

Into the 80s. Our schools and their purposes

South Australia. Education Department, 1981

Overview of the document

43 page document comprising consolidated general statements of the Education Department's aims and purposes, and guidelines for the development, of school programmes, as well as policy statements that indicate the educational framework for the operation of government schools. It is intended to replace 'The Purposes of Schools', a 1971 statement of the general aims of South Australian schools.

Keywords

Curriculum framework; curriculum development and planning; teaching methods.

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Summary of Contents

FOREWORD

- Notes that the documents contain general statements of aims and purposes of school programmes, guidelines for the development of school programmes and policy statements that indicate the educational framework for the operation of government schools. Notes that "The intention of this document is to provide is to provide an appropriate balance between central direction and local needs." (p. 5)

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

- Notes that the document has been written "to serve as the basis of educational policies and practices", but without discussion of "the issues and assumptions." (p. 7)
- Notes some features of the document, including that:
 - It replaces 'The Purposes of Schools', a 1971 statement of the general aims of South Australian schools.
 - It looks at schooling as a continuous process, the statements are intended for all schools, regardless of level, kind or locality and argues that "The main

concern is that the education of individuals will be understood as a continuous process, each stage of which is vital.” (p. 7)

- It seeks to balance educational ideals with social realities.
- It is one of several key statements, with the following statements also containing educational policies for South Australian government schools: The Education Act (1972) and Regulations, which prescribe the legal boundaries for education in South Australia (including making the Director-General of Education responsible for school curriculum, describing the legal framework for how curriculum is put into operation within the Education Department, the authorisation of school councils and definition of their powers and role, and stipulating that schooling be compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15); and The Freedom and Authority Memorandum (1970), whereby the then Director-General of Education delegated to school principals considerable freedom “to vary courses, to alter the timetable, to decide the organisation of the school and government within the school”. (p. 8)
- It contains policy statements which are “binding on all schools in the Education Department”. (p. 8)
- It will be the basis of curriculum development, the formation of policies, the allocation of resources and, ultimately, what goes on in the classroom.” (p. 9)
- While remaining consistent with the theoretical basis of statements of goals and purposes of other educational systems and institutions, it “has taken into account those characteristics and developments appropriate for South Australia” (p. 9) and will be supported by resource papers issued from time to time to assist schools to work out its implications.

SECTION 2: AIMS, PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- Presents in abbreviated form “the most important matters for curriculum planning” which are described in more detail in Sections 6, 7, 8 and 9. (p. 10)

SECTION 3: DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

- Notes that “Many factors have influenced the way in which South Australian education has developed in recent times.” (p. 12)
- Notes that “By the end of the second world war, government schools in South Australia were organised and administered in these ways” (p. 12), with primary schools catering for the first seven years of formal schooling, secondary schools providing education for up to five years, with differing emphases in the high and technical schools, area schools in country areas catering for the whole span from years 1 to 10 and a variety of opportunity and special classes.
- Discusses decision making and the 1970 Freedom and Authority Memorandum and the 1971 The Purposes of Schools.
- Notes that after 1974, the only certificates were issued at Year 12, making teachers and administrators considerably freer to make decisions about school organisation and programmes.
- Notes that school enrolments in the post-war period increased greatly because of higher birth rates, a general belief in the value of longer schooling and generally higher retention rates.

