



NSW Primary Principals' Association Inc.

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Submission from the NSW Primary Principals' Association (NSWPPA) to the Review of the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES)

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NSWPPA Introductory Comments

The NSW Primary Principals' Association (NSWPPA) is the peak professional association representing Principals in over 1,700 public primary education environments across NSW - Primary Schools, Infants' Schools, Central Schools, Community Schools, Special Schools, Hospital Schools, and Environmental Education Centres. These settings provide an education to approximately 486,000 NSW students. The Association welcomes the opportunity to put forward a submission to the Review of the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES).

Discussions with NSWPPA Principal leaders about the Review, elicited responses that queried the necessity for, and the reasons underpinning what is seen as, a major review of an entity that is largely fulfilling the roles for which it was established. The formation of BoSTES as a single entity with statutory responsibility for the functions previously undertaken by the NSW Board of Studies and the NSW Institute of Teachers was a decision of the current State Government.

The NSWPPA believes it is timely to assess the efficacy of this decision as demonstrated by the effectiveness of BoSTES in meeting the needs of schools via syllabus support, promoting high educational standards via accreditation levels and certifying school registrations within the expectations of the State Government. The NSWPPA submits however, that there is uncertainty in the profession as to whether a 'full-blown' Review, placed within an extremely short timeframe, will be able to produce an outcome that does not add to a sense of instability in NSW educational leadership.

The NSWPPA remains strongly supportive of BoSTES, its 'brief' and its commitment to enhancing educational provision across all sectors in NSW. BoSTES continues to substantially strengthen the Australian Curriculum, virtually ensuring that the high standards in NSW are not diminished. Syllabuses are developed in NSW through exhaustive and highly representative processes and consultations. This provides the foundation for and the consequent ownership and support of NSW syllabuses across the State's educational community. There is a high level of support across this educational community, due in no small part to the fundamental principles of professional representation utilising the expertise of teachers and Principals. The Association meets with the President, senior officers and staff on a regular basis, with scheduled meetings conducted on professional topics across the range of BoSTES areas of responsibility. The NSWPPA is directly represented on Board Curriculum Committees and on the Quality Teaching Council and holds the staff, Board and President in the highest regard.

While the NSWPPA supports BoSTES and questions the need for such a major review, there are matters itemised below, within the Terms of Reference, on which we have made comment. We acknowledge that, through BoSTES, NSW has a streamlined model from Early Childhood to Year 12 of curriculum delivery, integrated curriculum and student assessment and an increasingly aligned system of teacher standards and accreditation. Addressing the specific Terms of Reference in this submission however, we offer a Primary Principal perspective which supports the view that Early Childhood and the Primary Years of Schooling should receive increased representation and enhanced levels of support.

Terms of Reference

The Minister for Education has commissioned a review of BOSTES to ensure its current role, membership, functions and structure continue to best serve the community of NSW into the future by setting high and consistent education standards, building the best quality teaching and associated workforce, and improving outcomes for all students.

The Review will consult, consider and advise the Minister on:

1. The objectives, role, functions and responsibilities of the Board.

NSWPPA comments:

The NSWPPA supports the current objectives, role, functions and responsibilities of the Board. There is no support within the NSW Principals' Association for diminishing the role of BoSTES vis-a-vis National bodies such as ACARA and AITSL. Following the 'amalgamation' of the previous Board of Studies and Institute of Teachers, BoSTES has been required to focus on NSW Syllabus development, based on the Australian Curriculum; the development of teaching standards and accreditation of teachers in all education sectors; and the registration of schools. The Association believes that the support for curriculum delivery can and should be an increased focus for BoSTES, given there is currently wide variation within and across the three education sectors regarding the quantum and quality of teaching and learning support materials accessible by teachers. This critical support should not be left to commercial providers.

2. The most appropriate governance arrangements for BOSTES including:

a. the constitution and membership of the Board;

NSWPPA comments:

The NSWPPA believes that, over the last six years, the Board has worked exceptionally well within its constitution. It is both robust and highly professional, with the needs of students always at the forefront. Given this effectiveness, the Association maintains the view however, that twenty-two members on any board is probably excessive. The Association is strongly of the view that the members of the Board must be current practising educators or parent and members with children currently attending NSW schools. Board membership should never be replaced by self-proclaimed 'educational experts' with little, if any, recent experience in teaching and/or leading schools, or as members of the parent community.

b. the functions of the members of the Board;

NSWPPA comments:

A matter for consideration should be whether there is a need for more equitable representation from key education stakeholders including parents, the University sector, industrial unions, Principals' associations, employer representatives and from all three sectors of NSW education.

c. Board committees and related structures (e.g. Quality Teaching Council);

NSWPPA comments:

The NSWPPA believes, from the direct experiences of Principal representatives, that Board committees and the Quality Teaching Council (QTC) generally operate well, with clear roles and accountabilities. The role of the MCC needs reform with the increasing numbers of teachers seeking higher levels of accreditation. It appears to be now much harder to be accredited at a higher level against the Teaching Standards than to be promoted, within the Government School sector, to a position as Assistant Principal or Deputy Principal.

d. the regulatory responsibilities in relation to schools and teachers;

NSWPPA comments:

These are clear and effective. They are respected by Principals and communities.

e. BOSTES consultative arrangements.

