THEMATIC PROBE. Primary Education: an International Perspective

Country Description: Australia

This country description was compiled from the *INCA* Archive (www.inca.org.uk).

Note to readers:
Education in Australia is a matter for individual states and territories. As a result, the data provided below relates to the three states featured in the *INCA* Australia Archive. Where generalisations - at a national level - can be made, these are made also.

1. Organisation of school phases:

How are the early years and primary phases organised? (3-5yrs? 5-11yrs?)

General/national

Primary education in Australia lasts for either six or seven years, depending on the state concerned. Education is compulsory from the age of six (to 15, 16 in Tasmania), although many children start primary school at five in what is generally known as some form of 'preparatory' year.

	Queensland	Tasmania	Victoria
Early years	4-6 years old	4-6 years old	4-6 years old
Primary	6-13 years old	6-12 years old	6-12 years old

Early years provision is generally part-time for children in the four to five age range and full-time in the year before compulsory education begins (that is, for five- to six-year-olds).

Queensland

Queensland, which is currently the only Australian state not offering a full and full-time year of education for children before they start Year 1 of compulsory education, is trialling just such a preparatory year. Children will need to be at least four-and-a-half years old to participate in the trial.

Tasmania

Early childhood education is provided within a four-year framework, for four- to eight-year-olds. This includes the kindergarten year for four- to five-year-olds, the pre-school year for five- to six-year-olds and Years 1 and 2 of primary education (six- to eight-year-olds). The compulsory age for starting school is six years; attendance below the age of six is not compulsory. Primary schools generally cover the kindergarten year (four onwards to Year 6 - the final year of compulsory primary education, aged 11-12). In rural areas, there are schools catering for the full age range

(kindergarten to Year 12, aged four to 18 years). These are called 'district high schools'.

What are the points of transfer between phases?

	Queensland	Tasmania	Victoria
Early years age range	4-6 years	4-6 years	4-6 years
Primary age range	6-13	6-12	6 -12
Lower secondary age range	13-15+	12-16+	12-15+

In rural areas of Australia in particular, transfer between the phases outlined above may not necessarily entail a change in school. As mentioned above, some schools cater for the entire age range.

2. Locus of control

What degree of control over curriculum content and other aspects of primary schools exists at the national, regional, local and/or school level?

General

Australia has a federal system of government with six states and two territories. Since the formation of the Australian federation in 1901, the Ministers for Education in the individual states and territories have had constitutional responsibility for school education, that is, for primary and secondary schooling; student enrolment policies; determination of curriculum content; course accreditation and certification procedures; methods of student assessment; determination of acceptable teacher qualifications; the recruitment, appointment and salaries of teachers; and for buildings, equipment and materials. However, although there is no national system of schooling as such, the Commonwealth Government plays an important role in promoting national consistency and coherence in the provision of education across Australia. In cooperation with the individual states and territories, the Commonwealth, for example, addresses resourcing, equity and quality issues through its general recurrent, capital and specific purpose programmes. In addition, it has specific responsibilities for Aboriginal people and migrants and is responsible for international relations in education.

In sum, educational policy-making consists of the Australian federal government - through the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) - determining and funding broad policies dealing with 'the national interest' from time to time. Policies relating specifically to schooling are determined by the state/territory governments and administered through the respective Ministers for Education, who issue guidelines for schools to follow. Within these ministerial guidelines, the implementation of some policies may require negotiations to take place between schools and their local communities through School Councils. Formal lines of accountability mean that teachers in publicly-funded government schools are responsible, in an administrative sense, to their principal (not to their School Council)

and, in a legal sense, to their Minister for Education who, in turn, is responsible to the ruling state/territory Government.

There is also the Ministerial Council for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, MCETYA. This comprises the Commonwealth, state, territory and New Zealand Ministers with responsibility for the portfolios of education, employment, training and youth affairs, with Papua New Guinea having observer status. It meets on a biannual basis to discuss issues of mutual interest and to coordinate collaborative policies and approaches and generally to facilitate the exchange of information on education in Australia and overseas.

Curricular control

Australia does not have a national curriculum for its schools. Each state/territory has sole constitutional responsibility for the curriculum of its government schools. However, since 1986 there has been some support for national collaboration in the curriculum. In 1991, the Commonwealth and state/territory Ministers for Education agreed to develop national 'Statements and Profiles' for eight broad Key Learning Areas (KLAs): the arts, English, health and physical education, languages other than English (LOTE), mathematics, science, studies of society and the environment (SOSE), and technology. Statements do not prescribe a set national curriculum, nor are they intended to analyse in detail important issues of pedagogy, assessment, resources, and classroom organisation central to any curriculum, which are the responsibilities of states and territories, professional associations, schools and individual teachers. However, Statements do provide a nationally developed framework for curriculum development which can be used in conjunction with school and system policies and serve as a reference point for the design of resource materials for schools, including materials for professional development. Profiles describe students' learning outcomes at a number of levels.

There is currently widespread use of the eight Key Learning Areas as the basic units of the core school curriculum. In general, this curriculum is not mandatory for non-government schools. They may, however, follow it if they wish.

Information on the state of Victoria is provided below as an example of the levels of control of the curriculum.