- Notes that in a period of transition in the early 1970s, separate technical high and high schools became comprehensive high schools “with programmes intended to cater for students of widely varying abilities, backgrounds and interests.” (p. 13)
- Notes that “the 1970s schools were strongly influenced by new social pressures”, responses to which included: the appointment of counsellors in secondary schools; the introduction of courses in road safety, health and religious education; specific support for disadvantaged schools and attention to students and schools in socio-economic need; the introduction of new approaches to the teaching of English and emphasis on education for a multicultural society; recognition of the significance of technological change, the influence of the media and the changes in the life style of many people; and recognition of education as a means of social and career advancement.
- Discusses teaching methods and notes attempts in the 1970s to introduce the “most useful and effective new teaching approaches”, focusing on: teaching according to the stage of development of children; development of the whole person; co-operation between schools and parents; and learning as a process, “not merely the ability to recall facts and information.” (p. 13)
- Discusses new school buildings and notes that following the building of the first ‘open’ unit in 1969, features were “open plan and flexible plan teaching spaces, indoor sports and activity areas and resource centres”. (p. 14)
- Discusses curriculum development and notes that with the disappearance of certificates except in Year 12 and prescribed courses and syllabuses, “schools and individual teachers has greater scope to make decisions about curriculum content, teaching methods and student assessment at all levels of schooling”. (p. 14)
- States that “Curriculum development was seen as a process of determining the needs of students, and of using teaching methods, materials and content to meet their needs and aspirations.” (p. 14)
- Discusses community concerns and notes that the role of school councils in decisions about general educational and curricular matters and financial management has grown, a significant number of students and teachers change schools and there is a tendency for polarisation of views about discipline, assessment methods, content in courses and teaching methods.
- Notes that Into the 80s is the Director-General’s statement of the Education Department’s position about: the roles of schools in our society; matters to be considered in educational planning at the various Department levels; the Department’s priorities for learning in schools; and what areas of the curriculum should be common for all students during the compulsory years.

SECTION 4: SCHOOLS IN OUR SOCIETY

- Notes that the heart of schooling is the interaction between teacher and learner and that the school exists to support this relationship.
- Argues that schools must match the political, social and economic demands of society with those for intellectual, human and social development of the individual student.
- Argues that schools “should be humane institutions in which enjoyable and stimulating experiences are provided for their own sake and for the students’ present time of life as well as for their future benefit.” (p. 15)
- States that “Preparation for the adult world requires more than intellectual development; it requires social, physical, emotional and moral development. Character development is at least as important as intellectual development.” (p. 15)

SECTION 5: EDUCATIONAL PLANNING IN THE 80S

- Notes that educational planners need to be aware of both social and educational changes and lists important considerations.
- In terms of society notes that:
 - “An educational system must cater for the needs of all children, wherever their location. Departmentally planned curricula need to be as usable in small country schools as in large metropolitan schools.” (p. 16)
 - Changes in society are certain to continue, with its rate probably accelerating, with altered patterns of living and working that affect school programmes including shorter working hours, periods of unemployment, retraining for new jobs and an ageing population (p. 16)
 - The “knowledge explosion” will continue, making necessary appropriate skills for location of information. (p. 16)
 - The influence of the mass media on children’s education may be greater than that of schools. (p. 16)
 - Families/individuals will increasingly have to move to new locations. (p. 17)
- In terms of schools notes that:
 - Schools “will continue in the foreseeable future”, but the Education Department “will continue to provide different models”, of which parents wherever possible will be given the opportunity to exercise choice. (p. 17)
 - It is the responsibility of parents to coordinate the influences on children of bodies (mass media, family, church, peer groups).
 - “Schools are provided for children, but they are also a community resource.” (p. 17)
 - “Within the Departmental guidelines schools are expected to make their own decisions about school organisation, curricula and resource allocation.” (p. 17)
 - Schools should provide a supportive environment, no matter their size.
 - “Schools are expected to provide a sound general education for all students.” Besides their traditional provision of preparation for tertiary studies, they must provide for the differing needs of all who stay beyond the compulsory age of 15, for the majority of whom the requirements of tertiary institutions are irrelevant. (p. 17)
- In terms of learners and learning notes that:
 - “Every person is entitled to be treated as an individual of worth.” (p. 17)
 - “People learn in different ways and at different rates.” (p. 17)
 - Conditions conducive to learning include “a secure, stable environment, [promoting] a desire to learn, and a sense of self worth.” (p. 18)
 - Much learning occurs outside the classroom and fellow students are a powerful influence.
 - “All learners should be guided towards a situation where they assume much responsibility for their own learning.” (p. 18)
- In terms of knowledge notes that:
 - The Education Department does not prescribe in detail what every child should learn, but provides guidelines, syllabuses and materials for a broad and balanced education. Within these guidelines schools determine what is essential and what is negotiable.

SECTION 6: AIMS FOR SCHOOLS

- Argues that “In South Australia, schools aim to help students develop: lively enquiring minds, a love of learning, and a willingness to apply effort to worthwhile tasks; the ability to think rationally; the use of the imagination; powers of creative self expression; powers of judgement; physical and mental health; self-confidence, a sense of worth, and respect and consideration for others; a coherent set of personal and social values and a commitment to them; decision making and problem solving skills; an understanding of themselves and their world; competence in intellectual, social and physical skills; knowledge of skills relevant to adult life and employment.” (p. 19)
- Notes that these general aims are pursued in many ways, particularly through the formal curriculum of the school.

