

Overview of the Australian Curriculum Review

One sentence summary: *The changes to the Australian curriculum are broadly in line with the existing strategic direction of curriculum at BGS and will not adversely impact our ability to continue to provide world class education.*

1. Introduction

ACARA is currently undertaking a review of the Australian Curriculum. The review is based upon a cross-system comparative study - comparing the Australian Curriculum with those in Singapore, British Columbia, New Zealand, and Finland - and feedback from teachers, school leaders, and the Australian community.

Key Links:

[Australian Curriculum consultation main page](#): Up-to-date information about proposed changes

[Australian Curriculum review main page](#): original outline of the review

[One-page summary of the review](#)

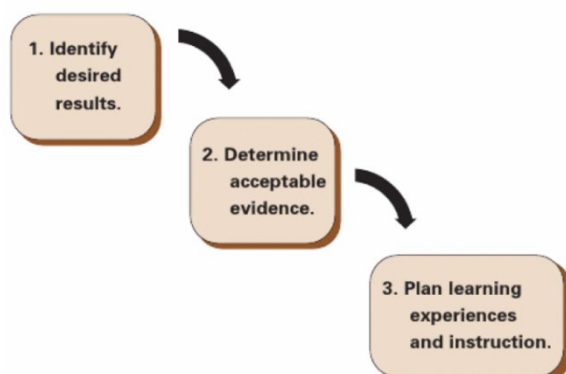
2. From the Australian Curriculum to T&L at BGS

ACARA states that the Australian Curriculum (AC) exists in order to provide, ‘teachers, parents, students and the community with a clear understanding of what students should learn, regardless of where in Australia they live or which school they attend.’ The portion of the AC under review relates to the Foundation years to year 10.

The AC is not implemented directly at Brighton Grammar School, but rather mediated by the Victorian state curriculum. Presently, these two curricula are almost identical, with the exception of some minor wording changes.

At BGS, the Victorian Curriculum feeds into teaching and learning via the Understanding by Design (UbD) planning framework, as part of our Effective Learner model (learning architecture).

UbD: Stages of Backward Design



Learning Areas	General capabilities	Cross-curriculum priorities
The arts	Literacy	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
Health	Numeracy	Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
Physical Education	ICT	Sustainability
Humanities	Critical and creative thinking	
Social Sciences	Personal and soc	
Languages	Ethical understanding	
Mathematics	Intercultural understanding	
Science		
Technologies		
Work Studies		

The Australian Curriculum includes learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities.

Each unit plan begins with explicit references to the content descriptors within the Victorian Curriculum that that unit of work relates to. These content descriptors are then complemented by Essential Questions (questions that drive to the heart of the discipline, provoke inquiry, recur, and require justification) and Transfer goals (how students are expected to demonstrate key skills and knowledge in a variety of contexts).

3. What the key changes are and when they are happening?

For each learning area, the proposed changes are represented in a series of key documents. A general overview for each learning area is found in a document entitled, *What has changed and why?*, and a detailed breakdown of changes can be found in a document entitled, *Comparative information*. Both documents can be found for each learning area through the respective Learning area's link from the main [Australian Curriculum Review page](#).

Included as an appendix is a brief summary of the changes in Mathematics, English, and the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

Key dates

- **July 2020-March 2021**—Reference Groups meet to discuss revisions.
- **April-July 2021**—10-week public consultation window on proposed revisions to the curriculum.
- **August-December 2021**—Revisions finalised and endorsed by education ministers.
- **Early 2022**—Revised curriculum available on new Australian Curriculum website.

4. Criticisms of the Australian Curriculum Review

Some critics have spoken out against an increased focus on problem solving within the revised mathematics curriculum, which is based in large part upon the Singapore curriculum. This change does not acknowledge the significant discrepancy between the mathematical foundations between the average Singaporean versus the average Australian student. Much research in the area of cognitive science has demonstrated that problem solving is best attempted once a solid foundation of procedural fluency has been established. Thus, this shift in emphasis to problem-solving could be misplaced given the lack of procedural fluency in mathematics of many Australian students.