Victoria

The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) sets out the major learning areas to be covered in the state of Victoria (which are the eight, nationally agreed Key Learning Areas, see above), and describes learning outcomes which most students are expected to achieve at particular levels. It provides a common basis and language for schools to plan and review the curriculum and to assess and report on student achievement. Schools, however, have responsibility for decisions about:

- course planning;
- curriculum organisation;
- classroom practice;
- the amount of time allocated to Key Learning Areas;
- the range of subjects offered; and

- specific issues relating to school culture, such as the development of attitudes, values and beliefs.

Are there any shifts in the distribution of control between these different levels? (Is it possible to assign percentages to each level, to reflect circumstances in each country?)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what intervals is the curriculum reviewed? (eg are there established review cycles?)

There are no established curriculum review cycles either nationally or at the state level.

In **Tasmania**, a review of the curriculum began in 2000. Prior to this, the state's last major curriculum policy statement for secondary education had been published in 1987 and that for primary education in 1991. For further information on the new curriculum proposals see 'New Essential Learnings' below.

In **Victoria**, the eight nationally agreed Key Learning Areas are organised into the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF). The CSF has been implemented in Victoria since 1997 and was reviewed during the period 1998-2000. CSF II (or CSF 2000) has been introduced since early 2000.

3. Curriculum content

What does the statutory curriculum consist of?

General/national

In general, the states and territories have all adopted the eight broad Key Learning Areas (KLAs) mentioned above, which are:

- the arts;
- English;
- health and physical education (HPE);
- languages other than English (LOTE);
- mathematics;
- science;
- studies of society and the environment (SOSE); and
- technology.

Although these eight Key Learning Areas are generally used by all states and territories as the **basis for curriculum development,** this does not mean that these subjects are compulsory for all Australian schools. As a result, there can be significant variation of provision across the country, as schools are generally free to determine their own patterns of provision within broad state or territory guidelines or frameworks. Within any one state or territory, for example, it would be possible to identify schools with widely differing subject structures and time allocations.

Variations in timetabling arrangements also mean that, in some schools, subjects are offered on an elective basis, or in vertical groupings, which allow them to be taken by students at different year levels. In the more complex and differentiated learning areas, such as health and physical education (HPE) and studies of society and the environment (SOSE), there are differences in interpretation and history across the states and territories, which lead to variations in provision. Within some education systems and schools, for example, SOSE is represented by history and geography, while in others it is represented by integrated studies such as social education.

In most states/territories, the languages other than English (LOTE) Key Learning Area does not become compulsory until children enter Year 6 (11+). However, some optional LOTE is available from Year 3 or 4 (aged eight or nine onwards).

Queensland

The core curriculum for students in Years 1-8 (ages six to 13) currently covers the eight Key Learning Areas. 'Lifeskills' is also mandatory. Since 1996, in line with the National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments, LOTE has formed part of the core curriculum from Years 3 to 8 of compulsory education (children aged eight to 14). Denominational schools also add religious education as a ninth Key Learning Area.

A new curriculum framework is currently being trialled in Queensland. This essentially makes use of four new curriculum clusters (life pathways and social futures; multiliteracies and communications media; active citizenship; and environments and technologies) as 'organisers of the curriculum'. See ‘The New Basics’ below, for further information.

Tasmania

Currently, the curriculum in Tasmania is organised around the eight (nationally agreed) Key Learning Areas (see above). These were gradually implemented between 1993 and 1996. In Tasmania, studies of society and the environment (SOSE) incorporates an ethics component - Asian and Aboriginal studies, includes LOTE (languages other than English), and has recently moved towards civics education.

A new curriculum framework is, however, being trialled (in around 40 schools) from 2002 onwards. See ‘New Essential Learnings - Essential Learning Frameworks One’ below for further information.

Victoria

The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) is based around the eight, nationally agreed Key Learning Areas.

What other aspects of the curriculum/teaching in schools are statutory? Are time allocations for subjects statutory?

General/national

Cross-curricular areas

Alongside the eight Key Learning Areas, there is general agreement that the following six cross-curricular areas should be used, in addition, to frame the state/district/local curriculum:

- the environment;
- information technology;
- personal and interpersonal skills;
- career and work education;
- literacy; and
- numeracy.

Discovering Democracy

Since 1999, with the introduction of the Commonwealth Government initiative, 'Discovering Democracy', all students in all schools in Australia (from the mid-primary to upper secondary phases) have had to study civics and citizenship. Students learn about democracy and citizenship and are examined each year to test their knowledge of the history and workings of government and the nation's democratic foundations. They study topics such as the history of the Australian constitution, the role of parliament, cabinet and the courts, freedom of speech, religion, the role and responsibility of the governor general and the history of indigenous Australians.

Time allocations

Throughout Australia, recommended amounts of time to be allocated to specific subject areas are not usually provided. The National Statements and Profiles (see above) do not normally specify the amount of time to be allocated to the eight Key Learning Areas.

Within any one state or territory, variations in timetabling arrangements mean that it is almost impossible to offer any comprehensive statement about subject offering or time allocations.