SECTION 7: THE EIGHT AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

- Argues that it is essential that a broad and balanced range of experiences promoting the aims listed in Section 6 be provided.
- States that “The framework of eight curriculum areas is the basis for planning and organising learning experiences for students in South Australian Departmental schools” and that its application “will ensure appropriate learning experiences, both in scope and balance.” (p. 20)
- Notes that schools will implement this policy framework in a variety of ways, and in doing so can ensure that the aims of Section 6 are met and that there is no hierarchy of importance for the areas of study.
- Provides the following eight areas of studies and discusses their opportunities and rationale: Environmental Studies; Health and Personal Development; Human Society; Language Studies; Mathematical Studies; Science and Technology; The Arts; and Transition Education.

SECTION 8: THE FOUR PRIORITIES

- Identifies four priorities which form a foundation for the total programme of a school and to which all schools in the 80s are expected to emphasise in curriculum planning and teaching.
- Notes that these represent a move away from excessive concentration on preparation for tertiary studies and a move towards a broader interpretation of personal development. (p. 26)
- Identifies the priorities as follows:
 - Skills of literacy and numeracy: Notes that schools must continue to give special emphasis to the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.
 - Communication skills: Argues that although communication is not confined to language, “language is the most common and most important form of communication. It is basic to most learning, and as such commands a high priority in its own right.” (p. 27)
 - Skills for social living: Notes that these include: basic survival skills, more complex skills which assist people to function effectively in society; the ability to cope with personal pressures; establishing links with social organisations; development of a more generalised social awareness. Notes that “Schools need to give high priority to the whole area of preparation for effective participation in society.” (p. 28)

- Problem solving skills: Argues that “The development of techniques of problem solving and new ways of looking at problems, rather than the presentation of ready made solutions to present or past problems, must be a high priority” and “a willingness to raise questions and a desire to seek realistic solutions are as essential parts of the learning process as the acquisition of factual knowledge.” Emphasises that learning is an active process, and that solutions are often reached by divergent thinking. (p. 28)

SECTION 9: TWELVE EXPECTATIONS

- Argues that the following twelve expectations arise when the school as a community of people who come under strong outside influences are considered, and should be observed by all schools of the Education Department:
 1. “Schools, in an increasingly pluralist society, should emphasise communication, tolerance and cooperation as a community.” (p. 29)
 2. “Schools should encourage, in this multicultural society, the understanding and appreciation of different cultures and ethnic groups.” (pp. 29-30)
 3. “Schools should ensure that students gain an understanding and an appreciation of the Australian environment – political, legal, historical, cultural, social, economic and physical.” (p. 30)
 4. “Schools should seek to provide opportunities for the greatest possible development of each student.” (pp. 30-31)
 5. “Schools should encourage all individuals to strive for excellence.” (p. 31)
 6. “Schools should encourage students, according to their level of development, to participate actively in the life of the school and its community.” (p. 31)
 - Notes that “Schools can provide continuing opportunities to impress upon students the importance of developing the required skills for taking part in democratic organisations.” (p. 31)
 7. “Schools should emphasise the development of transferable skills and processes and the skills of learning to learn in order to encourage flexibility.” (pp. 31-32)
 - Notes that “it is wise to concentrate strongly upon the learning of principles and processes rather than on the learning of facts as an end in itself. Knowing how to find and organise information, and to carry out tasks and solve problems should assist students to meet changing situations.” (p. 32)
 8. “Schools should provide for different rates and styles which individuals develop in their learning.” (p. 32)
 9. “Schools should take into account, in their planning of curriculum, the needs of those students who change schools from time to time.” (p. 32)
 10. “Schools should provide an ordered and structured environment so that learning is facilitated.” (p. 33)
 11. “Schools should consult and work with parents, community groups and other organisations in planning and carrying out educational programmes, and in the sharing of facilities and resources.” (p. 33)
 12. “Schools should acknowledge their accountability by consulting the community about their aims and programmes and by informing it about their subsequent decisions and their use of resources for those programmes. Schools

are accountable to their students, parents, the community and the Education Department.” (pp. 33-34)