Additionally, there are still remnants of whole-language approaches to reading instruction within the revised curriculum framework. This does not adequately reflect what is now known about the science of reading, and what constitutes best practice in reading instruction.

5. What does this mean for our teaching and learning?

Quality curriculum is a major strategic focus for Crowther (2020 onwards). Whilst we anticipate revisions to the Victorian Curriculum to bring it in line with the revised Australian Curriculum, these will be minor and unlikely to impact on our overall strategic direction. Any changes will be reflected in our Understanding by Design (UbD) curriculum planning documents, with existing curriculum links changed to updated links, and restructuring as needed.

Though it appears that, post-review, there will still be a gap between the Australian Curriculum and best practice instruction in some areas, this will not hamper our ability to continue to pursue best practice at Brighton Grammar. Case in point, remaining allusions to whole-language literacy instruction will not stop us from further refining our approach to phonics instruction. Similarly, the increased focus on problem-solving in mathematics will not change our ability to deliver high-quality explicit instruction in our mathematics classrooms.

6. Appendix. Notable proposed changes to the Australian Curriculum

Mathematics

The mathematics curriculum has been changed to focus more upon the **application** of mathematical knowledge and **understanding** in 'real world situations'.

Another major change relates to the structure of the mathematics curriculum. At present, there are four proficiency strands - Understanding, fluency, problem-solving, and reasoning - each of which sits apart from the content descriptors, which detail the knowledge and skills to be mastered by students. Content descriptors also presently sit under three main headings: Number and algebra, measurement and geometry, and Statistics and probability. At present, teachers are expected to determine how each of the proficiency strands is to be combined with the content descriptors.

Under the proposed restructure, the whole mathematical curriculum is being reorganised under six key strands: number, algebra, measurement, space, statistics, and probability. The extant proficiency strands will therefore be built into these six stands, making it clearer to teachers how understanding, fluency, problem-solving, and reasoning are to be built in relation to content.

The year 10 advanced curriculum (introduced in 2019) content has also been reviewed to better align with a pathway into mathematical methods and specialist mathematics.

English

The three strands of language, literature, and literacy have been retained. Sub-strand structure has also been retained, though some sub-strands have been renamed for greater clarity. The main changes to the English curriculum relate to renaming content for increased clarity, removal of content to avoid internal duplication, and removal of further software related content to avoid duplication in both English and the Technologies curriculum.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Given Brighton Grammar School's commitment to indigenous reconciliation, this review of proposed changes to the Australian Curriculum also details changes to the cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and cultures.

Encouragingly, ACARA has acknowledged the following

the Review found that the existing organising ideas were outdated and did not reflect Australia's First Nations Peoples' calls for truth-telling with greater respect for, and inclusion of, First Nations Australians histories and cultures throughout the Australian Curriculum.

More specifically, the review found that the current curriculum organising ideas:

- *do not include enough truth telling about the experience of First Nations Australians since the arrival of Europeans*
- *place too much emphasis on the period prior to contact with Europeans, positioning First Nations Peoples of Australia as artefacts of the past*
- *fail to recognise that the First Peoples of Australia experienced colonisation as invasion and dispossession of land, sea and sky*
- *lack mention of the Native Title Act 1993 as a law passed by the Australian Parliament that recognises the rights and interests of First Nations Peoples of Australia in land and waters according to their traditional laws and customs*
- *do not mention the First Peoples of Australia being recognised as the world's oldest continuing culture*

- *do not showcase the sophisticated political, economic, and social organisation systems of the First Peoples of Australia*
- *do not adequately appreciate the breadth and depth of First Nations Australians' contributions to contemporary Australia*
- *fail to highlight enshrined rights to maintain, control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.*

As such, the revised curriculum will better reflect these current oversights. This brings the Australian Curriculum more in line with the work that Brighton Grammar School has been doing in recent years in these important areas.

Further, the phrases 'First Nations Australians' and, 'Australia's First Nations Peoples' will be used in preference of the broad terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal'.