computer skills

- being rushed through or missed out altogether, especially when the curriculum requires the teaching of these in addition to the actual curriculum papers because these are not embedded within the curriculum.

Ambiguous, cluttered and inconsistent curriculum, which does not include basic literacy, numeracy and other skills also impacts teachers and students in a small school environment. Due to limited staff in small rural schools, teachers often have multi age classrooms. They face the extremely demanding challenge of teaching across the year levels and differentiating for varying student capabilities, while trying to keep on track with curriculum/term expectations and timelines.

Teachers with multi-age cohorts also must fit in Language Other than English (LOTE) lessons, extra-curricular activities along with administration responsibilities which often fall on teaching staff in the small school environment, particularly in small schools where teaching staff also hold the role of Principal.

Feedback from ICPA (Aust) members indicates that there is a need for keyboarding and basic computer program and app skills to be embedded in the curriculum, along with other basic skills. There is an assumption that these skills will be taught to the children separate from the curriculum. In the case of distance education and small schools where there is limited opportunity for library lessons and out of session classes to teach these and other skills, they inevitably get neglected if they are not in the curriculum. In order to alleviate this issue, these along with basic literacy and numeracy skills need to be embedded into the curriculum to ensure all students have equitable learning opportunities.

Students with Specific Learning Needs

Students with specific learning needs that live in rural and remote areas need to be a vital consideration in curriculum development due to the unique challenges they face and also their difficulties in accessing support and assistance where they live.

It is imperative that curriculum can be adequately and easily differentiated and modified in a geographically isolated teaching environment to cater for specific learning needs, particularly in multi-age classrooms. The curriculum needs to offer flexibility to ensure it caters for the needs and abilities of all students, including gifted and talented students.

Food and Fibre Production

The Australian Curriculum should contain relevant, accurate representations of agriculture, including explicit components on Food and Fibre production, to be taught and integrated into primary and secondary school curriculums.

ICPA (Aust) strongly believes that there is a great opportunity to incorporate Food and Fibre Production in an updated version of the Australian Curriculum. A broad range of subject matter specifically related to Primary Production should be embedded in the Australian Curriculum in order to create a better opportunity for understanding and awareness of the significance of agriculture in Australia, where food and fibre comes from and how it is produced.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that there are misconceptions and misunderstandings around agricultural production in Australia. Our members feel this is a direct result of the actual “where, why and how” of producing food and fibre being omitted from the Australian Curriculum in favour of topics such as sustainability and environment in relation to “agricultural science”.

Agriculture and in particular, food and fibre production, is a critical part of the Australian economy and social framework, contributing more than \$60 billion to the Australian economy in 2017 and employing more than 1.6 million people across the supply chain, as well as producing almost 93% of Australia’s daily domestic food supply <https://www.nff.org.au/farm-facts.html>. The inclusion of specific food and fibre production components in place of the current topics taught in relation to

agricultural science would be both a positive and valuable addition to the Australian Curriculum, broadening and enhancing the learning experiences of students and fostering positive understandings of agriculture in Australia.

Conclusion

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the Australian Curriculum review and the opportunity to raise topics associated with the curriculum in relation to rural and remote educational contexts. While ICPA (Aust) is encouraged by the refining, realigning and decluttering of curriculum content within this Review, we seek assurance that adequate funding will be made available to implement these curriculum changes for rural and remote schools and in distance education settings. Unique rural and remote educational contexts require specialised curriculum resources and it is imperative that the development and supply of these resources is efficient and effective to ensure equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for the students educated in these settings.