NSWPPA comments:

Overall BoSTES is highly collaborative and professional in nature and the professional views and experienced opinions of NSWPPA Principals, for example, are listened to and acknowledged. The consultation processes within BoSTES are exemplary, taking the lead from the President, who is highly effective, engages with the profession and values input from all parties.

From a Primary Principal perspective however, BoSTES is currently set up to be disproportionately focused on the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and its far-reaching effects. This leads to the critically important voice of Early Childhood and Primary Schooling, on many occasions, being overwhelmed by political and organisational demands, relating to the Secondary years.

3. The nature and scope of the BOSTES role and functions in establishing, promoting, monitoring and assuring rigorous regulatory requirements for schools and teachers and the processes for dealing with failure to meet regulatory requirements.

NSWPPA comments:

This is still a relatively new process for the Government School sector and this is currently a developing 'work in progress'. This aspect of the work of BoSTES should not detract from what the NSWPPA believes are the two key areas for schooling – syllabus development based on the Australian Curriculum and the production of high-quality support materials; and developing high-quality teaching standards and associated accreditation mechanisms.

4. The optimum processes for formulating and assuring high educational standards for curriculum, for assessment, for schools, and for the accreditation of teachers.

NSWPPA comments:

The NSWPPA submits that some of the current views on assessment and reporting are dated and in need of updating into a 21st Century context. The ARC website for example, in the view of many professional educators, is anchored in old-world thinking.

The challenge of creating a truly 21st Century curriculum with innovation and risk-taking learning was left behind, as much the fault of Federal Government guidelines as any lack of future-thinking by BoSTES. The opportunity to achieve a great leap forward however, remains a possibility. The NSWPPA believes that because BoSTES is responsible for syllabus development (nominating the content, knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to develop at each stage) it therefore requires a greatly enhanced focus on developing assessment and reporting materials and support in order ensure consistency across all three sectors.

BoSTES should also move to recognise the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in the NSW context, for the future development and accreditation procedures for Principals.

The Association further suggests that BoSTES should now commence to provide additional focus and resources on supporting leading teachers and school executive to maintain accreditation at the higher levels.

5. The most appropriate organisational structure for supporting the functions of the Board.

NSWPPA comments:

A much smaller Board is required with potentially no more than ten regular members. These should be representing each sector equally.

6. The implementation of recommendations including identifying legislative or other necessary changes.

NSWPPA comments:

It is structurally inequitable that under the Act only one Primary Inspector can be appointed compared to Secondary Subject Inspectors. This returns us to the theme that Primary Educators must continue to advocate against the “poor cousins” syndrome in Board strategic thinking. The NSWPPA does not believe that Secondary Inspectors have a sufficient grasp of Primary and Early Childhood issues. Any reform should create complementary positions reflecting fair representation for the more than 1700 Government Primary Schools in NSW as well of course as Primary Schools in the Catholic and Independent sectors. Increased funds, flowing to BoSTES in the coming years from accreditation fees, should make this a financially viable proposition.

7. Any other matters considered relevant to achieving the outcomes of the Review.

NSWPPA comments:

The role of BOSTES should be significantly expanded to compensate for the lack of curriculum resourcing, training and curriculum leadership within and across all three sectors. We are currently in a support-void, which is being filled by private providers. It would seem to make sense for the Board to be both curriculum provider and training provider of high quality online and face-to-face support. It has the capacity to be a world class resource-provider, capable of on-selling these resources to self-fund expansion.

These could include:

- Improved induction support for teachers;
- Streamlined probation and accreditation, which has become more complex and overly bureaucratic for both staff and Principals;
- Practical tools for teachers to use to evidence daily classroom practice.

There is a vital need for BoSTES to provide more equitable support for Early Childhood and the Primary Years of schooling. It is time that the importance of these years of early intervention is recognised and urgently brought within the legislative boundaries of BoSTES.

NSW is considered to be, amongst the other seven State and Territory jurisdictions, a leader of innovative practice, effective implementation and rigorous standards in school education. This strong foundation, much of which is due to BoSTES, should be built on, not undermined by a fallacious belief that National Government and entities established federally, from time to time, are better equipped to support NSW schools.

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