

McGaw to oversee national curriculum

January 30, 2008 - 3:59PM

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has taken a big step towards his so-called education revolution, appointing the man who will oversee development of a national school curriculum.

Mr Rudd announced Professor Barry McGaw as the head of the federal government's new National Curriculum Board, to be established by January 1, 2009.

The Labor government's national curriculum, slated to take effect in 2011, will initially cover English, mathematics, science and history from kindergarten through to year 12.

Professor McGaw, director of the Melbourne Educational Research Institute, will be part of a 12-person board comprised of representatives from state and territory governments, Catholic and independent schools.

Mr Rudd said there was an historic opportunity to move to a national curriculum, with the Australian workforce increasingly mobile and interstate transfers common.

A national curriculum would help Australia compete internationally and improve retention rates, he said.

"Right around the country this week we've got some 80,000 kids who are starting school in a different state or territory," Mr Rudd told reporters at Queanbeyan Public School.

"If you are a mum or dad or carer for those kids, there are a whole lot of problems in moving from one state or territory to another because, frankly, the curriculums don't speak to each other."

He admitted it would be tough to put a national curriculum in place, as each state government was wedded to its own system and the states were traditionally reluctant to cede control.

"In terms of the task ahead, it's formidable. This is an area of work which historically has been paved with good intentions with very little outcome," Mr Rudd said.

"Our intention is to make a difference, but it's going to be very hard and we recognise that.

"It's a three-year task; it'll be tough and very intensive work.

"The nation hasn't done this before so I'm being entirely upfront with you about how complex I think it's going to be."

Mr Rudd pledged the national curriculum would be rigorous and would help increase year 12 retention rates to 85 per cent and eventually 90 per cent.

Professor McGaw said Australian students' maths performance was declining in comparison with other countries, and a national curriculum could help Australia compete internationally.

"You could argue that we're small enough to do things as a whole," he said.

Supporters of the existing system often argue that allowing each state to have its own curriculum lets each jurisdiction build on the successes of others.

But Professor McGaw said the states had never exposed their curricula to critical comparisons and had not really learnt from one another.

Opposition education spokesman Tony Smith said the government must not allow the adoption of a national curriculum to lead to a drop in standards.

"It is imperative that the new curriculum takes the poorly performing states up to the highest standards and not the other way around," Mr Smith said.

"Some states such as NSW have been regarded as having better education standards than other states, and it is important that this is maintained and enhanced, not taken backwards."

A national curriculum was long overdue, would make life easier for families moving interstate and reduce bureaucratic duplication, he said.

© 2008 [AAP](#)

<http://news.smh.com.au/mcgaw-to-oversee-national-curriculum/20080130-1p0u.html>