

Australian Curriculum Review Submission July 2021

Interest in the consultation

Baringa Early Learning Centre is a Canberra-based centre that is rated as Exceeding National Quality Standards. Baringa places high value on providing an exceptional quality of care and education to babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, ensuring they feel safe and supported.

Baringa's curriculum is based on the Australian Government Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which aims to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years,¹ supporting children to thrive for today and tomorrow. As the Australian Curriculum aims to build upon the EYLF, Baringa is invested in ensuring that both documents achieve appropriate outcomes for children. In particular, Baringa is passionate about ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture is appropriately included and that educators are supported to facilitate this learning. Similarly, mental health should be explicitly included and stated in the Personal and Social Capabilities curriculum and policy change is required to better-support educators in delivering this content.

Response

General Capabilities

Personal and Social Capability

Noted improvements.

- Baringa is supportive of the simplified language in the revised sub-elements and learning curriculum. The additional descriptions for each element are helpful to provide better support for teachers in this curriculum priority.

Areas for further improvement

- Mental health is widely recognised as an essential component of healthy childhood development, underpinning children's social and emotional development.² It should therefore be explicitly included in the sub-elements of this section of the curriculum.
- Baringa acknowledges that schools experience great difficulties in working within a crowded curriculum and face a major challenge in the extent of topics covered in mental health and wellbeing.^{2,3} Policy change is required to better support schools to deliver mental health curricula, which has been highlighted by both the Australian Government Productivity Commission and the National Mental Health Commission.^{2,3} Mental health curricula needs to be given parity to literacy and numeracy and its importance as a key subject needs to be emphasised in this document so teachers are empowered to devote more teaching time to mental health and wellbeing.
- Consideration should be given to mental health being included as a cross-curriculum priority to enable content to be included throughout other subject areas.
- Baringa wishes to highlight the urgent need for more training and support around mental health and wellbeing to be included in tertiary curriculum for those working towards qualifications in school-age education.

Cross-curriculum Priorities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Noted improvements

- Baringa expresses strong support for the revision of organising ideas that better reflect core aspects of Country/Place, People and Culture for today and the future. We agree that the revised curriculum demonstrates better respect for and inclusion of First Nations histories and cultures, better reflects truth-telling, and better represents contemporary First Nations Australian communities as strong, resilient, rich and diverse. It is essential that these changes remain in the revised curriculum, and are further strengthened where possible.

Areas for further improvement

- To support implementation, there needs to be specific frameworks to ensure that teachers are aware of and accountable to this cross-curriculum priority. These frameworks should be introduced in the tertiary setting for those engaged in university qualifications in education, and in the professional education sector. This includes providing stronger messaging, resourcing and illustrations of practice available for student teachers and qualified teachers that are informed by anti-racism principles and practices; actively addressing teachers' anxieties about being culturally inappropriate, insensitive or unsafe; and reflecting age and stage appropriate truth-telling.
- Explicit connections to the cross-curriculum priority should be made within content descriptions and elaborations across all year levels within all subject/learning areas.
- Further increase to the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture throughout the curriculum content.

Sustainability

Noted improvements

- Baringa is supportive of the broadening of the Sustainability priority to consider all aspects of the earth systems as this is an essential component of this subject area. The revised content is clearer in identifying and acknowledging how these systems are interlinked.
- The new section organising ideas under the "Design" heading are relevant and provide a practical approach to evaluating, planning for and implementing sustainable practice.

Areas for further improvement

- The Overview refers to "collective endeavours shared across local, national and global communities". Baringa suggests strengthening this to explicitly identify that collaborative partnerships are essential to achieve sustainable practice.⁴ This should be reflected in the associated curriculum content.
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (the Goals) are referred to as having been referenced in the revisions of the curriculum. The Goals should underpin the content and be a key resource for students to access and understand.
- There is an emphasis on empowering students to take action to impact upon sustainable practice. Baringa suggests that empowering students to make informed decisions about their own daily practices should be included as a key skill throughout.

References

1. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009). Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf
2. Australian Government Productivity Commission (2020). Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Volume 2, no. 95. 30 June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume2.pdf>.
3. Australian Government National Mental Health Commission (2021). *National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Draft*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/Mental-health-Reform/Childrens-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Strategy>.
4. Gray B, Stites J (2013). Sustainability through Partnerships: Capitalizing on Collaboration. Network for Business Sustainability. Retrieved from <http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/resource/nbs-systematic-review-partnerships.pdf>

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