

## Primary School Charter – A Blueprint for Future Primary Education

*Press Release - August 1, 2007*

A draft Primary School Charter that simplifies the curriculum and proposes core areas of learning has *been released by the Australian Primary Principals' Association, which represents more than 7,000* Government, Independent and Catholic primary schools with a combined attendance of almost two million students.

The draft Charter is the result of a forum in Sydney in July where 35 of the nation's leading educationalists, including academics, principals, teachers and parents examined the question of what primary schools are and their role in the education system.

The National President of APPA, Leonie Trimper, said the draft Charter sought to answer two key questions: "What should primary schools be like" and "What is the purpose of primary schools". She said that the end result was a draft Charter that reflected the majority views arrived at by the forum, adding: "It would be wrong to say all attendees agreed with everything in the draft Charter.

The forum, funded by the Minister for Education, Ms Julie Bishop, concluded there were four prime core curriculum areas that were essential to primary education - English, Mathematics, Science and History.

Read more of the press release at <http://www.appa.asn.au/news/?IntCatId=16>

Download the Charter at <http://www.appa.asn.au/cms/uploads/news/primaryedcharter2007.pdf>

---

### ACSSO Commentary

In launching the draft Charter, APPA President Leonie Trimper has indicated they seek this document to provide the catalyst for a "wide-ranging, healthy and constructive debate that will result in a final charter that can truly become a blue-print for the future" in terms of primary schooling in all parts of the country. The Charter is an attempt by its authors to address these two admittedly very broad and rather general focusing questions:-

- What is the purpose of Primary Schools?; (and thus in turn)
- What should Primary schools "be like"?

The Draft Charter posits in response to the first question, that "the role of primary education is to ensure all children learn and gain a permanent love of learning, characterised by high expectations and joy in learning; rich experiences and depth of understanding".

All well and good. Then, in terms of the second question, in terms of what it is they will be learning, by means of which they will all develop this permanent love of learning, through rich experiences and depth of understanding, the Charter informs us that there are in fact only two aspects of knowledge and skill which are central and form "the heart of primary schooling":

- English Literacy; and
- Numeracy & Mathematical Literacy.

Having thus firmly ensconced Reading Riting & Rithmetic as the fundamentals of a primary education, the Charter then recognises two other “significantly less central areas” which are nevertheless seen as having some subsidiary value:

- Science
- Australian History

The import of the Charter to this point is that with an overcrowded curriculum the purpose of primary schools, as stated above, is more effectively served by trimming the core curriculum back to those central and subsidiary learning areas: a scenario the corollary of which would be that any other areas of learning are necessarily optional extras within the rigours imposed by the total time and resources available in the primary school day. Having firmly established that central position, the draft goes on to point out that there are indeed a variety of other elements of learning which are “often the means for learning in the core areas” – but also have some intrinsic value as introductions to “important areas of life”.

Already a range of concerns are being expressed by a variety of groups across education as to the potential ramifications, implications – and limitations – of such a charter in terms of the ways in which it could be applied in action to the detriment of young people and a negation of its stated purpose of ensuring all children learn and gain a permanent love of learning, characterised by high expectations and joy in learning; rich experiences and depth of understanding”.

If the core areas for primary schooling are English Literacy and Numeracy, with a subsidiary role for Science and Australian History, there is a real risk that all other areas of learning become simply optional extras that can be relegated to a peripheral or token presence, or simply dispensed with altogether as expendable and irrelevant. Commentators have noted that this would be very hard luck indeed for young people whose joy in learning, rich experiences and depth of understanding are achieved through such potential casualties as: literacy development through languages other than English; visual arts; music; dance; sports and physical skills; ICT.....

After all, it is established in the Adelaide Declaration on the Goals of Schooling for the 21st Century (<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/natgoals.htm>) that “Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development... (via) public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence and enable a diverse range of educational choices...”

That diverse range of choices through the compulsory years of schooling should be across and encompass: “the agreed eight key learning areas:

- the arts;
- English;
- health and physical education;

- languages other than English;
- mathematics;
- science;
- studies of society and environment;
- technology

Clearly, the APPA Draft Charter raises a range of vitally important issues that need to be worked through by a process of informed national debate. Everyone with an interest in the future of education should access the Draft Charter on <http://www.appa.asn.au> and make your views known via the discussion process – APPA invites your input by 30 August 2007!