Queensland

In 1996, however, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) did develop a set of guidelines for curriculum organisation. These were reviewed and endorsed in October 1997, and were intended primarily as guidance to curriculum developers working on the state's new syllabuses in the eight Key Learning Areas. Their aim was to assist curriculum developers in determining the range and scope of content to be included in the syllabuses. The time allocations specify 'minimum indicative times for the core curriculum'. The term 'core curriculum' refers not to the whole curriculum, but to the 'essential elements that all students are expected to undertake during the

years of compulsory schooling'. The time allocations suggested (in each case referring to total hours of contact time across the full relevant period) are:

Key Learning Area	Years 1-3 (ages 6-9)	Years 4-7 (ages 9-13)	Years 8-10 (ages 13-16)
English	780	640	240
Mathematics	600	640	240
Science	180	240	180
Health and physical education	180	240	180
Studies of society and environment	240	240	180
The arts	300	400	180
Technology	180	240	180
Languages other than English	0	240	180
System/school designated time	120	320	840

The above curriculum framework is based on assumptions of average time allocations, but schools can add their own 'gloss' and vary things in the light of their student intakes. Thus, schools can specialise using school designated time or can use discretionary time to help slower learners cover the ground. The framework aims to demonstrate a commitment to local variation and school decision making within the specified framework; a strong focus on literacy and numeracy in the early years of schooling; an acknowledgement that priorities for the curriculum are different at each stage of schooling; and a recognition of the need for greater curriculum variety and diversity as students progress through compulsory education.

Tasmania

Religious instruction for students may be provided at a government (publicly-funded) school, with the approval of the most senior official in the state Department of Education. The total number of hours of religious instruction provided at a government school may not exceed one hour per week.

In addition, a numeracy policy was launched for Tasmanian schools in August 1998. This policy made mandatory a minimum of 45 minutes daily dedicated to the teaching and learning of mathematics and numeracy in classes from Preparatory to Year 6 (ages five/six to 12).

A similar policy on literacy, launched in March 1998, had already made mandatory a minimum of one hour per day for the teaching and learning of literacy in primary schools.

In all education districts in Tasmania, health and physical education was a priority school curriculum area for the period 1998 to 2001. The aim of this three-year programme was 'to unite under one banner all school-based programmes which have an impact on health education and to emphasise a whole-school approach to staff and student health issues'. The impetus for the project resulted from schools being expected not only to provide a physical fitness programme, but also to tackle such topics as sun protection, drugs education including the effects of alcohol and tobacco, HIV/AIDS education, healthy living, nutrition, stress control and recreation.

Victoria

Time allocation - mathematics

Although there are five content strands in the mathematics national statement of the Victoria Curriculum and Standards Framework, this does not imply that each of these strands should take up 20 per cent of curriculum time. Guidance in Victoria indicates that more time should be spent on 'number' (and space and measurement) with younger students and more time on 'algebra' and 'chance and data' with older, more able students.

Early Years Numeracy Programme

The recently introduced Early Years Numeracy Programme for children in Preparatory to Year 4 classes (students aged five to 10 years) recommends a daily focused one hour numeracy session for students.

Are there statutory timings for the length of the school day/week?

General/national

The primary school day normally contains about five hours of tuition, five days per week (Monday to Friday), and the school year comprises around 200 days.

The duration of teaching periods can vary widely.

The school year in Australia is generally organised around four terms, usually divided along the following lines (although these will vary according to the specific state/territory):

- Term 1 begins in late January and lasts until Easter. There is then an Easter break (around two weeks).
- Term 2 runs from mid-end April to mid-end June, followed by a further two-week break.
- Term 3 runs from mid July to mid September, followed by a two-week holiday.
- Term 4 runs from early-mid October to Christmas. The annual five- to six-week summer break then lasts until late January.

Tasmania

Exceptionally, in Tasmania, there are three main terms in school education. Term one runs from mid February to late May/early June, with a 10-day break for Easter in the middle, and is followed by a 10-day holiday; term two runs from mid June to early/mid September, followed by a 10-day holiday; and term three commences in late September and ends just before Christmas. The long, summer holiday lasts from Christmas until mid February.

What changes have there been to the statutory/non-statutory elements of the curriculum?

National/general

Discovering Democracy

Since 1999, with the introduction of the 'Discovering Democracy' initiative (see above) all students in all schools in Australia (from the mid-primary to upper secondary phases) have had to study civics and citizenship.

Queensland

See 'The New Basics' and 'What other trends……?' below.

Tasmania

See 'New Essential Learnings - Essential Learning Frameworks One' below.

Victoria

The 1998-2000 review of the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) in Victoria resulted in the eight Key Learning Areas remaining as the key organisers of the curriculum. However, the numbers of learning outcomes were reduced; a simpler structure was introduced - linking strands and essential learning to core curriculum areas and levels of schooling; clearer outcomes statements resulted; and all Key Learning Areas began to incorporate references to information technology. This stronger emphasis on information technology was introduced to take account of the skills and knowledge students now need to prepare them for work and further learning in an increasingly information-rich world.

CSF II (the revised post-2000 Curriculum and Standards Framework) creates space in the early years for a focus on literacy and numeracy; embeds information and communication technology skills in all Key Learning Areas; integrates civics and citizenship education and national literacy and numeracy benchmarks into the framework; and makes explicit the pathways from the compulsory years to further education and training.

What government/other initiatives have been introduced? What has been their impact?

National/general

National Literacy and Numeracy Plan

The Commonwealth Government has highlighted literacy and numeracy as its highest priority in relation to school education. In March 1997, Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to a national literacy and numeracy goal:

- that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

The Ministers also adopted a sub goal:

- that every child commencing school from 1998 would achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years.