SECTION 10: PLANNING THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

- Notes that in planning and organising its curriculum a school must take many factors into account, including: Education Department policies, priorities and guidelines; the school’s philosophy, aims and curriculum policies; the local context; the characteristics of students; the expertise, skills and experience of staff; school type, size and facilities; and different possible curriculum structures and forms of school organisation.
- Discusses the eight areas of the curriculum and notes that while all of these (listed in Section 7) are to be part of the learning experience of the compulsory years, the weighting apportioned to each may vary from child to child and school to school. Argues that “The question of the balance of the curriculum for an individual child or a particular school is best answered at school level.” (p. 36)
- Notes that materials may be chosen from a variety of sources and schools are encouraged to develop their own curricula, but should ensure they operate within the policies and guidelines of the Education Department. Notes that syllabuses provided by the Education Department may be adapted so long as they remain consistent with Education Department policies and guidelines.
- Notes that school curricula must be approved. Approval is to be given by the Director-General of Education, either directly or by delegation, and approval may be specific to particular schools or may be general for all Department schools.
- Notes that the Education Department curricula are planned on an R-12 basis: “Current Departmental policy emphasises the value of R-12 planning, and, as appropriate, recent curricula have been developed on this basis.” (p. 37)

SECTION 11: RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

- Notes that there have been two significant changes of recent years with regard to curriculum planning and teaching programmes: more decisions are made at school level and that it is now necessary for schools to consult with parents and to explain the aims and nature of school programmes. (p. 38)
- Argues that teachers have, therefore, an obligation to: inform parents of the aims of courses and activities, before and during the programmes; consult with parent about, and encourage their support for the programmes; keep parents informed of the progress of their children; understand and attempt to meet the educational needs of all their students; and use effective methods to monitor and attempt to improve the quality of their teaching.
- Notes that teachers also have the right to: expect cooperation from parents in meeting the above obligations; expect parents to support the school’s aims by encouraging a positive attitude and effort and responsible behaviour from their children; and expect parents to inform the school promptly of successes and problems experienced by students in any part of their school programme.
- Notes that teachers can develop collaboration and understanding between schools and their local communities by: using available community resources, persons and facilities, in enriching the learning experiences of children; promoting the reputation and work of the school in the community; and responding positively both to praise and criticism.

- Discusses the responsibilities of teachers with regard to the Department and notes they include an acceptance that: they are part of the total Department and should develop an understanding of its structure and functioning; they should be aware of their responsibilities under the Act and Regulations; and in their professional work they should develop understanding of both the freedom and constraints for teachers in the Department as indicated by Departmental policies and guidelines.

SECTION 12: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

- Notes that the Education Department, within available resources, will undertake the following: develop and promulgate policies that will enable schools to function responsibly and effectively in the education of their students; develop and promulgate guidelines for curriculum planning, implementation and organisation in schools; develop effective strategies for monitoring and attempting to improve the quality of educational programmes in schools; develop and make available for schools curriculum, course and teaching guidelines and materials; allocate resources to schools as equitably as possible; develop procedures for approving and monitoring school curricula; and inform the sections of the Department and the community about developments across the Department and its schools.

SECTION 13: RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS

- Notes that parents should be willing to: provide information to the school about factors relevant to the student's school performance; assist the school to ensure a student's regular attendance and participation in school life; assist the school in building a positive attitude and self concept for each student; and provide support for their elected representatives on school councils and affiliated organisations.

SECTION 14: DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES IN INTO THE 80S

- Notes that the following Departmental educational policy statements are included or are implicit in Into the 80s:
 - Balanced development.
 - Different types of schools: The Education Department will provide different types of schools according to the needs of an area or a community.
 - Educational programmes: The Education Department will encourage schools to determine their educational programmes.
 - The eight curriculum areas.
 - The four priorities at all levels.
 - The school environment.
 - Cultural and ethnic understanding.
 - The Australian environment.
 - Development of each student.
 - Students who change schools.
 - Community participation.
 - Accountability.
 - Teacher performance.
 - Curriculum approval.
 - Responsibility of teachers.
 - Responsibility of the Education Department.
 - Responsibility of parents.