

## PM's lesson: cash for history

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Schools will be forced to teach 150 hours of Australian history as part of a prime ministerial push for a radical change to the curriculum.

John Howard will announce the Australian history requirement as a condition of federal funding to the states.

It follows the recommendations of a hand-picked panel, including the conservative historian Geoffrey Blainey and the political commentator Gerard Henderson, after Mr Howard sidelined the recommendations of the Monash University historian Tony Taylor.

The NSW Board of Studies already requires schools to teach 100 hours of Australian history in years 9 and 10, as well as 100 hours of history in 7 and 8.

There is concern among teachers that the curriculum is bogged down with compulsory subjects, leaving less time for electives, including languages and music.

Mr Howard is expected to say that Australian history will be a compulsory stand-alone subject in years 9 and 10. The announcement will be made during a visit to Moorebank High School accompanied by his Education Minister, Julie Bishop.

The Federal Government commissioned Professor Taylor, who is head of Monash University's National Centre for History Education, to write the Australian history draft curriculum. It came after an Australian History Summit last August.

A number of historians told the *Herald* that Mr Howard was unhappy with Professor Taylor's final draft, and appointed another panel of experts to rewrite it.

Ms Bishop appointed Mr Blainey and Mr Henderson, who has written a history of the Liberal Party, to review Professor Taylor's draft curriculum.

The NSW Minister for Education, John Della Bosca, barred Jennifer Lawless, a Board of Studies inspector who has taught history for 20 years in schools, from being on the committee.

Asked about Mr Howard's announcement, Professor Taylor said last night: "An over prescriptive approach at the national level doesn't work. A broad framework approach does work."

It is also understood that Department of Education officials told Professor Taylor that Mr Howard regarded his recommendations as "politically unreliable".

The federal Opposition education spokesman, Stephen Smith, said he wanted to examine the detail of the Government's proposal, but he strongly believed history, particularly Australian history, "is a very important part of the curriculum".

"I have no objection to history being a compulsory component of the curriculum for parts of the secondary school years," he said.

Mr Della Bosca said Mr Howard had lost any ability to work co-operatively with the states. "He makes these demands and funding threats when Australian history has been compulsory in NSW for many years," he said.

Mr Della Bosca said Mr Howard had called the principal and school captains back from their school holiday for his announcement at Moorebank High instead of waiting until they returned to school next week.

The Federal Government has a limited role in school education, besides helping fund private schools. Most school funding comes from the states.

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