Ministers agreed that the goals would be achieved through a National Plan focused on the crucial early years of school. The National Literacy and Numeracy Plan includes:

- Comprehensive teacher assessment of all students as early as possible in the first years of schooling, to identify those students at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national literacy and numeracy goals (although as yet, no national system of school entry - baseline - assessment has been implemented).
- Intervening as early as possible to address the needs of students identified as at risk.
- The development of national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9/10 (students aged eight-nine, 10-11, 12-13 and 14-16 respectively), against which all children's achievement in these years can be measured.
- The measurement of students' progress against these benchmarks using rigorous state-based assessment procedures.
- Progress towards national reporting by systems on students' achievement against the benchmarks.
- Teacher professional development to support the achievement of the national literacy and numeracy goals.

The National Plan reflects the commitment of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers to literacy and numeracy as essential for all learning. The Plan also makes it extremely clear that it is crucial for children to develop these foundation skills at the earliest possible time in the school years. In other words, literacy and numeracy are regarded as *the* key skills during this phase of education.

National Goals for Schooling

The national literacy and numeracy plan is an agreed part of Australia's national goals for schooling. A set of goals was originally agreed by all the Ministers of Education of the Australian States and Territories in 1989. These were reviewed in 1999 and form the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-First Century*. The goals identified in the *Adelaide Declaration* aim to provide a foundation for the intellectual, physical, social, spiritual, moral and aesthetic development of young Australians and set out desired characteristics of Australians in their different life roles as citizens, family members and workers. Specifically, as part of their commitment to the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration*, Ministers agreed to the following six areas of schooling for initial outcomes reporting:

- literacy;
- numeracy;
- student participation, retention and completion;
- vocational education and training in schools;
- science; and
- information technology,

and noted the need to develop performance indicators for:

- civics and citizenship education; and
- enterprise education.

The goals, alongside the national literacy and numeracy plan and the agreed Key Learning Areas are all taken into consideration when individual States and Territories set out their curricular frameworks.

The full text of the *Adelaide Declaration* can be accessed at http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/adelaide/index.htm

Discovering Democracy initiative - see above.

Queensland

The New Basics

A four-year curriculum research trial began in Queensland in January 2001. Entitled the 'New Basics', the trial involves 38 schools, which are piloting four new curriculum clusters - life pathways and social futures; multiliteracies and communications media; active citizenship; and environments and technologies - as 'organisers of the curriculum'. The New Basics are cross-curricular - Queensland refers to them as transdisciplinary - that is, they encompass the eight Key Learning Areas (the arts, English, health and physical education [HPE], languages other than English [LOTE], mathematics, science, studies of society and the environment [SOSE] and technology). The schools are also piloting 'Rich Tasks' - the means by which assessment of progress in the New Basics is measured. That is, within the New Basics framework, learning outcomes are defined as Rich Tasks, which are specific activities that students undertake that have real-world value and use, and through which students are able to display their understanding, knowledge and skills. For example, students in Years 4 to 6 in the pilot scheme (aged nine to 12) will, during the period 2001-2004, design an experiment to be performed on the Space Shuttle. Scientists at NASA will judge their work.

Science

In addition, the Queensland Science State-Smart State initiative was introduced in 2002 with a view to boosting the profile of science and improving the quality of science education. This has three main objectives:

- To enhance the teaching and learning of science in school and universities, and ensure the relevance of the curriculum to meet the future knowledge and skills of the State.
- To increase the numbers of students choosing science and technology careers, in particular, by focusing the resources of schools, government departments, universities and the industry sector to help meet future workforce needs.
- To generate an awareness and acceptance in the community of the importance of science education, scientific literacy and the value of science and science

teaching careers to contribute to an improvement in the quality of life for all citizens.

Tasmania

New Essential Learnings - Essential Learning Frameworks One

The Office of Education in Tasmania is currently in charge of a wide-ranging curriculum consultation and development in Tasmania. The aim is to ensure that any future curriculum framework engages all learners, particularly those who previously may not have seen the purpose of what they were asked to learn. It is recognised that this curriculum framework for the future should have at its core those issues and ideas that matter to young people. It has to seek to develop personal and social competence as well as understandings about the world and skills in thinking and communicating.

Initial consultation began in 2000, and resulted in the publication of a 'Statement of Values and Purposes' late in that year. On the basis of this document, an initial draft new curriculum framework - the Emerging New Essential Learnings - was released in February 2001 for comment and input. Extensive changes to this initial draft have resulted from the engagement of schools, teachers, parents, children and other stakeholders in the development work. In March 2002, a new curriculum framework, based on this initial draft, was published. This is currently being trialled in around 40 pilot centres. Known as 'Essential Learning Frameworks One', the new curriculum framework is organised into a statement of values and purposes, a statement of 'essential learnings', a set of learning, teaching and assessment principles, and a statement of outcomes and standards. Some of the above are still the subject of considerable development.

Essential Learning Frameworks One is organised around the following framework of values, purposes and five essential learnings:

Essential Learning Frameworks One - Values

- connectedness;
- resilience;
- achievement;
- creativity;
- integrity;
- responsibility; and
- equity.

Essential Learning Frameworks One - Purposes

- learning to relate, participate and care;
- learning to live full, healthy lives;
- learning to create purposeful futures;
- learning to act ethically;
- learning to learn; and
- learning how to think, know and understand.

Essential Learning Frameworks One - The Five Essential Learnings

- **thinking**: key elements - enquiry, reflective thinking;
- **communicating:** key elements - being literate, being numerate, being information literate, being arts literate;
- **personal futures:** key elements - building and maintaining identity and relationships, maintaining well-being, being ethical, creating and pursuing goals;
- **social responsibility:** key elements - building social capital, valuing diversity, acting democratically, understanding the past and creating preferred futures; and
- **world futures:** key elements - investigating the natural and constructed world, understanding systems, designing and evaluating technological solutions, and creating sustainable futures.

This new framework ultimately aims to ensure a continuous learning experience for planning, teaching and assessment, for use for children from birth to age 16 in homes, childcare centres and schools.

Victoria

There is an Early Years Literacy Programme for children in the Preparatory Year to Year 4 (aged five to 10 years). This involves funding for the provision of early years coordinators and one-to-one reading intervention programmes, and for a class size reduction programme for children in Preparatory to Year 2 classes (aged five to eight years). In addition, professional development resources are provided for teachers by the State Department of Education.

There is also an Early Years Numeracy Programme targeting children in the same school years. This, too, involves funding for a class size reduction programme; for numeracy trainers to provide professional development for early years numeracy coordinators and teachers; for the provision of packs and guides to assist teachers and parents in supporting the initiative; and for schools' television to provide on-site professional development for classroom teachers in the use of the programme.

Internet resources have been made available to support both initiatives. These can be accessed at http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/eys

What other trends are emerging in curriculum development? (eg new subjects/areas of learning being introduced)

Queensland

Recent revisions to the syllabuses for the arts and languages other than English (LOTE) have introduced some changes to the primary level curriculum.

The revised arts syllabus, introduced in 2002 for students in Years 1 to 10 of education in Queensland (aged six to 16 years), means that children in primary level education (Years 1 to 7, aged six to 13) are, for the first time, being taught dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts as part of a single arts syllabus. Previously,

primary schools had separate syllabuses for only some of the above five arts disciplines. The new syllabus, which is being phased in gradually, identifies learning outcomes in each of the five strands and, as part of the syllabus, aims to teach students how to analyse and create new media materials, including CD-ROMs, videos and magazines.

The new LOTE syllabus, which also began to be introduced in Queensland in 2002, includes, for the first time, guidelines for children in Years 1 to 3 (aged six to nine), even though LOTE does not become compulsory until Year 6 (aged 11+) in Queensland (although it may often be introduced in Year 3 or 4).

The new LOTE syllabus for Year 1-10 education in Queensland was introduced as part of an overarching initiative - to equip school students with the skills to succeed in a multicultural society. Linked to this initiative, a new studies of society and environment (SOSE) syllabus was also introduced in 2002. This includes social studies, history, geography, civics, economics, cultural studies, environmental education, enterprise and future studies.

The two new curriculum frameworks currently being developed in Queensland and Tasmania (New Basics and the Essential Learnings Framework respectively, both described above) emphasise a move towards reducing the curriculum framework to its essential learnings and so making learning more relevant to engage all learners.

Further information is available via the following online publication - *Curriculum Trends across Australia in 2000 - State by State* - accessible at http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/acaca2

What other levers may be having an impact on curriculum content? (eg international studies: PIRLS, IEA, PISA, TIMSS)

Victoria

During the process of the 1998-2000 review of the Curriculum and Standards Framework in Victoria, which aimed, amongst others, to:

- provide a simpler curriculum structure, firmly establishing literacy and numeracy as priorities;
- support curriculum design in schools;
- ensure learning outcomes are based on internationally comparable standards;
- support the use of information technologies; and
- ensure that the revised curriculum was informed by national and international curriculum benchmarks and research,

the results of the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* (*TIMSS*) informed the review.

4. Organisation of the curriculum

What are the common features of curriculum organisation in the primary phase? (single subjects? planning subjects as 'topics'?)

Subject integration based on themes is widely used in primary schools across Australia.

Victoria

The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) determines the purpose of the early years of schooling as being to establish a firm foundation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for further learning. There should be a particular emphasis on students achieving high standards in literacy and numeracy; skills essential for success in all areas of learning. In many schools, integrated approaches to curriculum organisation and delivery reinforce the specific teaching of foundation literacy and numeracy skills as well as introducing key concepts in other areas of learning.

Language and mathematics skills, concepts and processes are developed across the curriculum. At the same time, there needs to be discrete teaching of specific knowledge and skills in English and mathematics to provide students with the basic tools to develop understanding in all Key Learning Areas.

The CSF is intended to be used by primary schools to ensure that their approaches to integrated or holistic learning provide comprehensive coverage across all Key Learning Areas. While the integrity of each Key Learning Area needs to be maintained, it is unlikely that each one will be delivered separately in the Preparatory to Year 4 classroom (children aged five to 10 years). Key Learning Areas can often be grouped for the purposes of curriculum organisation and programming.

How are subjects labelled?

What examples are there of 'areas' rather than subjects?

What examples are there of clusters of subjects (eg Humanities, made up of geography and history) being brought together?

In Australia, subjects/subject areas are generally known as Key Learning Areas (KLAs). Of the eight nationally agreed KLAs used by most states and territories as 'organisers' of the curriculum, three are organised specifically as areas rather than subjects. These are:

- health and physical education (HPE);
- languages other than English (LOTE); and
- studies of society and the environment (SOSE).

The exact subject combinations included under these headings vary between states and territories. In **Queensland**, for example, studies of society and environment (SOSE) includes social studies, history, geography, civics, economics, cultural studies, environmental education, enterprise and future studies. In **Tasmania**, SOSE

incorporates an ethics component - Asian and Aboriginal studies, LOTE (languages other than English), and has recently moved towards civics education.

The other Key Learning Areas are made up of multiple strands or disciplines. For example, the arts often includes dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts. In addition, in primary schools, the science and technology Key Learning Areas are often combined to form one curriculum/subject area.

What are the common features of timetabling? (eg weekly lessons in each subject, English and mathematics taught daily)

Tasmania

Since March 1998, there has been a mandatory minimum of one hour per day for the teaching and learning of literacy in primary schools. In addition, in August of the same year, a numeracy policy for Tasmanian schools introduced a mandatory minimum of 45 minutes daily dedicated to the teaching and learning of mathematics and numeracy in classes from Preparatory to Year 6 (students aged five to 12 years).

Victoria

The recently introduced Early Years Numeracy Programme for children in Preparatory to Year 4 classes (aged five to 10 years) recommends a daily focused one hour numeracy session for students.

5. Assessment

What is the purpose, nature and scale of assessment? (eg end of phase assessment, statutory, published test results, optional, national, local, timed tests, teacher-assessment)

General/national

Since the late 1980s, there has been an increasing focus on student assessment and the development of education indicators, with state and territory governments tending to shift their attention away from monitoring resource inputs to monitoring student outputs. For example, a number of states use standardised pencil and paper tests to assess the achievement of students in the areas of basic literacy and numeracy.

Assessment arrangements are the responsibility of individual states and territories. However, research has shown that all are using the National Framework of Statements and Profiles as a basis for curriculum development and consequently as a basis for assessment.

To date, most states and territories do not have a specific system of school entry (baseline) assessment. The State of **Tasmania**, however, tests children in their first term in kindergarten (aged four onwards) and, in **Victoria**, school entry assessment is compulsory. See below.

Assessment under the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan - literacy and numeracy benchmarks

Agreement was reached in March 1997 on a national testing programme for Australian primary children in Years 3 (aged eight to nine), 5 (aged 10-11) and Year 7 (aged 12-13, the primary to secondary transition period), as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. At a meeting of State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers it was agreed that this annual, national literacy and numeracy testing programme would aim to assess the reading, writing, spelling and arithmetical abilities of all children in the Years identified. All states and territories have agreed to assess students against these benchmarks. Roman Catholic and independent schools are also taking part. Under the agreement, some states are discontinuing existing testing programmes where only a sample of students are subject to regular literacy and numeracy assessment.

National benchmarks for literacy (reading, writing and spelling) in Years 3 and 5 were approved in April 1998 and published in October 1998. In April 2000 national benchmarks for literacy **and** numeracy for Years 3, 5 **and** 7 were approved by the Education Ministers of the states and territories. These, and further information on the benchmarks can be found at the following Internet addresses:
http://online.curriculum.edu.au/litbench/default.htm and
http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/LiteracyNumeracy/index.htm

The national literacy and numeracy benchmarks aim ultimately to provide data, through the comprehensive assessment of all students in Years 3, 5 and 7 (aged eight-nine, 10-11 and 12-13 respectively), on the achievement of students in relation to the national benchmarks.

Assessment against the national benchmarks has been progressively introduced since 1999 when children in Years 3 and 5 (aged eight to nine and 10-11 respectively) began to be assessed against the national literacy standards. Since 2001, all children in Year 3 and Year 5 in all states and territories have been assessed against the national literacy **and** numeracy standards. The Year 3 and 5 numeracy benchmarks were trialled during 1998 and the Year 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks have recently been developed. Children in Year 7 are expected to be assessed against the literacy **and** numeracy benchmarks shortly. Assessment is via rigorous, state-based programmes. Schools report individual student assessment results to parents. Some schools and education authorities also report assessment results against the national benchmarks.

Students will often be assessed as soon as possible following entry to Years 3, 5 and 7 to identify those at risk of not making adequate progress towards the literacy and numeracy goals and benchmarks.

Queensland

In Queensland, there is testing for children in Year 2, Year 3, Year 5, Year 6 and Year 7.

The Year 2 diagnostic 'net' (students aged seven to eight) and the Year 6 Test (for students aged 11-12) involve all students in government (publicly-funded) schools and those in non-government schools that wish to take part (see below).

Prior to the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy testing programme, Year 3 testing took place for a sample of students (aged eight to nine) in government schools, and Year 5 (10-11) and Year 7 (12-13) assessment applied to all students in the relevant Year group.

Year 2 testing

Since 1996 a statewide diagnostic 'net' involving Year 2 students has acted as a screening device to:

- identify children experiencing difficulties in literacy and/or numeracy learning;
- diagnose the cause(s) of children's learning difficulties;
- provide children with appropriate experiences to address their difficulties; and
- keep parents well informed about their child's literacy and numeracy learning.

There are plans to replace the Year 2 diagnostic net. Consideration is being given to the possibility of modifying the Year 2 diagnostic assessment and bringing it forward to school entry, with a view to identifying student needs earlier.

Year 6 testing

The Queensland Year 6 Testing Programme provides information about literacy and numeracy achievements of Year 6 students (age 11-12).

Testing in Years 3, 5 and 7

Under the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (see above) all children in Years 3 and 5, and shortly also in Year 7, of primary education in Queensland are being tested against the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Tasmania

Under the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (see above) all children in Years 3 and 5, and shortly also in Year 7, of primary education in Queensland are being tested against the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Victoria

The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) sets six levels for student achievement over 11 years of schooling. The six levels are associated broadly with the years of schooling from Preparatory to Year 10 as follows:

Level 1 - end of Preparatory Year (aged six)
Level 2 - end of Year 2 (aged eight years)
Level 3 - end of Year 4 (aged 10)
Level 4 - end of Year 6 (aged 12 - end of primary level education)
Level 5 - end of Year 8
Level 6 - end of Year 10

In line with the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan and the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF), there is statewide assessment for all students in Years 3 (aged eight to nine years) and 5 (aged 10-11) in English (literacy), mathematics and either science or SOSE, in addition (in alternate years). (Science was tested in 1998 and 2000, for example, and SOSE in 1999 and 2001.) Until the 2000/2001 school year, this assessment programme was known as the Learning Assessment Project (LAP). Since 2000/2001, it has been known as the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM). LAP was first introduced in primary education in Victoria in 1995. Year 7 testing will also take place in Victoria under the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

LAP assessment to 2000/2001

The Learning Assessment Project (LAP) provided benchmarked assessment of the achievement of Year 3 and Year 5 students in mathematics and English and one other Key Learning Area each year. Assessment tasks were designed to assist schools in monitoring student learning outcomes in specific strands and modes of the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF). Year 3 tasks assessed learning outcomes from Levels 1-4 of the CSF, while Year 5 tasks assessed learning outcomes from Levels 2-5. Each student's achievement was reported against the levels of the CSF in the strands or modes assessed (that is, assessment was criterion referenced). Benchmarks grouped 'like' schools (that is, those with similar levels of students receiving economic maintenance allowance and students with a non-English-speaking background) to measure added-value. Two forms of LAP assessment were used in mathematics: a written, multiple-choice test which was 'machine-scored'; and 'performance assessment', which was assessed by the teacher.

Students were assessed in Year 3 to identify individual student achievement at the end of the early years of schooling. They were assessed again in Year 5 to monitor their achievements before transition to secondary school. At both points, the assessment aimed to assist teachers in identifying students who would benefit from enrichment activities, or who may require further development in specific aspects of the curriculum.

LAP involved a series of assessments taken over a period of two weeks. Two tasks were assessed by the (class) teacher and four were centrally-assessed by the Board of Studies (now the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, VCAA).

From 1999, the centrally-assessed tasks under LAP took place in term three, as follows:

Year	Date	Subject tested
1999	Tuesday 3 and Wednesday 4 August	English, mathematics and SOSE
2000	Tuesday 1 and Wednesday 2 August	English, mathematics and science
2001	Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 August	English, mathematics and SOSE

NB. The school year begins in January.

Time allocated for centrally-assessed tasks in 1998

Subject	Year 3	Year 5
Mathematics	35 minutes	45 minutes
Science	35 minutes	45 minutes
English	35 minutes	45 minutes
Writing	30 minutes	35 minutes

In the centrally-assessed tasks, students in both year groups were usually requested to respond to questions in a mark-sensitive booklet. They might have responded in different ways, for example by shading a bubble or shape or writing a number. Student answers were scanned electronically. Where there was any doubt associated with a student response (for example, where all bubbles for one item were shaded, or where the written number was not clear), question papers were checked manually by trained adjudicators.

In the English writing test, students completed a piece of writing on a set topic. Teachers normally engaged students in some preliminary discussion about the topic and students then wrote their work in the task booklet. Trained markers assessed the centrally-assessed writing task.

The teacher-assessed and centrally-assessed tasks were all conducted by the class teacher and took place in the usual classroom. Students worked independently.

AIM assessment 2000/2001 onwards

LAP assessment has recently been replaced by the Achievement Indicator Monitor (AIM). Detailed information on AIM is still to be posted on the *INCA* website. In the interim, further data is available via the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) website at http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au

In the course of the preparation of this probe, the following information regarding AIM assessment has, however, been located. The Achievement Indicator Monitor programme includes five key components:

- classroom assessment;
- homework guidelines;
- comprehensive reporting;
- learning improvement; and
- statewide testing,

each of which aims to complement the other as part of a comprehensive programme to boost student learning, improve teaching skills and better inform parents. AIM also aims to identify students having difficulty at school and provide expertise to assist such students in their education.

Classroom assessment is a central component of the AIM. In addition, the statewide testing component of the AIM includes testing in literacy and numeracy in Years 3, 5 and 7 of compulsory education in accordance with the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

Baseline assessment

Since the 1998 school year, all five-year-olds commencing compulsory education in schools in Victoria have had to take compulsory literacy tests (reading and writing) in their first month at school. The aim is to assist teachers to identify children in need of special assistance.

Reporting

Each year schools are required to provide parents with at least two written reports on student achievement. Since 1997, schools have been required to include in these reports information about student achievement in relation to the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) levels for all Key Learning Areas. Qualitative comments on a student's achievement in his/her report should be made in relation to CSF strands/modes and assessment tasks (example provided below), and include suggestions for support and extension.

Schools	English modes	Mathematics strands
Primary	Reading	Number
	Writing	Measurement
	Speaking and listening	

In addition, schools are required to give parents the opportunity to attend at least one formal interview focusing on their child's progress each year and to provide other opportunities for informal discussions between teachers and parents when requested. Since 1997, schools have progressively developed learning improvement plans for individual students in consultation with parents and, where appropriate, with others with specific expertise.

Results of LAP, now AIM, assessment, provided as part of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, are confidential to the school, the student and his/her parent(s). Reported results show the student's performance in comparison with state levels. (Results are transferred to a student's new school, should he move prior to completion of primary education.)

How far is the curriculum driven by assessments? (eg evidence of teacher preparation for testing, 'booster' or 'catch-up' classes in schools)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

6. Teaching profession/training

What changes can be identified in initial teacher training programmes?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What kinds of continuing professional development/on-going training are provided?

National/general

National Literacy and Numeracy Plan

As part of the national literacy and numeracy plan, a national programme of teacher professional development was developed to support the achievement of the national literacy and numeracy goals.

Victoria

Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) assessment

With the recent introduction of the Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) programme, every school in Victoria has had the opportunity to receive training in the programme.

In addition, to assist teachers in the classroom assessment aspect of the programme, samples of students' work are published exemplifying expected standards, and specially developed packages of materials to assist in teacher professional development in the programme have also been made available.

Early Years Literacy and Numeracy Programmes

With the introduction of the Early Years Literacy and Early Years Numeracy Programmes for children in Preparatory to Year 4 classes (aged five to 10 years), the State Department of Education has provided professional development resources for teachers. These include, for example, online support; a CD-ROM to assist teachers working with English as a Second Language (ESL) students; a resource to support the teaching of handwriting; the provision of early numeracy trainers to provide professional development for early years numeracy coordinators and teachers; and schools' television providing on-site professional development programmes for classroom teachers.

To what degree are teachers'/schools' planning subject to scrutiny?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teachers using electronic formats to plan?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

7. Pedagogy

Which teaching approaches are dominant or developing a higher profile, and which are receding? (eg collaborative work, whole-class instruction)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the impact of ICT in teaching practice? (eg use of electronic whiteboards, intranets, managed learning environments/local grids)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teaching approaches focusing on developing thinking skills, creativity and building on children's learning styles?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

8. Resourcing

How far are resources to support teaching made available via government/central/local agencies?

General/national

Learning materials and tests are prepared by a variety of agents including the curriculum sections of education departments, academics, commercial publishers and teachers' subject associations. In a significant development in 1990, although similar bodies had existed previously under different guises, the State/Territorial and Commonwealth Education Ministers established the Curriculum Corporation, a semi-autonomous body with a charter to develop curriculum materials on a commercial basis.

Queensland

Whilst there are no centralised procedures for adopting curriculum materials in any State or Territory in Australia, some elements of centralisation are found in Queensland. A network of teachers provides reviews of recommended curriculum resources to AccessED, a branch of Education Queensland, which disseminates this information to schools on a searchable database known as *Classroom Resource Reviews*. See the AccessEd website at http://education.qld.gov.au/accessed/

The Queensland Education Department (Education Queensland) also launched a new online learning website early in 2002. The Learning Place, which aims to be a gateway to online learning for teachers and students, offers access to the latest software, online discussion forums and curriculum resources. It is accessible at http://education.qld.gov.au/learningplace

Victoria

In Victoria, textbooks are not approved by an external authority before they can be used in schools. The Department of Education and Training does, however, publish course advice for Preparatory to Year 10 students (aged four/five to 15-16 years) in all Key Learning Areas to assist government school teachers. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) publishes curriculum outlines and assessment specifications and some material to assist teachers in implementing them. In mathematics, for example, the Department of Education and Training has produced 'Mathematics Course Advice' which suggests that teachers should use this course advice, plus a wide variety of other resources, rather than relying on one source for the teaching of mathematics.

The Achievement Improvement Monitor (AIM) programme

In addition, with the introduction of the AIM programme, schools have been provided with specially developed packages of materials to assist teacher professional development.

Early Years Literacy and Numeracy Programmes

With the introduction of the Early Years Literacy and Early Years Numeracy Programmes for children in Preparatory to Year 4 classes (aged five to 10 years), the State Department of Education has provided professional development resources for teachers, including published (printed) and online information. The online website at http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/eys also includes information for parents.

How far, and in which subjects, are resources statutory/ recommended/ subsidised? (eg textbooks, courses, lesson plans for teachers, web-based materials)

General/national

In general, schools and individual teachers have a great deal of independence in the selection of learning materials, and textbooks are not usually approved by an external authority prior to being used in schools.

The choice of textbooks is usually left to teachers or school faculties, but reviews in professional publications can be influential, as can suggested reading lists in association with syllabuses. Except in special circumstances, school authorities no longer publish or prescribe textbooks, but they effectively commission some student material by commissioning and funding projects. Boards of Studies publish support materials for teachers and encourage, if necessary, commercial production of texts for students. The Curriculum Corporation (see above) is the main body to receive such commissions.

National and state frameworks and projects are normally accompanied by support materials and teacher guides. These continue to be mainly in printed form, since this is the only universally accessible form, but videos, CD-ROMs and computer software for both teacher and student use are becoming more common. Support services are also making increasing use of the Internet. It is assumed that materials will more and more be in electronic form, but the pace of this change is limited by the provision of hardware in schools. Printed material includes pages that can be photocopied.

The great bulk of material for students is bought by parents at commercial prices. Occasionally, a government-funded project, such as 'Discovering Democracy', see below, provides student material free for reproduction by schools.

Discovering Democracy

As part of the Commonwealth Government 'Discovering Democracy' initiative, which involves the teaching of civics and citizenship education to all students in all schools in Australia from the mid-primary to upper secondary phases, schools have been provided with lesson plans, books, CD-ROMs, games and activities.

Victoria

With the introduction of the revised Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF II) in 2000, course advice for teachers and curriculum support materials were made available on CD-ROM and via the Internet. The CSF online curriculum resource entitled curriculum@work is accessible via the following website:
http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au.catw/